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Insight into daily life in the Florence Chancellery
The formation of humanist language in the early letters of
Coluccio Salutati

PhD Thesis
Thesis booklet

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I. The antecedents of the research, aims and objectives

The aim of the dissertation is to present and analyse the copies of the missives written by the Florentine Chancellor (1375–1406), Coluccio Salutati (1332–1406), between 8 August and 23 September 1375, on behalf of the *Signoria*, who led the Florentine Republic. The original missives survived sporadically only in the receiving state, but thanks to the Chancellor's vocation, twelve chancery copybooks preserve copies of the missives. Because of these collections – accurately managed by the Chancellor –, which can be consulted in the State Archives of Florence, and to other surviving copies (in codex 786 in the Biblioteca Riccardiana and codex C 89 in the Biblioteca Marucelliana in Florence, codex 5.5.8 in the Biblioteca Capitulare y Colombina in Sevilla, and codex *Capponi 147* in the Vatican Library) and original missives, we know of nearly 8,000 state letters from Salutati's thirty-one years in office. Of these, however, only a few hundred have been published in critical editions until today. The present work is therefore based on the processing of one hundred state letters written during the first year of Coluccio Salutati's chancellorship, following chronologically the epistles published by Armando Nuzzo in 2003.

In 2018, at the beginning of my PhD studies, the objective was to elaborate the letters preserved in the mentioned copybooks from the years of the war between Florence and the Holy See between 1375 and 1378 and to prepare a critical edition of them. However, by analysing the state letters of the Florentine chancellor Coluccio Salutati, since I sought to process each letter from all points of view, I did not limit myself to letters relating to the war, even though they constitute the greater part of the letters.

I projected in my research plan at the time the probability of spatial or temporal restriction of the copies of the missives, when I had not realized

that these letters written in Latin (and sometimes in Italian) were worth examining not only for their content, their language and their palaeographical features, but also for the corrections made at the time of writing or even later, for the various parts of the letters which follow the classical scheme, for the punctuation already used by the Chancellor and the *cursus* which he consciously associated with it, and for the observance of the rules of the *ars dictaminis* itself. In this way I try to give a fuller picture of the Chancellor's early style and work.

In my thesis, therefore, my main focus was to give a comprehensive presentation of the letters analysed according to each aspect, but at the same time I tried to give an insight into the individual letters by citing examples, so that the reader of my dissertation can see the significance, strength and literary value of these epistles one by one. The other main aim of my thesis is the critical edition of the one hundred letters (and two original missives, of which copies are not in the Florentine collection), which is completed by the indexes attached.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, several scholars paid attention to the Chancellor's work and his role among the humanists. Extensive work has been done by Armando Petrucci, Ronald G. Witt, Francesco Novati, Berthold L. Ullman, Daniela De Rosa, among others. In addition to Armando Petrucci and Ronald G. Witte, the manuscript of *Salutati* was also studied by A. C. de la Mare in 1973. For the years of the war between 1375 and 1378 – the period in which I am working on the epistles – the name of Alessandro Gherardi should be mentioned in particular, who wrote the history of the war in his monograph, and in the appendix he published transcriptions of several state letters, and included even more letters the regesta and/or quotations of one or two sentences, using not only the copy books of the *Signori*, *Missive I Cancelleria* but also many other archival sources in Florence.

In 2006, the 600th anniversary of the death of Coluccio Salutati was commemorated with celebrations, exhibitions and conferences. The papers presented at scientific conferences have been published in volumes of studies, and in the volume *Coluccio Salutati e l'invenzione dell'umanesimo*, published in 2008, the authors also dealt with Salutati's tractates, letters, punctuation and library. In the same year, the issue of the Florentine journal *Medioevo e Rinascimento* was also devoted to Coluccio Salutati, and about half of the studies were related to him, due to the great interest at the time. Roberto Cardini and Paolo Viti edited *Coluccio Salutati e Firenze. Ideologia e formazione dello Stato*, and Armando Nuzzo's two-volume *Incipitari* were also published in Rome in 2008.

