

# HUMANIST LATIN AND ITALIAN IDENTITY:



*sum vero Italus natione et Romanus civis esse gloriior*

By Marianne Pade

*From Petrarch onwards humanist writers (Bruni, Lapo da Castiglionchio, Valla, Guarino, Brenta, Sabellico) describe the Latin language, classical Latin as well as contemporary humanist Latin, as essential for the cultural achievement of both ancient Rome and early Renaissance Italy. The way these writers use history, evoking a long lost Golden Age which is now about to return, is analysed with the conceptual framework of modern theories on the construction of national identity. The article argues that by making language a central aspect of the Golden Age myth, which in their interpretation regards Italy and not other parts of the Latin West, Italian humanists succeed in making humanist Latin an essential part of Italian cultural identity.*

Even though Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca 1304–1374)<sup>1</sup> grew up with connections to the curia at Avignon, Europe’s intellectual centre during the fourteenth century, he always described the city as an awful place, a den of sin and iniquity, stubbornly refusing to admit that France had any learned men at all. When in the spring of 1368 Petrarch wrote a letter to Pope Urban V in which he urged the pope to move the papacy from Avignon back to Rome he argued that “of the four doctors of the church, two are Italian and Roman. Of the rest one is born near to and almost in Italy, the other has moved to and lived in Italy. All four are buried there. None is French, and there is no learned person in France”. Italians established and developed both secular and ecclesiastical law, you hardly found any orators or poets outside Italy – writing in Latin, that is. The reason was that “Latin literature, the root of our arts and the foundation of every branch of knowledge, is found here, as well as the Latin tongue and the Latin nation, which the French themselves boast they belong to”:

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<sup>1</sup> A recent monograph on Petrarch’s life is Stierle 2003.

E quattuor ecclesie doctoribus duo sunt itali ac romani, duorum reliquorum alter iuxta et prope intra Italie fines ortus, certe intra Italiam doctus ac nutritus, alter in Italia conversus et conversatus; omnes in Italia sunt sepulti. Nullus est gallicus, nullus doctus in Gallia. Ius utrumque quo utimur itali condidere, conditumque itali exposuere, [...] Oratores et poete extra Italiam non querantur, de latinis loquor, vel hinc orti omnes vel hic docti. Sed quid ago? aut quid rem certissimam verbis traho? Radix artium nostrarum et omnis scientie fundamentum, latine hic reperte sunt litere, et latinus sermo, et latinitatis nomen quo ipsi gallici gloriantur (Petrarca 2002–2004, *ep.* IX 1.35–36).

We notice that Italy as a geographical entity is important. To be born Italian or Roman is probably best, as were Gregory the Great and St Ambrose, but if not then at least to be born near it as St Jerome (who was born in Dalmatia) or to move there, as St Augustine, would make it possible for a person to partake of Roman culture. France, on the other hand, offers no such advantages.

Petrarch's letter provoked a Latin tract by the French theologian Jean d'Hesdin, in answer to which Petrarch composed the *Invective against a detractor of Italy*. Here he denounces French culture as barbarian, while he repeatedly stresses the connection between Italy as a place and true Latin culture. He proudly announces that "in fact, I am Italian by birth and glory in being a Roman citizen". He also maintains that the great poets of Antiquity, if born elsewhere, needed to come to Italy or Rome to achieve what they did: "wherever they came from, their style is Italian, nor could it be otherwise. Indeed, we perceive the truth of what I wrote in an early pastoral poem: 'In the fields by the Tiber/ They all learned to speak Latin' (*buc.* 10,344.45)":

Sum vero italus natione, et romanus civis esse glorior [...] Statium origine gallum non infitor; addo, si libet, et Lucanum ex Hispania. Ceterum, undecunque ipsi fuerint, stilus est italus, nempe aliter nullus esset; verumque deprehenditur, quod ipse ego in pastorio iuvenili carmine olim dixi: "Tiberina Latine docti omnes per rura loqui" (Petrarca 2003 §§ 45 and 91).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Another good edition is in Petrarca 1996. We meet very explicit Italian mistrust towards French learning in Giovanni Aurispa's 1449 letter to Panormita: "ille qui primo Commentum Donati in Virgilium in Italiam apportavit, nuper Romam [...] is est et doctus et solers antiquitatis indagator, quamvis Gallus" (Aurispa 1931, 119. He who first brought Donatus' commentary on Virgil to Italy (*Jean Jouffroy*) recently arrived in Rome. He is both learned and knowledgeable about antiquity, even if he is French).

### Theories of identity

In this article I am going to argue that Latin, both the language of ancient Rome and contemporary humanist Latin, was seen by Italian writers as constituting an important part of their cultural and local, or national, identity. I hope to be able to show that humanist Latin culture was used to constitute a cultural identity which not only comprised a certain cultural, transnational or common European stratum. In Italy it was specifically used to strengthen and further the inhabitant's sense of belonging or their loyalty towards a specific locality, very often a city state, but also towards Italy as a whole. I also want to show that the process was closely bound to a linguistic project, the renewal, revival or reconquering of classical Latinity, perhaps the core project of renaissance Humanism. When Petrarch repeatedly stressed the connection between Italy as a place and true Latin culture, it was because Italy had a pre-eminent claim to the Latin language which was "the root of our arts and the foundation of every branch of knowledge". And to him, as we saw in the quote from the *Invectiva*, it is through the mastery of Latin, acquired only in the geographic homeland of the language, that one becomes an *italus*.

