# Francesco Petrarca Between the *Gotica* and *Littera Antiqua*: the Graphic Reform of Script and the Humanist Aesthetic.

*Giovanni Spani*

College of the Holy Cross

Worcester

gspani@holycross.edu

**Abstract:** The present article discusses the fundamental role of Petrarch's script evolution in the graphic reform carried out by Italian Humanists of the 15th century from the gothic script to humanist miniscule. His exposure to the various scripts in use – from the Tuscan chancery style to the *gotica libraria* style of universities and monasteries – afforded Petrarch the perspective to develop his own model of writing, one which more capably responded to his philological and practical conception of writing. The contemporary gloss script known as the *scriptura notularis*, whose essential elements were based on the Carolingian model, provided the foundation for a style which Petrarch developed, through *imitatio*, into a more elegantly refined form in an attempt at greater clarity and spaciousness. Inevitably, this gloss script reform moves toward a textual script reform, whose motivation lies in Petrarch's intimate knowledge of scribal practices along with the importance he places on philological concerns for which most scribes of his day had little regard. It is also founded in the elementary need for a more clear and legible text than provided by the cramped, gothic script. Petrarch discerned a possible solution to the deficiencies of contemporary book scripts in the Carolingian model: the Caroline miniscule satisfied the poet's criteria for an ideal script, and thus he modified the form to fit his goals of clarity, equilibrium, and simplicity. It is Petrarch's intermediary, semi-gothic script that was used as the foundation of the Italian Humanist script reform.

Keywords: Petrarch, graphic reform, humanist miniscule, Malpaghini, textual script reform, litterae scholasticae, codex Vaticano Latino 3195.

This essay explores the importance of Petrarch's graphic reform and its influence on the written works of the humanists by tracking the various stages that brought Petrarch to re-imagine script itself. Humanism is generally considered as a culture committed to recuperating and restoring the classical world in light of the mediocre conditions of the present. The lesson of the Ancients becomes a fundamental point of reference in this process, inasmuch as the decadence of modernity requires a renovation through a return to the ideals of dignity and humanity – many of which are exemplified in the works of antiquity. In this period, handwritten manuscripts were becoming more common: many of these texts could be found in the hands of those humanists who not only consulted them but also produced them as well. As Martin Davies notes (47-48):

> "the common bond of humanism, uniting many disparate strands of interest, was the study, absorption, and imitation of the classics, and the common style was a classicizing humanistic Latin. What was distinctive about the humanistic book? In the first place, it was a new manner in the preparation of manuscripts: new in that it turned against current practice in these matters, but backward-looking in its attempt to recover classical virtues of clarity and purity. There were plenty of early humanists in the monastic and mendicant orders, and many humanists became academic teachers; but in origin and essence the movement stood apart from the traditional centers of book production in the religious houses and universities. [...] The origins of the humanistic reform of script, like so much else in the history of humanism, go back to Petrarch".

Petrarch was attuned to the virtues of the classics to which «iter rectum eo ubi finis est noster; per virtutes, inquam, non tantum cognitas, sed dilectas» (1906, 69-70).

To properly contextualize this study one must begin by taking geographical factors into consideration. Petrarch spent his early years at Incisa[1] but by 1311 had relocated to Avignon (the seat of the papacy since 1305) where his father worked as a notary. In Carpentras he studied grammar and rhetoric under the guidance of Convenevole da Prato; from 1316 until 1320 he studied law at the University of Montpellier where he was able to dedicate himself to reading classical works (Cicero and Virgil). In 1320, he moved to Bologna; however, the death of his father in 1326 forced him to return to Avignon (Ferroni, 235). His education and his continual displacement allowed Petrarch to become familiar with (and to assimilate) numerous types of script, and to thus be equipped to compare and synthesize these forms, leading him to the renewal and invention (or for lack of a better word, adoption) of a new type of script commonly known as "semi-gothic script."

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[1]    Between 1304 and 1311.

We can assume that Petrarch's elementary education took place outside of Italy and that Convenevole da Prato (a Tuscan notary who was also near the papal court in Avignon) taught him how to write «even before he taught him Latin» (Petrucci 1967, 18). From these factors we can deduce that the young Francesco used a lower-case chancery script[2], or rather the script of Tuscan notaries, which Convenevole would have known very well[3].

