

Alex Mueller

# Alexander and the *Ars Dictaminis*: Translating Language Through Letters

*Aristoteles inter caetera docebat eloquentiam, sic adhuc declarant sua Homerica commenta et Iliadis dictamen quod dedit Alexandro.*

Aristotle, among other topics, taught eloquence, as is evident in his commentaries on Homer and *dictamen* on Troy, which he gave to Alexander.<sup>1</sup> Ranulph Higden, *Polychronicon* (c.1327)

The medieval romances of Alexander the Great are filled with written correspondence between the Macedonian conqueror and his many friends and enemies, from his teacher Aristotle to the Persian King Darius. While the epistolary character of these texts has long been recognized, scholars have not fully addressed the ways in which Alexander's letter writing appealed to a geographically dispersed readership throughout the Arabic Near East, the Latin West, and the Scandinavian North. Even if we limit our focus to the Latin translations of the Pseudo-Callisthenes Greek Alexander Romance (c. 200 B.C.E.), we must contend with an overwhelming number of vernacular language traditions, ranging from French to Italian to Swedish to Russian. For English readers, two Latin recensions of a Latin prose history known as the *Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni*, which are based on the *Nativitas et victoria Alexandri* of Archbishop Leo of Naples – itself a mid-tenth century Latin version of the Greek Alexander – proved to be particularly attractive, resulting in four Middle English translations in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Of the four, three are fragments of longer poems in alliterative verse, one of which is entirely devoted to Alexander's epistolary encounter with Dindimus, King of the Brahmins (Cary 1967, 24–61). Alliterative long lines share rhythmical features with the prose *clausulae* of their Latin sources, which makes this association between Alexander's letter writing and alliterative verse particularly compelling.

This chapter focuses primarily on the longest of the alliterative poems, the *Wars of Alexander*, which offers the greatest insight into the epistolary allure of the Alexander romance. Scholars have long noted the similarities between the headlong cadences of alliterative verse and the dactylic rhythms of the Latin *cursus*, a prose technique that marks the endings of clauses with formulaic combinations of accented and unaccented syllables (Lawton 1979, 329–343; Cornelius 2009; Johnson 2013, 61–78). This rhythmical method of punctuating *clausulae* was taught within universities as part of the *ars dictaminis*, the medieval art of writing letters (*Statuta antiqua universitatis oxoniensis*. ed.

---

<sup>1</sup> Higden, *Polychronicon*, ed. Babington and Lumby (1869, 3.360). The English translation is mine.

---

Alex Mueller, University of Massachusetts Boston

Gibson 1931, 20–23, 169–174). The manuals used to teach this art, the *artes dictandi*, were reproduced in schoolbooks that contain prose exemplars, ranging from letter formularies to prose histories. Guido delle Colonne's *Historia destructionis Troiae* was a common example, not because of its letters, but because of what John Lydgate calls its “sovereignty of style” (ed. Bergen 1906–1935, 373), its commanding use of *cursus* and rhetorical devices, such as apostrophe and *amplificatio* (Camargo 1994, 165–187). The *Historia* was popular among alliterative poets, especially John Clerk of Whalley and the *Siege of Jerusalem*-poet, whose common dialect and alliterative formulae suggest they were regional contemporaries of the *Wars of Alexander*-poet (Duggan and Turville-Petre 1989, xxv–xliii; Simpson 2002, 68–120; Mueller 2013). When we also consider manuscripts such as Cambridge University Library MS Mm.v.14, which contains Guido's *Historia*, the *Historia preliis*, and the alliterative *Siege of Jerusalem*, we are left to wonder what the manuscript's audience considered to be the relationship between Latin letter writing and English alliterative verse (Hilka and Magoun 1934, 84–86; Ross 1955, 149–150; Mueller 2013, 93–99). In the chapter that follows, I want to suggest that the *Wars of Alexander*-poet views the Alexander corpus as optimal for translation, not just for its imperial subject matter, but also for its learned style, which exhibits the rhythmical and epistolary potential of the *ars dictaminis*. To make this argument, I begin with an analysis of the relationship between the *Historia preliis* and the *ars dictaminis* in thirteenth-century Italy, proceed into an examination of the dissemination of the *Historia preliis* in fourteenth-century England, continue with an investigation of the dictaminal character of two alliterative Alexander poems, and conclude with an assessment of the epistolary style of the *Wars of Alexander*.

