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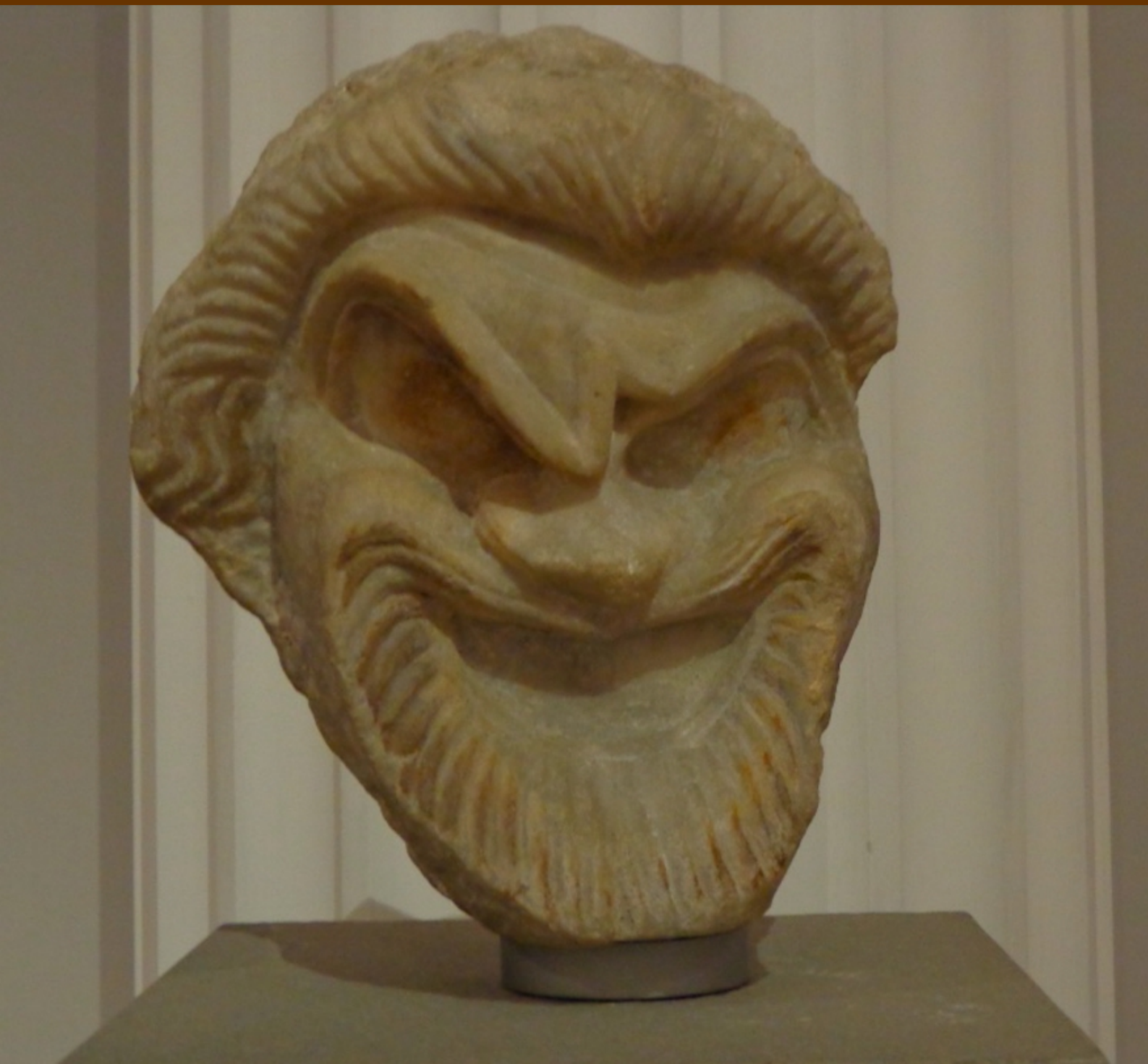

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EDITORES
Fábio Frohwein de Salles Moniz
Rainer Guggenberger

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras Clássicas
Departamento de Letras Clássicas da UFRJ

Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras Clássicas | Faculdade de Letras – UFRJ
Av. Horácio Macedo, 2151 – sala F-327 – Ilha do Fundão 21941-917 – Rio de Janeiro – RJ
www.letras.ufrj.br/pgclassicas – pgclassicas@letras.ufrj.br

A Stronghold of Letters: Late Medieval Durham as a Symbol of the Epistolarity

Lucas Matheus Caminiti Amaya

ABSTRACT

In this article, we will explore how the consumption of ancient letter collections and the development of letter-writing practices, known as dictaminal culture, reflect the grandeur of Durham Cathedral Priory. Located near the Scottish border and in a place with a historical influx of Scandinavians, Durham Cathedral Priory was a distant Benedictine community which stood as one of the most significant examples against the idea of cultural and educational periphery. It had one of the most comprehensive and multidisciplinary libraries in Western Europe, of which a significant part is still available and heavily invested in primary and secondary education. In that context, Durham Cathedral Library was a beacon of erudition, social and political connectiveness and humane growth. Linked to all those advancements, we can find both the consumption of ancient letter collections, which we will present as a product of various techniques and genres and the development of letter-writing techniques, which were inherited from late Antiquity but were transformed into something utterly new in medieval Europe. Therefore, we intend to demonstrate how Durham Cathedral Priory was an epistolary stronghold in all senses, which allowed it to grow further than any other distant and small community in England.

KEYWORDS

Letter-Writing Practices; Ancient Letter Collections; Ars Dictaminis; Middle Ages; Epistolarity; Durham Cathedral Priory.

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INTRODUCTION

Contemporary scholarship has initiated a profound revaluation of the period named "Middle Ages", challenging the still popular notion that significant political, juridical, educational, and societal transformations did not occur between the sixth and the fourteenth centuries. Now, it is known that several profound transformations did happen, and they were characterised by complex dynamics, including the development of robust communication networks, evolving administrative structures, and the expansion of educational systems. Hence, the evolution experienced in the Middle Ages underscored the crucial role of the different degrees of literacy (a concept often misunderstood in modern studies) encompassing both Latin and vernacular languages.[1] Within this transformative context, structured fundamental and higher education systems emerged as influential forces shaping medieval societies, and the consumption of written texts and production of technical writing grew exponentially.

Ancient letter collections and letter-writing practices significantly facilitated educational developments related to those transformations.[2] They were inherited from late Antiquity and adapted to accommodate new technologies, support bureaucratic structures, and emerge new political realities. Moreover, letter-writing practices were one of the foundations of reading and writing skills, helping spread literacy in Latin. This evolution triggered essential inquiries into the transformation of educational systems, the influence of letter-writing on societal development, and the teaching of specific letter-writing techniques during the Middle Ages. The consumption of ancient letter collections, in turn, suggests new ways of understanding literacy and possible new interpretations of the act of reading in the Middle Ages.