I am well aware that the development of national cultural identity is generally maintained to be related to the emergence of the modern national states during the eighteenth century and that it may seem anachronistic to apply modern theories of identity to Italian fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Latin humanism. However, as I have argued elsewhere,<sup>3</sup> many of the mechanisms, or strategies, which modern theoreticians have identified as important for the constitution of national cultural identity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century states, are in fact found in renaissance humanist texts. Modern theories stress that the way a given nation chooses to tell its own history and the way the past is valorised are important aspects of the constitution of national cultural identity. In Italian humanist writings we find that a common set of histories or scenarios is created which together constitute the common experiences of a city state or of Italy as a whole, experiences that relate the individual citizen to the history of the specific geographical or political entity. An important element is the origin of the city or the country, wherefore myths concerning the founding of the nation are regularly related, myths which sanction contemporary norms and values with the dignity of age and tradition.<sup>4</sup> We also encounter the notion that those belonging to the city or country pertain to an original people/ race. This concept is very effective in creating identity, because only when you are part of the people do

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<sup>3</sup> Cp. Pade 2005. See also Jensen 2004, 117.

<sup>4</sup> Cp. Hall 1993, 293 and Renan 1990.

you belong to the nation; others don't – cp. Petrarch's statements about the French.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, national identity is often bound to the idea of an earlier Golden Age which the national culture wishes to revive. Such a national renaissance may serve to mobilize the community to fight another, foreign community which threatens its identity: in Italy that Golden Age is of course represented by ancient Rome, the culture of which the humanists strove to revive, after a long period of decline.<sup>6</sup>

In the following I shall discuss some programmatic texts written by Petrarch and by a number of fifteenth-century Italian humanists, showing how these writers all make use of some or more of the strategies I just described and more or less explicitly link the humanists's literary and linguistic project to Italian cultural identity.

### Early humanism

In the Latin West the Catholic Church was a factor of cultural convergence, with its own language and rules for communication. All higher education was closely connected to the Church, and like the Church it used the same language all over Europe, namely Latin – a Latin which had developed away from the language of Antiquity, with regard to both orthography, lexicon and syntax. It had also been adapted to new literary and scientific purposes with no classical models.

In spite of being brought up in the cultural orbit of the Roman Curia, Petrarch ceased to see Latin primarily as the means of communication in a pan-European culture. As we saw, he felt that Italians had privileged access to true Latin culture, and it became an important part of his cultural programme to try to restore the language and literary forms of the high culture to which he felt he, as an Italian, was the privileged heir, namely that of ancient Rome. Silvia Rizzo, probably the greatest expert on Petrarch's Latin, has analysed his development as a writer of Latin. She has shown how Petrarch in the *Familiare*s regularly exchanged the medieval lexicon and morphology found in an earlier version with a more classical idiom.<sup>7</sup>

Petrarch's conscious effort to express himself in classical Latin instead of the Latin used by his contemporaries had a decisive influence on the deve-

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<sup>5</sup> Hall 1993, 295. See also Smith 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Focus on a past Golden Age and on the racial purity of the members of a given society has often been identified as strategies for the construction of cultural identity. Cp. Gellner 1983, 57: "Dead languages can be revived, traditions invented, quite fictitious purities restored [...] The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often historical inventions".

<sup>7</sup> Rizzo 1988, 41–56. See also Rizzo 1990, 7–40; 1992–1993, 349–365; and 2002. Other treatments of Petrarch's Latin are Martellotti 1956, 195–200; 1961, 219–230; Bufano 1961, 147–150; and Celenza 2005.

lopment of Latin in the following centuries. Quickly a divide developed between adherents of the traditional more scholastic Latinity and those who enthusiastically embraced the new classical language norm – a *querelle des anciennes et des modernes*, before the word. Fifteenth-century humanists continued Petrarch's endeavours to master classical Latinity and a number of influential works aim at a description of classical Latin lexicon and syntax, among them the *Elegantiae linguae latinae* of Lorenzo Valla<sup>8</sup> and Niccolò Perotti's *Cornu copiae seu linguae Latinae commentarii*.<sup>9</sup> With time Petrarch's linguistic and literary ideas also spread to the rest of Europe, even to Denmark.<sup>10</sup> In this respect we might say that Petrarch's cultural initiatives contributed to the survival of the common European Latin culture, they were forces of convergence. In other respects Petrarch contributed to the breaking up of the cultural unity, when he very consciously interpreted the inheritance from Antiquity as an Italian rather than a common European concern.

Petrarch's cultural programme, which links the linguistic and literary revival of ancient Rome and Italian identity, is expressed in many forms in his works. The theme of the physical, ideological, intellectual and linguistic return – or coming home – to Italy recurs frequently. As I have shown elsewhere, his *Farewell to Avignon*, and to France, in the eighth eclogue<sup>11</sup> is equally about Petrarch's need, under the mask of the shepherd Amiclas, to return to Italy and Rome.<sup>12</sup> Rome is *patria*, his native country, and it is in Rome that the sources of poetry and learning flow clear and life-giving. So they did for Lucan and Statius in the tenth eclogue mentioned above, and so they still do for Petrarch. There he will sit alone “in the middle of summer, on a green hillside or in a shadowy valley, by the border of a clear fountain”, where he will write poetry in a bower, under Apollo's laurel. His flock will produce wool and he himself imitate bees, making honey from the flowers around him.<sup>13</sup> In Petrarch's poetry water, fountains and rivers are a recurrent image for poetry. He wants to imitate bees making honey, an image he often uses elsewhere about his imitation of the classics, of their lan-

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<sup>8</sup> Only modern edition is Valla 1999. For the *Elegantiae*, see Regoliosi 1993, 2000 and Regoliosi (ed.) 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Modern edition in Perotti 1989–2001. For a full bibliography on the *Cornu copiae*, see Charlet 2011.

<sup>10</sup> This devolpment is described in Rabil (ed.) 1988.

<sup>11</sup> Pade 2005. Jensen 1997 contains a thorough analysis of *buc.* 8, as well as an English translation which I have used in this article.