## ***The Historia preliis and the Ars dictaminis***

The story of the translation of the Alexander romance begins much earlier in antiquity, but for the purposes of my argument, I begin with an examination of Leo's *Nativitas*, the base text for the *Historia preliis* recensions and the source for the *Wars of Alexander*. Leo discovered the Greek manuscript in Constantinople and translated it into Latin between 951 and 968/9 C.E., inspiring the production of numerous copies, of which over one hundred survive. Among the extant witnesses of Leo's text, the closest to the original is Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, MS E.III.4 (Ba), which was copied around 1000 C.E. in southern Italy. This book is a veritable compendium or *summa* of Alexander material, including popular texts devoted to epistolary exchanges, the *Collatio Alexandri cum Dindimo* and *Epistola Alexandri ad Aristotelem* (*Kleine Texte zum Alexanderroman*, ed. Pfister 1910; *The History of Alexander's Battles*, trans. Pritchard 1992, 7; Stone 2016, 724–744). As Charles Russell Stone illustrates, this version of Leo's *Nativitas* was disseminated in subsequent centuries as the *Historia preliis* via three recensions that incorporate Byzantine and Jewish material about Alexander, which made them particularly attractive in

Norman and Hohenstaufen Italy, especially to Frederick II who proved to be a profusive host for Latin translations of the many Eastern depictions of the philosopher-king (2016, 725). For my purposes, the third and most important recension, known as I<sup>3</sup>, which was composed between 1218 and 1236, became what Stone calls “the culmination of Latin Alexander romance in Frederick’s multicultural, polyglot Italian lands” (2016, 726). The I<sup>3</sup> also becomes the eventual source of the English alliterative *Wars of Alexander*, which extends this multilingual correspondence with amplified accounts of Alexander’s Eastern epistolary engagements.

The I<sup>3</sup> recension was produced within and adjacent to a southern, particularly Campanian and Sicilian, Italian imperial environment, where many writers flourished, including Pietro della Vigna, Frederick’s chancellor and secretary (Kantorowicz 1957, 322–359). Pietro famously composed a popular *summa dictaminis*, a compilation of epistolary examples, including papal letters and administrative memoranda, which document Frederick’s courtly undertakings and the creation of a style of sovereignty that became an exemplar for western European imperial diplomacy (Grévin 2008a, 271–300). As Benoît Grévin has meticulously documented, Pietro’s compendium reflects a political expansion and revision of the *ars dictaminis*, which originated as a set of rhetorical principles for letter-writing within the eleventh-century monastic circles of Monte Cassino and developed into an art of legalistic and bureaucratic composition within twelfth- and thirteenth-century university classrooms, including the Bolognese *studia* that Pietro occupied as a law student (Grévin 2008b). The dictaminal teaching of the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian universities did not abandon its attention to the standard parts of the pseudo-Ciceronian epistle, particularly the salutation, exordium, narration, petition, and conclusion, but the *dictatores*, the writing teachers, increasingly composed manuals that stretched their scope and transferred the focus of writing instruction to prescriptive techniques for description, amplification, and abbreviation, treatises on verse rhythms and prose cadence, and formularies for common administrative writing tasks. By shifting the emphasis to flexible examples for future writers to adapt, Pietro’s *summa* puts the theoretical principles of the *ars dictaminis* into action, establishing a wide-ranging field for the implementation of the “epistolary”, including both the common vocabulary and formulas for political and personal letter-writing, from notarial memoranda to intimate letters, which writers could copy and incorporate into their own compositions (Grévin 2008a, 276–300). As another product of Frederick’s dictaminal environment, the I<sup>3</sup> recension of the *Historia preliis* was composed within an imperial context in which the letter and its rhetorical forms and cadences developed into a confluence of art and bureaucracy, obscuring the common divisions between verse and prose and between private and public writing.