To explore how letter-writing and reading skills reflected the administrative complexities of small and medium communities in Western Europe during the late Middle Ages, we will examine

the use of manuscript books containing ancient letters and letter-writing manuals in the Durham Cathedral Priory. Although Durham, located in Northeast England, might be wrongly considered peripheral,[3] it was a small yet affluent community with a strong focus on secular and ecclesiastical education. By analysing the ancient letter collections found in Durham's libraries and the chancery's catalogue created by Benedictine monk John Fyshburn in 1421, we can gain valuable insights into the evolution of letter-writing culture and epistolary consumption as interconnected practices that stimulate each other. These records provide insight into Durham's preferences for reading and technical material, deepening our understanding of this intriguing topic.

DURHAM AND NORTHEAST ENGLAND: EDUCATION, GROWTH, WEALTH

Durham, a palatinate county with a massive Cathedral and a Benedictine Priory in Northeast England, was a region of strategic importance, cultural diversity, and economic prosperity.[4] Durham's location near the Scottish border made it a critical defensive site for England, as evidenced by its castles and fortifications. It also maintained a politically neutral stance when England had to deal with the Highlanders and established diplomatic and commercial ties with continental people, especially Scandinavians. Due to that multicultural and mixed linguistic[5] and societal reality, Durham was a flourishing part of the British Island, where Scandinavians, Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Normans, and Anglo-Saxons cohabitated in various degrees between peace and war. In that context, Durham Cathedral Priory engaged in various administrative and diplomatic activities, making it a versatile agent with extensive political experience and considerable legal expertise in several fields.[6]

From that power, the necessity of offices, courts, and chanceries arose fast.[7] Thus, Durham Cathedral Priory established a chancery, a court for small and medium cases related to local matters, and offices[8] to produce administrative documents.[9] All those bureaucratic structures needed men who could read and

write to work in those places – even though laypeople were regularly called "*illiterati*" regardless of whether they could read and write.[10] Due to the need for educated individuals in various roles within offices, courts, and chanceries, the proficient reading and writing of Latin were necessary for professional and spiritual growth in Durham and the broader northeast region of England.[11] The magnitude of the educational system there can be stressed by the significant financial investments made in the education of monks, novices, and even secular boys.[12] The focus was Latin Grammar and Song. We have no information about other disciplines that may be taught in northeast England. The training served first to prepare laypeople and clerics to aptly exert daily duties in any social, juridical, political or ecclesiastical institution;[13] secondly, the primary studies led the most apt men to be funded in Oxford or Cambridge.[14]

In Durham's case, the monks and laypeople who pursued higher studies at Oxford, although not always completing degrees, acquired valuable skills to pursue diverse careers in offices and courts. Their training encompassed the art of letter-writing, preaching, and ancient Rhetoric, including giving sermons, working at the chancery and courts and supporting the Bishop and the Prior. Notably, the last seven priors of the monastery held doctorates in theology and had previously served as wardens of Durham College.[15]

The commitment to education in Durham extended further as the Priory hired more teachers, opened more schools, and helped maintain a School for communal boys.[16] From as early as the twelfth century, advanced Latin instruction was a feature of Durham Priory's educational system.[17] As far as the current evidence shows, Durham Priory funded one to three schools in Northeast England between its foundation and the beginning of the construction of Durham's house in Oxford. By the end of the thirteenth century, when Durham's house at Oxford was open,[18] the Priory was supporting at least three Grammar and Song schools, besides the pedagogical role some elderly and literate monks had. It indicates the widespread teaching of the Latin

Language and parts of its literature, mainly letters, treatises, and short poems.[19]

A massive portion of Durham's monastic community hailed from Northumbria.[20] Thus, that support for education likely contributed to the depth of scholarly learning among novices and young monks, fostering successive generations of increasingly prepared individuals. Such a cyclic movement probably increased the degree of literacy of Durham's secular and ecclesiastical community.[21] Since the foundation of Durham Cathedral, later Durham Cathedral Priory,[22] books and their knowledge received exceptional care. First, many books were carried by monks and priests who had left Lindisfarne and, later, founded Durham, demonstrating the interest and regard the people who established Durham Cathedral had for books. Later, the number of libraries and their repeated expansion in Durham indicates that the same care the Durham community had for books grew stronger.

Hence, we can safely ascertain that the investment Durham Cathedral Priory made in education had genuinely affected the northern communities in England. Even though the primary objective of a Catholic church was to offer spiritual healing and guidance, Durham Cathedral Priory opened ways to the humane enlightenment towards the *Humanitas*; it gave training for professional careers within offices and chanceries, and it also funded suitable men to study in Oxford, what would be otherwise impossible. Secondarily, due to its investments and political and legal position, Durham Cathedral Priory became a harbour for trained people to work. Teachers, scribes, illustrators, copyists, attorneys, and booksellers, among many other professionals, could make a living in the Tyne and Wear area directly or indirectly related to Durham Cathedral Priory. Even during the harsh years of the Black Death,[23] Durham grew stronger and kept investing in books, libraries and schools. As we shall discuss, all the activities involved writing and reading official documents, usually written based on letter-writing practices.

ANCIENT LETTERS COLLECTIONS IN DURHAM: EPISTOLARITY AS A PRODUCT AND ITS CONSUMPTION

Epistolography was and is still a multifaceted genre that serves a complex range of purposes. In addition to facilitating private communication between individuals separated by time and distance, letters have historically been used to promulgate philosophical precepts, convey messages of friendship or passion, showcase the writer's erudition and social connections, spread political ideas, and facilitate official communication between political and military leaders. A letter can be used for dozens of different purposes; consequently, it can be consumed in different forms and for different objectives. It could be read as a historical document, a technical and literary composition piece, or a rhetorical work. Furthermore, it was also consumed as other genres were, such as elegiac poetry and orations.

It is worth noting that Durham Priory's community had a particular interest in ancient letters, as one can perceive by the number of manuscripts with letters of Ovid, Horace, and Seneca, as well as the late Christian letter-writers Ambrose, Jerome, Gregory, the Great, and Augustine.[24] Surprisingly, Ovid's *Epistulae Ex Ponto* was the most widely read of his works in this community, surpassing even *Metamorphosis* or *Amores*, works that had more copies elsewhere. No Ovid's and Horace's work has survived, and only one copy of Seneca's letters survived, despite the occasional entries of those works among personal belongings and the Cloister.[25] Both these two epistolary works hold similar content and the same educational purpose. The fact that so many epistolary books were heavily used and ultimately worn out suggests a deep appreciation for ancient epistolary work in Durham. Many of these books were listed among personal belongings or communal areas like the cloister, indicating a substantial consumption of ancient letters. Unfortunately, we cannot entirely understand the reasons behind this preference without access to side comments, rubrics, and glossae from those manuscripts, which have not survived.