These geographic factors are not without consequence: the end of the 13th century and the beginning of the 14th century saw the birth of a literary culture of the highest level in Tuscany, where the vernacular had evolved into a learned language in a few decades. Not only was it the era of Dante, but also of a communal civilization and a new leading class. With this new culture came new tools and methods, and script was essential among these. «The script in which all the works that formed the connective tissue of the communal culture were published—from ascetic treatises to vulgarized religious works, from French translations to didactic publications—was the chancery script»[4]. Thus, it is likely, that the first script Petrarch learned to employ was precisely that chancery script which, being used in libraries, spread rapidly not only throughout Tuscany but also other communal regions of Italy[5]. It's worth noting, however, that in other major Tuscan cities, and in northern Italy, another form of script was commonly used. This script, known as gothic (*gotica libraria*), was the one that Petrarch had encountered during his time in Bologna (Petrucci 1967, 15): this was the script of books, university texts, and classics from the Middle Ages that was adopted by the *scriptoria* belonging to large universities as well as the *scriptoria* of religious orders (mostly the Franciscans and Dominicans). This script was «"rotund," clear, low and rounded, with heavy shading and sharp contrast between "borders" and full stroke» (Petrucci 1979, 23) that somehow differed from the

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2   See Bischoff (136-145); Battelli (213-215).

3   According to Petrucci: «One wouldn't be too far from the truth in affirming that Convenevole da Prato would have certainly used, and taught to his favorite student, his usual, professional writing: the legal lower-case» (1967, 18). All the translations from Italian into English of Petrucci's quotes are mine.

4   «We refer to a drawing of the line sometimes more, sometimes less marked, even if it is never heavy like the "*bononiensis*", with letters separated from each other, a fairly small, slender form, written on the line with ends defined by subtle flutters and decorative tails» (Petrucci 1967, 14). See also Petrarca (1968, 12).

5   To this end Petrucci (1967, 13-14) recalls that the legal lower-case also preceded the first diffusion of the *Divine Comedy*, and that this writing in Florence had reached an incomparable level of elegance in the workshop of Ser Francesco di Ser Nardo da Barberino (famous later for having been the copyist of the Codex *Trivulziano 1080*).

French gothic script[6], which in its strokes and form was very different from the *rotunda* and the *bononiensis* in particular.

Avignon had become to some degree a cultural capital of Europe in the beginning of the 14th century, and where, under the guidance of popes and cardinals, numerous learned scholars gathered to preserve the great works of literature and philosophy. It was here that the pontifical library collected texts from every part of Europe and copyists and illuminators prepared to transcribe and illuminate these manuscripts; and it was ultimately here that Petrarch had another one of his graphical experiences, coming into contact with the French gothic script commonly used in codices of the period in this region.

Up to this point, we have referenced three different types of script: chancery script, the French gothic script, and the *littera bononiensis*[7]: Petrarch's continual movement situated him in the middle of these extremely diverse traditions and trends that, for many reasons, influenced his initial graphical education. The displacement from his home region to the Papal Court, and from his studies in France to those in Bologna, defined the environment in which the calligraphy and taste of the young writer were formed. These visual experiences molded Petrarch's graphical knowledge: Petrarch, due to his continual displacement, was able to acquire a general survey of the scripts of his time, to take in their advantages and limitations, and to develop a new aesthetic and graphic ideal that lead him to reform script altogether.

The process of graphic reform undertaken by Petrarch concerned two types of script: that of the marginalia and of the text itself. The script of glosses was traditionally adopted in a scholastic environment to annotate the margins of studied texts. There was a long tradition, rooted in antiquity, that had always kept this script different (graphically) from the numerous textual scripts it was accompanying. The annotations became an independent and important literary genre directed towards the public: to an uneducated class (in the case of classical texts), but also to the scholars and professors (for didactic and university texts) or a limited number of pupils (for scholastic texts). This type of script, which, for these characteristics assumed the typologies of an independent literary genre (Petrucci 1979, 31), had become so important that the production of books was most often conditioned by an obligation to adopt specific guidelines and patterns of *mise en page* (Petrucci 1979, 31).

Near the end of 1320, Petrarch moved from Montpellier to Bologna where he completed, despite various interruptions until 1326, almost five

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6    The French literary Gothic script was one of two types: "littera de forma" and "littera parisiensis", see Petrucci (1967, 17).

7    Petrarch came across this type of script in Bologna but he never learned to write it. See Petrucci (1967, 19).

courses in jurisprudence. One can easily imagine that, between consultation and study, Petrarch had also acquired familiarity with legal codices[8], with their script and graphical particularity, their complex glossing system, and the common practice of writing marginal and interlinear comments.

