

6 Access to Knowledge through the Classicity of Manuscripts at the Beginning of the 16th Century in the West – Some Thoughts on Modernity

Vichelmina ZACHOU

Ionian University, Corfu, Greece

Concerning changes in writing in the early 15th century in the West. An especially important period since the fundamental principles of the science of Palaeography originate from the period of humanism. The Humanists, despite the different views of the graphical features and the dating of the scriptures, were aware that *littera antiqua* had been attributed to an ancient writing but was in use during the Middle Ages. In Florence, at the end of the 14th and the beginning of the 15th century, the Greek script, the Greek alphabet, other than the Latin, not only extended the writing program that tends to return to the ancient script, and at that time embodies the Byzantine world of the late Middle Ages, but disrupts a dialectical scripture born in Latin writing.

The 16th century humanists refuse to recognize in the letters of their time a bond, any similarity to the letters of the ancient, and in addition accept next to the monumental, the presence, during the Roman times, of a writing, of cursive, known during the Renaissance, which appears in the many ancient ruins scattered in the cities and in the countryside. Although in the ancient inscriptions we find majuscule scripture, there were certainly other types of letters. This historical consciousness that stems from the view that writing cannot remain unchanged but depends on the functional and practical ability to reform and re-interpret the graphic instrument, matured in private libraries and fueled by daily friction with books.

Keywords: humanism, scripture, *littera antiqua*, graphic Greek-Latin

6.1 Introduction

The 14th and 15th centuries present a contradictory picture in the West, as in the same period in which Europe is tested by a multidimensional crisis, ecclesiastical, demographic, economic, moral, political, two interlinked movements manifested that have positively marked European historical course, Renaissance and Humanism. In the second half of the 14th century, the crisis will largely be overcome, and an instinctive need to balance the past suffering of material life would be the logical reaction of people if circumstances permit it. As the European urban population is beginning to grow creating conditions for increasing demand for products, a class of people is emerging in urban centers that is increasingly involved in trade and services. To thrive in these activities a prerequisite is education, a need which leads to the increase of schools and the number of literate. This class of people with high incomes, for which the problem of livelihood and survival does not exist, now has more time for higher level education and fun than in the past, while it considers children's education to be essential.

As the need for reading in everyday language increases, they begin to form the conditions that will lead to the development of national literatures. This, of course, does not mean that the Latin language preserved by the church, is abandoned; on the contrary, its knowledge offers access to the classical works whose authors are moving within the new values and interests of society. The book, originally manuscript and after the middle of the 15th century printed form, will allow this wider public to come into contact with the spiritual production of antiquity and its ideas in the field of science, politics, philosophy, administration, art and be influenced by them. Under these circumstances and given the demand for cultural products of high quality from

various Maecenas of the time, the conditions are formed for spiritual and cultural renewal that puts man and nature at its centre.

6.2 Influence of manuscripts from antiquity

Humanism of the first half of the 15th century is generally characterized by a dynamic in the propagation of the new culture, a dynamic expressed through various directions: from the recovery of manuscripts in libraries to the dissemination of new discoveries thanks to translations of works from Greek into Latin and from the promotion of the humanitarian message to the local centres of power until the creation of private academies, where the supporters of humanism gathered and exchanged information. [1]

The humanist educational program provided for the direct study of the classics. Latin was taught directly by the text, not by "exaggerated" medieval grammatical theory, while Greek was taught by the *Erotimata* [2] (*Ερωτήματα*) of Manuel Chrysoloras [3]. Then they entered the literary area and *studia humanitatis*, history, moral philosophy (based on Aristotle's *Ethical Nicomachy*- *Ηθικά Νικομάχεια*), literature, historiography and rhetoric.[4]

The real source of classical beauty was ancient Greek literature and the knowledge of the Greek language that was a basic prerequisite. The "fugue" of the Byzantine scholars to the West had begun some decades before the Fall, as the danger of the fall of Constantinople had begun to be predicted from the end of the 14th century. However, the exit was accelerated and increased, as was normal, immediately after the Fall (1453). Greek scholars teach the Greek language in Italian cities, as in Florence, while the Humanists organize missions for the purchase and transport of Greek codes in the West, such as Aurispa, who in 1423 transported 238 manuscripts to Italy. The first among the scholars, Manuel Chrysoloras [5] taught ancient Greek language and literature at the University of Florence from 1396 to 1399. His presence in Florence was a catalyst for the course of Greek studies in the West. His lecturing was held in front of a large audience, including well-known humanitarians and Florentine personalities, and arriving from neighboring cities to attend his lessons. From time to time, Chrysoloras taught in other cities in Italy, such as Padua, Milan, Rome, but in Florence, a known Renaissance centre, began to systematically teach Greek letters. The Florentine Maecenas Palla Strozzi, [6] had invited Chrysoloras in Florence, when he was there as a diplomatic envoy of the Emperor Manuel II Palaiologos in the West, to search for bases and help against the Ottomans in order to create a center for humanities in Florence. Chrysoloras taught his students using Greek manuscripts.