Ovid's *Epistulae Ex Ponto*[26] comprises poems that emulate an enthusiastic exchange between him and distant friends and patrons. It is one of the few books of that period that present a thoughtful design, a characteristic of other epistolary collections. Horace's letters[27] strike a conversational and witty tone, replete with humour, anecdotes, and reflections on everyday life. Following the principles of Epicureanism, Horace adopts a pedestrian tone, as if he were conversing with close friends in a safe and welcoming literary context. In contrast, Seneca's letters[28] exude a more philosophical and didactic tone, written primarily to a friend, Lucilius, whose existence cannot be confirmed. As said before, these letters are not exactly the product of letter-writing practices (the first two are poems, the latter is philosophical prose with a pedagogical tone), and rarely are they used as the source of quotations for medieval letter-writing practices.

Epistulae Ex Ponto and Seneca and Horace's letters were not used in primary education. They might have been used to deepen Latin Grammar matters or metrical features, but it cannot be argued without more evidence; and despite the considerable number of manuscripts, none have survived. Nevertheless, the prevailing information points out a particular use of ancient letter collections as literature and a source of knowledge. Most epistolary books were found among personal belongings, so Durham's monks invested their short annual earnings in buying Ovid, Horace, and Seneca's works.[29] They do not needed those books to accomplish their duties within the monastery, nor were they used in the courses of Theology and Law, which were the regular disciplines for Bachelor's and Doctoral degrees people from Durham achieved. This choice highlights subjective purposes and personal enthusiasm for Classical Antiquity, underscoring a desire for intellectual enrichment beyond formal educational mandates. That desire hardly came from private inquiries and obscure studies; they are probably connected to the educational system heavily funded by Durham Cathedral Priory since they were constant and affected many monks. Therefore, the consumption of ancient

letter collections probably resulted from the educational system established in northeast England.

Early Christian letters mirrored a significant portion of the rhetorical patterns we perceived in Ovid, Horace and Seneca.[30] There is a need for more studies on the evolution of Epistolography in late Antiquity. However, all ancient Latin letters indicate the hierarchy between writer and addressee by vocabulary choice, morphosyntactic structures, and subjects of choice, and display the use of the second person of the verb, establishing a direct turn of a dialogue. The epistles of Paul, for instance, followed a structured pattern: thanksgiving, signs of a continuous dialogue, the body of the letter discussing theological or ethical matters, and a conclusion with a valediction formula. This format drew upon Roman conventions while reshaping them to serve the distinctive purpose of Christian instruction and exhortation.

Later Christian letter-writers, as well as non-Christian authors, applied more rhetorical features initially intended for public speech to letters, such as engaging introductions (*exordium*), clear presentation of facts (*narratio*), and compelling conclusions (*peroratio*).[31] Therefore, public letter-writing and public speech have shared similar foundations for a long time, and both were applied in similar contexts. Thus, Christian and Classical Roman epistolography had extraordinary similarities – which is evident if we understand that the medium, the Latin Language, is the same; therefore, the principles of a genre may slightly alter, but they do not change profoundly.

The letters of the ancient late Christian letter-writers read in Durham – Gregory the Great, Jerome, Ambrose and Augustine – are quintessential examples of those epistolary features.[32] Their letters often began with expressions of thanksgiving, delved into didactic sections addressing doctrinal or ethical matters, and concluded with exhortations or blessings. *A posteriori*, they use letters with an educational purpose: how the Christian community should behave daily, be organised, and react as a unified community to certain situations.

During the Middle Ages, letters were not just historical documents, but essential tools for religious and educational purposes. The letter collections we find in Durham held immense authority and provided guidance for the Christian community's daily conduct, organizational structure, and collective response to various situations. They served as a unifying force, offering a cohesive vision of Christian living and doctrine. The teachings of Church Fathers conveyed through their letters played a significant role in shaping the theological and moral landscape of the time. Despite the hierarchical manipulation and distance in time and space, the Church Fathers used letters to create a sense of proximity between themselves and the Christian communities. In essence, the letter acted as a direct communication channel, even though it was a rhetorical piece of ethical or moral treatise.

These Christian epistles were an essential part of the scholastic curriculum. They were studied, copied, commented on, and distributed throughout Europe, forming a significant part of the intellectual heritage of the Christian West. Monastic and cathedral schools relied on these epistles for instruction in theology, hermeneutics, and moral philosophy.[33] The fact that these letters were widely received and revered highlights their enduring impact on medieval Christian thought and practice. They helped connect the faithful with the foundational teachings of the Church Fathers, thus serving as a bridge between the patristic and medieval Christian traditions. Their influence was evident in the works of countless theologians, clerics, and laypeople throughout generations. Even their style and textual structure served as models to medieval thinkers and helped students develop rhetorical practices.[34]

In Durham, ancient Christian letters were mostly kept near the refectory and open areas of the monastery. Most of these books were in pristine condition, with no signs of daily, heavy use. While personal property included works by Ovid, Horace, and Seneca, manuscripts of Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine belonged to the Cathedral Priory rather than individual monks. This strategic positioning indicates that these texts had been subjected to

mandatory study, unlike the classical works discussed earlier. However, their good condition indicates they might have been less handled than the Classical epistolary collections.

DURHAM'S *LE SPENDEMENT*: MEDIEVAL CHANCERY AND THE PRACTICE OF LETTER-WRITING

The establishment of a medieval chancery, such as the one within Durham Cathedral Priory, was rooted in the evolving administrative and legal practices of the Middle Ages and the revaluations of the importance of writing.[35] This institution was fundamental to the administration of medieval Europe, and its origins can be traced back to the bureaucratic systems of the Roman Empire. Understanding this historical context is crucial for comprehending the evolution of chanceries and their role in the governance structures of the early medieval period. In the Roman Empire, the chancery, also known as the *cancellarius*, was primarily responsible for managing the imperial seal, which symbolized authority and authenticity. It played a crucial role in official communications, overseeing the issuance of decrees and documents that bore the mark of imperial sanction. As the Western Roman Empire declined, these administrative structures did not disappear; instead, they adapted to the changing political landscape.

By the late medieval era, chanceries had become sophisticated centres of administrative excellence, staffed by skilled professionals well-versed in Latin and vernacular.[36] Their functions and influence were significantly shaped through interactions with various institutions. The royal court, for instance, relied heavily on the chancery for formalising decisions and proclamations. Churches collaborated closely with chanceries in managing ecclesiastical arrangements, legal decrees, and administrative decisions. These interactions fostered a complex web of influence and communication, reflecting the interconnected nature of medieval governance and societal structures.

However, only significant institutions (churches, governments, and prestigious families) would have chanceries. First, it would take considerable money to hire, if not train, *scriptores* and *dictatores*, and to buy writing material and dictaminal books. Second, only institutions with recognised power within their societies would have the legal and political necessity to have an office to produce documents representing their power. Hence, chanceries should represent legal, bureaucratic and financial status.

In Durham's case, the establishment of the chancery within the library, nominated as *Le Spendement*,[37] accentuated the institution's commitment to education and the intellectual formation of the northern English community, since most of the persons who worked in Durham were born, raised or studied somewhere near the region of the Tyne and Wear. Furthermore, selecting this secluded location ensured that valuable documents and books remained beyond the reach of unauthorised individuals and favoured focusing on producing documents and training people to compose those documents in a safe place to develop both administrative and educational work. Consequently, the books stored in the chancery were not intended for public display but for exclusive internal use – surveys, queries, and educational activity.