<sup>12</sup> “Agnosco validum patrie revocantis amorem”, *buc.* 8,56.

<sup>13</sup> “Ipse per estatem mediam, vel colle virenti,/ Valle vel umbrosa, nitidique in margine fontis/ Solus apollinea modulans sub fronde sedebo,/ Lanigerumque gregem pascam, et loca florea circum/ Mellificas imitabor apes”, *buc.* 8,123–127.

guage as well as their literary form.<sup>14</sup> In the eclogue, he describes his poetic endeavours as a longing towards his *patria*, Italy. Thus he turns the Latin literature of Antiquity, and the appropriation of the language it was expressed in, into a national, Italian concern, using it to construct an Italian cultural identity, based on Italy's Roman heritage.

Petrarch's conception of his *patria* was very much bound to his pride in its now long-gone Golden Age, that of ancient Rome; his cultural programme, sometimes described as a return to his *patria*, was connected to a revival or recreation of that Golden Age. By constant emphasis of the connection between Roman culture and Italy as geographical entity Petrarch made Roman culture into an *Italian* national heritage which others, for instance – or especially – the French, did not have equal access to.

The concept of imitation was central for this return to the *patria*, that is the recreation of Italy's Golden Age. Especially one of Petrarch's own descriptions of his unremitting study of the Latin classical authors, which made this *imitatio* possible, has often been quoted. In a letter to Boccaccio he recalls how he reads their works so often and so intensely that he almost absorbs their language and content, and forgets that their thoughts are not his own and so uses them freely in his own writings.<sup>15</sup> However, it has also been noted that Petrarch's *imitatio* aimed at *similitudo* not *identitas*, and thus the *patria*, Roman culture, would not only be revived but also enriched by his endeavours. This is expressed very clearly in another letter to Boccaccio where Petrarch describes the budding talents of his young amanuensis, Giovanni Malpighini. He should elaborate a novel style from his imitation of old masters "so that he will resemble nobody, but rather will seem to have introduced something original into Italy from old sources",<sup>16</sup> – to Italy, not just to whom it may concern.

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<sup>14</sup> Cp. e.g. *fam.* I 8,2–3 to Tommaso Caloria: "apes in inventionibus imitandas, que flores, non quales acceperint, referunt, sed ceras ac mella mirifica quadam permixtione conficiunt" (In creative writing one must imitate the bees. They don't return the flowers as they found them, but produce wax and honey by some wonderful mixing together).

<sup>15</sup> "Legi apud Virgilium apud Flaccum apud Severinum apud Tullium; nec semel legi sed milies, nec cucurri sed incubui, [...] etsi per omnem vitam amplius non legantur, ipsa quidem hereant, actis in intima animi parte radicibus [...] nec cuius sint certe nec aliena meminerim" (I read Virgil, Horace, Boethius and Cicero, and not once but thousands of times, and I didn't rush through them, no I sank into them [...] even if I should never read them again, what they wrote remains with me, since it has struck roots in the deepets part of my mind. But sometimes I forget where it comes from [...] and I neither remember clearly whose it is nor that it isn't mine), Petrarca 1933–1941, *ep.* XXII 2,12–14 to Giovanni Boccaccio, *a.* 1359 or 1363.

<sup>16</sup> "sic ut nulli similis appareat sed ex veteribus novum quoddam Latio intulisse videatur", *fam.* XXIII 19,10. Cp. McLaughlin 1995, 29. As McLaughlin remarked, Petrarch here

### The fifteenth century

In fifteenth-century Italian writers we repeatedly find the emphasis on the connection between language and identity, and especially between humanist Latin and local or Italian national cultural identity, to some degree, we may assume, due to Petrarch's influence.<sup>17</sup> In Florentine *civic humanism*<sup>18</sup> the city's republican constitution was consciously and effectively used in the ideological propaganda by Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni against the threats of monarchical Milan. Salutati and Bruni both recall how Florence was founded by Roman veterans already in the first half of the first century before Christ, that is long before Roman freedom was destroyed by the emperors. Florence is thus heir to the free Roman republic and this explains both the city's constitution in the fifteenth century – and the character of its inhabitants, especially their love of freedom. As Salutati puts it: “For what does it mean to be Florentine if not both by birth and law (the multifaceted meaning of *natura* contains an elegant allusion to its etymology) to be Roman, and accordingly to be free, not a slave?”<sup>19</sup> In his *Laudatio Florentinae urbis*, Bruni enumerates the horrendous crimes of the Roman emperors, and stresses Florentine love of freedom and hate of tyranny, inherited from Republican Rome.<sup>20</sup> In the same work he refers to Tacitus who maintained that the general intellectual level went down in Rome with the loss of political freedom.<sup>21</sup> So according to Bruni, Florence is the heir not only to the political institutions of republican Rome, but also to its culture. In the *peroratio*, Bruni sums up all aspects of Florentine superiority, among them language. The Florentine vernacular is of course the sweetest, purest and most elegant in Italy, but Latin learning, *litterae*, flourished too, not the lowly kind, but

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echoes Horace: “Graccia capta ferum victorem cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio”, *ep.* 2.1.157–158.

<sup>17</sup> See Stierle 2003, 93–155.

<sup>18</sup> See Baron 1966. Some years ago James Hankins edited an anthology on the influence and criticisms of Baron's thesis; cp. Hankins (ed.) 2000.