Approximately a decade after the completion of the I<sup>3</sup> recension, another important figure who emerged from this epistolary setting was Guido delle Colonne, a judge in Messina, Sicily from 1243–77, where and when he was commissioned to compose the *Historia destructionis Troiae* by Matteo della Porta, the Archbishop of Salerno,

who served as protector of Campanian dictaminal writers, including Pietro's student Nicola da Rocca *senior*, before and after the departure of the Hohenstaufens in 1266 (Nicola da Rocca, ed. *Delle Donne* 2003, 53, 74–75; *delle Donne* 2004, 143–159; Grévin 2005, 101–115; Brunetti 2019, 39–59). In the epilogue to this Trojan history, Guido acknowledges his patron Matteo and emphasizes his awareness of an audience who seeks a high style of ornamented Latin:

ego hystoriam ipsam ornassem dictamine pulchriori per ampliores metaphoras et colores et per transgressions occurrentes, que ipsius dictaminis sunt picture; sed territus ex magnitudine operis, ne dum occasione magis ornate dictaminis opus ipsum longa narratione protraherem [. . .], in tantum insisti, [. . .] quod infra tres menses [. . .], opus ipsum in totum per me perfectum extitit et completum (Guido de Columnis, ed. Griffin 1936, 275–276).

I would have decorated this history with a more beautiful *dictamen* by means of richer metaphors and colours and through occasional digressions, which are the artistry of this *dictamen*; but frightened by the magnitude of the task, lest I prolong this work by long narration on the pretext of a more decorated *dictamen* [. . .], I persisted so much that, [. . .] within three months, [. . .] I finished and completed this work in its entirety.<sup>2</sup>

Because Guido's text is a translation of Benoît de Sainte Maure's *Roman de Troie* (1904–1912) – itself a French translation of the Latin accounts of Dares (ed. Meister 1873) and Dictys (ed. Eisenhut 1973) – which is not focused on written correspondence, Guido's *Historia* accordingly prefers speeches and apostrophes to the epistolary exchanges that pervade the Alexander Romance. Nevertheless, the *Historia* replicates the rhythmical *clausulae* of the Campanian dictaminal tradition, notably the writing of Tommaso da Capua and Pietro della Vigna, which suggests that, despite his protestations, Guido reproduces the dactylic features of *dictamen* in his Latin prose (Schaller 1965, 317–518; Grévin 2008a, 284).<sup>3</sup> His objections to this imperial register are also evident in his critiques of the violence that would accompany *translatio imperii*, a translation of power from East to West that he calls a “tante cladis diffusa lues” (1936, 11; ‘far-reaching plague of great destruction’)<sup>4</sup> (Mueller 2013, 11–12, 19–39). Guido's misgivings about perpetuating an imperialist narrative in a sovereign style, particularly in the wake of the Hohenstaufen's demise, may also be found in the I<sup>3</sup> recension, which resists an expected celebration of similarities between Frederick II and Alexander. Instead, Stone argues, “the I<sup>3</sup> reiterates the inefficacy of the conqueror's reign, his presumptuous self-presentation as a divine ruler, and his pursuit of imperial glory, all reflective of criticism that had long defined Alexander's legacy” (2016, 726). Despite

<sup>2</sup> Future citations refer to this edition. The translation is adapted from Guido delle Colonne, trans. Meek (1974, 264).

<sup>3</sup> I am also indebted to Grévin's essay, “Les techniques de rédaction de l'*Historia destructionis Troiae* et l'école campanienne d'*ars dictaminis* (1220–1290)” which is to be part of a collection on Guido delle Colonne currently in progress.

<sup>4</sup> The English translation is mine.

their critical dispositions towards assertions of sovereignty, both Trojan and Alexandrian histories survive in hundreds of copies, reflecting a popularity among European audiences that needs to be further examined.

## ***The Historia preliis in England***

Among its wide-ranging readership, the *Historia preliis* and Guido's *Historia* gained the attention and intellectual interest of an English audience. The enthusiasm for these texts is reflected in the survival of its English translations that were often produced and copied within dictaminal environments, particularly at Oxford and Westminster. To understand the nature of this engagement, I turn to fourteenth-century English manuscripts that contain both *artes dictandi* and this Alexandrian and Trojan material. For example, one fourteenth-century compilation annotated by English hands, Oxford University, Corpus Christi MS 55, contains both Guido's *Historia* and another well-known dictaminal treatise, the *Summa Dictaminis* of Riccardo da Pofi (Batzner 1910; Thomson 2011, 28–29). Riccardo's compilation of papal epistles was enormously influential, joining the *summae* of Tommaso da Capua and Pietro della Vigna to become one of the most popular *artes dictandi* of the thirteenth century (Schaller 1965, 317–518; Grévin 2008a, 284). This conjoining of Guido with Riccardo is especially provocative because the association of these two rhetorical *auctores* is also made explicit in the *Compendium artis dictatorie*, a late-fourteenth century dictaminal treatise composed in England by an anonymous teacher of rhetoric (Camargo 2016, 345–363).<sup>5</sup> Of the four late fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century extant manuscripts that include copies of the *Compendium*, all are associated with Oxford and one even contains a copy of Guido's *Historia*.<sup>6</sup> To solidify this connection between Guido and Riccardo, the *Compendium* includes them in a detailed recommended reading list for those seeking additional examples of letters to read:

Si quis amplius exemplares epistolas huius artis videre voluerit, legat epistolaria scripta Petri de Vineis, Ricardi de Pesys, Lemouicensis, Petri Blesensis, Guydonem de Columpna de historia Troianorum <et> sextum librum Decretalium, cum dictaminibus aliis curiosis. (Camargo 2016, 360, 363).

If someone should wish, in addition, to see letters illustrative of this art, let him read the epistolary writings [epistolaria scripta] of Pietro della Vigna, Riccardo da Pofi, the one from Limoges, Peter of Blois, Guido delle Colonne on the history of the Trojans, and the sixth book of the Decretals, along with other carefully prepared compositions.

<sup>5</sup> For an earlier published French translation, see Camargo (2015, 287–307).

<sup>6</sup> Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 358, Douai, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 764, Oxford, Balliol College MS 263 (contains Guido); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 65.

For a work that does not contain epistles in the manner of the Alexander Romance, the reference to Guido as an author of “epistolaria scripta” appears misplaced, but his setting within a syllabus filled with *dictatores*, such as Pietro and Riccardo who composed imperial *summae*, attests to the broadening applicability of epistolary writing within the English *artes dictandi*. The lengthy compendia of Pietro and Riccardo were copied within books titled “epistolae”, despite the fact that they included lots of texts we would rarely consider to be epistles, such as procedures for legal action and orders from the chancery (Grévin 2008b, 26, 45–57). In characterizing the contents of these *summae*, Grévin (2015, 410) explains that they all

were assimilated to letters, and they were all rhetorically organised according to the same philosophy of letter writing, and the same stylistic criteria. In other words, the thirteenth century practice of amalgamating administrative, judicial, diplomatic, and literary writing together under the single aegis of the letter form is strikingly evinced through the strategy at work in these collections.

Within this expanded definition, Guido’s *Historia* becomes a kind of dictaminal formula, one that could serve as an example of a “sovereign” style.

When we consider the “epistolary” similarities between Guido’s Trojan history and the Alexander romance, as well as the composition of the I<sup>3</sup> recension of the *Historia preliis* within the political sphere of Frederick II’s imperial correspondence, we can begin to fill in the translational background or “universe” for the composition of the alliterative *Wars of Alexander*. Of the surviving manuscripts that include the I<sup>3</sup> recension, two are the work of Richard Frampton, a commercial scribe who copied both bureaucratic and literary texts in England from approximately 1390 until 1420 (Doyle 1982, 88–100, 144n19; Parkes 2016, 113–114). These same two manuscripts, Cambridge, University Library, Mm.5.14 (CUL) and Glasgow, University Library, Hunterian, T.4.1(84) (GUL), also happen to include Guido’s *Historia*, which gestures towards a special affinity between these two prose histories that Estelle Stubbs links to Frampton’s work as a clerk at London’s Guildhall (2015, 250–251). During the politically turbulent end of the fourteenth century, civic scribes like Frampton were tasked with additional document production in the royal courts and at Westminster Abbey, including *The Westminster Chronicle*, an addendum to Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon* for the years 1381–1394 (Mooney and Stubbs 2013; Stubbs 2015, 231). Barbara Harvey argues that the likely author of this chronicle is the bibliophilic monk, Richard Exeter, who sojourned at Oxford before becoming prior of the Abbey in 1377 (1982, xli). By his death in 1396, Exeter had accumulated a large number of books, including Guido’s *Historia* and three other texts that Frampton copied (1982, xlii; Stubbs 2015, 250). It is important to note that the book that contains Guido’s *Historia* is accompanied by “multis tractatibus” (Harvey 1982, xlii; ‘many treatises’), suggesting it could have been one of the Oxford readers that frequently include Guido’s prose as an “epistolary” example (Camargo 1994, 165–187). The presence of another item in Exeter’s library, John Bromyard’s *Summa Praedicatorum*, a preaching manual closely aligned with the principles of the *ars dictaminis*, also indicates that prescriptive rhetoric was a driving force for his bibliophilia. One inventory of