Observations of the manuscripts in the chancery reveal intriguing insights into their usage patterns. Most manuscripts feature side comments, with occasional corrections and erasures, often attributed to a rubricator, suggesting regular use for specific purposes, such as surveys and teaching. The physical characteristics of the parchment and hardcover imply moderate use, with few stains or spots attributable to manual handling. Remarkably, the manuscripts show few additional handwritten annotations, attesting to the careful and expert handling by individuals trained in book production and care.[38]

Within the confines of the *Spendement*, an assortment of materials, including excerpts and commentary on Canon and Civil Law, letter models, and writing manuals, were available to facilitate the composition and examination of legal and political documents.

Moreover, these resources served the formal communication needs of Durham Cathedral's Prior. The meticulous catalogue by John Fyshburn in 1421 enumerates the following books:[39]

> a) CARTUARIUM PRIMUM, de Specialisbus Munimentis infra Diocesim Dunelmensem. Secundo Folio "Edwardus";
> b) CARTUARIUM SECUNDUM, de Generalibus Munimentis per Angliam. Secundo Folio "Carlixtus";
> c) CARTUARIUM TERCIUM, de Munimentis Specialiabus et Generalibus infra Diocesim Eboracensem et Lincolniensem. Secundo Folio "in capellis";[40]
> d) QUARTUM CARTUARIUM ANTIQUUM, de Munimentis Generalibus quod vocabatur LIBER TERRARII. Secundo Folio "nonice";
> e) REGISTRUM PRIMUM, de Dimissionibus terrarium per Capitulum factis, et confirmacionibus Dimissionum Episcoporum. Secundo Folio "anno Domini 1304";
> f) REGISTRUM SECUNDUM, de Literis sigillatis Sigillo communi et Prioris, cum aliis Recordis, a tempore Antonii Episcopi. Secundo Folio, "ydoneos";
> g) REGISTRUM TERCIUM, in quaterno, de materiis antedictis, incompletum. Secundo Folio "pateat".
> h) Libellus THOMAE MELSONBY, qui vocatur LANDMAYBOKE. Secundo folio "Adam Cartar";
> i) Summa Dictaminis THOMAE DE CAPUWAY Cardinals. Secundo folio, "malum";
> k) Liber Continens PLACITA inter Willielmum Archiepiscopum Eboracensem et Capitulum Dunelmensem super formam visitandi, Sede Vacante. Secundo Folio, "tam simplices.";
> l) REGISTRUM papireum diversarum Literarum, in quondam volumine libri ligati. Secundo Folio, "cedentes";[41]
> m) Summa RICARDI BRITONIS de Legibus Anglicanis, continens octo livros, cum Tractatu de Natura Brevium et Statutis. Secundo folio, 'tudinis non est';
> n) REGISTRUM papireum diversarum Literarum, cum tabula precedente. III. Folio "nobis et monachis";[42]
> o) Cronica de Exordio et Progressu ECCLESIAE DUNELMENSIS, in quaterno. II folio "et quam maxime";
> p) Summa Dictaminis Monachi RICARDI DE POPHIS et Constituciones Sinodales ECCLESIAE DUNELMENSIS a c Constituciones Octoboni Legati, cum multis aliis. II folio "deus ut solitum";[43]

> q) Principium Tabulae Juris Canonici, continens duas literas tantum, videlicet A e t B. Et quaedam Glosa super Constuticiones Clementinas, compliati per Magistrum THOMAM WALKYNGTON. II folio, "glosae de 9 di 5";[44]
> r) REGISTRUM Diversarum Literarum, in quodam parvo volumine ligato. II. Folio "diffinicio ire";
> s) Summa AZONIS super Codicem, cum Institucionibus litera S.[45]

Registers and cartularies served multiple purposes.[46] They were historical records from decisions and legal and social agreements that guided Durham's laws and moral principles in cases involving the Cathedral, its bishop, its prior, and its community. Secondly, they served as examples to write similar documents.[47] Nonetheless, what is interesting to us is the fact that these books taught jurisprudence to new scribes, *dictatores*, and students. The most recent letters and register in those books were likely the product of letter-writing techniques learned through *Artes Dictaminis* in the previous centuries.[48] The oldest charters, which date back to the eleventh century, may not have followed strictly any particular *Dictamen*, which were still developed in Italian communal cities and France.[49] Still, they share some resemblance to the other registers. It indicates that some writing practices were somewhat standardised even before the development of the *Dictamen*.[50] However, there are no complete studies yet on how those previous practices of writing official documents, with textual structures similar to letters, evolved from late ancient Roman bureaucratic structures to what would be the standard practice in the eleventh century.

Even though some of those works might not have been read as letters in the last centuries, nor being composed as letters, the presence of at least three *Dictamina* treatises among those eighteen books suggests that they were read by the people working and studying in the *Spendement* as of letter-writing practices. One may argue that those registers or even the charters were not letters, presenting valid arguments to sustain their opinion. Nevertheless, one cannot deny the use of letter-writing practices to produce

official documents in late medieval chanceries.[51] We cannot precisely know how many *Dictamina* there were in those eighteen books, but there were at least three: two *Summae*, one from an English Author,[52] and one *Tractatus*, written there in Durham. There were likely more, but we cannot be precise about how many as we only have a few books and some unbonded texts.

The two *Summae Dictaminis* suggest an occasional need to search for reliable structures, prestigious excerpts from ancient and medieval writers, and direct definitions of the parts each sort of official document would have to have.[53] As one of them was from England, choosing treatises written by English people would positively affect the reception of those treatises in England. The author's choice for specific textual structures, genre characteristics, proper representation of the hierarchy within a particular community, and authors who should be quoted was more reliable than other *dictatores* who may have lived in kingdoms or cities with severe political and administrative differences from England.

However, the key to understanding the books in the *Spendement* correctly is the *Tractatus Dictaminis*, written by a monk named *Williamus de Waillay*, about 1400. This text is a rare case of a single and autographed copy of a work prepared to be used by Durham's students inside Durham Cathedral.[54] It is uncommon to find texts written in the same place they should be used, autographed and with so many deictic references to the place in which it was written. The other texts in the same manuscript are letter models, a concise explanation of the parts of a letter, a treatise on preaching, book IV from *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and several excerpts from Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Noua*. The combination of the text strongly suggests that this very book was used to teach letter-writing practices in all their complexity; the book covers the essential structure of an administrative letter, the elements of phonetics and clauses, principles of rhetoric, and epistolary models to be used as examples.[55]

The last sentence of William of Whalley's text indicates the reason for composing the text, "*ad honorem dei trinette iste libellus pro iuuenibus exaratus*" (In the honour of the Triune God, this booklet

was prepared for young people). Therefore, we can ascertain that the book was destined for young male students who used to take classes within the Cathedral. Moreover, passages like "*vt si dicatur femmina anglicana forme egregie*"[56] (as if it was said by an English woman outstandingly), in the second paragraph of the second part of the text, show deictic references to where it should be used - England.