<sup>19</sup> “Quid, enim, est Florentinum esse, nisi tam natura, quam lege civem esse Romanum, et per consequens liberum, et non servum?” Salutati 1826, 54. See also *ibid.* “Nos autem tamquam verum Romanum genus et qui a tantis descendisse viris merito gloriamur” (As we are of true Roman stock and rightly proud to be the descendants of such men).<sup>20</sup> “Ex quo illud evenire arbitror, quod in hac civitate egregie preter ceteras et fuisse et esse videmus: ut florentini homines maxime omnium libertate gaudeant et tyrannorum valde sint inimici”, Bruni 1996, 600.<sup>21</sup> “Nam posteaquam res publica in unius potestatem deducta est, preclara illa ingenia, ut inquit Cornelius, abiire”, *ibid.* 606 – Tac. *hist.* 1,1.

that which befits free men and always flowered in a noble people, that kind thrived in Florence:

Nam quid ego de orationis suavitate et verborum elegantia loquar? In qua quidem re sine controversia superat. Sola enim hec in tota Italia civitas purissimo ac nitidissimo sermone uti existimatur. Itaque omnes qui bene atque emendate loqui volunt ex hac una urbe sumunt exemplum. Habet enim hec civitas homines qui in hoc populari atque communi genere dicendi ceteros omnes infantes ostenderint. Littere autem ipse, non mercenarie ille quidem neque sordide, sed que maxime sunt liberis hominibus digne, que in omni principe populo semper floruerunt, in hac una urbe plurimum vigent (Bruni 1996, 644).

As we see, Bruni connects the flourishing of Latin letters in his city, i.e. the humanist Latin literature of which he himself is perhaps the prime representative, to the characteristic he and Salutati constantly stressed in their description of the Florentine, namely freedom. Like Salutati, Bruni used the circumstances of the foundation of the city to explain the present characteristics of its citizens: the founding myths and historical institutions of the city-state are evoked with a clear view to contemporary conditions.

### **Roman humanism and Valla**

Petrarch had been eager for the papacy to return to Rome, and in the following century, when it did, the return was often hailed by humanists as the second, or third, founding of Rome. We can observe a strong interest in the myths about the founding of Rome and in the early history of the city: humanists assiduously studied the institutions and topography of Early Rome, and the Pope himself is called *pontifex maximus*, that is the title of the high priest of ancient Rome. The title was avoided as being heathen during the Middle Ages, as Iiro Kajanto has shown, but from the middle of the fifteenth century it was more used than “papa” in curial epigraphy.<sup>22</sup>

All this may be seen as the humanists’s general enthusiasm for all things classical, but if we keep in mind what happened in Florence, we may also interpret it as a conscious use of the city’s history and exceptional culture. Archaeologists distinguish between “Roman” and “city-Roman”, and I suggest we do the same with humanism. We find invocations of the grandeur and high cultural level of ancient Rome in the writings of humanists all over Italy, and outside, but from the second half of the fifteenth century we find a distinct group of humanists whose identity is connected to Rome as a geographical locality.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kajanto 1981, 37–52.

<sup>23</sup> See for instance Weiss 1958, 162–166; D’Amico 1983.



I have now repeatedly quoted the theories of scholars like Gellner and Smith, who maintained that history, when used as a factor in the construction of a common or national identity, often contains the idea of an earlier Golden Age, or high culture, which must either be conserved or revived. In the case of Rome, whether we talk about the city or the empire, this Golden Age is closely connected to language and literature. We see this in the preface of Lapo da Castiglionchio (1406–1438) to his translation of Plutarch's *Publicola*, dedicated to Cardinal Giordano Orsini. Orsini belonged to one of Rome's oldest families, so a biography of one of the city's first consuls was a fitting gift, but he was also known as a patron of literary men and owned a fine library.<sup>24</sup> Lapo's hopes for Rome's rebirth are connected to the Cardinal's endeavours to collect new or rare works of the Latin classics, for instance Plautus, and to the flowering of humanist Latin: "I watch the study of eloquence, which for so long has been neglected, but has now finally been brought back to us. I look at our contemporaries who are burning with eagerness to express themselves and have been endowed with every gift of nature which should make this possible. And this makes me hope that soon we shall see a truly praiseworthy orator". Even so, Lapo and his contemporaries had been deprived of the possibility of fully achieving what the ancestors did, because so many of their books had been lost, the poets, historians, jurists, orators and philosophers from which an orator would learn style and rhythm and acquire wisdom. Lapo here talks about the books "our ancestors left us" (*quos maiores nostri scriptos nobis reliquerunt*) and about the various sorts of poets born "in your (i.e. Orsini's) city alone" (*quos una ciuitas tua tulit*), clearly indicating the special relationship between the Roman Orsini and the writers of old. He continues to express his gratitude that a good fortune let Orsini be born at this very time, so that he could be of help to scholars in reduced circumstances, "for you are the only one in centuries who have tried, and not just tried, but to a large degree also succeeded in raising, developing and adorning the Latin language", amongst other things by collecting rare books and bringing them to Rome (*in tuam urbem undique contulisti*). As a sign of his gratitude for Orsini's services to Latin culture, Lapo had translated Plutarch's life of Publicola, his compatriot, for him. Publicola should be of special interest to Orsini, because he gave Rome, Orsini's city, the beginnings of freedom after the expulsion of the kings:

Etenim saepissime cum perspicio eloquentiae studia, quae deserta et inculta iam diu iacuerunt, longo interuallo repetita et ad nos relata esse, nostros uero homines ita dicendi cupiditate flagrantes, ita ad eam

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<sup>24</sup> Pade 2007, I Ch. 7.5.