In fact, the first hand-written exemplar from Petrarch dates back to these years as we can see in the glosses and in his handwritten annotations detailing the purchase of Saint Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*[9]. In this manuscript, the script of these glosses (drawn up with a fine-point pen, see fig. 1) is characterized by a notary cursive, with thin, uniform strokes, which were also spacious and ligatured (Petrucci 1967, 21): forms and strokes that were not particular (or new) to the typical script of that period. In these forms, there was no evidence of a personal graphical preference, except for the spaciousness of the characters[10]. Up until that point, Petrarch continued to be influenced by scholastic inclinations of the early 14th century, or at least by these elements that were part of a system of study and annotation of codices used largely in universities and intellectual circles, the same system that Petrarch would later come to criticize:

> "There are numerous manuscripts, whether Italian, French, scholastic or of other origin, that have in their margins catchwords or underlining, those hands, those small lines or dots, that the 21 year-old Petrarch was employing with confidence in his volumes of St. Augustine" (Petrucci 1967, 21).

Between 1200 and 1300, the cultural climate was changing; the intellectual horizon was expanding towards a series of *auctores* that for many years had been neglected by the Scholastic philosophers. Scholars began to research direct and indirect testimonies of antiquity, from manuscripts to inscriptions, and all of these trends came to be interpreted in a literary category that refuted the universalistic canon of the universities—that is, the doctrine of *ipse dixit—,* or Logics and the natural sciences[11].

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[8]  This date is certain by now: if one observes Codex *Vat. Lat. 3196* ("*Codice degli Abbozzi*") it is possible to see how Petrarch annuls his poetry while correcting with a diagonal line that intersected the text from top to bottom, exactly as the notaries of his time did when they annulled their dispositions on paper.

[9]  The manuscript in question is the *De Civitate Dei* brought to Avignon in February of 1325 and housed today in the University Library of Padua (Cod. 1490 Bibl. Univ. Pd). The manuscript measures 320X220 mm. and contains cc. II + 248 + I.

[10]  The spaciousness and airiness of the characters constitute a fundamental point in Petrarch's graphic reform. If his writing remains, in fact, anchored in the past, in certain scholastic standards, then the writing still evolves, making room for a letter that is more comprehensible and less confusing than that of the university writings.

[11]  In this vein Petrarch appears quite precocious; it is sufficient to recall the invective thrown against scholars in his work, *De sui ipsius et multorum ignorantia*. An example among many is the famous passage in which the poet ironically criticizes

Amongst these pre-humanist men of letters in Avignon, Petrarch met Landolfo Colonna[12] who, like all men of culture at the time, used the *scriptura notularis*[13], a harmonious script of simple elegance and refined accuracy in which Petrucci perceives «a new style of literary "glossing" with its own essential qualities of Carolingian ["notula"], transferred in the "humus" script of that epoch, that was profoundly Gothic» (1967, 38). Petrarch purchased two manuscripts in 1337 from the library of the Colonna (Petrucci 1967, 38), the current codices Par. Lat. 1617 and 2540: two manuscripts insignificant in terms of their content, whose margins were annotated by the elegant hand of their first owner.

From Colonna, Petrarch assimilated these graphic lessons, modeling his glosses on Colonna's example to the point that the difference between the two hands is hard to distinguish if there were not, as Petrucci maintains (1967, 39), an obvious difference in the use of particular reference markers, paragraphs, and signs. Petrarch's *scriptura notularis* seems fully defined at this point: the Carolingian *notula* used by Landolfo Colonna, with all of its limitations[14], must have been a novelty to the young Petrarch, who had made it his own by 1340[15]:

> "It is a sharp script, small and elegant, with uniform strokes of tall and slim forms that, by its elegant look, unites the gracefulness of the markers of paragraphs[16], the careful disposition in the margins and the precious architecture 'in clusters'" (Petrucci 1967, 39).

The graphic reform of script began fully from this practice of annotation in the codices Par. Lat. 1617 and 2540, and in a few years Petrarch's gloss script became even more aesthetically refined, evolving into a true masterpiece of graphic elegance in which

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the knowledge of the scholars: «Multa ille igitur de belvis deque avibus ac piscibus, quot leo pilos in vertice, quot plumas accipiter in cauda, quot polipus spiris naufragum liget […]» (Petrarca 1906, 24).