Based on the evidence we find in the *Spendement*, we can safely say that letter-writing practices related to administrative, bureaucratic, and legal activities were taught in Durham Priory Cathedral. As England had no unified political, societal, juridical, and educational systems, Durham Priory invested considerable money in training local boys to work for the Priory itself. The young males from Northeast England might have learned local history, memorised some jurisprudence of the local courts, and dug up into the administrative documents of the local chanceries and courts. Such training would prepare scribes, rubricators, and administrative workers for activities within Durham Cathedral, Durham's chancery, and other offices.

Although letter-writing practices may have been influenced by local customs and contain some regional references, they were nonetheless subject to strict guidelines and adhered to common patterns throughout Western and Central Europe. This was essential for the diplomatic function of the *Dictamen*. Most letters produced using these practices could be recognised in multiple cities and kingdoms, thanks to their uniformity in key elements of the epistolary structure. This ensured that the document would be easily understood in any other office, chancery or court in Europe. While the content and information contained in these letters may not be relevant to all readers, any educated person would recognise the genre and purpose of the document based on its standardised elements, including the parts of the oration, regular quotations, specific rhythms, and patterns of hierarchy.

The development of the Rhetoric based on the early works of Cicero, known as *Iuvenalia*, pointedly the *De Inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*,[57] followed the ideas and teachings of

Augustine.[58] For that reason, it is of no surprise that most of the dictaminal texts were accompanied by Cicero's early Rhetorical works. Simultaneously, the *Dictamina* also relied on poetical figures, including rhythm and metrics.[59] Because of that, it is common to find copies of poetry manuals, in Durham's case, Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*, in the same manuscripts one could find any dictaminal treatise. Lastly, the use of *Rhetorici Flores*,[60] or famous and brilliant sentences from ancient or contemporary authors that could be used in various contexts to signify different ideas, also relied on the reading and knowledge of ancient authors, including letter-writers, such as Seneca, Horace, and Ovid.

The *Tractatus Dictaminis*, written by William of Whalley, served not only as a guide to style but also as an educational tool for ensuring that future employees of the *Spendement* and other Durham houses' offices possessed strong written communication skills in both legal and diplomatic contexts. The Cathedral Priory required individuals with a deep understanding of Latin, canon law, Durham's court jurisprudence, and local history. Thus, investing in primary and higher education was not simply an act of charity, but also an investment in potential personnel who would be difficult to find elsewhere. Even if Durham managed to recruit well-trained individuals, additional training in local business and legal matters would still be necessary.

It can be confidently asserted that Durham took great care in training its own personnel in the art of letter-writing, from basic skills to the most advanced techniques. This included early instruction in medieval practices, with works provided to children and training offered to new students within the chancery itself. These future scribes, rhetoricians, illustrators, rubricators, and copyists were expected to possess a high level of literacy and erudition, in order to produce documents that were both ornate and deeply rooted in both ancient and modern letter-writing traditions. Such documents served to showcase the might and position of Durham Cathedral Priory in Western and Central Europe, while also enabling the individuals to recognise the strengths and weaknesses of documents received by Durham,

allowing for diplomatic responses that benefited both Durham and England.

UNVEILING THE BRIDGE: CONNECTING ANCIENT LETTER COLLECTIONS TO LETTER-WRITING PRACTICES

The dichotomy between the consumption of ancient letter collections and the practical application of letter-writing in late medieval Durham underscores a nuanced interplay between historical reverence and pragmatic necessity. If Cicero, Pliny, Seneca, Ovid and Horace's letter collections represent Epistolography as a stable genre, the letter-writing practices from the Middle Ages did not follow it completely. Besides a few letter-writers who published letters like Cicero or Ovid,[61] medieval letter-writing practices were almost limited to the dictaminal culture. Mastery of the dictaminal practices was a mark of education and a means to ascend the social hierarchy. Thus, Epistolarity in the Middle Ages is unlike from the Epistolarity from the late Roman Republic and the Augustan period. It does not mean that the dictaminal culture was developed without ancient roots – the *Dictamen* followed some rules close to those used in late Antiquity, as discussed before. In that way, ancient letter collections, consumed by many monks in Durham, and the daily letter-writing practices are not two sides of the same coin but two faces in the same polyhedron, which, depending on the time and society, may have a different face of the same object, Epistolography.

Nevertheless, they still have to rely on the same basis. The key to fully understanding the humane growth, administrative organisation, and political and social revolutions in the Middle Ages lies in better perceiving the educational systems – their objectives, pedagogical structure, and ramifications in each community. Ancient letter collections, as a product, were appreciated by learned people, who, in turn, were obliged to read and sometimes even write documents prepared following letter-writing practices of the time. Ovid's *Epistulae Ex Ponto* and Horace's *Epistulae*, although the product of poetry application

embedded in an epistolary form due to rhetorical reasons, were understood as letters, as Epistolography, the genre most developed in the Middle Ages. Even though consumed by literate people, epic poetry, tragedies, and ancient novels do not connect to daily activities in the Middle Ages as ancient letter collections do. The consumption of epistolary works by Ovid, Horace, and Seneca was not an exercise in mere literary appreciation but a critical engagement with the foundational elements of rhetoric, poetry, and rhythm. Durham's community would rely on books to develop those elements most necessary in the dictaminal culture.

The development of Durham's educational system sustained a tradition of consuming ancient letter collections and writing letters following dictaminal patterns in the medieval period. This tradition was deeply rooted in the daily life of late medieval Durham, serving both historical and poetic purposes as well as being a mandatory practice for those seeking to advance in society. The societal significance of letters, as exemplified in the concept of *Amicitia* found in the epistolary collections of Cicero and Pliny, was largely limited to literary circles and influential individuals.[62] However, by adopting letter-writing practices similar to those found in the late ancient Christian letter collections of Augustine and Jerome, one could gain the status necessary to climb the rungs of late medieval society. Moreover, such practices provided a solid foundation in Latin language and literature that enabled one to eventually read ancient letter collections with ease.

This trend was also evident in the medieval scholastic environment, where classical texts were often studied for practical application rather than just theoretical exploration. In medieval Durham, the practical approach to letter-writing was a response to the evolving societal and administrative structures. The letters produced were essential in maintaining ecclesiastical hierarchies, managing administrative and political obligations, and facilitating diplomatic communications. Despite the utilitarian nature of letter-writing, the intellectual community of Durham, made up of monks, clerics, and laypeople, still appreciated classical texts for their rich source of rhythm, metric, literary figures, and poetic

constructions found in ancient letter collections; in sum, they appreciated the erudition they gained from those works. These texts formed the foundation of dictaminal culture, blending the eloquence and the poetical and rhetorical figures of late ancient letter-writers such as Ovid, Horace, Augustine and Jerome with contemporary governance and communication practices.

