
Michael Von Cotta-Schönberg

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(Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II; 9)

Final edition, 1st version

September 2018
Copenhagen
Abstract

In autumn 1445, Enea Silvio Piccolomini, secretary in the Imperial Chancery of Emperor Friedrich III and poet laureate, was invited to give two academic lectures at the University of Vienna. The first one, the “Nisi satis exploratum”, was most probably delivered at the beginning of the winter semester at the Faculty of Law in October. The second one was given as a quodlibetal disputation in connection with the yearly academic celebration at the Faculty of Liberal Arts on the Feast of Saint Catherine, 25 November. In this lecture, Piccolomini defended the position that wisdom is not the same as knowledge, since knowledge is a purely cognitive function, whereas wisdom is a virtue based on love of the good. Secondly, he gave an apology and praise of poetry. And thirdly, he made a facetious answer to a facetious question about why chanceries sell animal skins and old shirts with wax (meaning sealed documents on parchment or paper) so expensively.

Keywords

Enea Silvio Piccolomini; Aeneas Sylvius Piccolomini; Æneas Silvius Piccolomini; Kaiaser Friedrich III Habsburg; Emperor Frederick III Habsburg; Pope Pius II; Papa Pio II; Vienna University; Wien Universität; University of Vienna; Renaissance orations; Renaissance oratory; Renaissance rhetorics; 1445; 15th century; History of universities; Quodlibet disputation; Quodlibetal disputation; Poetry; Science vs. Virtue; Wisdom vs. Knowledge; Chanceries; Chancelleries

Editor and translator

Michael v. Cotta-Schönberg

Mag. Art. (University of Copenhagen)
Bachelier en Philosophie (Université de Louvain)

Emeritus Deputy Director / The Royal Library, Copenhagen
Emeritus University Librarian / University of Copenhagen

ORCID identity: 000-0001-8499-4142
E-mail: typsita@gmail.com
Foreword

This is the first version of the final edition of the present text. I do not, actually, plan to publish further versions of this text, but I reserve the option in case I – during my future studies - come across other manuscripts containing interesting versions of the oration or if important new research data on the subject matter are published, making it appropriate or necessary to modify or expand the present text. It will therefore always be useful to check if a later version than the one the reader may have found previously via the Internet is available in HAL Archives.

In 2007, I undertook a project of publishing the Latin texts with English translations of the orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II (altogether 77 orations - including papal responses to ambassadorial addresses - are extant today, though more may still be held, unrecognized, in libraries and archives). Later the project has been expanded to include ambassadors’ orations to the pope, of which about 40 are presently known.

I have published the preliminary editions of both the individual orations and the collected orations in the French digital research archive, HAL Archives, and I shall gradually be replacing them with the final edition until the whole work – Deo volente - is completed in 2020.

I shall much appreciate to be notified by readers who discover errors and problems in the text and translation or unrecognized quotations.

10 September 2018
MCS

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I. INTRODUCTION
1. Context

On 27 July 1442, Emperor Friedrich III crowned Enea Silvio Piccolomini as poet. The emperor had not known Piccolomini before, and he was little interested in poetry, but he was solicitous to perform the traditional ceremonials of emperorship, and the coronation of poets was one such. Piccolomini, at the time secretary of antipope Felix V, had been recommended to the emperor by influential courtiers like Bishop Silvester of Chiemsee, and some months afterwards Piccolomini joined the Imperial Chancery as a secretary. He was to have a meteoric career as counsellor and diplomat at the Imperial Chancery and later a career in the Church leading him to the papal throne in 1458.

By autumn 1445, Piccolomini had been member of the Imperial Chancery for almost three years, and he had already been on his first, very important, mission on behalf of the emperor to Pope Eugenius IV in Rome, from where he returned to the Imperial Court in early summer 1445.

In the autumn of 1445, Piccolomini was invited twice to give a lecture at the University of Vienna. Apparently, he had not finished his university studies in Siena (1423-1430) with an academic degree, but his diploma of poet laureate conferred on him the right of "legendi, disputandi, interpretandi et componendi poemata liberam ubique locorum facultatem." The circumstances of the university’s invitation are somewhat obscure and various interpretations have been given. The university may have been interested in fresh humanist input from Italy, but at any rate the invitation to a member of the Imperial Chancery would have been a gesture of politeness to the Court, and it was appreciated to the extent that the emperor was personally present when Piccolomini was presented with the topics for his second lecture.

The first lecture was probably given on 13 October 1445, at the beginning of the winter semester of the university.

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1 Kisch, pp. 41-65; Lhotsky: Aeneas, pp. 32-33; Lhotsky: Wiener, p. 138; Strnad: Rezeption, pp. 80-81; Wagendorfer, pp. 22-23, 51
2 Or more precisely, King of the Romans and Emperor-elect until his imperial coronation which took place in Rome in 1452
3 Kisch, p. 41; Lhotsky: Wiener, p. 138
4 Helmrath, p. 108
5 Voigt, I, II, 6, p. 343
6 Lhotsky: Wiener, p. 33; Wagendorfer, p. 22
7 Kisch, p. 41; Lhotsky: Wiener, p. 138; Strnad: Rezeption, p. 80; Wagendorfer, p. 22
8 E.g. Kisch, p. 57-58
9 Participation in solemn academic functions might already in that age have been part of the extended ceremonial "system" of royalty. During his coronation travel in 1452, Emperor Friedrich III also assisted at the doctoral promotion at the University of Padua of another of his officials, Johannes Hinderbach, cf. Strnad: Johannes, p. 134
10 Oration "Nisi satis exploratum" of Enea Silvio Piccolomini
The second lecture, the “Aderat nuper”, was given in connection with the yearly academic celebration at the Faculty of the Liberal Arts, on the Feastday of Saint Catherine of Alexandria, 25 November 1454.

It was a quodlibetal disputation, based on three of the theses presented by professor Johann [Widmann] of Dinkelsbühl¹ and two other members of the academic staff. From the text of Piccolomini’s oration it appears that these theses were presented during the solemn academic act on the feastday itself, in the presence of the emperor and his noble companions. As disputant he was then given a period, probably some days, to prepare his lecture, whereupon an academic assembly gathered – without the emperor and the noble guests – to hear his disputation, which was followed by some kind of conclusion (judicium) by Johann Dinkelsbühl.

It is not known what kind of relationship Piccolomini might have had to Dinkelsbühl,² who presided over the disputation,³ but it is remarkable that one of the themes chosen for his lecture was directly related to his first lecture at the university. During that lecture he had praised each of the liberal arts and the other disciplines taught at the university, including the sciences of law, philosophy and theology. Philosophy he had called mother, creator, and queen of all the arts, and quoted Cicero naming her the guide to virtue as well as its explorer, gift of the gods, and teacher of morals. And theology he had called the only science ... which leads us to the Heavenly Kingdom. It teaches us to see the high throne of omnipotent God and all the ranks of the celestial hierarchy. It catches us up where we may contemplate that which, as Paul says, it is not granted to man to utter. It promises immortality to its adherents and followers. And now, at the second lecture, he was given the task of defending the opposite position, i.e. that science and knowledge are different from morals and religiosity, knowledge being a purely cognitive function, whereas morals and religiosity are virtues based on the supreme emotion of love of the good. For Piccolomini it would not have been awkward or difficult to defend an opposite thesis of what he himself he said earlier: his training made it quite possible – and even interesting – for him to engage in such dialectical activities, a pleasant form of mental exercise.

Secondly, in the first lecture, he had, remarkably, not mentioned poetry,⁴ even though Italian humanists had begun to include it in the broad concept of the liberal arts and humanities. Possibly the university climate in Vienna was, at the time, too traditional for such innovative ideas to be floated in a first lecture. But now, at the second lecture, he was directly offered the opportunity to present his ideas on poetry as an important discipline, including a defense of the use of classical pagan authors.

¹ Strnad: Rezeption, p. 81
² Kisch, p. 47
³ Ibid.
⁴ Except for calling Homer the first of poets
And thirdly, the facetious question about why chanceries sell animal skins and old shirts with wax (code for sealed documents on parchment and paper) so expensively, was an excellent opportunity for Piccolomini, a member of the Imperial Chancery, to shine, exercising his prodigious wits and humour.\footnote{Lhotsky, p. 140, believed that the choice of question may have showed some malicious intent, but this cannot be documented. Against Lhotsky, see Kisch, p. 49, n. 8, and pp. 48-49}

All in all, these three questions may be considered as reflecting an interested, polite, and friendly, possibly even cordial, attitude on the part of Dinkelsbühl towards Piccolomini, and the two men may even have met and discussed the themes before the event.

Piccolomini’s performance on this occasion may barely be criticised: his reply to the question on science versus wisdom was excellent, well-argued, and supported by great authorities. His apology and praise of poetry was lively and interesting (though not all may have been convinced that poetry was useful and necessary to a society), and it is, indeed, difficult to see how God may be praised if there are no poets to compose hymns in his honour! And Piccolomini’s facetious answer to Dinkelsbühl’s facetious question must surely have delighted the audience at a university where posing a facetious, tongue-in-the-cheek question was part of the standing procedure for quodlibetal disputations.

2 Themes

The three major themes of the oration are evidently the three questions or problems chosen by Piccolomini in reply to the theses presented by Johann of Dinkelsbühl. They are:

- Wisdom versus knowledge
- Apology and praise of poetry
- Price of skins sold by chanceries

2.1. Wisdom versus knowledge

Piccolomini sets out by defining the terms wisdom (prudentia) and knowledge (scientia) [sect. 3].
Concerning knowledge he uses a definition by Isidore of Seville: “Knowledge is the perception of something with certain reason.”¹ The main concept here is the cognitive faculty of perception.

Concerning wisdom he rejects two definitions by Isidore and Cicero which appear to identify wisdom with knowledge (of good and bad). In their stead he prefers two definitions, one by Augustine and the other one by the medieval author, Jean de la Rochelle²:

Augustine’s definition is: Wisdom is love distinguishing with sagacity between what hinders it and what helps it to God.³

Jean de la Rochelle’s definition is: Wisdom is the knowledge of good and evil things with love of the first and hate of the second.⁴

Discussing these definitions, Piccolomini shows that people may perfectly well have moral knowledge – derived from books, e.g. Aristotle’s Ethica - without transforming that knowledge into moral behaviour.

And concerning wisdom he defines it as a coming from God (the true sun) and comprising not only cognition, but also emotion, i.e. the love of good:

Knowledge is a passive cognition of things, which cannot change your will, so that you embrace what you know as good and avoid what you know as bad, whereas wisdom is a living ray of light, coming from the true sun, and it not only illumines the intellect, but also heats the emotions.⁵

Furthermore, he shows that though the two disciplines may have the same object, they treat it so differently that they are not identical. Here he gives the very appropriate example of astronomy and astrology, astronomy being a science of natural phenomena, and astrology being a superstition predicting the course of human affairs on the basis of such phenomena.

Astronomy gives knowledge about the changes [observed] in the sky and the course of the stars. Astrology does the same. But astrology is a superstition since it tries to predict the

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¹ Scientia est, cum res aliqua certa ratione percipitur
² Piccolomini does not refer to Jean de la Rochelle by name and indeed may not have known the source of this quotation
³ Prudentia est amor eorum, quibus adjuvatur in Deum, ab his, quibus impeditur, sagaciter eligens
⁴ Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum cum alterarum dilectione et aliararum detestatone scientia
⁵ Est enim scientia cognitio rerum mortuæ, quæ voluntatem mutare non potest, ut vel bonum cognitum amplexatun vel malum fugiat, at prudentia radius vivus est a vero sole procedens, qui non solum illuminat intellectum, sed etiam calefacit affectum
necessary course and the character of people on the basis of the course of the stars, and therefore we claim that astronomy and astrology are not the same. [Sect. 6]¹

He concludes by rejecting the thesis presented by Dinkelsbühl, that wisdom and knowledge are the same:

For even though wisdom deals with such things which are good for human life and moral knowledge deals with the same things, it does not follow that they are identical, for they have different properties: knowledge only understands what is good, whereas wisdom first understands what is good and then does it, as I said before. [Sect. 6]²

2.2. Apology and praise of poetry³

Dinkelsbühl had asked why there were so few poets when they were apparently both useful and necessary. Piccolomini uses this question to present a proper apology and praise of poetry, such as he had wanted to do for a long time, and begun to in his Pentalogus of 1443 and in a letter to his friend Wilhelm von Stein, of 1 June 1444, and which he would take up again later, in his treatise De liberorum educatione of 1450.⁴

By way of introduction to this theme, Piccolomini first shows, by a series of examples, how poets were highly honoured in Antiquity.