[12] «In the final years of the XIII century a cleric from a great Roman family, Landolfo Colonna, came to Chartres were he remained for thirty years, Ladolfo Colonna was the author of the ponderous *Breviarium historiarum* as well as juridical treatises, a man who increased his erudition by studying the texts of the cathedral of Chartres. When, towards the end of his life, Landolfo stayed for a few years in Avignon (1328-1329), he gave a young Petrarch the copy of the best text found in Chartres; a voluminous series of books by Livy (XXVI - XL) conserved in an unusual textual tradition within a codex that had been compiled many centuries before in an Italian scriptorium» (Billanovich 1996, 132).

[13] See Petrarca (1968, 12).

[14] We must always keep in mind that this writing was still Gothic.

[15] "[…] some of the poet's greatest strides were made in the 1340s in the development of a distinctive gloss script (*scriptura notularis*) through which Petrarch sought a visual harmony in the composition of the manuscript folio", Storey (203).

[16] These paragraph signs are typically Gothic.

"all of the elements, from its light suppleness to the ornamental straight verti-
cal strokes, to upper-case block lettering, all coincided to form a harmonious
and organic completion of the written page" (Petrucci 1979, 16).

The testimony of this "graphical progression" is most visible in the work
of "Virgilio Ambrosiano"[17] where the *scriptura notularis* presents itself in a
slightly larger form with tall and slim shapes and strokes which are hardly
marked, without ornamental borders or flourishes, giving a general im-
pression of clarity and expansiveness[18]. The graphical evolution of the
Petrarchan gloss did not stop here, but continued to evolve incessantly
in search of a perfect synthesis that would solidify once and for all a
standard typification: this is the case of the codex Vat. Lat. 2193[19], in
which the *scriptura notularis* reaches its highest levels of harmonious
calligraphy, giving an entirely new elegance to gloss script.

The gloss script adopted by Petrarch in his long literary career consti-
tutes an important step towards the reform of textual script, an inevitable
process that would leave many unresolved doubts if not confronted and
handled adequately. The evolution of the *scriptura notularis* allows us to
understand the Petrarchan mode of thinking: the poet has the possibility
to come in contact with numerous manuscripts and many types of script
until he recognizes in Colonna's Carolingian *notula* such an elegant form
that he redesigns it and makes it his own.

The result is a script that is neither Gothic nor Carolingian, but one
that fuses in a harmonious synthesis the elements of both traditions,
always aiming for the elements of clarity and expansiveness that had
previously been lacking. It seems that Petrarch's intention lies entirely in
a concept[20] that was dear to him, which he later expressed in a letter to
Bocaccio in 1366 (*Fam. XXIII, 19*): «curandum initiatori ut quod scribit
simile non idem sit» (Petrarca 1859, 238). After meeting with Colonna,
Petrarch was already in the process of formulating a new hypothesis for
his glossing script as a result of his previous graphic experiences, and
he started to reform his glossing script by synthesizing elements of the

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17 This concerns Codex S.P. 10/20 (già A 49 inf.), kept at the Biblioteca Ambrosiana
in Milan. The manuscript contains: *Bucolics* (2r-16v), *Georgics* (16v-52r), *Aeneid*
(52r-233r) plus the commentary of Servius; Statius' *Achilleis*, accompanied by a
commentary (233v-248v); four *Odes* of Horatius (249r-250v) and finally two com-
ments on the third book of *Ars Maior* by Aelius Donatus (251r-269v); See
Giuseppe Billanovich, "Il Virgilio del Petrarca da Avignone a Milano,"*Studi sul Pet-
rarca* 7 (1979): 20.
18 For a precise description of the writing of the Virgilio Ambrosiano, see Petrucci
(1967, 41).
19 For the Codex Vat. Lat. 2193, see Petrucci (1967, 42-47).
20 I am referring to the concept of *imitatio*: «which was to become crucial to the next
generation of humanists. […] The resemblance to be achieved is not that of a por-
trait to sitter, but of a son to his father: *similitudo non identitas*» (Mann 13).

Gothic and Carolingian traditions, hoping to develop a new form similar but not equal to the extent that: «eamque similutudinem talem esse oportere, non qualis est imaginis ad eum cuius imago est, sed qualis filii ad patrem» (Petrarca 1859, 238).