goods even notes that Exeter had a clerk, the very kind the Guildhall could supply from time to time (Harvey 1982, xlii, xli). As Stubbs (2015, 250) suggests, “It is tempting to speculate that the ‘clerk’ may have been Frampton, and that he could have been diverted from the original task of copying a *Chronicle* for the Abbey’s records, by pressures from other patrons”. Even if he did not work directly with Exeter, Frampton produced manuscripts within an environment of shared historical and civic interests, which can be traced through his CUL and GUL manuscripts that preserve the I<sup>3</sup> recension, the source for the alliterative *Wars of Alexander*.

The presence of a Guildhall clerk at Westminster suggests the additional influence of the *ars dictaminis* on the reproduction and reception of these books, despite the absence of dictaminal manuals within them. As Kitrina Bevan (2013, 211–218) has demonstrated, scribes like Frampton could not produce the bureaucratic documents of his profession, such as petitions and deeds, without extensive training in the letter-writing conventions and legal formulae that were fundamental to the *artes dictandi*. The need and desire for such a dictaminal education was so acute at Westminster by the end of the fourteenth century that monks, perhaps even Exeter, were sent to Oxford to compile rhetorical treatises (Clark 2004; Camargo 2012, 109–110). One of these monks, another of Harvey’s candidates for the author of the *Chronicle*, was Thomas Merke, who left Westminster to study at Oxford and eventually produce his own *ars dictandi* in 1390 that accompanies Guido’s *Historia* in two surviving manuscripts (1982, xxxv–xxxvi; Camargo 1995, 30, 105–147).<sup>7</sup> In this writing treatise, the *Formula moderni et usitati dictaminis*, Merke even urges his audience to refer to the exemplary apostrophes and descriptions of Guido’s *Historia*, confirming its status as a source of dictaminal formulae:

Est autem apostrophacio color rethoricus [. . .] que semper fit cum tali interieccione, “O,” doloris vel gaudii causa. De quibus in libello vulgari quem Guydo de Columpnis edidit *De bello troiano* plurima et diffusa patent exempla [f. 79v] [. . .] Descripcio eciam materiam adauget, quando scilicet narrationem dimittentes, describimus personam, locum vel tempus. De quibus omnibus <in libro> preallegato *De bello troiano* plurima patent exempla [f. 81r-v] (Camargo 1995, 1.381–389, 474–477)

The apostrophe is also a rhetorical color [. . .] which is always accompanied with the interjection, “O,” on the occasion of suffering or joy. Many widespread examples of these are available in the commonly known book that Guido delle Colonne wrote, *The Trojan War* [. . .] Description also augments material, namely, when abandoning narration, we describe a person, place, or time. Many examples of all of these are available in the aforementioned book, *The Trojan War*.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Camargo dates Merke’s manual to c. 1390. The two manuscripts that also contain Guido’s *Historia* are Dublin, Trinity College 427 (composed before 1415 at Oxford, Merton College) and Oxford, Balliol College 263 (fifteenth century, composed in England).

<sup>8</sup> The folio numbers in the Latin refer to Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 237, the manuscript on which Camargo’s edition is based. The English translation is mine.

The presence of a copy of Guido's *Historia* in Exeter's library and its reproduction within two of Frampton's manuscripts, the same two that include the I<sup>3</sup> recension, suggest that these texts provide a writing style transferable across genres, and eventually across languages.