The educational system in Durham played a crucial role in this process. It fostered a deep understanding of Latin language and literature, not merely as academic exercises but as practical tools for social and professional advancement. In this context, the engagement with ancient letter collections in Durham was far from an antiquarian pursuit. It was a vital part of the Durham community's intellectual life, bridging the classical past as a product and the medieval present as a practice. In conclusion, the relationship between ancient letter collections and medieval letter-writing in Durham symbolises the broader cultural and educational dynamics of the late Middle Ages. It highlights the enduring relevance of classical texts and how they were adapted to meet new contexts and needs. This interaction between past and present, classical heritage and medieval innovation, old and solid fruits and new faltering practices, is a testament to the intellectual vitality and adaptability of medieval literate people and practitioners in Durham and northeast England.

RESUMO

Neste artigo, exploraremos como o consumo de coleções de cartas antigas e o desenvolvimento de práticas de escrita epistolar, conhecidas como cultura dictaminal, que refletem a grandeza do Priorado da Catedral de Durham. Localizado próximo à fronteira com a Escócia e em uma região com um histórico de influxo de escandinavos, o Priorado da Catedral de Durham era uma comunidade beneditina remota que se destacava como um dos exemplos mais significativos contra a ideia de periferia cultural e educacional. Possuía uma das bibliotecas mais abrangentes e multidisciplinares da Europa Ocidental, parte significativa da qual ainda está disponível e amplamente utilizada na educação primária e secundária. Nesse contexto, a Biblioteca da Catedral de Durham era um farol de erudição, conectividade social e política e crescimento humano. Ligados a todos esses avanços, encontramos tanto o consumo de coleções de cartas antigas, que apresentaremos como um produto de várias técnicas e gêneros, quanto o desenvolvimento de técnicas de redação de cartas, herdadas da Antiguidade tardia, mas transformadas em algo completamente novo na Europa medieval. Portanto, pretendemos demonstrar como o Priorado da Catedral de Durham foi uma fortaleza epistolar em todos os sentidos, permitindo que crescesse mais do que qualquer outra comunidade pequena e distante na Inglaterra.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Práticas de escrita epistolar; Coleções de cartas antigas; *Ars Dictaminis*; Idade Média; Epistolaridade; Priorado da Catedral de Durham.

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[1] On the definitions of literacy and the utility of reading and writing in the late Middle Ages, see CHINCA; YOUNG, 2005 and CLANCHY, 2013. For a more historical approach to literacy before the Norman invasion, see HILL, 2003.

[2] On the material used to teach basic and advanced writing and reading abilities in the English late Middle Ages, see CLANCHY, 2011, p. 18-29, and CULLUM, 2003, p. 135-142

[3] RUNDLE, 2019, p.275, explains that "These patterns of movement make it difficult to sustain the idea that the success of humanist scripts was a slow diffusion from centre to periphery. It would be better to say that this cosmopolitan tradition itself constituted a conceptual centre which was geographically diffuse. In this re-thinking, the periphery is not in a distant land but can always be close to the piazza or the market-place; it comprises those less able to afford – or simply less interested in following – the recent innovations. The periphery was, of course, the majority".

[4] The most recent and solid studies on medieval Durham are CLAXTON, 2020; BROWN, 2015; DOBIE, 2015; BOYD, 2013; THRELFALL-HOLMES, 2005; KIRK, 1991; and DOBSON, 1973.

[5] The manuscripts in Durham show that Latin, English, and French were frequently used, at least in written documents. There are also a few manuscripts in Greek and some texts in Germanic languages. Besides that, by the people who circulated in northeast England, we may expect that some people spoke Italian, Danish, Welsh, Irish, and Scottish Gaelic languages.

[6] On this matter, see HASKETT, 1996, p. 247-253

[7] According to PATT, 1978, p. 134, "In actuality, however, its most important aspect was the teaching and practice of letter-writing. One can distinguish at least two main reasons for this utilitarian tendency. First, letter-writing was one of the most common forms of composition practiced in the Middle Ages. Second, the ars dictaminis offered one of the few opportunities for a career in administration, government and politics. The seats of power, the ecclesiastical and secular chanceries and courts, were accessible to those with training in law, theology, or ars dictaminis. Because the ars dictaminis was so indispensable, it was taught in cathedral and monastic schools, and later in the universities, all over Europe".

[8] On the powers granted to Durham Cathedral Priory, see CLAXTON, 2020 and BOYD, 2013.

[9] FRASER, 2005, p. 111-114, clarifies that by the early thirteenth century, Durham probably had some sort of court, and by the early fourteenth century, it certainly had a prestigious court. A significant amount of documents produced in the courts during that period are still available.

[10] As well demonstrated by CLANCHY, 2013, p. 228-248, the ability to read a text was partially, if not completely, independent from writing skills in the Middle Ages. But it goes even further, for the ability to understand a text could be evaluated as a visual skill or hearing skill. Secondarily, the concept of *literatus* and *illiteratus* relied on other things than just the ability to read a text: it depended on the social order (clerks were *literatus,* and knights and ordinary people were *illiteratus*), decisions of courts, and social recognition. For further studies on the definition of literacy in the Middle Ages, see also FORD 1993.

[11] ORME, 2006 and ORME, 2015 are the better references for studying Middle Ages schools in Northeast England. However, THOMSON and MORGAN, 2008 and GREATREX, 1991 are also excellent references to comprehend education in the Middle Ages. For the teaching of secular boys, see SURTEES SOCIETY, 1842, p. 81. For Latin's social and professional uses and the pedagogical outline of Latin teaching, see CORNELIUS, 2010.

[12] On the amount invested by Durham Cathedral Priory in education, see CLAXTON, 2020, and ORME, 2015. For instance, ORME, 2015, p. 437, states that "In 1286, Durham began to acquire land at Oxford on which to build a house for student monks, and this house duly came into existence Durham College", which was a pioneer and lonely entrepreneur.

[13] CORNELIUS, 2010, p. 298, says that The ostensible purpose of such instruction was to ensure that the letter proceeded in a manner appropriate to its circumstances and hence to maximize the sender's chances of receiving favourable hearing. However, the specifically codified form taken by this instruction lent the instruction a slightly different function: by providing a menu of ready-made and approved formulas, the ars dictaminis spared chancery clerks and notaries from the task of making independent judgments concerning matters of social decorum.". For other studies, see also CLANCHY, 2005.

[14] On the Northern English people funded to go universities, see CLAXTON, 2020 and GREATREX, 1991.

[15] On the education of several Priors and Bishops in Durham, see BOYD, 2013, p. 21-25.

[16] According to ORME, 2006, p. 192, "by the thirteenth century, the schoolmaster came to be appointed and supervised by the bishop. He was essentially the teacher of a city school rather than a cathedral school. His school lay outside the precincts of the monastic cathedral, although it might have links with the monks. They might send him the boys whom they maintained in their almonry: boys who were not monks but acted as servers in church, as was the case at Durham and Worcester."