He then goes on to speak on four subthemes:

- Usefulness of poetry
- Necessity of poetry
- Use of classical pagan literature
- Rarity of poets

¹ Astronomia de caeli conversione stellarumque cursibus notitiam praebet; idem facit astrologia. Quia haec tamen superstitionis quid habet, dum siderum cursu necessitates hominum et mores praedicare conatur, alid astronomiam dicimus esse et alid astrologiam

² Quamvis enim prudentia circa ea versetur, quae sunt ad vitam humanam bona, ac circa eadem scientia moralis consistat, non tamen identitas sequitur, nam modis invicem diversis se habent. Scientia enim solum intelligit, quid est bonum, prudentia vero, postquam novit, etiam operatur

³ A number of the examples from Antiquity, Piccolomini had already used in remarks on poetry in his Pentalogus of March 1443, cf. pp. 62-67, and in his letter to Wilhelm Stein of 1 July 1444, cf. Piccolomini: Epistolarium, p. 289, and he would reuse them in a further development of the theme in his De liberorum educatione from 1450

⁴ In the notes to the translation, some of the recurrent quotations in these texts are indicated exempli gratia
2.2.1. Usefulness of poetry

Poetry is useful for two reasons: firstly it fulfils a useful moral purpose by praising virtue and blaming vice, and secondly it fulfils a useful religious purpose by praising God. Piccolomini proves his point by referring to a number of classical examples, derived mostly from the Bible, Basil’s Ad adolescentes, Cicero’s Pro Archia and Tusculanae Disputationes, and Solinus.

2.2.2. Necessity of poetry

For any society to thrive, it is necessary that citizens live morally and abandon vice: cities do no live well without men who are able to convince citizens to live morally and to abandon vice. [Sect. 16]

Piccolomini identifies three kinds of men, or three professions, who perform this function: orators, theologians, and poets.

Like poets, orators have an important function in the persuasion of men to live morally. Some may think that they do it better than poets because they have a much broader store of words and concepts to use.

Related to orators are the theologians who have a professional duty to convince people to live morally and do so primarily by sermons, a form of oratory.

And then there are poets who persuade people to live morally through verses, i.e. short and cogent verbal messages.

Piccolomini observes that orators use long and disconnected concepts that are not easy to remember, whereas theologians are not trained as orators and therefore do not speak well. Therefore both orators and theologians fall short in their function of persuading people to live well.

Poets, however, have a privileged language in which to foster morals since they are able to coin striking phrases and concepts in a linguistic form (the metre) which makes it easy for people to remember. Thus poets are far superior as promoters of morals, and therefore they are necessary to society.
2.2.3. Use of classical pagan authors

The use of classical pagan authors was, for centuries, a problem as well as bone of contention between a large segment of the clergy on the one side and classically formed churchmen of the early Church and the new humanists of the Renaissance on the other.

The opponents pointed to the plurality of false gods and the blatant immorality of these gods, and to erotic themes unacceptable to Christians.

In his defense against these objections, Piccolomini uses the well-known arguments, concepts, and images developed by church fathers like Basil the Great, Jerome, and Augustine, indeed a worthy company. Even his reference to Plato’s exclusion of poets from his ideal city is standard fare in this context.

More original are his arguments concerning the faults of poets versus the faults of theologians. Poets and poetry as a whole should not be blamed just because a few poets err, for in that case also philosophers and philosophy, and theologians and theology as a whole must be rejected. Piccolomini supports this argument with a reference to the many philosophical theories unacceptable to Christianity and to the plethora of heresies produced by theologians:

"What is said in the poems about gods is not the fault of the poets but of the times since [at that time] people worshipped idols. And it is not just poets who speak about gods: the philosophers and all the writers of that age (except the Jews) talk about [gods] and claim to worship them. That they tell of crimes is not objectionable for they do so in order to deter men from such crimes, just like theologians do. Those who approve of vice are actually very few, and all should not be blamed for what only two and three do. We should not condemn poetry because a few poets are in error, for if we go that way, we would follow no teaching at all; we should despise even philosophy, the mother of all sciences, for it is a fact there are philosophers who have erred. What can be said to be more soft or languorous than the view of Epicure who based all happiness on pleasure and denied that souls are immortal? Pythagoras denies the existence of Hell and believes that after death the souls of men transmigrate to other living beings. And Averroës thought that all bodies share one soul. [Sect. 18]"

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1 Indeed classical authors had themselves discussed the appropriateness of using myths and stories of the immoral acts of gods in their writings
2 Including a pope, Martinus V, see below
3 Cf. e.g. Schucan, pp. 38-41
4 However, his use of a quite explicit homosexual poem by Plato, reported by Macrobius, is quite astonishing and might seem somewhat counterproductive in the context of argumentation
What about the theologians whom we today honour most of all? Did they never err? What about Arius, what about Eutyches, what about Nestorius, what about those almost countless others who caused division in the Church? And in our own times, what about Jan Hus and Jeronimus who were burnt in Konstanz? So many heresies could not have flourished, if these men had not flaunted their title of theologian. But just as theology is not at fault because many theologians err, poetry too is not harmed because many poets nourish errors. And that may not be called evil which we may use for the good, for otherwise neither the liberal nor the mechanical arts were acceptable since we can use them for the bad. [Sect. 19]

2.2.4 Rarity of poets

The four reasons for the rarity of poets are:

- Only few people have the great knowledge and many and varied skills needed in poets
- God only gives the gift of poetry to few men
- Like human virtues decrease with time, so does poetry
- Poets are not honoured as they deserve

2.3. The price of skins sold by chanceries

The background to this question may have been a rise in the charges for chancery documents, as noted by Heinrich Kollar:

Den Zeitgenossen dürfte eher aufgefallen sein, dass die Privilegien wegen ihres eindrucksvolles Aussehens ... vom Empfänger teuer bezahlt wurden, wie es für die päpstliche Schriftstücken ... längst üblich geworden war. Diese Beweggründe wurden erst vor wenigen Jahren von Isenmann hervorgehoben, der betonte, dass für das Urkundenwesen des Spätmittelalters finanzielle Überlegungen und die Höhe der notwendigen Zahlungen wichtiger als die Dokumentation rechtlicher Normen waren.¹

Dinkelsbühl’s facetious, but pointed question is answered by Piccolomini quite elegantly, and with a delightful, irreverent and somewhat risqué riposte against theologians of whom many would be present in the audience:

¹ Koller, pp. 67-68
When the heads of the chancery heard this and understood that there was great power in skins,¹ they considered that they ought not be given out cheaply, but began - as was reasonable – to sell them, and shirts² with wax,³ at a great price. In this they imitated the priests who reap great profits from dispensing the sound of bells, smoke, and water, and making words, and who would not dream of giving them away for free. [Sect. 26]

The chancery got its playful revenge!

3 Date, place, audience, and format

The oration was delivered some days after 25 November 1445, the Feastday of Catherine of Alexandria, patron saint of the Faculty of Liberal arts at the University of Vienna. That feast was the yearly occasion of an academic celebration accompanied by a quodlibetal disputation, initiated during the feast itself, and held by the disputant after some days of preparation.⁴

The place was the aula of the University of Vienna, probably the one in the Nova Structura.⁵

The audience at the presentation of the theses was Emperor⁶ Friederich III, Archduke Sigismund of Austria, many nobles accompanying the emperor, and presumably the high-ranking university officials and senior academic staff, as well as junior academic staff and students. The audience at the lecture itself was doctors and students from the university.⁷

The format was an academic quodlibetal lecture in reply to theses presented by Johann of Dinkelsbühl on the feastday itself, and it was immediately followed by Dinkelsbühl’s conclusions (judicium).

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¹ I.e. parchment
² I.e. paper
³ i.e. wax seals
⁴ Kisch, p. 42
⁵ The Nova Structura was built 1423-1425
⁶ King of the Romans, not yet crowned as emperor
⁷ Kisch, p. 42
4 Text

4.1 Manuscripts

For unknown reasons, the "Aderat nuper" is not mentioned in Pius' Commentarii, and it was not included in the Collected Orations of Pope Pius II, compiled under his direct supervision in 1462. Possibly, the text had disappeared from his personal files at some point during his many travels as imperial secretary and diplomat.

The oration is extant in a number of manuscripts:

- München / Bayerische Staatsbibliothek
  Clm 215, ff. 62r-66r
  Clm 5311, ff. 157v-165v (H)
  Clm 18802, ff. 138r-142v (I)

- Roma / Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana
  Reg. lat. 1375, 157r-154v
  Ross. lat. 786, 52r-57v

- Szombathely / Egyházmegyei Könyvtár
  8

- Uppsala / Universitetsbibliotek
  C 916, ff. 151r-155v (U)*

4.2. Editions and translations

The oration has been published a number of times, among them:

- Pius II: Epistolae de laude poetica, de differentia inter scientiam et prudentiam et de poetis, de laude litterarum, cur li bri cumul en tur. Köln, Dictys / Arnold ter Hoernen, 1470-1471

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1 Manuscripts for which an orthographical profile is given in Collected orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II, vol. 11, are marked with an asterisk
2 Cf. Wagendorfer, p. 23, n. 7
• Pius II: *Epistolae familiares*. Ed. Nikolaus Wyle. Norimbergae: Anton Koberger, 1481, 1486, 1496\(^1\) / Ep. CIII (WY)  
  *In the present ed., the digitized version of 1486 ed. has been used (dig.pag. 109 ff.)*

• Pius II: *Opera que extant omnia*. Basel: Heinrich Petri, 1551 & 1571 / ep. CIII, pp. 594-599  
  *On the basis of the letter ed. by Wyle*

  *On the basis of the clm 5311*

It has not been translated previously.

### 4.3 Present edition

For principles of edition (incl. orthography) and translation, see *Collected Orations of Enea Silvio Piccolomini / Pope Pius II*, vol. 1, ch. 11-12.

*Text:*

The present edition is based on clm 5311, clm 18802, the manuscript from Uppsala, and the Koberger edition of 1486, with clm 18802 as the lead manuscript.

*Pagination:*

Pagination is from the clm 18802 (red) and the clm 5311 (blue).

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\(^1\) Cf. Hain, pp. 19-22. The other incunabula editions of Piccolomini’s epistolae familiares, cf. Häbler, have not been checked. Presumably the *Aderat nuper* is also printed in (some of) these
5 Sources

In this oration, altogether 45 direct and indirect quotations from various sources have been identified:

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</table>

The classical quotations dominate heavily, and there is only one quotation from the bible. This distribution may be due to the character of the oration as an academic lecture.

Biblical sources: 1

Old Testament: 0

New Testament: 1

• 2. Corinthians: 1

Classical sources: 33

• Aristotle: 1
• Cicero: 9
• Homer: 1
• Horatius: 2
• Juvenalis: 2
• Macrobius: 1
• Plato: 2
• Plutarch: 1
• Quintilianus: 1
• Seneca: 2
• Solinus: 6

1 Politica
2 De inventione 2; De officiis 1; Pro Archia 3; Tusculanae disputationes 3
3 Ars poetica 1; Epistolae, 1
4 Republic
5 Parallel lives
6 Epistulae ad Lucilium
- Vergilius: 2
- Valerius Maximus: 3

**Patristic and medieval sources: 11**

- Augustinus: 2
- Basil of Caesarea: 5
- Isidore: 3
- Jean de la Rochelle: 1

**Contemporary sources: 0**

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6. Bibliography

Basil of Caesarea: *Ad adolescentes*

- Gane, Jennifer Helen: *Fourth Century Christian Education. An Analysis of Basil’s Ad Adolescentes*. PH.d. in the School of Historical Studies. 2012
  [With Greek text and English parallel translation]

Bruni, Leonardo: *De studiis et litteris*


Hain, Ludwig: *Repertorium bibliographicum, in quo libri omnes ab arte typographica inventa usque ad annum MD. typis expressi, ordine alphabetico vel simpliciter enumerantur vel accuratus recensentur*. Stuttgart, 1831

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1 Collectanea mirabilium mundi
2 Aeneis
3 De moribus ecclesiae catholicae 1; De quantitate animae 1
4 Adolescentes
5 Etymologiae

Jean de la Rochelle: *Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentiarum animae*.


Kallendorf, Craig (ed.): *Humanist Educational Treaties*. Harvard, 2002. (The I Tatti Renaissance Library; 5)


Koller, Heinrich: *Kaiser Friedrich III*. Darmstadt, 2005


McManamon, John: *Funeral Oratory and the Cultural Ideals of Italian Humanism*. Chapel Hill, 1989

Migne, Jacques-Paul: *Patrologia latina*. 217 vols. 1841-1865 (*MPL*)


Pius II: *Epistolae*


Pius II: *Opera omnia*
Pius II: *Opera quae extant omnia*. Basel: Heinrich Petri, 1551 & 1571

Pius II: *Orationes*

- Pius II: *Orationes politicae et ecclesiasticae*. Ed. Giovanni Domenico Mansi. 3 vols. Lucca: Benedini, 1755-1759


Piccolomini, Enea Silvio: *Pentalogus* [1443]


Solinus, Gaius Julius: *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* [3rd c.]