## ***Alliteration and the Ars dictaminis***

Now that I have suggested a relationship between these Latin prose histories and English *artes dictandi*, I want to consider the implications of this association for the production of English alliterative verse translations. Of the aforementioned two manuscripts produced by Frampton, CUL is of special interest because it also includes the *Siege of Jerusalem*, an English alliterative romance that shares the Northwest Midlands dialect and provenance of the *Wars of Alexander*. In particular, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet's tendency to alliterate *hw*- and *cw*- prefixes associates this romance with the *Siege*-poet and John Clerk of Whalley, the author of the alliterative *Destruction of Troy*, a translation of Guido's *Historia* (Duggan and Turville-Petre 1989, xxxvi–xliii; John Clerk of Whalley, ed. Matsumoto 2002). CUL therefore obtains a remarkably alliterative, possibly dictaminal, flair, hosting one alliterative poem and two Latin prose histories that serve as sources for alliterative romances. The selection of the alliterative long line to translate Latin prose additionally suggests that John Clerk and the *Wars of Alexander*-poet recognize the “epistolary” nature of their sources and their potential appeal to their audiences. Even when translating from a text that is filled with letters, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet adds epistolary elements, addressing his audience directly with a salutation:

Syre, it betid on a tyme, þe text me recordis,  
 Ðat þe mode kyng of Messedone with mekill nounbre,  
 Ðat was Sire Philip þe fers, [was] farne out of toune  
 For to fezt with his fais out of fere landis.

(214–271)<sup>9</sup>

Working from a short and understated Latin line, “Interea Philippus rex Macedonie abiit in prelium” (2.18) the *Wars of Alexander*-poet rhetorically augments the I<sup>3</sup>'s narration in a descriptive style that Merke might call Guidonian.<sup>10</sup> As David Lawton notes in his comparison of Clerk's *Destruction* and the “*Alexander*-poets”, the alliterative poets who translated the *Historia preliis*, “The poet of the *Destruction of Troy* [Clerk] commends his source, Guido, as a model of amplification; the *Alexander*-poets, by contrast, are unlucky. The *Historia de preliis* often fails to offer sufficient material to the

<sup>9</sup> All quotations and line number references for *Wars of Alexander* are from Duggan and Turville-Petre (1989).

<sup>10</sup> All quotations and line number references for the I<sup>3</sup> recension of the *Historia preliis* are from *Die Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni Rezension J<sup>3</sup>*, ed. Steffens (1975).



translator working in the alliterative long line form” (Lawton 1981, 260). Even though the Latin sources may possess significant stylistic differences, their translational orientation toward alliterative verse reflects a dictaminal and amplificatory sensibility that a scrivener like Frampton and the patron of CUL appear to share.

Perhaps more importantly, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet’s attraction to the Alexander romance is more than just rhetorical – it is also rhythmical. Throughout the poem, the word “clause” signals to the audience a direct reference to the Latin authority, often specifically meaning the composition of a “letter” (278, 1008, 1920, 2081, 2562, 3489). For example, after Darius receives news of Alexander’s approach, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet amplifies the nature of the Persian King’s epistolary impulse:

Sire Darius for þa ditis was deeply agreuyd,  
 Callis him his conseil, a clause he him enditis,  
 Mas a brefe at a braide & it in brathe sendis  
 To Alexsandire as belyue & all þus him gretes.

(2080–2083)

Whereas the Latin merely explains, “Audiens hec Darius imperator, iterum scripsit Alexandro hoc modo” (34.15–16), the alliterative translation expands upon Darius’ grief and anger, emphasizing the “clause” he writes in a “brefe”, two words that reiterate the writing of the epistle that follows. This association between letter writing and a “clause” may refer to the rhythmical *clausulae* that grammar masters were required to teach to Oxford students in the late fourteenth-century. Two Oxford statutes, which were issued before 1350 and 1380, contain almost the exact same phrasing:

Item, tenetur singulis quindenis versus dare, et literas compositas verbis decentibus non ampulosis aut sexquipedalibus, et clausulis succinctis, decoris, metaphoris manifestis et, quantum possint, sententia refertis, quos versus et quas literas debent recipients in proximo die feriato vel ante in percameno scribere, et deinde sequenti die cum ad scholas venerint, magistro suo corde tenus reddere et scripturam suam offerre. (*Statuta antiqua universitatis oxoniensis*, ed. Gibson 1931, 20–23 and 169–174)

Every fortnight they [i.e. the students] must present verses, and compositions [*literas*], put together with fitting words, not swollen or half a yard long, and with *clausulae* concise and appropriate, displaying metaphors, and, as much as possible, replete with *sententiae*; which verses and compositions, those who are given the task should write on parchment on the next free day or before, and then on the following day when they return to school they must recite them by heart to the master, and hand in their writings. (my translation)