rem naturae muneribus instructos, ut non desperem nos perbreui omni laude cumulatam oratorem esse habituros, queri uehementer soleo hanc nostram aetatem in ea tempora incidisse, quibus facultas eis erepta sit ne ad pristinam illam eloquentiae gloriam peruenire possint, ut mihi aliquod infestum numen huiusmodi laudem inuidisse nobis uideatur. Nam illi litterarum thesauri, illa doctrinae monumenta, illa uberrima librorum copia, quos maiores nostri scriptos nobis reliquerunt, deleta est et interiit, egestas et inopia consecuta est. Ut enim omittam de singulis cogitando recordari: ubi tot latini poetae, tragici, satyrici, lyrici, elegi, quos una ciuitas tua tulit, quo nam abierunt, á quibus oratori granditas uerborum et sententiarum ubertas, numerorum praeterea ac pedum concentus et harmonia quaedam petenda est? Ubi illa historicorum turba, quae nobis monumenta rerum gestarum et uetustatis exempla suppeditet, quae nisi orator percursa animo et decantata habeat, ignarus quidem et hebes uideatur? Ubi tot et tam amplissima uolumina, in quibus ius legum et iuris ciuilibus scientia continebatur? [...] Quis casus, quae calamitas, quae clades nobis illas eripuit [...] ut ex infinito pene oratorum numero unum tantum nec eum quidem integrum habeamus? Adde philosophorum libros [...] Sed me in hac tanta molestia mea illa res maxime consolatur, quod spero immortalem deum his nostris incommodis difficultatibusque aliquando tandem prospicere uoluisse, cum te nobis, pater clementissime, tradidit, qui mihi non sorte natus, sed praecipuo quodam fato huius aetatis genitus et procreatus esse uideris, qui studiosis hominibus inopia laborantibus tuo studio, labore, diligentia, tuis denique facultatibus subuenires. Siquidem unus tot iam seculis extitisti, qui Latinam linguam attollere iacentem, amplificare, ornare conatus es, neque conatus es solum, sed magna iam ex parte perfecisti; tu enim comparandorum librorum gratia affecta aetate longissima itinera et difficillima ad remotissimas regiones magnis sumptibus labore periculo suscepisti, tu ueteres permultos doctissimos uiros inuentis eorum operibus, quae ante ignorabantur, ab obliuione hominum et silentio uendicasti [...] tot iam solus libros, ut audio, in omni genere doctrinae, in tuam urbem undique contulisti, qui pluribus ciuitatibus ad legendum sufficerent, ut illis homines discendi cupidi sine labore, sine sumptu, sine molestia uterentur [...] Ut et tibi si non digno, grato tamen munere, quod á me deberetur, persoluerem et reliquos ad simile factum prouocarem, itaque Publicolae ciuis tui clarissimi uiri uitam tibi ex Plutarcho interpretatus sum, non tam quod intelligerem te Plutarchi opera studiose querere, quam quod hanc tibi prae ceteris iucundam fore existimaui, quod ab eo uiro tua ciuitas exactis regibus libertatis initium habuisset.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Pade 2007, II Ch. 3.2

So in Lapo's preface we find both the Golden Age, i.e. the high culture of Ancient Rome, the period of decline, i.e. the Middle Ages, and the beginning of the new age which marks the return to the (linguistic) standards of the Golden Age. Lapo celebrates this budding new age by dedicating the life of Publicola, who exemplifies the beginning of Rome's Golden Age, to his compatriot Orsini, who was instrumental in reviving the high culture of ancient Rome by his patronage of humanist Latin.

The connection between language and (high-)culture is even more explicitly stated in the *Elegantiae linguae latinae* of Lorenzo Valla. Valla (1407–1457) was actually Roman by birth, and the *Elegantiae* is dedicated to his colleague Giovanni Tortelli, the eminent curial humanist who had translated Plutarch's *Romulus*<sup>26</sup> and written a treatise on the topography of ancient Rome.<sup>27</sup> Valla's famous preface is written in 1449, under the reign of Nicholas V. It is composed as a grandiose comparison between the Latin language and the Roman Empire: whereas many people had managed to extend their empire, none had ennobled their own language as the Romans did theirs. Valla writes "as we did", writing thus as the descendant of the ancient Romans, who – he continues – "in a short time made the *Roman* language famous and sovereign, the language which is also called Latin after *Latium*, where Rome is situated". So Latin is the language of Rome, and the emphasis on Latin as *Roman* is marked all through the preface, on the lexical, stylistical and figurative level. Latin is defined nine times with the adjective *romanus*. Valla talks about *lingua romana*, *sermo romanus*, and he uses the expression *romane loqui* several times, instead of the more common *latine loqui*.<sup>28</sup> The juncture with *latinus* is used only six times. Valla further recalls how the provinces had freed themselves as quickly as possible from the yoke of the Roman empire, but kept the language, which as a divine gift educated people and countries in the free arts. The flowering of literature and science presupposes that of the language: "For who were the greatest philosophers, orators, lawyers – if not those who were most intent on expressing themselves well?" Later, however, things deteriorated. "Is there any lover of the arts and the public good who will not cry when he sees that this knowledge, i.e. the linguistic capacity, is in the same sorry

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<sup>26</sup> Pade 2007, I Ch. 7.13 and II Ch. 1.3.

<sup>27</sup> Modern edition in Tortelli 1999. For Tortelli, see Regoliosi 1966 and 1969; Rinaldi 1973, Capoduro 1983; and Donati 2007.