Alfred A. Strnad: *Johannes Hinderbachs Obedienz-Ansprache vor Papst Pius II – Päpstliche und kaiserliche Politik in der Mitte des Quattrocento*. In: Römische historische Mitteilungen, 10 (1966/67) 41-183 / pp. 165-177


6. Sigla and abbreviations

H = München / Bayerische Staatsbibliothek / Clm 5311
I = München / Bayerische Staatsbibliothek / Clm 18802
U = Uppsala / Universitetsbibliotek / C 916


Abbreviations


MPL = Migne, Jacques-Paul: *Patrologia latina*. 217 vols. 1841-1865
II. TEXT AND TRANSLATION
Anno domini 1445. o in aula universitatis Wiennensis studii Aenee Silvi1 poetae propositae fuerunt haec infrascriptae quaestiones in quodlibeto, quod disputatum fuerat per eximium magistrum Johannem de Dinkelspuehi2, artium et theologiae doctorem pro tunc licentiatum, praesente3 rege divo Romanorum4 Friderico5, Austriae, Stiriae duce6 7, ac Sigismundo Austriae8 duce9 praesente10, dum modo proponebantur.11


1 omit. H  
2 omit. H  
3 omit. H  
4 divo Romanorum omit. H  
5 Frederico H  
6 illeg. add. I  
7 Austriae Stiriae duce omit. H  
8 omit. H  
9 illeg. add. I  
10 presentibus H  
11 omit. U; Anno ... proponebantur : Triplicis probleumatis resolutio. Epistola CIII. WY  
12 omit. I  
13 atque U, WY  
14 alias U, WY  
15 alias rite add. in marg. U; recte WY  
16 propleromata I; probleumata WY  
17 et add. WY  
18 icomicorum H, I, U, WY  
19 omit. I  
20 omit. H, U, WY  
21 cancellaria WY  
22 notam fortasse : fortasse notam U, WY  
23 omit. U, WY  
24 illeg. add. I  
25 optima munera : optimis muneribus WY
In the year of the Lord 1445 the following questions were put to the poet Enea Silvio, in a quodlibet disputation in the aula of the University of Vienna, by magister Johann of Dinkelsbühl,1 then licensed doctor of arts and theology. Friedrich,2 Holy King of the Romans and Duke of Styria, and Duke Sigismund3 of Austria were present when these questions were presented.

0. Introduction

[1] When some days ago His Imperial Majesty was here, accompanied by many barons and nobles, and the auditorium was filled with teachers and students, you, distinguished doctor,4 and forceful and subtle disputant, presented to me a number a problems. Among these problems were, if I remember correctly, the following three:

- The first was: is wisdom (prudentia) the same as the moral knowledge (scientia) set forth in [Aristotle’s] books on Ethics, Politics and Economics and in the books of canons and laws?

- The second was: why are there so few poets in our time when apparently they are both very useful and necessary?

- The third was a question which may have been thought up either to embarrass the Chancery or humourously: why are cheap skins of dead animals and old shirts with wax on them sold in the chanceries at the price of precious metals?

These were – if I am not mistaken - the questions put to me by your eminently learned self5, distinguished magister and debater.

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1 Johann of Dinkelsbühl
2 Frederick III [Habsburg] (1415 – 1493): Duke of Austria (as Frederick V) from 1424. Elected King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor in 1440, crowned in Rome in 1452. Piccolomini’s employer from 1442 to 1455
3 Sigismund [Habsburg] (1427 – 1496): Archduke of Austria, and Duke of Tirol from 1446 to 1490. Cousin of Emperor Friedrich III and his ward until 1446
4 “vir”
5 “singularis prudentia”
Quaesierunt et alii duo, qui illic assident, quaedam alia, ut moris est in disputatione, quae de re qualibet habetur. Illa ego memoriae non habeo. Neque enim Cineas sum, ille Pyrrhi legatus, qui altera die, qua Romam intraverat, universum senatum et equestrem ordinem propriis nominibus salutavit, tanta eumuisse memoria tradunt historiae. Respondebo igitur his tantum tribus, quae retuli, problematibus. Nec verebor me dicere imparatum fuisse, cum illa quaererentur, nam et Demosthenes, qui omnium Graecorum praecipuus orator fuit, interrogatus jussusque sententiam in senatu dicere non erubuit imparatum se venisse respondere. Quidam adeo cupidi gloriae sunt, ut ex tempore velint cuilibet interrogatiunculae satisfacere, sed his saepe, dum gloria quaeritur, ingens ignominia crescit. Nec enim humanum est cuilibet interroganti bene respondere, sed est hujus auditorii tanta modestia, ut data sit unicuique ad cogitandum mora. Qua nunc ipse usus paratus adveni vestris petitionibus, magister ornatissime ac hujus universitatis clarissimum jubaverat, non solum respondere, sed etiam, ut opinor, satisfacere. Nihil tamen dicam quasi vestram doctrinam instruens, sed tamquam meam ignorantiam erudiens verbum habeo daboque locum responsis vestris, quibus me melius et rectius admonueritis.
Two others, who are sitting over there, also formulated some questions as is the custom in a quodlibet disputation, but these questions I do not remember. Indeed I am not like Cineas,\(^1\) the legate of Pyrrhus,\(^2\) who according to the history books had so extensive a memory that he was able to greet each member of the Senate and the Equestrian Order by name already the day after coming to Rome.\(^3\) So, now I shall only make a reply concerning those three problems which I was able to recall. And I am not ashamed to admit that I was unprepared when these problems were presented, for also Demosthenes,\(^4\) the most outstanding orator of all the Greeks, once - when asked a question in the Senate and required to give his considered opinion\(^5\) - was not ashamed to answer that he had come unprepared.

Some men are so eager for glory that they want to reply immediately to any question whatsoever, but such men often find great shame in stead of the glory they seek. For it is not human to be able to answer all questioners well. But the moderation of the present audience is so great that all are given time\(^6\) to reflect. Having used this time, I have now come, ready to answer your questions, excellent magister and shining light of this university, and not just to make a reply, but a satisfactory one – I believe. As I speak I shall not be trying to lecture your learned selves, but laying bare my ignorance I shall heed your answers\(^7\) with which you will instruct me properly.

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1. Cineas: (fl. 3\(^{rd}\) c. BC): minister of Thessaly and friend of King Pyrrhus who after the Battle of Heraclea in 280 BC sent him to negotiate peace with the Roman Senate. In Antiquity famed for his memory
2. Pyrrhus (c. 319 – 272 BC): Greek general and statesman. King of Epirus and Macedon. Fought Rome. After the Battle of Heraclea in 280 BC, he sent Cineas to Rome to negotiate a peace. Defeated a Roman army at the Battle of Asculum in 279 BC but lost so many men that he could not afford more victories! (Pyrrhic victory)
3. Solinus: *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, 1, 109 (p. 27): *Cineas Pyrrhi legatus postero die, quam ingressus Romam fuerat, et equestrem ordinem et senatum propriis nominibus salutavit*
4. Demosthenes (384 – 322 BC): Athenian statesman. Considered one of the best Greek orators
5. “sententia”
6. “mora”
7. Cf. the “judicium” or reply of Dinkelsbühl which would follow Piccolomini’s oration
1. First question: is wisdom (prudentia) the same as the moral knowledge (scientia) set forth in [Aristotle’s] books on Ethics, Politics and Economics and in the books of canons and laws?

[3] When you ask whether wisdom (prudentia) is the same - as I said before - I take the opposite view to the one defended by you in the second place. For wisdom makes men good, whereas the knowledge set forth in those books is also given to wicked men. Therefore they cannot be the same. However, let us now go deeper into this matter and define knowledge and wisdom, for in his books De Officiis, Cicero\(^1\) says that “every systematic development of any subject ought to begin with a definition, so that everyone may understand what the discussion is about.”\(^2\)

Isidore\(^3\) says that “knowledge is the perception of something with certain reason,”\(^4\) and “wisdom is the distinction between good and bad.”\(^5\) If this is so, knowledge is more praiseworthy than wisdom for it is more comprehensive. And Cicero agrees when, in his rhetoricals books, he says that “wisdom is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad.”\(^6\)

However, in his book on De moribus ecclesiae, Augustine\(^7\) defines it differently when he says that “wisdom is love distinguishing with sagacity between what hinders it and what helps it to God.”\(^8\)

And elsewhere this definition is used: “Wisdom is the knowledge of good and evil things with love of the first and hate of the second.”\(^9\)

\(^1\) Cicero, Marcus Tullius (106-43 BC): Roman statesman and author
\(^2\) Cicero: De officiis, 1, 2, 7: Omnis enim, quae [a] ratione suscipitur de aliqua re institutio, debet a definitione proficisci, ut intellegatur, quid sit id, de quo disputetur
\(^3\) Isidore of Seville (c. 550 – 636): Archbishop of Seville. Author of Etymologiae, an encyclopedia based on classical works which served as a storehouse of knowledge for later centuries
\(^4\) Isidore: Etymologiae, 2, 24, 2: Scientia est cum res aliqua certa ratione percipitur
\(^5\) Isidore: Etymologiae, 2, 24, 6: Prudentia est cum discernuntur a bonis mala
\(^6\) Cicero: De inventione, 2, 53: Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum et utrarumque scientia
\(^8\) Augustine: De moribus ecclesiae catholicae, 1, 15, 25. (MPL, 32, 1322)
\(^9\) Cf. Jean de la Rochelle: Tractatus de divisione multiplici potentiarum animae. .., p. 166: Similiter Aarialdus in libro de requie mentis: Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum cum alterarum delectatione et reliquarum detestatione scientia. With note by editor: Auctor et locus non inveni. Jean de la Rochelle was a French Franciscan monk, philosopher and theologian, who lived from 1200 to 1245. It is not known where Piccolomini picked up the quotation from his book
Secundum has diffinitiones, qui prudens est, idem quoque vir bonus est, cum bona diligat malaque detestetur. At scientia librorum Aristotelis et juris, quamvis bona malaque noscat, non tamen haec odire et illa diligere cigit. Plures enim peritiam illius habent, qui sunt et avaritia et aliorum vitiorum servi, quia non mutat affectum cognitio semper, quamvis instruat intellectum. Nam et Salomon, qui scientissimus fuit ac bonum et malum novit, tamquam vilissimum pecus luxuriae sese tradidit inter uxorres trecentas concubinasque septuaginta marcescens. Est enim scientia cognitionem rerum mortua, quae voluntatem mutare non potest, ut vel bonum cognitum amplectatur vel malum fugiat, at prudentia radius virens procedens, qui non solum illuminat intellectum, sed etiam caelefacit affectum. [cont.]

1 omit. H
2 omit. U
3 effectum H
4 sapientissimus WY
5 tamen add. U
6 tricentas I, U
7 sepingentas I; seuptuagintas U
8 omit. I
9 omit. U
10 virens alias vivus I; unus WY
11 omit. U
12 solo I
13 que H, WY
14 omit. WY
[4] According to these definitions the wise man is also a good man, since he loves what is good and hates what is bad. But the knowledge in the books of Aristotle\(^1\) and in the books of law though it knows what is good and bad, does not make us hate what is bad and love what is good. Many experts on this matter are slaves to greed and other vices, for knowledge does not always change one’s feelings about things, though if forms the understanding. Solomon\(^2\) was the most knowledgeable of men and knew what was good and what was bad, but he still, like the lowest beast, gave himself over to sensual pleasure, languishing between 300 wives and 70 concubines.\(^3\) For knowledge is a passive\(^4\) cognition of things, which cannot change your will so that you embrace what you know as good and avoid what you know as bad, whereas wisdom is a living ray of light, coming from the true sun\(^5\), and it not only illumines the intellect, but also quickens the emotions. [cont.]

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\(^1\) Aristotle (384–322 BC): Greek philosopher
\(^2\) Solomon (reigned ca. 970 – 931 BC): 3rd King of Israel. Son of David. Reputed to be fabulously rich and wise, though given to sensual pleasures
\(^3\) In the Old Testament, various numbers of Solomon’s wives and concubines are given
\(^4\) “mortua”
\(^5\) I.e. God
[4 cont.] Quod si quis neget, probari potest¹. Certum est enim Aristotelem, Tullium, Senecam²
ceterosque philosophos inter virtutes numerare³ prudentiam. Si virtus est, quae sunt virtutis, facit.
Virtus autem⁴ virum bonum⁵ reddit; ergo et prudentia virum bonum reddit⁶. Quod autem virtus
hominem bonum⁸ efficiat⁹, ex diffinitione liquet. Sic enim Augustinus eam in libro¹⁰ De
quantitate¹¹ animae¹² diffinit¹³. Virtus est aequalitas¹⁴ quaedam vitae undique consonans rationi.
Senecae quoque sententia est beatos fieri homines virtute¹⁵. Quod si virtus beatos efficit homines,
et prudentiam, quae virtus est, idem facere necessum¹⁶ est. Scientia vero juris et totius¹⁷ moralis
philosophiae minime hoc¹⁸ operatur; ergo virtus non est. Si non est virtus, neque¹⁹ prudentia est,
quam constat esse virtutem.