Let us turn now to the textual reform. Petrarch's interest demonstrated in his extensive scribal work on these graphic problems was not attributable to purely aesthetic motives:

> "the consideration of the role script should play in the production process and diffusion of culture had to do with a complex knowledge of literary phenomena and a broad experience of Petrarch's graphic aspect, […] furthermore it was amplified by a complete dissatisfaction with regard to the systems of book production of his time" (Petrucci 1967, 62).

For Petrarch, to write not only meant to exteriorize interior toil and express his more intimate thoughts, it also represented the heroic exercise that becomes exhausting with the onset of old age[21]. In fact, according to Petrucci, «the function of writing was noble for Petrarch insomuch as it was closely tied and almost identified with the activity of creating a man of letters»[22]. The consideration of the role that script should play in the production and diffusion of culture leaned, in Petrarch, upon a complex knowledge of literary phenomena and a broad experience of graphic phenomena and ultimately upon the book as a final product: if he had wanted to ensure that these codices were "philologically correct" he should not have left them in the hands of "mercenary" scribes who were direct representatives of the traditionalistic culture which was «indifferent to the new philological demands, and had already created and codified an anonymous and uniform system of producing scholastic books» (Petrucci 1979, 13).  A letter sent by Petrarch to his brother Gherardo in 1354 states this notion quite clearly (*Fam. XVII, 5*):

> "Sed ne ab illis quidem semper correctos ad unguem codices expectes. Maiora quaedam et laudabiliora pertractant. Non calcem temperat architectus, sed iubet ut temperetur; non gladios acuit dux belli, non magister navis malum dedolat aut remos: non tabulas Apelles, non ebur Polycletus, non Phidias marmora secabat. Plebeii opus ingenii est praeparare, quod nobile consumet ingenium. Sic apud nos alii membranas radunt, alii libros scribunt, alii corrigunt, alii, ut vulgari verbo utar, illuminant, alii ligant et superficiem comunt. Generosum ingenium altius aspirat, humiliora praetervolans. Itaque sic habe; saepe ut agros divitum, sic libros doctorum hominum incultiores esse quam reliquos: copia nempe securitatem, securitasque segnitiem, segnities situm parit" (Petrarca 1859, 481).

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[21]  It seems, in fact, that even at the time of his death, Petrarch was still correcting his *Rerum Vulgarium Fragmenta*.

[22]  Petrucci (1967, 63). It is precisely for this reason that the *calamus* becomes a symbol of his favorite means of expression: writing.

If Petrarch considered these artisans to be a real obstacle, it is not to say that the scholastic codices produced in the universities were as flawed as he claims: the real cause of his merciless polemic against the scribes of his era and their scripts was connected to the system of diffusion and production of books, geared towards a public that was completely different from the one Petrarch had envisioned:

> "He was concerned with the basic contrast that separated the two opposing conceptions of the book: on one hand, there is the book as an instrument of a technical culture offered to a broad audience; on the other hand, there is the book as a casual literary product, perfected in every part and directed towards the enjoyment and education of a restricted elite of learned men" (Petrucci 1967, 64-65).

Perfecting each part of the book implies that script had regained a fundamental role. From this moment on, the polemic against the 14th century book became impossible to ignore: after having taken the first steps in reforming glossing script, Petrarch pushed for the redevelopment of the entire system of editing, running contrary to the typification of the Gothic book, identified with the *litterae scholasticae,* which appeared to be specific obstacles to his aesthetic preferences (and which represented the preferred mode of expression for those scribes whom he despised the most[23]).

The *litterae scholsticae* were therefore denounced by Petrarch as illegible. Elsewhere, Petrucci explains that this illegibility was caused «by the narrow, congested columns of abbreviations, signs, conventional symbols, which were rarely illuminated with red rubrics or initial bicolored in red and deep blue»(1979, 5): the refutation of this specific type of script coincided precisely with the formulation of a new graphic ideal, or rather with the necessity, as Storey argues, of a «replacement of his day's illegible scripts (e.g., *litterae scholasticae*) with a clear semi-Gothic hand, revised on the model of the tenth- and eleventh-century Carolingian hands»(203-204).