During his thirty-one years as chancellor of Florence, Coluccio Salutati wrote approximately eight thousand letters, an average of seven or eight a day, which were preserved in twelve copy books. As several scholars, including Witt and Nuzzo, have pointed out, Salutati could have written many more letters, including the missing missives, up to ten or twelve thousand letters as a Florentine chancellor, on behalf of Florence. I continued the work where Armando Nuzzo stopped with the critical edition, on 8 August 1375. I found the entire edition of eight of the hundred letters (at Alessandro Gherardi, Gustav Wenzel or Hermann Langkabel), and in a few other cases a quotation and/or a regesta. In processing the letters, I drew the numerical limit at one hundred copies, so the last letter was written on 23 September to Prince Charles of Durazzo, later King of Naples and Hungary. For the present doctoral research, I used two of the twelve copy collections, books 15 and 16 of the *Missive I Cancelleria* subfond of the *Signori* fond preserved in the State Archives of Florence. The chronology of these two documents overlaps, because while book 16 contains state letters written between 22 July 1375

and 28 July 1378, the book 15 contains letters written between 7 September 1375 and 1 November 1376. Consequently, although I only dealt with the written material of two months (August and September), both chancery copybooks were used as a source, since – although I do not know the reason why – from 7 September onwards, copies of the letters were placed in one or the other copybook collection.

II. Process and methodology of the processing of the *corpus* of letters

The transcription, processing and translation of the letters were prepared in chronological order, and the final *corpus* consists of copies of the missives written between 8 August and 19/23 September 1375. The last, 100th letter of the appendix, written by Firenze to Charles Durazzo, is not dated. The *terminus post quem* for the date of this letter is 19 September 1375, but since the next date in the book is 23 September, the letter was written between these two dates. The Hungarian aspect of the letter was also an important aspect for its inclusion in the corpus, as it was addressed to the later Charles II, at this time still the peaceful (della Pace) Duke of Dalmatia.

I followed the same practice when processing each letter. I first prepared a modern transcription of the text in Latin (82+2) or Italian (18), dissolving the common and general abbreviations in the letters. After the transcription and the apparatus part were completed, and of course overlapping with it, a translation of the text was also prepared, which is not published in the appendix, but in the main text, where justified, the Hungarian translation accompanies the parts quoted from the letters. The transcript of each letter in the appendix is preceded by a short regesta that briefly describes its contents. For the elaboration and interpretation of the letters, the

identification of the several persons and places that were found is an important aspect and at the same time inevitable. For this reason, the appendix is followed by an index of persons, places and addresses, and a glossary. The punctuation of the published letters has been modernised, but the punctuation used by Salutati has been a special focus of study in this thesis, especially its occurrences in the sentence-closing clauses, which can be connected to the accent-based rhythm i.e. the *cursus*.

The *corpus* was treated in three major units, approaching each letter and its larger units from different perspectives. In the fourth chapter, the aim was to present the content of the epistles, divided into separate main and subgroups, and to outline the events of the two months, with the help of the letters and the literature. The fifth chapter deals with Salutati's epistolary style and his observance and use of certain parts of the *ars dictaminis* that he was required to follow as a chancellor in the period. Particular emphasis is placed on the various punctuation marks and *cursus* used by the chancellor, the relationship between the two, and the structure of the letters. The final chapter, the sixth, gives an insight into Salutati's Latin style, mainly from a linguistic point of view, but also provides an overview of the Chancellor's work, which contributed to the further development and later flourishing of humanism.

III. Conclusions from analyses and research results

In regard to their content, most of the one hundred letters, fifty-two of them, actually relate to the war against the Holy See, while the rest can be divided into two further categories. One group contains letters that are not related to the war, be it a letter of consolation to the Lord of Cortona after the death of his father Francesco Casali, a letter of recommendation to a Florentine

citizen, a letter written to exonerate someone, a letter to settle a probate dispute, or a letter written merely to do justice. For the latter reason, for example, the Republic of Florence wrote a letter to Siena for the benefit of a Florentine merchant, Johannes Bellacci, who had not received a certain payment from Meo Mercato and his son, who were from Montepiscalli, and, since this territory was then under the jurisdiction of Siena, asked for its intervention in the matter. Such and similar letters, thirty-nine in all, fall into this second category. In addition to these, there are nine other letters, which I grouped into a separate category: these are epistles relating to exiled citizens, criminals, or even murder.