¹ posset H
² Senecamque WY
³ numerare WY
⁴ enim U
⁵ virum bonum : bonum virum U
⁶ facit I
⁷ ergo et ... reddit omit. U
⁸ hominem bonum : virum bonum U
⁹ afficiat U
¹⁰ eam in libro omit. H
¹¹ qualitate U
¹² animi I
¹³ diffinivit U
¹⁴ qualitas U
¹⁵ fieri homines virtute : fieri virtute homines H, U; virtute fieri homines WY
¹⁶ necesse I, U; necessarium WY
¹⁷ et totius : totiusque H, U, WY
¹⁸ Omit. WY
¹⁹ nec I, U, WY
If anybody should deny this, it can be proven. It is certain that Aristotle, Tullius,¹ Seneca,² and the other philosophers counted wisdom among the virtues. If it is virtue, it does what virtues do. But virtue makes a man good. Therefore wisdom makes a man good.³ But that virtue makes a man good is proven by definition. This is how Augustine defines it in his book De quantitate animae: “Virtue is the evenness of a life in complete agreement with reason.”⁴ Seneca also says that “virtue makes men happy.”⁵ If virtue makes men happy⁶, and wisdom is a virtue, then it must do the same.⁷ But this the knowledge of law and of all moral philosophy do not do at all, and therefore it is not a virtue. And if it is not a virtue, then it is not wisdom which is clearly a virtue.⁸

¹ Cicero
² Seneca the Younger [Lucius Annaeus Seneca] (c. 4 BC – 65 AD): Roman Stoic philosopher, statesman, and writer. Tutor of Emperor Nero
³ A syllogism, where the Major is: Virtue makes a man good. The Minor: Wisdom is a virtue. The Conclusion: Ergo, wisdom is a virtue
⁴ Augustinus: De quantitate animae, 16 (PL, 32, 1052): Virtus est aequalitas vitae rationi undique consentientis. Cf. also Seneca: Epistulae ad Lucilium, 31 and 74: Perfecta virtus est aequalitas et tenor vitae per omnia consonans sibi. Cf. also Cicero: De inventione, 2, 54: Nam virtus est animi habitus, naturae modo, rationi consentaneus
⁵ Seneca: Epistulae ad Lucilium, 81, 21: Nam si malitia miseris facit, virtus beatos
⁶ “beati”: happy, with the contextual overtone of blessed in the religious sense
⁷ Another syllogism, where the Major is: Virtue makes a man happy. The Minor: Wisdom is a virtue. The Conclusion: Ergo, wisdom makes a man happy
⁸ A double implicit syllogism: A) Virtue makes men happy; Knowledge of law/Moral philosophy does not make men happy; Knowledge of law/Moral philosophy is not a virtue. B) Wisdom is a virtue; Knowledge of law/Moral philosophy is not a virtue; Knowledge of law/Moral philosophy is not wisdom
Maybe someone will ask why someone who knows what is good does not do it. The answer is easy: In the universities, many of those who teach music cannot sing even the shortest verse in the church, just like Themistocles in Athens who was not considered to be unlearned because he had refused to play the lyre at a party. And not all doctors who teach the practice of medicine are able to heal. But according to common “usage in whose hands,” as Flaccus says, “lies the judgment, the right and the rule of speech,” the wise are not those who can distinguish between good and evil, but those who do good. So, a man is wise who knows, wants, and does what is good. The “experts” on moral philosophy and the jurists are sometimes very wicked men, and therefore they may not be called wise. And moreover - I declare - even if they do all that they learn from their books and seek nothing more, they may still not be counted among the wise. For wise men never err, and they always do what is good. But any man who follows Aristotle completely, remains in error for Aristotle often mentions the gods.
[6] In jure civili non desunt ineptiae, nam et eorum libri ajunt legem quamquam duram esse servandam. In jure pontificio dietim mutationes fiunt, ut saepe, quod justum est hodie, cras fiat injustum. Nec possible est, quod jura et Aristotelis scripta praecipiant, simul vivere, quae sunt invicum saepe contraria. Si quis enim prudenter vivere vult, eum plura oportet scire, quam libris hujusmodi contineatur. Ex quo licet peritiam illorum, quos dixi, librorum nedum prudentem hominem minime facere, sed nec omnia docere, quae sunt prudentiae necessaria. Aliud igitur est prudentia et aliud rursus moralis scientia. Nec obstat argumentum vestrum loco priori positum. Quamvis enim prudentia circa ea versetur, quae sunt ad vitam humanam bona, ac circa eadem scientia moralis consistat, non tamen identitas sequitur, nam mod invicum diversis se habent. Scientia enim solum intelligit, quid est bonum, prudentia vero, postquam novit, etiam operatur, ut ante dixi. Astronomia de caeli conversione stellarumque cursibus notitiam praebet; idem facit astrologia. Quia haec tamen superstitiosum quid habet, dum siderum cursu necessitates hominum et mores praedicare conatur, aliud astronomiam dicimus esse et aliud astrologiam. Et haec ad primam petitionem respondisse sufficiat.
[6] In civil law there is no lack of nonsensical rules, for in its books it is said that even a cruel\(^1\) law should be followed. And pontifical law\(^2\) is changed daily so that often what was legal one day is illegal the next. And it is not possible to live according to rules which are often in conflict one with another, though the laws and Aristotle’s writings demand it. So, if one wishes to live wisely, he must know more than those books. From this it follows, as I have said, that even deep knowledge of such books does not in itself make a man wise, and it does not teach all that is necessary for wisdom. So, wisdom is not the same as knowledge of morals.

And the first argument presented by you is not an obstacle.\(^3\) For even though wisdom deals with such things which are good for human life and moral knowledge deals with the same things, it does not follow that they are identical, for they have different properties: knowledge only understands what is good, whereas wisdom first understands what is good and then does it - as I said before. [For example,] astronomy gives knowledge about the changes in the sky and the course of the stars. Astrology does the same. But astrology is a superstition since it tries to predict the necessary course and the character of people on the basis of the course of the stars, and therefore we claim that astronomy and astrology are not the same.\(^4\)

This suffices to answer the first question.

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\(^1\) “dura”

\(^2\) Canon law

\(^3\) In his presentation, Piccolomi’s opponent, Johann Dinkelsbühl had apparently argued that moral science (scientia) and moral wisdom (sapientia) were the same since they had the same object (how to do what is good). Piccolomini replies that though science and virtue may have the same object, they are different since science does not in itself result in good behaviour, whereas wisdom does (by definition)

\(^4\) Piccolomini argues that two “disciplines” may have the same object, but still be different because of their different treatment of the object
[7] Transeo nunc\(^1\) ad interrogationem secundam: cur tam pauci sunt nostris temporibus poetae, cum videantur multum utiles et necessarii? In qua re\(^2\), vir doctissime, ago vestrae prudentiae ingentes gratias, quae\(^3\) mihi de poesi dedit occasionem\(^4\) publice loqui. Sunt enim plerique homines\(^5\), qui poeticae ignorantiae invidiorum\(^6\) more poetas contemnunt atque, ut soli omnium litteratissimi reputentur, (160r) ea solum probant, quae ipsi sciunt. Quod vitium late patet ubique terrarum. Iстorum ergo injustitiam\(^7\) atque impudentiam contundere menti erat meae, sed non ingerebat se tempus commodum. Quod nunc mihi\(^8\) datum esse admodum laetor.

[8] Verum ego, magister clarissime, paucos\(^9\) esse nostris temporibus poetas non miror. Semper enim pauci rarissimique fuerunt, quia non datur passim culibet divina poesis, sed eos despici atque\(^10\) contemnunt edum miror, sed indignor, stomachor\(^11\), turbor, aetate nostrae condoleo, quae tam splendidum jubar tantumque decus humanae ac\(^12\) divinae scientiae, tam necessarium munus a Deo datum\(^13\) nihili faciat.

\(^1\) autem quantum WY
\(^2\) omit. I
\(^3\) qui I
\(^4\) de poesi dedit occasionem: occasionem de poesi dedit H; occasionem dedit de poesi U, WY
\(^5\) omit. I
\(^6\) invidiorum I
\(^7\) em.; justitiam H, I, U, WY
\(^8\) nunc mihi : michi nunc U
\(^9\) paucas I
\(^10\) et U
\(^11\) stimulor WY
\(^12\) atque U, WY
\(^13\) a Deo datum omit. I
2 Second question: Why are there so few poets in our time when apparently they are both very useful and necessary?

2.1 Introduction

[7] I now pass on to the second question: why are there so few poets today when they are apparently both very useful and necessary? I am greatly indebted to your wisdom (prudentia), eminent scholar, for having given me an occasion to speak in public on the matter of poetry. For many men who are ignorant of poetry jealously condemn poets, and in order to be considered the most literate of all they only favour what they themselves have knowledge of. This vice has spread far and wide. Though I have been intending to demolish their injustice and impudence before, I have not had the time, and therefore I am delighted to have been given it now.¹

[8] Excellent magister, I do not wonder that there are only few poets today: poets have, indeed, always been few and far between for [the gift of] divine poetry is not given to everyone. And I do not wonder that they are despised and mocked, no, I am upset, indignant, and angry, and I condole our age that it does not appreciate this splendid light, this great ornament of human and divine knowledge, and this necessary gift from God.

¹ Piccolomini had previously treated poetry and poets in his Pentalogus of 1443 and in his letter to Wilhelm Stein of 1 June 1444, cf. above
Nam priscis temporibus, cum sapientia virtusque viguit, tantus honor huic doctrinae impendebatur, ut sicut post victoriam imperator, ita et post consummatum studium poeta laureatus per urbem triumphali curru sequentibus civibus ac festum agentibus duceretur. Hinc et Julius Caesar, Romani fundator imperii, et Augustus, successor ejus, ad magnam sibi laudem reputarunt in collegio recipi poetarum, nec aegre tulit Julius, cum sibi collegium intranti non assurgeret Accius, quem poetam norat se esse praestantiorem. Scipio Africanus Major poetam Ennium adeo dilexit, ut eum viarum suarum omnium comitem habere voluit ejusque statuam in suo sepulchro collocari mandavit. [cont.]

1 sic I, U, WY
2 orbem H
3 civilibus WY
4 norat se : se norat U
5 omit. I
6 Eneam U
7 voluerit H
In the old days when wisdom (sapientia) and virtue flourished, the honour shown to this discipline\(^1\) was so great that when a poet finished his work,\(^2\) he was - like a general after a victory - crowned with a laurel wreath and carried through the city on a triumphal chariot wagon, followed by celebrating citizens.

Thus Julius Caesar,\(^3\) founder of the Roman Empire, and Augustus,\(^4\) his successor, considered it as a great honour to be received into the college of poets, and Julius was not angered that Accius did not rise when he entered the college, for he knew that Accius was a better poet.\(^5\)

And Scipio Africanus\(^6\) loved Ennius\(^7\) so much that he wanted him as a companion on all his travels and ordered a statue of him placed in his own tomb.\(^8\) [cont.]

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\(^1\) “doctrina”
\(^2\) “studium”
\(^3\) Julius Caesar, Gaius (100–44 BC): Roman general and statesman
\(^4\) Augustus, Gaius Octavius (63 BC – 14 AD): Adoptive son of Julius Caesar. Founder of the Roman Empire and its first emperor, ruling from 27 BC to his death
\(^5\) Valerius Maximus: *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 3, 7, 11. It is not clear which poet Accius Valerius speaks of since the famous Lucius Accius dies c. 86 BC when Julius Caesar was only 14 years old. Piccolomini had already alluded to this theme the year before in his letter to Wilhelm Stein of 1 June 1444, cf. *Epistolarium*, p. 289
\(^6\) Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus Numantinus [Scipio Africanus the Younger] (185–129 BC): politician of the Roman Republic, twice consul. As general he destroyed Carthage in 146 BC
\(^7\) Ennius, Quintus (c. 239 – c. 169 BC): Roman poet
\(^8\) Cicero: Pro Archia, 9, 22: *Carus fuit Africano superiori noster Ennius, itaque etiam in se p[ulcro] Scipionum putatur is esse constitutus ex marmore*. Cf. also Valerius Maximus: *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 8, 14, 1. Cf. also Solinus: *Collectanea mirabilium mundi*, 1, 122, p. 29. Piccolomini had already used this example the year before in his letter to Wilhelm Stein of 1 June 1444, cf. *Epistolarium*, p. 289

[1] comperit WY
[2] interisse U
[5] Euripidum I
[6] tragicum I
[7] credit tradidit H; tradidit U
[8] omit. I
[9] habuisses I
When the Spartan general, Lysander, besieged Athens and learnt that the poet Sophocles had died and not yet been buried, he made a truce so the poet could be given a fitting burial.

Alexander, the son of Amyntas, King of of the Macedonians, greatly loved Pindar the poet.

His successor, Archelaus, followed the counsels of Euripides, the writer of tragedies.

And when Alexander the Great had crossed over to Asia and seen Hector’s tomb, he said: “O fortunate adolescent who was sung by such a tuba!” Indeed he would have liked to have another Homer sing his own praises, but he was not that fortunate. As Flaccus says, he instead gave the poet Choerilus many gifts though he was quite inept.