<sup>28</sup> A search in the corpus of texts on the CD-ROM *Bibliotheca Teubneriana Latina* (version 3.0, 2004) shows that *latine loq\*/latine locut\** is very frequent, whereas *romane loqui* occurs only in a fragment from Ennius: "Hispane, non Romane, memoretis loqui me", *ann.* 503.

state as Rome when the city was taken by the Gauls. Everything was thrown over, burnt down, destroyed, so even the Capitol was hardly left standing. It is of course many centuries ago that anyone actually spoke Latin, but now even the written texts are not understood any longer". Valla's imagery refers to the catastrophe of 386 BC, when Rome was captured by the Gauls and the entire city apart from the Capitoline hill destroyed. The political and military reconstruction was led by Camillus, accordingly named the second founder of his country. Valla exhorts his reader to use Camillus as a model and rout the enemy, that is the linguistic barbary. He addresses his readers, whom he calls *quirites*, Roman citizens, with heavy allusion to Cicero's first Catilinarian speech: "How long, *quirites* [...] will you endure that our city is held by the Gauls [...]? How long will you watch, with unfeeling, almost unpatriotic eyes, while everything is desecrated? [...] You ought to take Camillus as a model, Camillus, who as Virgil says, returned the standards to the country and restored it":

nullos tamen ita linguam suam ampliasset, ut nostri fecerunt; [...] brevi spatio linguam Romanam, quae eadem Latina a Latio, ubi Roma est, dicitur, celebrem, et quasi reginam effecerunt [...] Qui enim summi philosophi fuerunt, summi oratores, summi iuriconsulti, summi denique scriptores? Nempe ii, qui bene loquendi studiosissimi [...] Nam quis litterarum, quis publici boni amator a lacrimis temperet, cum videat hanc eo in statu esse quo olim Roma capta a Gallis? Omnia eversa, incensa, diruta, ut vix capitolina supersit arx, siquidem multis iam seculis non modo latine nemo locutus est, sed ne latina quidem legens intellexit [...] Quousque tandem, Quirites, [...] urbem vestram, non dico domicilium imperii, sed parentem litterarum a Gallis esse captam patiemini? [...] Quousque profanata omnia duris et pene impiis conspicietis oculis? [...] Camillus vobis, Camillus imitandus est, qui signa, ut inquit Virgilius, in patriam referat eamque restituat (L. Valla, *Elegantiae* I, praef., from Regoliosi 1993).

Valla promises to lead in this fight, although he modestly maintains that his strength will probably not suffice. The wording of the preface, the style and the imagery all come together to make Valla's linguistic project specifically Roman. His preface, one of the most important manifestos of the humanists' endeavours to reconquer the linguistic norm of classical Latinity, elegantly links humanist Latin to one of the most famous incidents of Rome's early history and the grandiose *exhortatio* recalls Cicero's celebrated rescue of the republic, when he thwarted the plans of Catiline. So Valla invokes important elements of what would constitute Roman national identity, and his means of reviving that ancient high culture is language: only by reconquering the linguistic norms of classical Latinity would it be possible to revive the culture of ancient Rome. It is probably not fortuitous that Valla chooses Camil-

lus as the hero whom he would imitate. Camillus rescued Rome from the Gauls, who here, as in the texts by Petrarch we discussed, become the enemies of humanist culture and language. It is difficult to say whether one should see Valla's text as an expression of Roman "city-humanism" or Italian national pride, but to me there is no doubt that he links humanist Latin to a Roman or Italian cultural identity.

### Guarino, Brenta and Sabellico

The next text I want to discuss is a letter by Guarino Veronese (1374–1460). In August 1452 the old Guarino, the highly honoured Nestor of the *studia humanitatis*, wrote a letter to his son Niccolò, apparently in answer to a letter from Niccolò which has not survived – if indeed it ever existed. Guarino's letter is part of the so-called *Crisolorina*, a series of letters that should have been edited together to commemorate Guarino's beloved teacher, Manuel Chrysoloras, and they are probably not all documentary.

However that may be, from Guarino's letter it appears that Niccolò had come across some youthful writings of his father's and had been appalled by their Latin: "You are wondering about some words", Guarino writes, "which don't really have the odour of proper Latin" (*latini sermonis proprietatem minime redolentia*),<sup>29</sup> and indicate a different way of speaking and ornamenting one's sentences. Niccolò's remarks prompt Guarino to tell his son how fortunate he was to be born at the day and age he had been born. In his own youth they had the misfortune that there was no interest in *humanitas*, in good letters, which lay covered in darkness, as a result of which the former charm of Roman eloquence, this wonderful flowering of the letters, had withered away, and a hotchpotch had entered people's speech, making it harsh:

Nam sicut infeliciter olim nobiscum actum erat, ut ad ineuntes usque annos nostros tantopere studia ipsa humanitatis obdormissent iacentis in tenebris, ut avitus ille romanae facundiae lepos suavissimusque scribendi flos emarcuisset et nescio quae "sartago loquendi venisset in linguas" (Pers. 1,80), unde acerbata erat oratio [...]

We are definitely confronted with a myth of decline here! Now, Guarino continues, they lived in far better times, a fact Guarino uses to teach Niccolò how times change, and how it came about that Guarino himself had received such a miserable education – in the period before the present happy state of affairs. Guarino said that in his youth there was no interest in good letters, that *humanitas* lay covered in darkness.

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<sup>29</sup> *Ep.* 862. All quotes from this letter are from Guarino Veronese 1915–1919.

There are of course many definitions of what the *studia humanitatis* comprise, but in this connection it may be useful to quote P.O. Kristeller's definition.<sup>30</sup> He maintained that the expression *studia humanitatis* primarily signified the study of rhetoric, grammar, history, poetry and moral philosophy. But Niccolò did not criticise what his father wrote, but the language in which he wrote it, so it is interesting that Guarino blames the dormant *studia humanitatis* for his linguistic deficiencies. In modern terms one would say that Guarino here stresses the connection between language, literature and culture, something we have already met several times in the texts I have examined.