Within this dictaminal context, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet may have been drawing on a rhetorical term, particularly the writing of rhythmical “clausulae”, or *cursus*, that would have been intelligible to the clerical or aristocratic audience for the romance. *Cursus* commonly relies on three particular, largely dactylic, cadential sequences: *planus*, or plain, (ménte reuóluo), *tardus*, or slow (vítam dedúcerem), and *velox*, or fast (litteris índicáre) (Murphy 1967, 126; Thomson 1983, 298–310; Camargo 1995, 27–29; Camargo 2007, 67–87). While examples of *cursus* abound within Guido’s *His-*

*toria*, they are not as ubiquitous in the I<sup>3</sup> recension. If we examine the salutation of Darius' letter from the same scene, however, we can readily identify rhythmical clauses at the end of sentences: "Darius rex regem et dominus dominantium famulo meo Alexandro mandamus (*planus*): Per universum orbem commendatum est nomen Darii et laudatum, quin etiam dii titubant nomen eius (*velox*)" (34.16–20). The combination of the highly alliterative opening of the letter and the dactylic cues about the concluding *clausulae* produce an opportunity for composing alliterating units that replicate the rhythm of the beginning and ending of the Latin sentence, such as "Dari, þe deyne & derfe emperoure" (2084) and "wírschip oure nám[e] (*planus*)" (2089). While we might be tempted to dismiss this affinity between Latin prose and English alliterative verse as a coincidence, the alliterative long line is also the poetic form of choice for John Clerk's *Destruction*, an English translation of Guido's *Historia*.

This correspondence between the dactylic rhythms of Latin history and the concussive cadence of the alliterative long line suggests a translational equivalency that seeks to elevate a particular type of English verse. As Lawton (1979, 343) suggests:

It may well be, in fact, that the form of M.E. [Middle English] unrhymed alliterative verse represents a conscious attempt to construct a vernacular high style from the rhythmical principles of the *ars dictaminis*. If this were so, it would help explain one of the basic peculiarities of the alliterative verse corpus: over 22,000 lines of M.E. unrhymed alliterative verse, more than one-half of the whole corpus and two-thirds of the formal corpus, consist of translation from Latin prose sources. The figure is made up from four poems: the *Destruction of Troy* and the three alliterative Alexander poems, one of which, *Alexander B*, is actually an exercise in *dictamen* in the precise sense of epistolary rhetoric.

By emphasizing the "translation from Latin prose sources", Lawton calls attention to the fact that the *Destruction of Troy* is a translation of Guido's *Historia* and the three Alexander poems are translations of the *Historia preliis*. Of the three, he highlights *Alexander B* (henceforth *Alexander and Dindimus*) because it is an alliterative fragment that focuses almost entirely on the letter writing exchange between the Macedonian conqueror and the King of the Brahmins (Cary 1967, 49). Lawton's suggestion that these poems might reflect assertions of a "high", or what we might call a "sovereign", style, is well supported by the previous analysis of the dictaminal context for the *Historia preliis*.

With this in mind, it is particularly provocative to consider Lawton's description of *Alexander and Dindimus* as "an exercise in *dictamen*" and specifically "epistolary rhetoric", which appears to distinguish its style and character as qualitatively different from that of the *Wars of Alexander*, what he calls *Alexander C*. This characterization may be based on *Alexander and Dindimus*' focus on the exchange of letters and their use of standard dictaminal conventions, but this same epistolary debate and its letter formulas appear within *Wars of Alexander* as well. Moreover, *Alexander and Dindimus* survives in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodl. 264 as an interpolation within the French *Roman d'Alexandre*, a context which may appear to challenge the claim that this fragment of alliterative verse reflects any sort of epistolary "exercise"

(Cary 1967, 49; Gilbert 2015, 110–128). Lawton does not elaborate on his dictaminal description of *Alexander and Dindimus*, which he offers as a conclusion to his 1979 essay on Gaytryge's sermon, but he does offer some limited insight into this assessment in his 1981 article on the *Alexander*-poets' translational *habitus*, particularly in relationship to their source in the *Historia preliis*. For Lawton, *Alexander and Dindimus* is unique because of the poet's "elaborate variation of his source's almost identical epistolary formulae" (260), which may suggest a conscious attempt to experiment with different alliterative combinations that might be employed to replicate the language of formularies that a writer would find in a typical *ars dictandi*. While these writing manuals often warn against excessive ornamentation, a varied use of amplificatory techniques likely reflects dictaminal training.