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1 Lysander (d. 395 BC): Spartan admiral. Defeated Athens. Solinus: Collectanea mirabilium mundi, 29, 3
2 Sophocles (c. 497 – c. 406 BC): Athenian writer of tragedies
3 Solinus: Collectanea mirabilium mundi, 1, 118, p. 99
4 Alexander I (d. 454 BC): Ruler of the Kingdom of Macedon from 498 to his death
5 Pindar (c. 522 – c. 443 BC): Greek poet from Thebes. Verbatim quote from Piccolomini’s own letter to Wilhelm Stein of 1 June 1444, cf. Epistolarium, p. 289. Source not identified
6 Error for Alcetas II (313 – 306 BC): King if Epirus
7 Euripides (c. 480 – c. 406 BC): Athenian writer of tragedies. Solinus: Collectanea mirabilium mundi, 9, 14, p. 65
8 Alexander III the Great (356 – 323 BC): King of the Greek kingdom of Macedon. Created one of the largest empires of the ancient world, stretching from Greece to Egypt and into present-day Pakistan
9 Hector (Greek myth.): Son of King Priam of Troy. Killed by Achilles
10 Piccolomini had already used this quote the year before in his letter to Wilhelm Stein of 1 June 1444, cf. Epistolarium, p. 289. He had it from Cicero: Pro Archia, 10, 24, but here the text is: Atque is tamen, quum in Sigeo ad Achillis tumulum astitisset: “O fortunate, inquit, adolescens, qui tuae virtutis Homerum praecem nomv inveneris!” Note that Piccolomini misquotes Cicero, either through a lapsus of memory or because be reproduced an error in his source. Piccolomini would also – later – be able to read Arrian’s passage on Alexander’s visit to Achilles’ tomb in Sigeum: Some say that Alexander crowned the tomb of Achilles, while Hephæstion, others say, placed a wreath on Patroclus’ tomb; and Alexander, so the story goes, blessed Achilles for having Homer to proclaim his fame to posterity. Alexander might well have counted Achilles happy on this score, since, fortunate as Alexander was in other ways, there was a great gap left here, and Alexander’s exploits were never celebrated as they deserved, either in prose or verse; there were not even choral lyrics for Alexander as for Hiero, Gelo, Thero and many others not to be compared with him, so that Alexander’s exploits are far less known than very minor deeds of old times. (Arrian: Anabasis of Alexander, 1, 12). Piccolomini knew the text of Arrian in the Latin translation by Pier Paolo Vergerio which he had somehow gotten hold of, cf. Tournoy. It is not known when he acquired that manuscript, and it might have been after his composition of the oration “Aderat nuper” I.e. Homer. In the Western classical tradition, Homer is the author of the Iliad and the Odyssey. Most modern researchers place Homer in the 7th or 8th centuries BC
11 Horace
12 Choerilus of Iasus (4th c.): Poet from Iasus. Accompanied Alexander the Great on his expeditions and functioned as his court-poet
13 Cf. Horace: Epistolae, 2, 18, 230: gratus Alexandro regi magno fuit ille Choerilus, incultis qui versibus et male natis rettulit acceptos, regale nomisma, Philippo
Cum ergo tales tantique \textit{(140r)} viri poetas amarint et honori habuerint$^1$, eosdem nostris temporibus contemni, non indigne miror. Verum quia dicitis in quaestione vestra, magister gravissime, poetas videri utiles et necessarios, constat ex hoc vestram prudentiam non nihil detraxisse dignitati poeticae$^2$. Non enim, ut sunt, poetas utiles esse$^3$ dicitis, sed videri utiles. Plura namque videntur utilia, quae non sunt. Est igitur huic parti obviandum monstrandumque poetas et utiles et necessarios fore, quod paucis agam.

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$^1$ habuerunt H, I, U
$^2$ non nihil detraxisse ... poeticae : dignitati poetice non nichil detraxisse U
$^3$ omit. H, I, WY
When such and so great men loved and honoured the poets, I may justly wonder why they are despised in our own times. In your question you yourself state, most worthy magister, that poets “appear” to be useful and necessary, so you too, though a wise man, clearly do not have a high regard for poets. For you do not say that poets “are” useful, but that they “appear” to be useful. But since many things appear to be useful that are not so, I must counter this statement and show that poets are both useful and necessary, which I shall do briefly.
2.2. Usefulness of poetry

2.2.1. Poetry praises virtue and blames vice

[11] Every discipline\(^1\) which forms and improves human life is useful. Therefore poetry is useful. You may not believe this, but ask how poetry forms and improves men. So hear, pray, Basil,\(^2\) a Father most holy and greatly to be revered. He said: “I have heard a certain man, skilled to understand a poet’s mind, say all the poetry of Homer is praise of virtue, and especially so when talking about the naked Ulysses\(^3\) he said that ‘he was arrayed with virtue instead of a cloak.’”\(^5\) What else does Homer say when he he practically shouts: “Pay attention to virtue, O men, who swims even with a shipwrecked man.”\(^6\) And this is also the meaning of Virgil\(^7\) when he lets Aeneas\(^8\) say to Ascanius\(^9\): “Learn valour from me, my son, and true toil; fortune from others!”\(^10\) And again: “A blessing on your young valour! So man scales the stars!”\(^11\) Thus poetry is useful because it praises the virtues and thus incites men to love them.\(^12\) As Juvenal\(^13\) said: “The one and only nobility is virtue.”\(^14\) Again you see that poetry is useful because it hates the vices and draws men away from them. Juvenal says it beautifully in just three\(^15\) words when he states that “no bad man is happy.”\(^16\)

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\(^1\) “doctrina”. Note Piccolomini’s use of this term for poetry

\(^2\) Basil of Caesarea (c. 329 - 379): Greek bishop of Caesarea Mazaca in Cappadocia, Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). Doctor of the Church. Saint

\(^3\) Ulysses [Odysseus]: Greek myth. King of Ithaca. Hero of Homeric poem Odyssey

\(^4\) Homer: Odyssey, 6, 127-130

\(^5\) Basil of Caesarea: Ad adolescentes, 5, 6, in Leonardo Bruni’s Latin translation: Ego autem e quodam viro qui ad vestigandas poetaurum mentes acutissimus habebatur audivi cum diceret totam Homeri poesim laudem esse virtutis omniaque illius poetae huc tendere nisi interdum incidens sit. Verum in eo loco vel maxime id patere cum finxit cephalenorum ducem naufragio eiectum tantum abfuisse, ut illos quibus et solus et nudus apparuit verecundia aliqua averteret: quandoquidem pro vestibus virtute illum dixit ornatum. English translation quoted after Schucan, p. 121

\(^6\) Basil of Caesarea: Ad adolescentes, 5, 8, in Leonardo Bruni’s Latin translation: O homines, sit vobis cura virtutis quae et cum naufragio simul enat et in littore nudum eictum teacibus venerabiliorem ostendit

\(^7\) Vergilius Maro, Publius (70 – 19 BC): Roman poet

\(^8\) Aeneas: Greek-Roman myth. Related to King Priam of Troy. In Virgil’s Aeneid he brought a group of escapees from to Latium and as ancestor of Romulus and Remus he became the ancestral founder of Rome

\(^9\) Ascanius: Roman myth. Son of Aeneas. King of Alba Longa, ancestor of Romulus and Remus

\(^10\) Vergiliius: Aeneis, 12, 35: Learn valour from me, my son, and true toil; fortune from others (disce, puer, virtutem ex me verumque laborem, fortunam ex aliis)

\(^11\) Vergiliius: Aeneis 9, 641: A blessing, boy, on your young valour! So man scales the stars (macte nova virtute, puer, sic itur ad astra)

\(^12\) Here Piccolomini voices a common Renaissance notion that Virgil described Aeneas as the virtuous man par excellence (Petrarca, Vegio), and that the function of poetry was to praise virtue and rebuke vice (Bocaccio), Cf. Kallendorf, p. 581

\(^13\) Juvenalis, Decimus Junius (active in the late 1st and early 2nd century AD): Roman poet. Juvenal was one of Piccolomini’s favourite classical authors

\(^14\) Juvenalis: Satirae, 8, 20: nobilitas sola est atque unica virtus. the one and only nobility is personal excellence

\(^15\) The Latin text has just three words: Nemo malus felix

\(^16\) Juvenalis: Satirae, 4, 8: No bad man is happy

1. omit. I
2. Falerii I
3. omit. I
4. Aloyci I; Altaici U
5. versus add. I
6. causam et: et causam H
dimirantur I, WY
8. atque H, U, WY
9. poetae nomen: nomen poetae H
10. opibus WY
diverso metro: diversa metra I
domesticas I
12. omit. I
14. et I
15. scripsisse I
16. quid H
cantatur U
18. est add. I
19. omit. I
20. fuit I
2.2.2. Poetry praises God

[12] Poetry is useful in another way, too, for the praises of our God are not sung better and more sweetly than in the verses of poets. Thus, according to Isidore, all the psalms of the Hebrews are composed as metric verses and - like in the Roman Flaccus and the Greek Pindar - their verses are now in iambic, now in Alchaic, and now in Sapphic metre. Therefore we call King David the Holy Poet. And Solomon, too, whose wisdom both we and the Jews admire greatly, was among the poets for, according to Josephus and Jerome, the three books he composed in his own language, the Parables, the Ecclesiastes, and the Canticle of Canticles, he wrote in hexameters and pentameters. Isaiah, too, wrote his song in the same meters. And Jeremiah was not ashamed to be called a poet for, as Isidore says, he also composed many of his works in diverse meters. This I have related so that you may see that also those of the household of the faith made poetry. They were followed by Christian [authors] like Damasus, Ambrose, Gregory, and others who later wrote hymns in various meters. For the hymn which is sung in praise of John the Baptist, the Ut queant laxis resonare fibris, is in Sapphic meter. I pass over Boethius Severus who, though being a holy philosopher, used all forms of poetry.

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1 David (c. 1010 – 970 BC): Second King of Israel. Father of King Solomon
2 Josephus, Titus Flavius (37 – c. 100): Roman-Jewish historian
4 Hebrew
5 Isaiah (8th c. BC): Jewish prophet
6 Jeremiah (6th c. BC): Jewish prophet
7 Here used with reference to the Jews
8 Damasus I (c. 305 – 384): Pope from 366 to his death
10 Gregorius I (c. 540 – 604): Pope 590 to his death in 604
11 John the Baptist (2st c. BC): Jewish itinerant preacher and prophet. Major religious figure in Christianity and Islam
12 Cf. Bruni: De studiis (Kallendorf), p. 117: when Mass is being said in church, we sometimes yawn and fall asleep even when it is done very beautifully, but when once that poetical refrain breaks our, the Primo dierum or the Iste confessor, or the Ut queant laxis resonare fibris, which one of us is so earthbound as not to feel some lifting up of the soul, some inspired feeling?
13 Ut queant laxis: Latin hymn in honour of John the Baptist written in Horatian Sapphics and traditionally attributed to Paulus Diaconus. Famous for its part in the history of musical notation, in particular solmization
14 Boëthius, Anicius Manlius Severinus (c. 480 – 524): Roman senator, consul, philosopher
[13] Duoque tantummodo referam exempla, quibus utilem constat esse poeticam. Inter Athenienses et Megarenses de proprietate Salaminae\(^1\) insulae prope usque interitum armis dimicatum fuerat. Post multas clades capitalis\(^2\) esse apud Athenienses cepit, si quis de vindicanda\(^3\) insula legem tulisset. Quam rem Solon, cum aliter non posset, insuetis sibi versibus perturbavit atque animos civium arte\(^4\) poetica sic \((161v)\) cepit, ut extemplo bellum adversus Megarenses decernetur insulaque devictis hostibus Atheniensium fieret. Referam\(^5\) alii. Inter Messenios atque\(^6\) Lacedaemonios bellum erat. Dux Lacedaemoniorum Thirtheus poeta Atheniensis\(^7\) claudus fuit. Cumque\(^8\) multa sinistre perpessi erant\(^9\) Lacedaemonii, ne contra fortunam pugnando majora detrimenta civitati inferrent, reducere\(^10\) exercitum voluerunt. Sed intervenit Thirteus, qui composita carmina exercitui pro contione recitavit, in quibus hortamenta virtutis, damnorum solatia, belli officia\(^11\) scripsit. Itaque tantum ardorem militibus injecit, ut commisso proelio mox victoriam obtinuerunt\(^12\). Sic duo clarissimae civitates, Sparta et Athenae, quae duo totius Graeciae oculi putabantur, consilio et ingenio poetarum relevatae sunt.

\(^1\) Salamia
\(^2\) capitale
\(^3\) iudicanda
\(^4\) omit.
\(^5\) refero
\(^6\) et
\(^7\) omit.
\(^8\) cum itaque
\(^9\) essent
\(^10\) ad add.
\(^11\) consilia
\(^12\) obtinuerint
Now I shall just mention two examples which prove the usefulness of poetry.

The Athenians and the Me
garans fought a ruinous war about possession of the island of Salamis. After many grievous battles, the Athenians made it a capital offense to propose any law concerning the claim on Salamis. Since no other option was left to him, Solon\(^1\) changed the situation composing verses (which he did not usually do), and thus – through the art of poetry - inspired the citizens to such courage that they quickly decided on war against the Megarans: the enemies were defeated, and the island fell to the Athenians.\(^2\)

And another [example]: there was war between the Messenians and the Spartans.\(^3\) The Spartan general was the lame poet Tyrtaeus from Athens\(^4\). When the Spartans had suffered many dire defeats, they wanted to bring the army back [to Sparta] so that their city would not suffer even greater calamities by fighting against Fortune. But then Tyrtaurus intervened: he composed some poems and recited them to the assembled army. In these poems he incited [the soldiers] to courageous action, he consoled them for their losses, and described the duties of war. So doing, he stirred up the soldiers so much that they went to battle and soon gained victory.