At the basis of this attitude, beyond the motives we saw before, is the fact that Petrarch reclaimed this unclear Gothic script specifically because it was too refined and elaborate, or rather because these letters seemed so practiced that they almost appeared to be designed by the

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[23]   With regards to this point, Petrucci (1967, 65-66) examines the letter in which Petrarch openly criticizes the writing of the young people of his time and its lack of legibility. I cite part of the letter in Latin from Petrucci's text; the passage belongs to *Seniles VI, 5*: «Adolescentia enim cunctis suis in actibus improvida et insulsa miratrix inanium, contemptrix utilium, perexiguis atque compressis visumque frustantibus literulis gloriari solita est, acervans omnia et coartans, atque hinc spatio, hinc literarum super literas velut equitantium aggestione confundes, que scriptor ipse brevi post tempore rediens vix legat, emptor vero non tam librum, quam libro cecitatem emanate».

hands of a painter rather than those of a scribe (and this exceptional characteristic made the script less clear and, as such, less functional and hardly legible). Storey (204-205) insists on this point, arguing that Petrarch

> "viewed the highly calligraphic and often illegible minuscule forms of Gothic scripts, such as the *litterae parisiensis* and *bononiensis* of his day's professional scribes as symbols of Scholastic thought at its worst. These scripts were burdened by a plethora of abbreviations and compendia produced by unlearned school copyists in an environment of assembly-line confusion".

The requisites of the new book script had to be, therefore, simplistic, clear, and orthographically correct (Petrucci 1967, 67 and Storey 205), elements which book scripts at that time were lacking and that the poet had the ability to infer from examples of other, distant graphic systems, such as the Carolingian script[24]. «Petrarch's enthusiasm for the austere clarity of Carolingian hands» Storey writes, «represented a scholarly passion for the classical culture the poet was discovering in tenth and eleventh-century manuscripts» (204).

This does not mean a reform of the script *ex novo,* but more simply a synthesis obtained from the example of an ideal model, which inspired him as did his reform of glossing script. In his long experience as a philologist and scribe, Petrarch had before him a singular and clear graphic model to refer to, that which was offered to him by numerous codices in Caroline miniscule he possessed. By 1351, Petrarch wrote the following to Boccacio[25] (*Fam. XVIII, 3*):

> "Huic tali amicitiae tuae dono praeter eam quam loquor magnitudinem et libri decor vetustioris litterae maiestas, et omnis sobrius accedit ornatus, ut cum oculos ibi figere coeperim siticulosae hirundinis in morem nequeam, nisi plenos avellere: ita saepe mihi dies impransus praeterlabitur, nox insomnis". (Petrarca 1859, 477-478).

Here *vetustas* refers almost certainly to the antique codices in Carolingian[26]. What would have struck Petrarch about Caroline miniscule? It was most likely the clarity and expansiveness already formed in the glossing script, elements that at this time were gaining their greatest definition if we consider Petrarch's hostile position in relation to the *litterae scholasticae*; but also the graphical elegance (so difficult to surpass) and ulti-

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[24]  «The Carolingian script reached its finest flower in the ninth century, then gradually decayed. By the thirteen century its transformation into Gothic was complete» (Ullman 1960, 11).

[25]  Thanking him for having received as a gift the Codex Par. Lat. 1989 (in *carolina italiana* from the eleventh century), (See, Petrucci 1967, 67).

[26]  Storey (205) affirms: «The model for such a hand was, in theory, the *littera vetustas* which Petrarch encountered in the minuscule scripts of Carolingian manuscripts of classical litterature, science, and philosophy».

mately his reverent admiration for the antique manuscripts (Petrucci 1967, 68). The qualities of the Caroline miniscule, however, corresponded to the requisites that Petrarch maintained were necessary for the new book script that he was constructing: *maiestas, decor* and *sobrius ornatus.*

Exploiting these three characteristics, Petrarch reformed the script of his era: it is important, however, to not confuse the terms of this question. Petrarch never imitated the Carolingian script directly—he never would have reproduced this script as it was—but he remade it according to his ideal graphical guidelines from which it was possible to extrapolate the general principles of clarity, equilibrium, and simplicity according to which the gothic book should be modified. Ullman (12) also alludes to the vaguely Gothic inclination of the first humanist scripts:

> "the humanists of the fourteenth century, men who read more, perhaps, than their predecessors, preferred manuscripts in large, clear writing, in *littera antiqua*, i.e., in the Carolingian script of the ninth to twelfth centuries, particularly, perhaps`s, the large twelfth-century Italian script".