There is no consensus among the researchers about how much of his own style he incorporated in his letters, but the more accepted view, argued by Daniela de Rosa and Armando Nuzzo, among others, is that Salutati followed the strict rhetorical rules he had studied at the University of Bologna, but mixed with the influence of earlier writers such as Petrarch, Boccaccio, and even more so Cicero, Virgil, and several ancient authors, he himself formulated his letters so eloquently that they would achieve their purpose as surely as possible, and some of which were considered almost literary works. A typical day of the chancellor went as follows: he attended the daily council meeting, listened carefully to the leaders' discussion, took notes, and then, after reaching consensus on the matter or matters, Salutati retired to write the letters to be sent based on what had been heard. The Chancellor did not write strictly what Signoria said 'in pen', that was only the guide. He remained one-hundred per cent faithful to the content, of course, but he also incorporated his own style, often turning it into a literary work or even a pamphlet.

The official letters written by Coluccio Salutati on behalf of the Florentine Republic, analysed in this dissertation, are very important in several points, as he exhorts and calls upon the Italian cities, in Latin language eloquent in Ciceronian circular phrases, to join the common league in defence of their own sweetest liberty (“conservationem dulcissime libertatis”). The Chancellor condemned the *Tyrannis*, because instead of the tyrannical few, space must be given to the people, the *populus*, which is an integral and inalienable part of the city. He contrasted tyranny with the ideal of *libertas*, freedom. Where there is tyranny, there can be no freedom, which is a “divine gift” that we must defend even at the cost of our lives. The ideology of liberty was with him throughout his long tenure as a Chancellor, and he made it a point to emphasise it. Thus, for example, when Florence waged war against the Holy See between 1375 and 1378, he carried a kind of rhetorical propaganda by inviting the Italian cities, the Communes, to join the common league by means of state letters and by sending them a red flag bearing the word *libertas*. This word and the flag itself became both a symbol of rebellion against the Holy See and a symbol of the League.

In the second half of 1375, Florence, according to the letters, had two main aims in the war against the Holy See and against Gregory XI. The first was to call the Tuscan cities into league against the Holy See and to make alliances, especially with the King of Hungary and to strength the alliance with the Lords of Milan; the second was to resolve the question of the English mercenary company and to raise the money promised to John Hawkwood. Florence sent several letters to Tuscany and other Italian states to organise the league, thirty-three of the fifty-two letters were sent to a city-state or ruler. Most of them were sent to Volterra, urging it to send the necessary military aid to the Republic as soon as possible. In addition to Volterra, the Chancellor

sent official letters to Arezzo, Siena, Lucca and Pistoia. He wrote three letters to Gherard Du Puy, the papal vicar, the abbot of Marmoutier and the vicar of Perugia, seven letters to Florentine ambassadors and eight to mercenary captains, especially the aforementioned John Hawkwood, but also one to Corrado Vittingher and one to the Milanese ambassador Ruggero Cane. Among the sovereigns, the Republic wrote several times to the Lords of Milan, Galeazzo Visconti and especially Bernabò Visconti, or to both of them, and to the Lord of Rimini, Galeotto Malatesta, and to Charles, Duke of Durazzo.

The next major part of the thesis focused on the structure of the letters, the use of punctuation and the *cursus* found in the clauses that end sentences, and the possible relationship between the latter two. In total, I analysed ninety-one letters written in Latin to investigate the relationship between *cursus* and punctuation, eighty-two of which were copies of missives preserved in the chancellery copybooks and nine of which were original missives. In regard to punctuation marks, only ones indicating a medium and strong pause were included in the analyses, so that the four relevant types of punctuation are *colum*, *interrogativus*, *exclamativus sive admirativus* and *coma*. There were eight questionable or “irregular” *cursus*, but in addition to these, the 427 *cursus* found before the punctuation marks in my opinion indicate an effective relationship between the *cursus* and the punctuation mark. We can confirm that Salutati used the *cursus* consistently, as he was obliged to do by his office as a chancellor. Of the total of 435 *cursus*, including the irregular ones, 84.59% (= 368 cases) are *velox*: 87.29% of all clauses are *cursus velox*, while 69.23% of the cases are preceded by a middle punctuation mark within the sentence. It is clear that the most frequent

cursus used by the chancellor was *cursus velox*, as already established in his familiar letters.