Thus two famous cities, Sparta and Athens, considered as the two eyes of Greece, were raised up again by the advice and genius of poets.

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\(^1\) Solon (638 – 558 BC): Athenian statesman, lawmaker, and poet
\(^2\) Plutarch: *Parallel Lives / Solon*, 8
\(^3\) Second Messenian war (743-724 BC)
\(^4\) Tyrtaeus (7th c. BC): Greek poet from Sparta. Known especially for the poems in which he exhorted the Spartans to fight the Messenians. Some classical sources mention that he at some time commanded the Spartan army, that he came from Athens, and that he was lame. Piccolomini’s source not identified
Nunc an sint poetae necessarii videamus. Nempe necessarium dici\textsuperscript{1} debet illud\textsuperscript{2}, sine quo bene non possumus\textsuperscript{3} vivere. Sed absque poetica nulla res publica bene vivit; ergo necessaria est. Dicent\textsuperscript{4} aliqui et sine poetica plures bene vixisse fuisseque sanctos. Sed\textsuperscript{5} ego non unicumque necessarium dico poesim\textsuperscript{6}, sed in communi rei publicae, quia non bene vivunt civitates, nisi sint, qui bene mores suadeant\textsuperscript{7} et vitia confutent, quod proprium\textsuperscript{8} poetarum est, qui mille modis milleque artibus sciunt hoc probare et illud redarguere. Instabitur rursus dicteturque melius hoc oratorem facere, cui verborum milia suppeditabunt. Non nego, nam qui sermones habent ad populum, quamvis theologi sint, in ea\textsuperscript{9} tamen parte oratoris funguntur officio et, nisi praeceptis utantur oratoris, quae quibusdam vel sine arte natura ministrat, parum proficiunt\textsuperscript{10}. Sed oratorum dicta non haerent menti et, quia soluta sunt, (162r) facile dilabuntur. Poeticae sententiae breves sunt, ligataeque pedibus absque negotio retinentur. Hinc est, quod in omni gente quantumcumque barbara, inhumana, fera\textsuperscript{11}, poetae reperiuntur, si non Latini, saltem vulgares, qui versibus sententiosis graves materias sub brevitate concludunt, qui, etsi nomen poetarum illustre tantamque\textsuperscript{12} dignitatem ferre non valeant, poetica tamen utuntur.

\begin{footnotes}
\item\textsuperscript{1} necessarium dici : dici necessarium H, U
\item\textsuperscript{2} id U
\item\textsuperscript{3} non possumus : possumus non H
\item\textsuperscript{4} dicerent I; dicunt WY
\item\textsuperscript{5} sine poetica ... sed omit. I
\item\textsuperscript{6} necessarium dico poesim : poesim necessarium dico H; necessarium poesim dico U, WY
\item\textsuperscript{7} suadent U
\item\textsuperscript{8} proprie H, I, U
\item\textsuperscript{9} in ea omit. H
\item\textsuperscript{10} proficiant I
\item\textsuperscript{11} inhumana fera : in humana vera U
\item\textsuperscript{12} tamquam I
\end{footnotes}
2.3. **Necessity of poetry**

[14] We shall now consider whether poets are necessary. That without which we cannot live well must of course be called necessary. But without poetry no society\(^1\) lives well, therefore poetry is necessary. Some may object that many, and even saints, have actually lived well without poetry. However, I am not saying that poetry is necessary to every individual, but that it is necessary to society as a whole, for cities do no live well without men who urge citizens to live morally\(^2\) and who restrain them from vice. This is the proper function of poets who know how to promote morals and condemn vice in thousand ways and with great art. But someone may object to this and claim that the orator does this so much better, since he has thousands of words available. I do not deny this since those who make sermons to the people function, in this respect, as orators though they are actually theologians. However, unless they use the rules of oratory they will not have great success (though there are some who speak well by nature, and not through artfulness).

But the statements of orators do not stick in the mind, and since they are unconnected they are easily forgotten. The sentences of poets are short and connected metrically, and therefore they are easily remembered. Thus in every people, however barbarous, primitive, and crude, there are poets. Even though they are not Latin, but common poets, they do manage to express important things briefly, in meaningful verses. They may not live up to the illustrious name and grand dignity of poets, but they do use poetry.

\(^1\) *res publica*

\(^2\) *bene*
Addite, quod eloquentia, sermonis lux, expolitio, brevitas, gravitas haberi\(^1\) non potest, nisi ex poetarum fontibus hauriatur. Hinc Jeronimus, Lactantius, Augustinus, Ambrosius\(^2\), Cyprianus, Leo et ceteri, qui litteras\(^3\) sacras ornatissime commentati\(^4\) sunt, studiosi fuerunt \[^{141r}\] poeticae, sicut eorum scripta demonstrant poetarum dictis ubique referta. In Aristotelis voluminibus omnes scitis, quam crebra et inculcata sint testimonia poetarum, quamvis moderni doctores non sine gravi damno catholicae fidei poeticam spernunt\(^5\), quae procul dubio necessaria est. Sed\(^6\) referre\(^7\) gratias Deo suasque laudes pulchre cantare debemus, nec enim alii sunt, qui psalmodiam dulcesque hymnos ac\(^8\) suavissima de Deo suisque sanctis carmina recte componere norint nisi poetae, quos tamen\(^9\) utiles et\(^10\), ut monstratum est, necessarios mirandum\(^11\) est dignis honoribus non efferri et maxime, cum eorum doctrina, sicut Cicero tradit, et philosophiam et alias scientias vetustate\(^12\) praecedat, cujus repertores Museus atque Orpheus reputantur, qui vicini erant\(^13\) Saturnis\(^14\) temporibus.

\(^1\) habere WY
\(^2\) omit. I
\(^3\) omit. I
\(^4\) communicati I
\(^5\) spernant H, U, WY
\(^6\) tibi \textit{add.} WY
\(^7\) ferre WY
\(^8\) omit. U
\(^9\) tam U, WY
\(^10\) omit. I
\(^11\) morandum I
\(^12\) vetuste H
\(^13\) fuerunt U, WY
\(^14\) Saturni U, WY
Add to this that eloquence, the light of speech, polish, brevity, and gravity can only be had if you draw from the fountains of the poets. Therefore Jerome, Lactantius, Augustine, Ambrose, Cyprian, Leo² and others who wrote commentaries on Holy Scripture, studied the poets as shown by their writings which are replete with sayings from the poets. And you all know how frequently and appropriately Aristotle cites the poets in his books. Still, learned men of the present age spurn poetry – to the great detriment of the Catholic faith - though it is undoubtedly necessary. But we should thank God and praise him in beautiful chants, and only poets know how to write psalms, and beautiful hymns, and lovely songs about God and his saints.

Since, as shown, poets are useful and necessary, one may justly wonder why they are not given the honour they merit, especially since their discipline, as Cicero says, is older than philosophy and other branches of knowledge, for reportedly poetry was invented by Museus⁵ and Orpheus⁶ who lived close to the times of Saturn.⁷

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¹ Lactantius Firmianus (c. 240 – c. 320): early Christian author
² Cyprianus, Thascius Caecilius (c. 200 - 258): Bishop of Carthage and an important Early Christian writer
³ Leo I (c. 400 – 461). Pope from 440 to his death. Saint. Strong proponent of supreme papal authority
⁴ Including pope Martinus V. At the occasion of the translation of the relics of Saint Monica, Augustine’s mother, to Rome in 1430, he said: Having Augustine, why do we need the cleverness of Aristotle, the eloquence of Plato, the brightness of Varro, the dignified gravity of Socrates, the reputation of Pythagoras, and the skillfulness of Empedocles. We do not need these men, Augustine is enough. Pastor, I, p. 178
⁵ Musaeus: (Greek myth.) Athenian polymath, philosopher, historian, prophet, seer, priest, poet, and musician
⁶ Orpheus: (Greek myth.) legendary musician, poet, and prophet
⁷ Roman god
[16] Nunc tempus est, ut eorum argumenta dissolvam, qui poeticae solent detrahere poetasque carpere.

[17] Sic enim ajunt, “poetarum libri deos esse plures\(^2\) affirmant eosque discordes, plura quoque in his adulteria et nefanda crimina continentur ac\(^3\) nunc amorem suadent illicitum, nunc alia vitia probant. Quod \(\textit{162}v\) si idcirco beatus Jeronimus\(^4\) se caesum ab angelo narrat, quia\(^5\) Ciceronianus\(^6\) esset, cum tamen Cicero totus moralis existat, quibus\(^7\) tandem\(^8\) verberibus afficiendus erit, qui poetarum lenociniis oblectatur? Platoque\(^9\) in his, quos edidit de re publica, libris\(^10\) poetas censuit ex sua, quam ordinavit\(^11\), civitate pellendos, ne\(^12\) blandis orationibus\(^13\) viriles\(^14\) animos demollirent, sicut Cicero in \textit{Tusculanis}\(^15\) refert et probat.” Hae\(^16\) sunt, quae adversus poesim communiter dici solent.

\(^{1}\) sic enim: sicut I
\(^{2}\) plurimos I
\(^{3}\) at H
\(^{4}\) idcirco beatus Jeronimus : beatus Jeronimus idcirco H, U, WY
\(^{5}\) qui H
\(^{6}\) Ciceranus WY
\(^{7}\) qui I
\(^{8}\) tum U
\(^{9}\) Plato quoque U
\(^{10}\) libros H, I, U
\(^{11}\) ordivit WY
\(^{12}\) ut H, I; et WY
\(^{13}\) sermonibus U
\(^{14}\) viribus WY
\(^{15}\) Tusculis WY
\(^{16}\) hec U, WY
2.4. **Christians’ use of pagan authors**

[16] It is now time for me to demolish the arguments of those who are wont to belittle poetry and to criticize poets.

### 2.4.1. Objections

[17] They say that “the books of the poets claim that there are many gods, and that these gods have conflicts between them. Moreover, the books contain many cases of adultery and unspeakable crime, and sometimes they promote illicit love, sometime they approve of other vices. If Saint Jerome says that he was beaten by an angel because he was a Ciceronian¹ (even if Cicero was completely moral), then should those who enjoy the alluring [verses] of the poets not also to be whipped. In the books he wrote on The State, Plato² considered that poets should be expelled from the city he was planning so that they would not weaken manly characters with smooth speech,³ as Cicero mentions and approves in his Tusculanae.⁴

These are the usual objections against against poetry.

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¹ Piccolomini also spoke on the use of classical authors and the angel beating Saint Jerome in the oration “Si quis me roget”, sect. 23
² Plato (428/427 or 424/423 BC – 348/347 BC): Greek philosopher. Student of Socrates
³ Plato: Republic, 3, 398a ff; 10, 595 ff, 605b, 607a
⁴ Cicero: Tusculanae disputationes, 2, 11, 27: Sic ad malam domesticam disciplinam vitamque umbratilem et delicatam cum accesserunt etiam poëtae, nervos omnes virtutis elidunt. Recte igitur a Platone eiiciuntur ex ea civitate, quam finxit ille cum optimos mores et optimum rei publicae statum exquireret
Quibus non erit mihi arduum respondere, si vobis facile fuerit audire. Nam quod in poematibus de diis mentio fiat, non poetarum culpa, sed temporum fuit, quibus colebantur idola. Nec enim soli poetae de diis loquentur, sed philosophi et omnes scriptores illius saeculi praeter judaeos deos nuncupant et illos se fatentur venerari. Quod autem crimina referunt, non est reprehensibile, quando illud agunt, ut homines ab his deterreant, nam et theologi idem factitant. Qui vero vitia probant, rarissimi sunt, nec, quod duo tresve faciunt, in commune trahendum est. Nec idcirco vituperanda est poesis, quia quidam poetarum errores tuentur, nam, si sic pergimus, nullam doctrinam sequemur, sed ipsam scientiarum matrem philosophiam contemnemus, nam et ipsos constat errasse philosophos. Quid enim mollius aut languidius dici potest Epicuri sententia, qui omnem felicitatem in voluptatibus collocavit, et anima negavit immortalis existere? Pythagoras inferos esse negat et animas hominum post mortem in alia putat animantia transire. Averroes unam in omnibus corporibus animam esse rebatur.
2.4.2. Refutation

[18] It will not be difficult for me to answer [these objections], if it would be easy for you to hear. For what is said in the poems about gods is not the fault of the poets, but of the times, since [at that time people] worshipped idols. And it is not just poets who speak about gods: philosophers and all the writers of that age (except the Jews) talk about gods and claim to worship them. That they tell of crimes is not objectionable for they do so in order to deter men from such crimes, just like theologians do. Those who approve of vice are actually very few, and all should not be blamed for what only two and three do. We should not condemn poetry because a few poets are in error, for if we pursue that course, we should follow no teaching at all, but despise even philosophy, the mother of all sciences, for it is a fact that there are also philosophers who have erred. What can be said to be more soft or languorous than the view of Epicure who based all happiness on pleasure and denied that souls are immortal? Pythagoras denies the existence of Hell and believes that after death the souls of men transmigrate to other living beings. And Averroës thought that all bodies share one soul.