In fact, an attentive survey can easily reveal that Petrarch's hand was still Gothic in comparison to that of his young assistant Giovanni Malpaghini[27] of whom Petrarch wrote to Boccacio in the famous *Fam. XXIII, 19:*

> "non vaga quidem ac luxurianti littera (qualis est scriptorum seu verius pictorum nostri temporis longe oculos mulcens, prope autem afficiens ac fatigans, quasi ad aliud quam ad legendum sit inventa, et non, ut grammaticorum princeps ait, littera quasi legitera dicta sit), sed alia quadam castigata et clara seque ultro oculis ingerente, in qua nihil othographicum, nihil omnino grammaticae artis omissum dicas" (Petrarca 1859, 238).

Take into consideration f. 37r (but also f. 39v and f. 62r)[28] of codex. Vat. Lat. 3195: of the four sonnets, the first (*Amor mi sprona in un tempo et*

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[27] «In the summer of 1364 a smart and cheerful eighteen year old kid, Giovanni Malpaghini from Ravenna, was sent to Petrarch by Donato Albanzani; and the old poet discovered in him not only "abstinentia et gravitas…, acre ingenium ac facile, rapax memoria…" (*Fam. XXIII, 19*), but also marvellous qualities of calligraphy» (Petrucci 1967, 77).

[28] Also in these two folia the hand of Malpaghini alternates with that of his teacher and confirms the absolute uniformity of the writing of this student from Ravenna relative to that of Petrarch. Concerning this point, it is possible to hypothesize that the different paginations, the graphic style (that is, the drawing), the form, the relationship between bodies and lines of the Petrarchan hand assume this form due to the change of the destination of the manuscript itself. If in the first place the Vat. Lat. 3195 had been conceived as a gift, and was thus looked after in every detail, it seems that then it became something the poet decided to keep for himself and so, after the departure of Malpaghini, he transcribed on his own, at that point his man-

*affrena*,fig. 2) and the last two are transcribed by Malpaghini, while the second (*Geri quando talor meco s'adira*, fig. 3) came to be transcribed by Petrarch, probably after his assistant abandoned him[29]. The difference between the two hands is very evident: in Malpaghini's script, the aforementioned ideals of clarity and expansiveness are fully realized. The graphical elegance here reaches its highest levels—the script *clara et castigata* is of such a simplicity that it almost caresses the eye of the reader and the spaces between the words also evoke the expansiveness so precious to Petrarch. Ultimately the *mise in page* is perfect and occupies the entire writing space.

Observe instead the hand of Petrarch: the semi-Gothic[30] (as the script of the poet came to be defined) presents a form that is notably smaller, not expansive and far less legible. The Gothic characteristic remained and is much more evident in the tall vertical strokes of the "d", "l", "h", and also of the "g" which were of genuinely Gothic tastes while in Malpaghini we have a quadrangular loop, typically late-Carolingian. And on the influence of the Gothic script on the first humanists Ullman affirms that: «Petrarch, Boccaccio, Salutati, and many others wrote in a legible Gothic script, a less formal variety of the *rotunda*[31], not compressed or angular but preserving the important Gothic element of fusion» (12).

Malpaghini's script therefore is of generally large proportions, larger than those of Petrarch's script: the vertical strokes are short and squat, with respect to the large and round body of the single letters; the heavy and broken stroke in the curves was to provoke (in some letters) forms completely different from those done in the Petrarchan hand. If these characteristics seem to be completely different from the style of the grand lettered reform, realistically we are not far from the truth in saying that the script of Malpaghini is a wonderful example of semi-Gothic script, precisely because:

> "It took from the lesson of Petrarch some essential elements, even if more formal than substantial, more aesthetic than not exactly graphical: first of all the expansiveness—that is, the distance of the letters and single graphical elements between each other; therefore, the clarity of this route is the precise individuation of any tract and any letter; in the end, the sobriety of the ornamentation. Such elements made up the principle and fundamental theories of Petrarch's graphical aesthetics, in which the material aspects of the script, the problems, deriving from the use of specific instruments or techniques, did not have any relief" (Petrucci 1967, 78-79).

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uscript, without conforming himself to the graphic style that before had been previously imposed on his young assistant.

[29] Malpaghini left Petrarch around the end of 1367, (See, Petrucci 1967, 79).

[30] For the *semigotica textualis*, see Petrucci (1967, 73); and also Storey (201-209).

[31] For the *scrittura rotunda*, see Ullman (12).