After deploring the general lack of good letters in his youth, Guarino goes on to explain the essence of the problem in more detail: People did not heed "Cicero, who more than anyone else was the father of Roman eloquence, and from whose tongue speech flowed sweeter than honey", at the time of their ancestors when Italy had created an image of how to speak from his language, as from a mirror.<sup>31</sup> Guarino continues to hold up the language of Cicero as the absolute linguistic norm: once the mere emulation of Cicero's style and the enthusiasm for it had led to very considerable progress,<sup>32</sup> in the good old days, before things went wrong. It may be significant that Guarino here uses the noun *aemulatio*; I believe that he here, like Petrarch did in his *imitatio* of the classics, wants to produce a linguistic *similitudo*, not *identitas*, a mechanic reproduction of the original. Guarino continues to explain when and how the linguistic corruption set in: "Long after, when Italy instead of Cicero devoured various Prosperos, *Eva Columba* and *Chartulae*, coming from God knows where, a rough and uncouth style of speaking and writing developed":

In eius autem locum longo post intervallo cum Prosperos, Evas Columbas et Chartulas irrupentes quaquaversum imbuta absorbuisset Italia, quaedam germinabat dicendi et scribendi horrens et inculta barbaries.

Guarino here criticises the influence from some very widespread scholastic grammars, namely that of Prospero of Aquitania, and two named after their *incipits*, *Eva Columba* and *Chartula*. They had many deficiencies, one apparently being that they weren't Italian, they were *irrupentes quaquaversum*.

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<sup>30</sup> Kristeller 1956.

<sup>31</sup> "Ignorabatur 'romani maximus auctor Tullius eloquii' (LUC. *civ.* 7,62), cuius ex lingua penes maiores nostros 'melle dulcior fluxerat oratio' [CIC. *Cato* 31,16], a qua velut e speculo Italia dicendi formarat imaginem".

<sup>32</sup> "solaque ciceroniana dictionis quondam aemulatio ac delectatio vehementem proficiendi causam induxerat".

To Guarino, then, the sad cultural state he experienced in his youth was the result of two factors: neglect of Cicero, the Roman author *par excellence*, as a linguistic norm, and foreign influence. To him, as to Petrarch, Lapo and Valla, the development of humanist Latin is the most important means to revive the cultural Golden Age of Ancient Rome, and that Golden Age is bound to Italy, to the people born or settled there – linguistic influences from elsewhere are not welcome.<sup>33</sup>

Andrea Brenta's (†1484) 1482 oration *In disciplinas et bonas artes*, held in Rome, contains a praise of Latin which again makes it clear that Italians, and even more so Romans, were exceptionally blessed in being so to speak born into the mastery of Latin. Latin is their language, the language of the Romans which with its sweetness and elegance conquered the world more permanently than the military might of the Roman empire had managed to. If Latin had not possessed every good quality, the nations of Egypt, Africa, Asia, the Balkans, Germany, France, Britain, Spain – and all other barbarian people – would not have adapted it, held it in honour and used it until the present. The Spaniards, who cherish Latin as much as the Italians, almost made it their home-tongue. So Italians ought to be proud that they were born and raised in Latin! As Plato used to express his gratitude that he was Greek, not barbarian, and born in Athens rather than in another Greek city, so Brenta's audience should rejoice in the fact they were not barbarians, but Italians, and not born in just any Italian town, but of noble Roman stock. Because they were born and raised – and here the text can mean either – in Rome or with the Latin language, they should be proud and happy, think of themselves as superior to other people and ascribe it to their very fortunate circumstances. For their language and Roman eloquence had without any doubt received, preserved and developed every branch of learning:

Primum igitur lingua nostra Latina citetur, quae quam excellens, splendida atque praeclara sit non multa demonstratione indiget, quippe quae omnibus manifesta, testata, clara et illustrata pateat ac totum fere terrarum orbem occupaverit et quod vi aut armis retineri non potuit, id

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<sup>33</sup> We find another example of the connection between Latin learning and Italy as *patria* in the preface of Niccolò Perotti's (1430–1480) large encyclopaedia of the Latin language, *Cornu copiae seu linguae latinae commentarii*, dedicated to Federico di Montefeltro. Perotti praises the Duke and promises him that people will realise that because of him true learning had again found life, blood and fatherland, having so long been banned and exiled from its native soil: “ut sub te uno spiritum et sanguinem et patriam bonarum artium studia receperint, quae antehac natali solo priuata et perpetuo exilio damnata uidebantur”, CC *proh* 10 from Perotti 1989–2001, vol. I. The learning Perotti refers to is of course his own study of the Latin language, the printing of which he hoped Federico would subsidise. If the work was printed in Italy, learning would return to its origin, its fatherland.

ipsa sua dulcedine, suavitate et lepore sibi subditum fecit. quae omnia bona nisi inessent in ea, non Aegyptii, non Africani, non omnes Asiatici, non Pannonii, non Illyrii, non Germani, non Galli, non Britanni, non Hiberni, non denique reliquae omnes barbarae nationes eam amplexae, ea usae fuissent et usque ad hodiernum diem tantopere uterentur adamarentque. quid dicam de Hispanis, a quibus lingua nostra non minus quam apud nos colitur, ut iam illam suam propriam et prope vernaculam fecerint [...] quanto igitur magis nobis gloriandum est in hac esse natos, altos et educatos! Plato vir ille divinus solitus dicere fertur inter cetera se ingentes diis gratias habere, quod Graecus, non barbarus, quod Atheniensis, non ex alia Graecorum civitate ortus fuisset. similiter vobis in maxima laude ponendum est quod non barbari, sed Itali, non ex alia Italiae urbe, sed nobiles Romani nati estis. vos ergo, quibus a natura datum est in hac nasci, nutriri et educari, ea gloriamini, ea oblectamini, eo vos reliquis hominibus praestare in animum inducite et id optimae fortunae vestrae tribuatis. lingua namque nostra et Romanum eloquium cui dubium est quin omnes doctrinas et bonas artes exceperit, conservaverit, excoluerit? (Brenta 1995, §§ 9–15).