1 “doctrina”
2 Epicure (341–270 BC): Greek philosopher
3 Pythagoras (c. 570-c. 495 BC): Greek philosopher and mathematician
4 Averroës [Ibn Rushd] (1126-1198): Andalusian scholar, philosopher and polymath
[19] Quid theologi, quos hodie prae ceteris veneramur, numquid\textsuperscript{1} plures erravere? Quid Arius, quid Eutices\textsuperscript{2}, quid Nestorius, quid alii paene infiniti unitatis ecclesiae divisores? Quid aevo nostro Johannes Hus\textsuperscript{3} atque Jeronimus, \{163r\} qui Constantiae cremati sunt? Nec enim umquam\textsuperscript{4} tot haereses seminare potuissent, nisi theologorum se titulis ornavissent. Verum sicut irreprehensibilis \{141v\} est theologia, quamvis multi theologorum aberrent\textsuperscript{5}, sic incorrupta est poesis, licet poetae nonnulli\textsuperscript{6} vitia tueantur. Nec enim malum dici potest, quo possumus\textsuperscript{7} uti bene, alioquin\textsuperscript{8} nec liberales artes nec mechanicae probandae viderentur, cum his\textsuperscript{9} uti male\textsuperscript{10} possumus\textsuperscript{11}. Quod autem de Jeronimi percussionibus objicitur: si quis Jeronimum attente pervolverit, non propter Ciceronis lectionem accidisse comperiet, sed quia Jeronimus sic eum\textsuperscript{12} legebat, ut sacras litteras fastidiret. Quod ego nec laudo nec probo, sed ita legendos poetas dico, ut eorum imbuti coloribus scripturam sacram ornatissime sciamus proferre. Nec enim sequendi sunt alii, qui ex floribus nihil sumunt praeter odorem atque colorem, sed imitandae sunt apes, quae mel\textsuperscript{13} etiam\textsuperscript{14} exinde norunt excerpere.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1} numquam H
\item \textsuperscript{2} Eitices H; Eutite I; Eutides WY
\item \textsuperscript{3} Huss I, U
\item \textsuperscript{4} omit. I
\item \textsuperscript{5} oberrent WY
\item \textsuperscript{6} nonnulli corr. ex nonnulla H
\item \textsuperscript{7} possimus H, WY
\item \textsuperscript{8} omit. I
\item \textsuperscript{9} iis U
\item \textsuperscript{10} uti male : male uti U
\item \textsuperscript{11} possimus U; possemus WY
\item \textsuperscript{12} Jeronimus sic eum : sic eum Jeronimus H, U; sic Hieronymus eum WY
\item \textsuperscript{13} omit. I
\item \textsuperscript{14} mel etiam : eciam mel U
\end{itemize}
[19] What about the theologians whom we today honour most of all? Did they never err? What about Arius, what about Eutyches, what about Nestorius, what about those almost countless others who caused division in the Church? And in our own times, what about Jan Hus and Jeronimus who were burnt in Konstanz? So many heresies could never have flourished if these men had not prided themselves in their title of theologian. But just as theology is not at fault because many theologians err, poetry, too, is not at fault because some poets favour vice. And something may not be called evil when we can also use it for good, for otherwise neither the liberal nor the mechanical arts were acceptable since we can use them for evil.

And concerning the beating of Jerome: if you study Jerome carefully, [you will see that] he was not punished for reading Cicero, but for reading him so [intensely] that he neglected Holy Scripture. This I neither praise nor condone, but I say that poets should be read in such a way that under their inspiration we are able to propound Holy Scripture magnificently. But we should not follow those who only take odour and colour from flowers, nay, we should imitate the bees who also know how extract their honey.

1 Arius [Arrius] (250 or 256 – 336): Christian and priest in Alexandria. His teachings about the nature of the Godhead emphasized the Father’s divinity over the Son. They were condemned by the Council of Nicea in 325
2 Eutyches (c. 380 – c. 456): archimandrite at Constanople. Opposed the Nestorian heresy, but instead developed teachings concerning the nature of Christ which led to is own condemnation as a heretic
3 Nestorius (c. 386 – 450): Archbishop of Constantinople. His teachings on the nature of Christ were condemned as heretical
4 Half a year later, Piccolomini would return to the theme of ecclesiastics causing the divisions in the Church in his oration “Breviter me Hodie”, sect. 2
5 Jan Hus (c. 1369 – 1415): Czech priest, philosopher, early Christian reformer and Master at Charles University in Prague. Inspired by the teachings of John Wycliffe
6 Jeronimus of Prague [Jeroným Pražský] (1379 – 1416): Bohemian church reformer and one of the chief followers of Jan Hus. Burned for heresy at the Council of Constance
7 In 1415 and 1416 respectively, at the Council of Konstanz
8 “eorum imbuti coloribus”
9 I.e. perfume and cosmetics
10 Basil: Ad adolescents, 4, 7-8. The translation by Leonardo Bruni has: Ut enim ex floribus ceteri quidem nihil sumunt preter odorem atque colorem. Apes vero etiam mella inde sciunt excerpere.
Ad Ciceronem venio, qui sententiam\(^1\) Platonis de poetarum exclusione commendat\(^2\). Quid hic dicemus quibusve armis tuebimur? Magnus est testis Cicero, sed is non ex proposito locutus est, sed quasi per transitum irritatus. Nam mox poetas excusavit dicens idipsim\(^3\) philosophos facere, de quo fuerat poetas\(^4\) insimulatus. Is alibi extensius loquitur multisque verbis suadere Romanis\(^5\)\(^6\) nimitur, ut Architam\(^7\) poetam civitate donent, magnam eos propterea et laudem\(^8\) et utilitatem consecuturos affirmans, ut extat\(^9\) ejus oratio pulcherrima. Plato vero, cum poetas exclusit, etiam se ipsum excludendum asseruit, nam et ipse inter poetas\(^10\) locum habuit. Cujus apud Macrobiun versus extant:

\[\textit{Dum}\textsuperscript{11} \textit{semiulco}\textsuperscript{12} \textit{savio}\textsuperscript{13},
\quad \textit{meum puellum savior},\]

et alii plures. Atque, ut dicam, quod sentio, poetarum maxima laus est ex civitate Platonis excludi!\(^{163v}\) Quis enim vir bonus in civitate Platonis domicilium habere\(^14\) velit\(^15\), ubi, sicut Aristoteles in Politicis tradit\(^16\), omnes feminae in communi\(^17\) habentur, promiscui more bestiarum concubitus, incerti filii, ignorati parentes? Atque ista Platonii respondisse sufficiat\(^18\).

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\(^{1}\) scientiam U, WY
\(^{2}\) commendat H
\(^{3}\) ad ipsum WY
\(^{4}\) omit. I
\(^{5}\) Romanus U
\(^{6}\) suadere Romanis omit. WY
\(^{7}\) Archiam U
\(^{8}\) propterea et laudem : laudem propterea I
\(^{9}\) existit U; alias extat add. in marg. U
\(^{10}\) poetam H
\(^{11}\) in add. U
\(^{12}\) semhiulco WY; semihulto U
\(^{13}\) sanio H; save I
\(^{14}\) del. H; omit. U, WY
\(^{15}\) habere velit : velit habere I
\(^{16}\) in Politicis tradit : tradit in Politicis I
\(^{17}\) in communi omit. I
\(^{18}\) respondisse sufficiat : suffic(n)t respondisse H, U, WY
[20] I now come to Cicero applauding Plato’s view on the exclusion of poets. What shall we say to this, and which weapons shall we use in our defense? Cicero is indeed an important witness. Here, however, he did not express his considered opinion, but spoke in a fit of irritation. For soon afterwards he excused the poets saying that the philosophers were doing the same thing for which he had blamed the poets.¹ Elsewhere he speaks more fully on the matter, endeavoring in so many words to persuade the Romans to give citizenship to the poet Architas², and claiming that thus they would gain great praise and benefit, as he says in an admirable oration which is still extant.

As for Plato, when he excluded the poets, he also said that he himself would have to be excluded since he too was a poet. Macrobius³ quotes a verse of his:⁴

*When I kiss my boy
With half-parted lips...*⁵

and others, too.

And to say plainly what I think, it is actually to the very great honour of poets that they are excluded from Plato’s city! For what good man would want to live in Plato’s city where, as Aristotle says in the *Politica,*⁶ all women are held in common, sexual intercourse being promiscuous like that of animals, sons uncertain, and parents unknown? This will be enough concerning Plato.

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¹ Cicero: *Tusculanes disputationes,* 2, 12, 28: *Sed quid poëtis irascimur? Virtutis magistri, philosophi, inventi sunt qui summum malum dolorem dicerent*
² Error for Archias. Cicero: *Pro Archia*
³ Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius (flourished during the early 5th c.): Roman author
⁴ Poem by Plato, quoted by Macrobius
⁵ Macrobius: *Saturnalia,* 2, 2, 17. One wonders if Piccolomini was aware of the homosexual meaning of this verse, which in the context would be rather risqué. That the subject of “savio” is a male, not a female, is shown by a later passage in in the same poem: “ut ad me fierem mortuus”
⁶ Aristotle: *Politica,* 2, 1, 1261: *For example, it is possible for the citizens in Plato’s communistic Republic. to have children, wives and possessions in common with each other, as in Plato’s Republic, in which Socrates says that there must be community of children, women and possessions. See also Plato: Republic,* 5, 449c ff., 457d ff., 461e ff., 464b ff.
[21] Verum ut de poetarum lectione in communi aliquid dicatur, beati Jeronimi in epistola ad oratorem urbis instructio servanda est, qui de litteris saecularibus figuram esse in Deuteronomio dicit, dum captivae duci in matrimonium per Hebraeos prohibentur nisi capite raso et unguibus amputatis, quod in veteribus poematibus faciendum est, ut amputatis, que de dis verba fiunt, et abrasis amatorii blandimentis, ubi laudantur virtutes fulminanturque vitia sine scrupulo recipientur. Cui et magnus Basilius astipulatur, qui similitudinem de apibus, nec enim, inquit, illae pariter omnes flores adeunt, nec si quos adeunt, eos totos absumunt, sed eo ablato, quod operi suo sit aptum, reliquum omne valere sinunt. Et nos quoque, si sapimus, in poetarum libris, cum excerptimus, quod veritati amicum consentaneumque sit, cetera omnia transgrediemur.

[22] Cum igitur ex testimonio magni Basilii Jeronimique sanctissimi etiam veteres gentilesque poetae recipiendi sint, cum antiquissima disciplinarum sit poetica, cum magni ex ea et necessarii fructus resultant, cum philosophi sanctique doctores pleni sint auctoritatus poetarum, cum Caesares atque reges omnesque maximi viri poetas suis temporibus honorifice susceperunt, cum divinae laudes a nullis melius queant quam a poetis decantari, non immerito, sicut ab initio dixi, mirandum est nostris temporibus vilipendi poetas, quamvis jam in Italia resurgere coeperint et pariter cum theologis honorari.
Concerning what is commonly said about the reading of poets, we may use Jerome’s guidance in a letter to an orator in Rome where he states that in Deuteronomy there is a symbol of secular literature: the Hebrews are forbidden to marry female captives unless their head has been shaven and their nails cut. This means that the poems of old should be shorn of the passages concerning the gods and the erotic blandimentis, and be accepted without hesitation where they praise virtue and castigate vice. Basil the Great supports this position, using the similitude of the bees: For they do not approach all flowers equally, nor do they attempt to carry away the whole of those to which they fly, but taking whatever is profitable for their work, they go away leaving the rest. And we, too, if we are wise, should take from the poets’ books only what is in accordance with truth, and bypass everything else.

Basil the Great and Saint Jerome attest that even the old and pagan poets should be accepted. Poetry is a very old discipline and has great and essential effects. [The writings of] the philosophers and the holy doctors are full of authoritative [quotations] from the poets. Emperors and kings and all great men revered contemporary poets. And poets are the best to sing the praises of God. For all these reasons, it is perfectly justified to wonder – as I said in the beginning – why poets are looked down upon in our our time (though they have begun to rise again in Italy and be honoured on the the same level as theologians).