In the beginning of this essay I proposed to explore why Petrarch's reform was so important for the humanists. Having analyzed the process that brought our Tuscan author to the restyling of the Gothic script into the semi-Gothic one, we can conclude that Petrarch represents the connection between two types of script: the Gothic and the *littera antiqua.* According to Ullman «it is precisely with Coluccio Salutati that humanistic script begins» (16)[32]: the script of the first humanist codices is closer to Petrarch from a graphical point of view, but the most important notion is that Petrarch's influence on the humanists must be sought above all in philology. To these new intellectuals, the semi-Gothic script of the poet of Arezzo was not enough; but they searched for a more antique script, closer to the lessons of old that Petrarch had uncovered in the many libraries of Europe. It should not be surprising then that one might think the first humanists had not reformed Gothic script but rather Petrach's *semigotica*:

> "it may at first seem strange that it was the clear script of the fourteenth-century humanists like Petrarch and Coluccio rather than the crabbed Gothic of France, Germany, and England that was the first to be reformed" (Ullman 14).
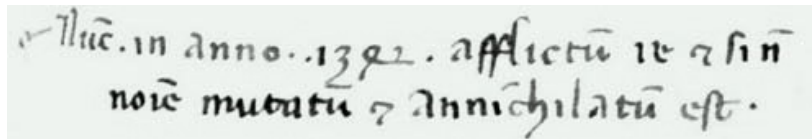
The Caroline miniscule, which for Petrarch had constituted only an ideal point of reference, the almost distant model that more closely resembled the script of his time, became for Poggio Bracciolini a live script, or rather the only script worthy of being adopted for books, in the same way that scribes had lauded it three or four decades before:

> "and that could happen, because this script, at once old and very new, was responding in an admirable way to aesthetic tastes, to mental attitudes, and the ideal propensities of the new humanistic elite that was organizing itself around the Italian courts and that, distancing themselves always from schools, universities, and from the organic culture of the communal society, a new intellectual ideology was being formed in full contrast with traditional values and all that is based on the return of antiquity" (Petrucci 1979, 29-30).
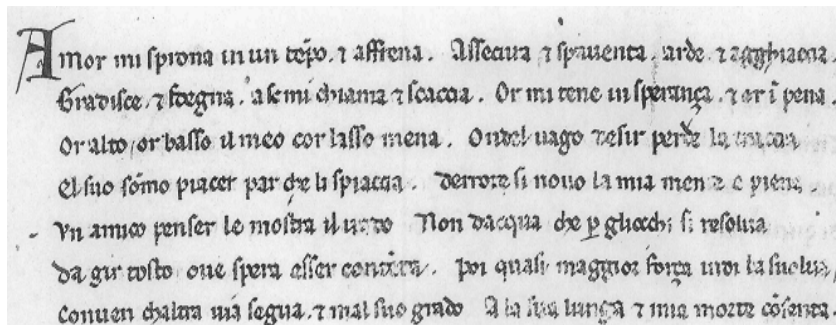
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[32] By *humanistic script* we mean precisely the writing more commonly defined *littera antiqua* or *minuscola umanistica*. For a detailed description of this writing see Petrucci (1979, 22-36) and Bischoff (145-149).
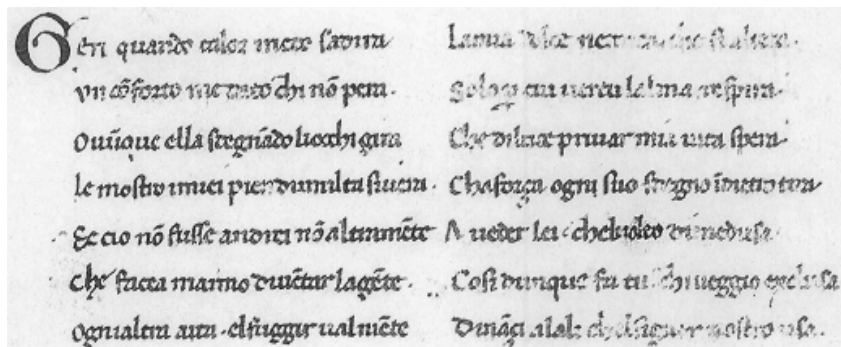
**Illustrations:**



(Fig. 1: Gloss by Petrarch in *Codex 1490*, Padua University Library, f. 32r)



(Fig. 2: Facsimile Reprint of *Codex Vat. Lat. 3195*, f. 37r)



(Fig. 3:Facsimile Reprint of *Codex Vat. Lat. 3195*, f. 37r)

Spani, *Francesco Petrarca*, 263-277

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