In 1406, Guarino Veronez (1374-1460) [7] bought in Constantinople a copy of the comedies of Aristophanes and *Erotimata* of Chrysoloras. The code (Vaticano Palatino greco 116) served in Guarino for his apprenticeship in Greek, for an exercise that at that time was mostly lexical, citing Greek words or idioms with the corresponding Latin form, and sometimes not due to lack of memory, but to make clearer the concept, choosing the common language. The code is an important testimony to the history of Guarino's studies and the reconstruction of a humanist library.

Guarino was in Constantinople for three years, where he remained until 1408, invited by Emmanuel Chrysoloras. At the time of his arrival, he was close to the age of 30 years and it seems that he had not, until that time, contacts with Florence: his education (including writing) took place in Verona, Padua and Venice. In 1397, Emmanuel Chrysoloras was hosted by Guarino when he was invited to Florence by a consortium of citizens to conduct Greek courses which constituted a fundamental station of *studia humanitatis*. Possibly, Guarino had heard from his teacher Chrysoloras about the graphic change in Florence and without knowing the Florentine rule, he wanted to write in *littera antiqua*.

The period in which Guarino was in Constantinople is the same that in Florence a program of radical reformation of writing was completed. A program that at that time did not involve any kind of writing but only copying books; and mostly classical works [8], Latins and Greeks in Latin translation, and sometimes in modern works, for example *De Verecundia* [9] of Salutati. Essentially, the writers we would call today "medieval" were excluded, and then called "modern". Strictly excluding popular literature.

Changes in writing in the early 15th century are accompanied by an awareness, a theoretical effort that cannot be compared to any other event in the history of writing. And it is no accident that the conceptual bases and terminology of science dealing with the history of writing, palaeography, come from the period of humanism.

The Florence program aimed at almost completely recovering a type of "ancient" book of the 11th or 12th century that imitates writing, decoration and even some structural practices (the use of parchment instead of paper, full layout of the text on the page and so on). This recovery was driven by literary, spelling and graphological motives.

In the handwritten note of Guarino, the ancient press is attained with the help of the Byzantine forms and based on a common root. It is worth noting that in Latin scripture such freedom of forms was not entirely foreign: in the late Roman period, maiuscule script and byzantine writing systems were observed in inscriptions, mosaics and codes in some centers of southern Italy, in areas of great Greek influence, or where Constantinopolitan writers were active. During the 13th and 14th centuries the use of mixed maiuscule is confirmed in the Veneto region.[10] Guarino could be described as the heir of a graphic tradition with ancient roots, and possibly had himself come in contact with some of these types and in Costantinople to recognize them. It appears that the use of Greek-Byzantine types by Guarino reveals a conscious recovery of ancient forms.

The presence of Greek or Hellenized letters, mainly in the use of capitals, titles or even in the text itself, is beginning to spread widely following the example of Guarino (Palatino greco 116). Many copyists in northern Italy consider it sufficient to use the maiuscule of Greek scripture to give the mark of ancient writing to a production that still remains deeply connected with the medieval tradition. Like, for example, a small Terenzio code [11] written in 1431 in littera textualis, but with a maiuscule Greek script and decorated with elaborate initials of Byzantine root.

It is a period in which the personal and indirect contacts are of particular importance. The level of writing knowledge is so high that the writers do not only capture their imitative graphic experience but a graphic model that almost takes the value of biographical features. [12]

It seems that with Guarino, initially in Veneto and then in Lombardy, starts a period of transcription of classics, in which writing tends towards to "old" scriptures (ad modum antiquorum) with a differentiation from the type of Florentine scripture. In Florence, the ideal type is represented by the code of the 11th and 12th centuries, while in the Veneto region return the models of the 8th and 9th century, that is the most ancient minuscule writing, which was interpreted with great freedom and this is the reason for the presence of elements which are not historically founded, but are peculiar with archaic complexion.

In the revitalization of litterae antiquae formae two voices coexist, the Florentine and that of the Veneto region: the first, balanced and practical, essentially continues to have ties to the late Middle Ages and provides professional scribes an excellent tool; the second, behind the myth of the ancient, will never be able to discipline a rule, but will continue to express very different scriptures. So, on the one hand, we are talking about a disciplined voice that feeds on the philological, grammatical and spelling needs of the Florentines, and on the other hand for an artistic, utopian voice. This different way of studying the scriptures of the past may be linked to contact with Greek culture and writing. This is a contact (through direct knowledge of the place and people) that has expanded the graphic perspective and opened the way to diversity and, at the same time, to the realization of a substantial continuity of writing.

Characteristic is the example of Kyriakos from Ancona (Ciriaco d'Ancona, 1391-1452). Palaeographers and historians consider Kyriakos' writing a historical stage in the evolution of writing based on a personal inclination. Unlike many other contemporaries, Kyriakos employs Greek-Byzantine models of writing, but at the same time he inherits and enriches a set of ideas and forms that he began to assemble based on Guarino's graphic experience in 1406. Recent studies have brought to light many copyists and notaries [13] who themselves moved in the same direction at the same time and used the same forms: Greek letters, special connections, letters maiuscule and minuscule together, grids, unusual shades.