We have another very eloquent coupling of Latin and contemporary Roman humanist culture in Marcantonio Sabellico's (ca. 1436–1506) *De reparatione linguae Latinae* from 1490. Iacopo Conte Giuliani, one of the interlocutors of the dialogue,<sup>34</sup> talks about the decline of Latin culture during the *gothica tempestas*, the Middle Ages, about the losses that in recent times are being partly remedied. Although true Latinity was not yet restored, there were many now who led the way towards that goal, through whom the Roman tongue would shed the barbarian squalor which had long covered it:

Iulianus/ Sunt non pauci, ut dicis, Sabellice, qui alia atque alia via romanas litteras nuperrime iuvare; nam, praeterquam quod omnia fere emendatiora occurrunt, non desunt qui quotidie aliquid novi in communem usum proferant. Quae, et si non sunt talia, ut iacturam illam, quam nostrae litterae gothica tempestate fecere, omnino resarciant, levant tamen inopiam et egestatem, quam dira illa calamitas latino nomini attulit. Quod malum ita violenter omnia invaserat, ut a clade illa longe vetustissima aegre ad hos annos respirare sit datum. Aliquid igitur effecerunt nostrorum temporum viri, per quos si non rem ipsam, umbram tamen et verum latinitatis adhuc nomen retinemus, si quidem horum ductu et auspiciis romanus sermo omnem exuit squalorem, omnem barbariem, quibus sordibus diu fuerat immersus (Sabellico 1999, 86–87).

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<sup>34</sup> For Giuliani, see the introduction of Bottari in Sabellico 1999, 13–16.



It should be noticed that the time of decline is designated with a non-Italian name, *gothica tempestas*, and that it is something foreign, *barbaries*, that has marred the Latin language, the *sermo romanus*, for so long.

With a rhetoric which is strongly reminiscent of Valla's preface to the *Elegantiae*, Sabellico compares the merits of two famous Romans, those of Furius Camillus who rescued Rome from the Gauls and those of Valla, who rescued the Roman tongue and composed the *Elegantiae* as a bulwark against barbarisms. Both merited the name of *pater patriae*, but Valla most, because restoring the language, the most useful of nature's gifts to man, was an even greater thing than restoring Rome to its inhabitants:

Cui igitur summus ille honor contigit? Huic videlicet a quo patrium sermonem maxime vindicari oportuit. Romanus fuerat Furius, non externus, qui barbaros Urbe expulit, romanus et hic, qui barbarum sermonem prorsus sustulit. struxerat Furius ille intra Urbem legiones, quas in hostem direxit, struxit et Laurentius Vallensis accuratissimos Elegantiarum libros in foedam et horridam barbariem. vicit dux ipse primo intra moenia, mox quod reliquum hostium fuit ad unum foris confecit, eodem non alio successu hic quoque Romae primo, mox reliqua Italia inveteratum malum oppressit. restituit ille patriae adempta signa, hic ademptum sermonem: uterque dignus qui pater patriae nominetur, sed eo alter dignior, quod plus certe fuit sermonem, quo nihil ab ipsa natura est homini utilius datum, quam Urbem civibus restituisset suis (Sabellico 1999, 120–121).

In the second part of the dialogue Guarino Veronese's son Battista discusses the merits of the humanist commentary, which, according to him, played a major role in the restoration of Latin, i.e. in the development of humanist Latin. It was through the worthy compilers of such commentaries that the Roman tongue finally, after thousand disgraceful years, regained its old liberty and that Rome and all of Italy reclaimed its language freed of barbarisms. It had almost been better if the rich literary culture of Greece had never reached Italy, because people who had never been familiar with that kind of culture did not miss it. Italy, on the other hand, had not only profited from it, but also passed it on to other people, and suffered the loss:

Hi sunt igitur – nam de reliquis qui ad nostrum non faciunt institutum nihil attinet dicere –, qui Romanam linguam mille circiter et amplius annos indigno pressam servicio in antiquam libertatem vindicarunt, omnique barbarie prorsus sublata suum Roma caeteraque Italia recepit sermonem [...] Satius pene fuisset nunquam ex Graecia litteras ad nos delatas, nunquam historicos, poetas, oratores habuisse, si tot claris ingeniis, tot foecundis laboribus iniuria temporum carituri fueraemus. Minus enim desiderantur ea quorum usus ad sensum non pervenit.

Multae gentes litteras non norunt atque ob id ne desiderant quidem. At terra Italia, quae id divinum munus non solum senserat, sed aliis etiam gentibus ingenti gloria nominis dederat, cui nihil ex tanto imperio quantum olim habuit, nihil praeter litterarum decus reliquum fortuna fecerat, qua maiore clade affici potuisset, aut in quem maiorem luctum incidere aut magis perpetuum, quam si hoc quoque cultu et vera laude fuisset demum spoliata? (Sabellico 1999, 203).

As I have mentioned several times in this article, modern scholars have identified the idea of an earlier Golden Age, which the national culture wishes to revive, as an important element in the construction of national identity. If we accept that, then it becomes evident that the development of humanist Latin in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries was also a means to constitute an Italian cultural identity. And if language was the vehicle of cultural identity, reconstituting the language of Roman Antiquity meant re-establishing the superiority of Roman culture. Even if the Romans had, through no fault of their own (as Valla is careful to point out) lost their political power, culturally they were once again the dominant power in Europe, “for”, as Valla said at the beginning of the *Elegantiae*, “the Roman Empire is found where the Roman language holds sway”. Petrarch had lamented the dominance of the barbarian Gauls; Guarino regretted their influence over spheres of culture which were properly Italian, and Valla used the consciousness of his fellow Romans as heirs of a glorious past to describe humanist Latin as the essential means of Roman cultural expansion.

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