[17] According to ORME, 2015, p. 437, "A grammar school may have existed by 1108-1114, since a later charter (spurious, but possibly based on a genuine document) refers to a schoolmaster of Durham in that period named Suirus, whose profession is likely to have been the teaching of Latin. There was certainly such a school by 1190, when it figures in Reginald's *Life of Godric* as the 'school of clerks', presided over by a master and attended by scholars 'giving their attention to literary studies'".)

[18] The date of the opening of Durham's house in Oxford is questionable. According to GAMESON, 2010, p. 18-19, and HOSKIN, 2015, p. 41-42 it is likely that by 1280, and certainly in 1330, there were Durham's young males sent to Oxford at the expense of the Priory.

[19] The current evidence shows that after learning the abc, usually through the Book of Hours and some prayers, students had contact with ancient poets, such as Horace, Ovid, Statius, and Virgil, Grammarians, such as Donatus and Priscian, and other thinkers, such as Isidore, Bede, Augustine, Seneca, Cicero, among others. See CLANCHY, 2011; ORME, 2006; OLSEN, 2013; and OLSEN, 1996.

[20] According to BOYD, 2013, p. 13, "It is clear from the lists of monks, still in the archives at Durham, that many came from the north-east of England and that many came from the middle ranks of society; sons of clerks and notaries and shopkeepers in Durham, of tenant farmers of the priory, of merchants of Hull or Newcastle".

[21] DOBIE, 2015, p. 10-28, demonstrates the progressive changes in Durham between the twelfth and the fifteenth centuries. There still is room for profound research connecting the number of schools, the sort of books read in Durham, and the number of people called "*literatti*" in legal cases during that timeframe. The currently available data is sparse and separate in studies from areas that did not communicate in the past but now seem complementary, such as History, Philology, Law, and Pedagogy.

[22] Initially, the Cathedral was secular, with no connections with houses or institutions other than the Roman Catholic Church and the pope. Only after a

few decades was it taken by Benedictine monks, who found the monastery within the cathedral and applied the Benedictine principles.

[23] On the Black Death impact and economic and societal recovery, see DODDS, 2007, p. 73-80.

[24] On the known works held in Durham libraries, see HUGHES, 1925; MYNORS, 1939; KER, 1964; DOYLE, 1974; and KRISTELLER, 1989.

[25] All the data about the books found in Medieval Durham Cathedral Priory and where they were located in a specific year can be found at the internal catalogues, such as the manuscript B.IV.46, digitalised and found at www.durhampriory.ac.uk (last visited on 08/02/2024). Secondly, SURTEES SOCIETY, 1838, p. lvii, says that "The Monks of Durham, however, appear to have possessed a purer taste, for we find them in possession of the Bucolics, Georgics, and Aeneid of Virgil, some of the Poems of Ovid, the Comedies of Terence, the Satires of Juvenal, the Poems of Claudian, and Lucan, and some pieces of Horace". That statement came from an analysis of the records and the repetitive entries of Classics authors in open places and private possessions. For instance, SURTEES SOCIETY, 1838, p. 6-10, lists some of the books found at personal belongings of specific monks, and in p. 49, 59-70, there are the name of the books found at the Cloister in 1395.

[26] On the general aspects of Ovid's reception in the Middle Ages, see DIMMICK, 2003. For the reception of Ovid's letters, see AKBARI, 2016. For the number and nature of Ovid's manuscripts in the Middle Ages, see REYNOLDS, 1983.

[27] On Horace's reception, see BRAUND, 2010. On the number and nature of Horace's manuscripts, see REYNOLDS, 1983.

[28] On the medieval reception of Seneca's letters, see MAYER, 2015. For the impact Seneca had on the Christian Tradition and how it affected the Middle Ages, see TORRE, 2015. On the number and nature of Seneca's manuscripts, see REYNOLDS, 1983.

[29] Due to the great effort of Durham's monks in registering all books they had and where they were kept, this information can be found at SURTEES SOCIETY, 1838.

[30] There are very few studies on the continuous evolution from late Republican letter-writing practices and the well-established genre Epistolography in late Antiquity. Most of the research focuses on isolated cases and authors and does not look to Epistolography as both genre and practice that changed according to societal needs and educational patterns. We hope that soon, more studies can cover that gap in the history of Education, Latin Language and Literature, and political and societal development.

[31] On the similarities between the medieval epistolary practices and the late Ancient epistolary tradition, see LANHAM, 1992, p. 115-118, and TURCAN-VERKERK, 2008, p. 176-183.

[32] On the Christian Epistles, their uses and their reception in the late Antiquity and Middle Ages, see EBBELER, 2012; AAEGESON, 2008, APOSTOLIC FATHERS, 1987, and CAIN, 2021.

[33] On the theological use of late ancient letters in the Middle Ages, see EDEN 1990.

[34] On the use of ancient Christian letter collections on the development of Rhetoric, see TURCAN-VERKERK, 2008, 176-180, and GRIFFITH, 2000, p. 200.

[35] On the development of literacy as a response to societal needs, see PATT, 1978 and CLANCHY, 2013.

[36] On the construction of medieval chanceries and courts, see CONSTABLE, 1992. On the requirement to work on chanceries and courses, see CORNELIUS, 2010.

[37] GAMESON, 2010, p. 19, calls the Spendement "the strong room off the northwest corner of the cloister". CLAXTON, 2020, p. 25, tells that "the

Spendement as The most valuable books were kept in the "spendement", or treasury, a special storeroom for valuables off the west alley of the cloister".

[38] The surviving manuscripts can be found digitalised at www.durhampriory.ac.uk.

[39] SURTEES SOCIETY, 1838, pgs. 123-4.

[40] The cartularies were volumes meticulously organised to house copies or transcripts of significant charters, deeds, and legal documents, particularly those related to land ownership, privileges, and rights. Durham's compilations served as a centralised repository, easing the management of land and taxation and preserving its crucial historical and legal records. They presented detailed descriptions and indexes, a precious historical and administrative resource. They were the first items on the list, A to D. Letter D of the list is currently missing; however, the three surviving manuscripts are in fair condition. Letters A, B and C are catalogued as Durham Cathedral Archive Cartulary 2, 1 and 3, respectively. There are also two other cartulary books in the Durham Cathedral Archive, but they do not display the first word of the second folio as described by Fyshburn. The manuscript listed as D has likely been dismembered and reinserted within other manuscripts, which makes it impossible to firmly ascertain if D was the current Cartulary 4. by type of addressee (Cartulary 1) or by subject (Cartulary 2 and 3).

[41] Book L is now found at Durham Cathedral Archive. Other folios were inserted into it, but due to the comments of dozens of previous librarians on books and registers at the Archive, it is now possible to identify it as MS C.IV.25. It is a book with letter models, treatises on prosimetrum, letter-writing and Rhetoric. Book L draws attention because it is a rare case of a book produced in the same place it was used, as one can see from the autographed pedagogical material *Tractatus Dictaminis*, written by a monk named William of Whalley. That work does references to York rhetors, creates paraphrasis using deictic references, and is intended to be used by Durham boys.