In the thesis I also examined the structure within each epistle, the occurrence of the different letter units and the proportions of their occurrence. The five classical parts of the letter (*salutatio*, *captatio benevolentiae*, *narratio*, *petitio* and *conclusio*) were generally reduced to three in medieval missive-practice, since the *salutatio* included the intention to gain goodwill, the *narratio* ended with the request, and the concluding formula remained as the third unit, which was gradually refined. In Coluccio Salutati's time, this process had not yet been fully completed, so that sometimes the classical parts merge, but sometimes they appear in the letters in a well-defined way. Seven of the one hundred state letters contain the fivefold division of the classical letter, five of which are autographs, the other two being written by one of his assistants, probably Antonio Arrighi. All seven letters were very important, both because of their addressee and their content, so on the one hand respect led the Chancellor to comply with all the rhetorical and stylistic rules. On the other hand, of course, these parts had their own function, which he used as a kind of weapon to give his words greater weight and an even greater chance of achieving the desired purpose of the letter.

Most letters, twenty-six in all, had neither *exordium* nor *conclusio*. Both are intended to gain the goodwill of the addressee, one at the beginning of the letter, the other at the end, both of which, when included, also provide a nice rhetorical framework for the message. However, one should not be surprised if these two are omitted, since the Chancellor had an incredible workload, drafting seven or eight letters a day, and even if he did not write them all, but dictated them, or at least reviewed them, without checking it is not probable that any letter would have left the Chancellery. Most of the

letters to Siena can be divided into just these three units, but they are intended to urge and encourage them to join the league. There was no need to state any lofty or general truth, but the aim was to be to the point, but to be as brief and concise as possible.

In a separate chapter devoted to the Latinity of Coluccio Salutati, the greatest emphasis was on the deletions and corrections visible in the copies of the letters, of which several types of correction can be observed. Thanks to some of the original missives, copies of which were part of the *corpus*, I was able to make further observations. Thus, in conjunction with the *cursus* analyses presented in the previous chapter, sometimes the correction of the prose rhythm is the reason for a modification, and these two sources also allow us to reconstruct the process of writing. For example, in a missive sent to Siena, the written *clausula* ‘qua oc-ca-si-ó-ne neg-lí-gi-tis’ forms a *cursus tardus*, but the copy later apparently crosses this out and corrects it to ‘quo consilio negligatis’, which carries the expected *cursus velox*. This proves, on the one hand, that the copy was written after the missive was sent and, on the other hand, that Salutati later, even after the expedition, corrected the copy preserved at the chancellery. In this chapter, further linguistic and stylistic analyses are presented, including the contact between the language of Latin and Italian and the occurrence of very rare words, including a *hapax legomenon*.

IV. Publications of the candidate on the subject

VISEGRÁDI Renáta: A központosítás és a prózaritmus kapcsolata: *cursusok* Coluccio Salutati állami leveleiben. In: Juhász Daniella – Kerti Anna Emese (szerk.): *A CHSEC XIII. Országos Konferenciáján elhangzott előadások*. Vol. II. (Concentio) Budapest, Magyarország: ELTE Eötvös József Collegium (2019) 37–50., 14 p.

VISEGRÁDI Renáta: Struttura epistolare di alcune lettere di Stato di Coluccio Salutati. *Verbum: Analecta Neolatina* 22/2 (2021), 397–410., 14 p.

VISEGRÁDI Renáta: Correlazione tra cursus e punteggiatura in alcune lettere di stato di Coluccio Salutati. *Medioevo e Rinascimento*. Annuario del Dipartimento di Studi sul Medioevo e il Rinascimento dell'Università di Firenze. XXXVI/ n.s. XXXIII Fondazione Centro italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo, Spoleto (2022), 63–86., 24 p.

VISEGRÁDI Renáta: Coluccio Salutati korai missilisei. In: Gephárt Enikő – Hunyadi Zsolt – Martus Nikoletta (szerk.): *Medievisztikai Vándorkonferencia: Tanulmányok I.* Szeged, Magyarország: Szegedi Tudományegyetem Történelemtudományi Doktori Iskola (2024), 255–271., 17 p.

ARMANDO Nuzzo, SZOVÁK Kornél, VISEGRÁDI Renáta: Adalék Coluccio Salutati magyar vonatkozású állami leveleinek készülő kritikai kiadásához. *Sodalitates quondam et nunc*. *Convivia Neolatina Hungarica* (6) – megjelenés alatt.