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1 Basil the Great: *Ad adolescentes*, 4, 8. In Leonardo Bruni’s translation: *sed tunc maxime oratores amplectemur, cum autem virtutem extollunt aut vitia fulminant*
2 Basil the Great: *Ad adolescentes*, 4, 8. In Leonardo Bruni’s translation: *ille enim nec omnes partier flores adeunt, eos totos assumunt. Sed eo solo ablato quod operi suo aptum sit, reliquum esse et valere sinunt*
3 “excerpimus”: this verb also carries the sense of taking notes from a literary work for inclusion in the student’s personal collection of *sententiae* and *exempla* and information for future use
4 In his oration “Si quis me roget”, sect. 24, Piccolomini speaks more fully on this subject
[23] Nunc absolvenda est quaestiuncula, cur tam pauci nostris temporibus sint poetae. Quod non solum aetate nostra, sed omnibus priscis temporibus contigit, plus tamen hodie quam umquam, idque, cur sit, nunc absolvam. Quattuor mihi hujus rei videntur causae – si plures sint, nihil est, cur movear. Prima causa est, quia multa et varia scire oportet eum, qui sit poeta, namque cum bella gesta suum sit scribere, cum tempestatibus, cum tempora, cum locorum situs, cum personarum conditiones, cum maris stratus ante oculos hominum ponere habeat, cum virtutes laudare vitiaque reprehendere debeat, quis non videt ad haec bene tractanda multis artibus opus esse? Multas autem artes pauci sunt, qui assequantur; idcirco pauci sunt poetae.

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1 nostris temporibus sint : sint nostris temporibus H, I, U, WY
2 eciam U
3 numquam H
4 id U
5 omit. H
6 hujus rei videntur : videntur hujus rei U
7 sunt WY
8 et varia omit. H, I, U
9 tempestatibus U
10 hominum ponere : ponere hominum I
11 cum virtutes ... debeat omit. I
12 et add. H, I, WY
2.5 Rarity of poets

[23] Now we must deal with the problem why there are so few poets in our own times. In all ages and not just in ours, there have been few poets, but today there are indeed fewer than ever, and the reason for this I shall deal with now. It seems to me that there are four reasons (if there are more it will not bother me). The first is that the poet must know many and different things, for it is the task of the poet to write about wars, and to place seasons, times, places,\(^1\) the conditions of individuals, and the extent of the sea\(^2\) before the eyes of men. And he must praise virtue and castigate vice. So, who does not understand that he needs many skills, great knowledge, and many arts\(^3\) to deal well with such themes? But only few men obtain so many skills, and therefore there are few poets.

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\(^1\) Cf. Solinus: *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, proem., 3: *locorum locorum commemoratio .. terrarum situsX*

\(^2\) Cf. Solinus: *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, 3: *tractus maris*. Cf also Valerius, 3, 3, ext.

\(^3\) “ars”: skill, knowledge, and art
Secunda causa est, quia nemo poeta est, nisi cui hoc singulare munus ex alto traditum est, ut cautis sententiosis versibus humanos actus conscribat. Singularia autem munera excellentia paucis dantur; ideo pauci sunt poetae. Poesis namque, ut Cicero in oratione pro Archita dicit, munus est Dei nec arte vel imitatione potest haberi, nisi virtus vera dicendi detur ex alto. Ex quo fit, sicut idem Cicero asserit, ut non solum nostris, sed omnibus temporibus rarissimi poetae fuerunt. Tertia rarietatis causa est, quia successu temporis crescentibus hominibus vitiis virtutibusque bereuntibus sicut aliae disciplinae diminutae sunt, sic et poesis ad nihilum videtur redacta. Nam sicut nemo mihi vel Augustinum vel Jeronimum debet, sic vel Ovidium vel Vergilium 15 16 17 18 19 20 21. Quarta causa est et in hoc ultimo loco: quia non redditur poesi suus honor; ideo pauci sunt poetae. Namque, ut Cicero dicit, honor alit artes omnesque incendimur ad studia gloriae; ubi vero deest honor, ibi et studium deficit. Ac 19 sic 20 fit, ut pauci nostris temporibus poeticaam assequantur, quia non putant homines honorari ex ea, atque idcirco negligent 21 illam.

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1 omit. H, I, U
2 cautus H; omit. I; canoris U
3 et WY
4 cautis ac omit. I
5 excellentiaque U
6 Archia poeta U
7 nec U
8 omit. H, U, WY
9 regula add. WY
10 vera add. H [sic!]; venia add. U
11 omit. I
12 asseruit U
13 carissimi I
14 homini WY
15 Ovidium vel Vergilium : Ve(i)rgilium vel Ovidium H, U, WY
16 dabit nemo : nemo dabat U
17 omit. H
18 gloria H, U
19 sit add. WY
20 ac sic : ita U
21 negligent LH
[24] The second reason is that all poets have received from on high the outstanding gift of describing human acts in polished¹ and sententious verses. But such outstanding and excellent gifts are only given to few men. Therefore there are only few poets. For as Cicero says in his oration for Architas,² poetry it is a gift from God, which can only be had by skill or imitation if the virtue of speaking true is granted from on high.³ Thus, poets have been very few not only in our own times, but at all times, as the same Cicero declares.⁴

The third reason for the rarity [of poets] is that just as, in the course of time, human vices grow and virtues perish, poetry appears to be reduced to nothing as also happens with other disciplines. For nobody will give me an Augustine and a Jerome today, and likewise nobody will give me a Virgil or an Ovid.⁵

The fourth and last reason is that poets are not honoured as they deserve. Therefore there are few poets. For as Cicero says: “Public esteem is the nurse of the arts, and all men are fired to application by fame.”⁶ Where there is no honour, there is no real effort. Thus only few in our own times pursue poetry for they believe that poetry does not bring men honour and therefore they neglect it.

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¹ “cautus”
² Error for Archias, i.e. Aulus Licinius Archias (c. 120 – 61 BC): In 62 BC he was accused by a certain Grattius of having assumed the citizenship illegally; and Cicero successfully defended him in his speech Pro Archia
³ Cicero: Pro Archia, 8, 18: Atqui sic a summis hominibus eruditissimisque accepimus, ceterarum rerum studia et doctrina et praeceptis et arte constare, poëtam natura ipsa valere et mentis viribus excitari et quasi divino quodam spiritu inflari. Qua re suo iure noster ille Ennius sanctos appellat poëtas, quod quasi deorum aliquo dono atque munere commendati nobis esse videantur. Piccolomini had already used this theme the year before in his letter to Wilhelm Stein of 1 June 1444, cf. Epistolarium, p. 290
⁴ Quotation not identified
⁵ Ovidius Naso, Publius (43 BC –17/18 AD): Roman poet
⁶ Cicero: Tusculanae disputationes, 1, 2, 7-8: Honos alit artes omnesque incenduntur ad studia gloria
[25] Absolutis duabus\(^1\) prioribus\(^2\) quaestionibus instat\(^3\) ridicula\(^4\) tertia inquisitio: cur viles cutes cadaverum atque antiquae camisiae cum cera in cancellariis venduntur pro optima minera\(^5\). Tangit me, Hercle\(^6\), ista quaestio, qui unus sum ex cancellaria, postquam divus Fridericus Caesar in secretarium suum me recepit. Solvam igitur quaestionem ex meo ingeniolo\(^7\).

[26] Quo in loco unum dicendum est jocosum. Viam solus asinus ibat suasque secum miserias quaerebatur, qui vinum portans aquam biberet frumentumque in horreis ponens fenum manuducaret\(^8\). Sed haec levia reputasset, nisi quod etiam\(^9\) post mortem ex ejus corio\(^10\) cribri\(^11\) fierent et\(^12\) tympana. \{142v\} Quem sic quaerulosum audiens varius parvum\(^13\) animal\(^14\) “Tace,” inquit, “asine! Meus\(^15\) est post mortem labor\(^16\). Nam isti, qui dicuntur homines, cum aliquem volunt sapientem facere, corium meum adhuc pilosum recipiunt frontemque illius adornant, quem volunt esse sapientem, doctores enim creantes\(^17\) eos meis\(^18\) pellibus vestiunt meque, quod est rerum omnium difficillimum, ex magnis bestiis viros oportet sapientes efficere\(^19\). Sic enim corium meum fata disposuerunt, quod est mihi et\(^20\) gravissimum et\(^21\) molestissimum.” Audiverunt haec rectores cancellariae videntesque\(^22\) in coriis cadaverum magnas esse\(^23\) virtutes, non censuerunt illa parvo pretio danda, sed ea atque camisias cum cera, sicut aequum erat, magnopretio coeperunt vendere imitatique sacerdotes, qui sonum campanarum et fumum et verba dantes magnis utuntur emolumentis, coria sua non putaverunt \{165r\} gratis danda\(^24\).

\(^{1}\) duobus U
\(^{2}\) [de] tribus add. H
\(^{3}\) instant WY
\(^{4}\) ridicula H
\(^{5}\) optima minera : optimis muneribus WY
\(^{6}\) Hercule H
\(^{7}\) ingeniyo WY
\(^{8}\) em.; mandetur H; mandaret I; manderet U, WY
\(^{9}\) quod etiam : etiam quod H
\(^{10}\) core... et passim WY
\(^{11}\) cribi H; cribra U
\(^{12}\) atque H, U, WY
\(^{13}\) parvum animal : animal parvum U
\(^{14}\) opus WY
\(^{15}\) labori WY
\(^{16}\) omit. I
\(^{17}\) eos meis : meis eos H, U, WY
\(^{18}\) sapientes efficere : efficere sapientes I
\(^{19}\) omit. H, U, WY
\(^{20}\) ac H
\(^{21}\) magnam esse add. U
\(^{22}\) magnas esse omit. U
\(^{23}\) dandis WY

72
3 Third question: Why are cheap skins of dead animals and old shirts with wax on them sold in the chanceries at the price of precious metals

[25] Now that two of the three questions have been dealt with, the third, humourous, question remains: Why are cheap skins of dead animals and old shirts with wax on them sold in the chanceries at the price of precious metals.

This question, by Hercules, touches me personally as I belong to the Chancery since Emperor Friedrich engaged me as a secretary. So I shall answer the question as my own puny intellect dictates.

3.1. Facetious answer

[26] First we shall answer with a joke.

An ass was walking along the road, alone, complaining about how miserable he was since he who carried wine had himself to drink water, and while he was bringing grain to the trashig halls, he himself had to be content with hay. But he would take that lightly if only after his death his skin would not be used for sieves and drums. Hearing him grining, a sheep\(^1\), a small animal, said: “Shut up, ass! My labor comes after death! For when those who are called men want to make someone wise \(^2\) they take my hairy skin and decorate the exterior of the person whom they want to make wise. Thus, when they create doctors, they clothe them with my skin, \(^3\) and thus it is I – and that is the worst of all – who must transform great beasts into wise men.\(^4\) This is how fate treats my skin: it is extremely irritating and annoying.” When the heads of the chancery heard this and understood that there was great power in skins, they considered that they ought not be given out cheaply, but began - as was reasonable – to sell them, and shirts, with wax, at a great price. In this they imitated the priests who reap great profits from dispensing the sound of bells, smoke,\(^5\) and water,\(^6\) and making words, and who would not dream of giving them away for free.\(^7\)

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\(^1\) Varrius?
\(^2\) “Sapiens”: this choice of words may not quite agree with Piccolomini’s previous distinction between wisdom as a virtue and moral knowledge
\(^3\) Piccolomini may be speaking of the doctoral robes
\(^4\) The university had made a joke of the chancery, and here Piccolomini neatly returns the joke on the university
\(^5\) Incense
\(^6\) Blessed water - Piccolomini does not dare or wish to mention the sacraments - that would be carrying the joke too far
\(^7\) Here the joke is turned specifically against the theological faculty, the most important faculty at the Vienna University
At ut emissisis jocis ad seria redeamus, ante cartae et membranarum usum in dolatis ex ligno codicillis epistolarum alloquias scriebantur, sicut et Cicero et Damasus et Isidorus attestantur. Deinde tam Graeci quam Tusci superinducere ceras incoeperunt illasque graphio ferreo inscripserunt. Post haec cartarum usus apud Aegyptum coepit, quae ex decerpto papyri tegmine conficiebantur, ac postmodum ex lineis pannis jam ineptis alii usibus. Exinde reges Pergami membranarum usum excogitaverunt, quae ex membris pecudum detrahantur et adhuc propter memoriam loci pergamena dicuntur. Quia igitur in cartis, quae ex vetustis fiunt camisiis, et in cutibus pecorum ad usum scribendi paratis res magnae maximaque notantur, non est injuria, si hoc magno pretio venduntur. Non enim res, quae continet, sed quae contenta est, in extimationem venit. Ac sic tribus quaestionibus vestris, excellentissime magister, haec respondisse sufficiat, vestro gravi et optimo judicio nihilominus salvo.
3.2. Serious answer

[27] But let us leave the jokes and return to the serious: before paper and skins [were introduced] letters were written on wooden tablets, as Cicero, Damasus, and Isidore attest. Then both the Greeks and the Etruscans began to put a layer of wax on the wooden tablets and wrote on them with an iron stylus. Later the Egyptians began to use paper sheets, which they made from the pith of papyrus plants, and still later paper was made of linen cloths which could no longer be used otherwise. Then the kings of Pergamum invented the use of membranes made of the skin of cattle, still called pergamenta (parchment) in memory of that place. And since both paper sheets made of old linen and skins from cattle prepared for writing are used to document great and important matters, it is quite fair that they are sold at a great price, for it is not the container, but the content that is being estimated.

And thus, excellent magister, I have sufficiently answered your three questions, reserving, of course, your own serious and excellent judgment.