The main thrust for returning to ancient writing was the restoration of classical Roman maiuscule scripture, both in inscriptions (engraved or painted) and in codes. Artists, scriptores

and antiquarii collaborate on a research that combines the reflection of artists and their literary and archaic studies.

At that time in the Veneto region a *littera antiqua* is born, which is distracted by the tradition of Florence. Special cases of graphic Greek-Latin mimetization thus bloom, more obvious stylistic than the use of Greek-style letters (alternation of Greek and Latin symbols).

This recovery of ancient maiusculae scripture is the principle of the return of *litterae antiquae formae* and is evidenced by the fact that already Petrarca and Boccaccio, in a context that remained constantly "modern" - Gothic, had already restored some maiusculae variants letters in the space of the corresponding "Gothic" types. Obviously, further research into the type of writing of other scribes or manuscript production centers would complete our knowledge of the sources of writing history.

6.3 Conclusions

Through the history of scripture from the past to the present, we find that it is essentially a product that is influenced by the educational and social habits of the scribes and is associated with the great moments of history. Graphic choices are driven by the historical necessity of time and place where a graphic development will take place.

6.4 References

[1] S.Gugliemino – H. Grosser, "Dal Duecento al Cinquecento", *Il sistema letterario, 1.Storia*, Milano, Principato 2000, pp. 248-249.

[2] His work "Τα ερωτήματα" based on the form of questionnaires, was translated into Latin and was printed in 1471 in a Greek-Latin epitome by his student, Guarino, and was highly appreciated.

[3] N.G. Wilson, "Από το Βυζάντιο στην Αναγέννηση", ed. Λιβάνης, trad. Πρεβερούδου – Γεωργίνη Φωτεινή, Athens 1994.

[4] S.Gugliemino – H. Grosser, "Dal Duecento al Cinquecento", p.277.

[5] Εμμανουήλ Χρυσολωρά, "Ερωτήματα", Vicenza, 1475-1476, Βιβλιοθήκη της Βουλής των Ελλήνων - É. Legrand, "Notice biographique sur Manuel Chrysoloras", Paris 1894 – G. Gammelli, "I dotti Bizantini e le origini dell'umanesimo I. Manuele Crisolora", Firenze 1941-1954 – I. Thomson, "Manuel Chrysoloras and the early Italian Renaissance", *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* (1966) – N. G. Wilson, "From Byzantium to Italy", *Greek Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, London 1999.

[6] M. Vannucci, "Le grandi famiglie di Firenze", Roma, Newton Compton Editori, 2006.

[7] C. de' Rosmini, "Vita e disciplina di Guarino di Verona e de' suoi discepoli", Brescia, 1805 – G. Fiesoli, "La biblioteca greca dei Guarini", in L. Avellini e N. D'Antuono (eds.), "Custodi della tradizione e avanguardie del nuovo sulle sponde dell'Adriatico. Libri e biblioteche, collezionismo, scambi culturali e scientifici, scritture di viaggio tra Quattrocento e Novecento", *Atti del convegno* (Pescara, Univ. degli Studi, 25-28 mag. 2005), Bologna, 2006, pp. 41-102 – R. Sabbadini, "Guarino Veronese e il suo epistolario edito e inedito", Roma, 1885 – M. Pade, L. Waage Petersen, D. Quarta, "La Corte di Ferrara e il suo mecenatismo 1441-1598", Ferrara, 1990.

[8] In the broad sense of classicity as they fall into the category and works of Augustine (354-430 AD) and Lactantius (250-317 AD).

[9] A letter of 1390 addressed to Antonio Baruffaldi on the positive or negative character of *verecundia* (respect).

[10] E. Barile, "Littera antiqua e scritture alla greca. Notai e cancellieri copisti a Venezia nei primi decenni del quattrocento", Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, 1994, pp. 69-86 - A. Petrucci, "Scrivere alla greca nell'Italia del Quattrocento", in G. Cavallo, G. De Gregorio, M. Maniaci (ed.), "Scritture, libri e testi nelle aree provinciali di Bisanzio", *Atti del seminario di Erice* (18-25 settembre 1988), II, Spoleto, Centro italiano di studi sull'Alto Medioevo 1991 («Biblioteca del Centro per il collegamento degli studi medievali e umanistici nell'Università di Perugia», 5), pp. 511-514.

[11] Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vaticano latino 3226 – S. Prete, *Il codice di Terenzio Vaticano latino 3226. Saggio critico e riproduzione del manoscritto*, Città del Vaticano 1970 (Studi e Testi 262).

[12] Suffice it to think of the likeness of the *littera antiqua* of Niccoli and the *littera antiqua* of the young Poggio, Niccoli's reworked writing and Traversari's counterpart. It seems that the combination of *littera antiqua* and Greek maiuscule script belongs to Guarino: S. Zamponi, "I manoscritti petrarcheschi della Civica di Trieste Library. Storia e Catalogo", Padova 1984, pp. 99, 102 and tav. XXVII.

[13] Barile, "Littera antiqua e scritture alla greca", pp. 69-86 passim.