[42] There are three *Registri* dedicated to official documents encompassing communications with fellow church members and political dignitaries within England and abroad. There are also formal registers of legal and social transactions involving Durham Cathedral Priory. The list represents them by letters E, F and G. The *Registri* exhibits clear lettering devoid of embellishments, marginal notes, or rubrics. Only marginal indications of each excerpt's content are discernible. These books serve as duplicates of official letters and documents penned in the name of Durham or directed to Durham, serving as references for consultation and modelling. We can find letter N, however dismembered with some new parts, including a treatise on *Dictamen* in extremely poor condition, yet to be confirmed the authorship and provenance. It suggests that, at some point, more books containing letter-writing treatises were brought to the chancery after 1421. Thus, we may assume that the chancery was running and growing in a number of books.

[43] The book, which has the work of Ricardus de Pophis, currently resides in the British Library, with only an old, microfilmed copy retained in Durham. Records indicate that this manuscript is the sole book from Fyshburn's list departing from the Priory. The manuscript shows brown, red, and blue ink, decorated side margins, and prominent initial letters at the beginnings of paragraphs. It includes a compilation of various letter models and glossaries. This manuscript was probably composed abroad and later acquired to augment Durham Cathedral libraries. The absence of a similar manuscript in Durham covering prose and versification accentuates the willingness of Durham's monks to acquire educational material for chancery use.

[44] The manuscript holding the work of Thomas Melsonby stays conspicuously absent from digitalised collections and the Cathedral archive. There is no sign of its survival based on the reference "Adam Cartar" as the first words of the second folio. Nevertheless, finding portions of such texts dispersed within other manuscripts, including those beyond Durham would not be implausible. One other text was dismembered and reassembled into another book, Thomas de Capuway's *Dictamen*, incorporated into the *REGISTRUM DIUERSARUM LITERARUM*, a manuscript neither digitised nor entirely catalogued, discovered within the Durham Cathedral's archive.

[45] The books registered as K, M, O, Q, R and S are not found among the digitalised works or at the Cathedral Archive under those same names. It raises the possibility of dismemberment or relocation to an alternative location. Therefore, we cannot detail and comment on them, except for the major works on them. It seems that they covered Durham's history and its legal regiment, which may have been replaced by new works on the subject, mainly the legal texts, which may have lost their meaning due to possible changes in Durham's jurisdiction or political position in England.

[46] On the epistolary nature and societal value of registers and charters, see DECLERQ, 2000, and YSEBAERT, 2015.

[47] CORNELIUS, 2010, p. 292, explains that "when assembled into collections (formularies) and appended to manuals of letter-writing (*artes dictandi*) these letters served as illustrations of correct epistolary style. Hence, a student might encounter, within the materials that taught the correct execution of secretarial duties, letters soliciting appointment to that office. He would be invited to adapt a letter between a generic 'clerk' and 'bishop' to his own purposes; the letter's style and formulation would testify to the student's progress and hence support the legitimacy of his petition".

[48] On the evolution of the *Dictamen,* the best references are CAMARGO, 2001; TURCAN-VERKERK, 2009; WITT, 1982; ALESSIO, 2001; and WARD, 2018.

[49] On epistolary styles before the *Dictamen* in England, see GRIFFITH, 2000.

[50] On epistolary practices before the *Dictamen* in England, see INSLEY, 2011, and HASKETT, 1996.

[51] According to CORNELIUS, 2010, p. 292, "When assembled into collections (formularies) and appended to manuals of letter-writing (*artes dictandi*) these letters served as illustrations of correct epistolary style. Hence, a student might encounter, within the materials that taught the correct execution of secretarial duties, letters soliciting appointment to that office. He would be invited to adapt a letter between a generic 'clerk' and 'bishop' to his own purposes; the letter's style and formulation would testify to the student's progress and hence support the legitimacy of his petition."

[52] There is no certain information about the place of birth of Richard of Pophis or where he might have studied and worked. Considering the name, he might have been English, German, or Norman.

[53] On the textual structure of medieval official letters, administrative offices, courts and the *Dictamen,* see GRÉVIN, 2008 and MONFASANI, 2008.

[54] This exemplar may not be the only one that existed. Many teachers may have written their own *Dictamen*. CORNELIUS, 2010, p. 302, says that "during the second half of the fourteenth century, an internally differentiated teaching tradition of *ars dictaminis* developed in England, comparable to that observed in the French and Italian traditions, if on a considerably smaller scale. One group of teachers attempted a rapprochement with the tradition of classical rhetoric, producing manuals of *ars dictaminis* that drew heavily on twelfth-century arts of poetry and prose: another group stripped *ars dictaminis* to its formulaic essentials and taught letter-writing alongside the basic administrative skills of accounting

and the drafting of legal instruments".

[55] On the frequent use of poetry manuals, rhetoric treatises and *Dictamen*, see GRÉVIN, 2015, and WARD, 2001.

[56] A paraphrase of an Isidore's sentence, in which we read "*femina aegyptia*" (Egyptian woman), Etymologiae II.19

[57] It was widely believed by medieval readers that *Rhetorica ad Herennium* was authored by Cicero. While contemporary evidence suggests that it may have been written by a different individual from the late Republican era, it is crucial to examine the text through the lens of those who originally read it to gain insight into their methods of interpretation and application of the theory.

[58] On the construction of the Medieval Rhetoric and its practical use in the dictaminal culture, see ALESSIO, 2006, p. 335, where he says, "it is important to recognize, first, that for the theorists of the ars dictaminis as for all other practitioners of medieval communication theory down to the advent of humanism, the principal sources for classical rhetorical doctrine were the De inventione and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* […] Their utilization of classical rhetorical doctrine is, in fact, limited to those partes orationis still recognizably present within the structure of the letter (exordium, narratio and, more rarely, conclusio), and, more generally, to what might be regarded as functional to the needs of dictamen as a primarily stylistic art oriented towards the production of written texts". Other most important reference is WARD, 2001. On the Ciceronian reception of Augustine and its practical application, see EDEN, 1990.

[59] On the use of prose versification in medieval letters, see TURCAN-VERKERK, 2003, p. 111, who says that "à une époque où l'accroissement d'activité des chancelleries et le souci de codifier la communication au sein de la *societas Christiana* rendent urgente la diffusion de normes écrites. […] L'une de ses innovations à l'égard d'une rhétorique traditionnelle qui connaissait les genres prosaïque et métrique est la notion de *genus mixtum,* qui, avec des hésitations (nous y reviendrons dans un instant), reçoit alors le nom de *prosimetrum,* terme que nous voyons apparaître pour la première fois dans la littérature latine".

[60] On the construction and use of *Rhetorici Flores,* see CAMARGO, 1992, p. 162-170, and ALESSIO, 2006, p. 336.

[61] On these medieval letter collections, see CONSTABLE, 1992, p. 39-43, and HALDESINE, 1994.

[62] On the literary circles before the Renaissance, see HALDESINE, 1994.