To understand the nature of this vernacular *dictamen*, it is instructive to compare the epistolary translations of the *Historia preliis* as they appear within *Alexander and Dindimus* and *Wars of Alexander*. For example, in Alexander's first letter to Dindimus, the I<sup>2</sup> recension of the *Historia preliis* provides a conventional, but relatively undecorated, salutation: "Rex regum Alexander ad regem Bragmanorum. Filius dei regis Amonis et regine Olimpiadis, Dimdimio regi Bragmanorum gaudium" (*Gests of Kyng Alexander of Macedon*, ed. Magoun 1929, 178). The I<sup>3</sup> recension offers essentially the same salutation with the extra epithet, "dominus dominantium" (98.6–7), to emphasize Alexander's assertion of dominance over the Brahmins. *Alexander and Dindimus*, however, amplifies the salutation to eight lines of alliterative verse:

Be kidde king Alixandre þat coup is in erþe  
 þat name hap of nobleté and nevere man dradde,  
 þat grete god Amon in graciouce timus  
 Bigat on Olimpias þe onurable quene,  
 Dindimus þe dere king doþ for to grete,  
 þat lord of Bragmanus lond and ledere is holde  
 And in þis same wise saiþ and sendeþ him goie  
 And til alle þat arn aftur him þare.

(191–198)<sup>11</sup>

This excessively ornamented opening to the letter, which asserts a divine origin for his imperial birthright, may reflect both the poet's dictaminal pretensions and an attempt to convey Alexander's latent anxiety about the "nobleté" of his name. The *Wars of Alexander*-poet, by contrast, offers a measured, but slightly elaborated, salutation half the length of its alliterative counterpart:

I, þat kyng am of kyngis & crouned of lordis,  
 Alexsandire þe aire of Amon our driȝtin,

<sup>11</sup> Line numbers for all citations of *Alexander and Dindimus* refer to *Gests of Kyng Alexander of Macedon*, ed. Magoun (1929).

And of þe quene Olimpades, þat I am ofsprongen,  
 To þe, Sire Dindyn on þi dese, dities of ioye.  
 (4340–4343)

Once again, Alexander asserts his noble status, but without an extensive divine genealogy that would lengthen the epistolary greeting. Perhaps the *Wars of Alexander*-poet recalls Guido's rationale for the unornamented style of the *Historia*, which he chooses for fear that he might "prolong this work by long narration on the pretext of a more decorated *dictamen*". Near the end of the exchange of letters, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet, working from nearly the same Latin salutation (102.30–31), offers a variation of Alexander's greeting:

Hiȝe kyng without comparison of kyngis all opire,  
 Of all lordis þe lord þat leues vndire heuen,  
 Sire Alexsandire, þe aire of Amon oure driztin,  
 To þe, Sire Dyndyn on þi dese, þis dities I write.  
 (4819–4822)

Leaving out his maternal heritage, Alexander uses the extra line to reiterate, perhaps desperately, the extent of his dominion over all other "lordis". If we return to the equivalent salutation in *Alexander and Dindimus*, we find another eight-line greeting that augments Alexander's imperial sovereignty:

þe Emperour Alixandre of armus alosed,  
 þat noble is and namekouþ and nevere man dradde,  
 By godus chaunce þat ys chose chef ovur kingus  
 And of burnus ybore baldest of mihte,  
 þat Amon þe grete god in graciose timus  
 Bygat on Olimpias þe onurable quene,  
 Bykenneþ King Dindimus in kiþ þere he dwellus  
 His aselede sonde and saip in þis wise.  
 (1078–1085)

While the poet of *Alexander and Dindimus* plays freely with dictaminal ornament, the English elaborations strictly follow the four-stress pattern aa/ax – three alliterating syllables followed by a non-alliterating syllable – the regular sequence for the alliterative long line. Most alliterative poets, including John Clerk and the *Wars of Alexander*-poet (in other parts of the poem), stray from this pattern, which makes *Alexander and Dindimus* especially remarkable, what Frank Grady (2004, 82) calls "a paradigmatic alliterative poem, an almost perfect example of the species" and what Jane Gilbert (2015, 119) calls "exemplary expression of a singular law". *Alexander and Dindimus* also stands out as the only English text within MS Bodl. 264, which is dominated by French Alexander material and a French prose version of Marco Polo's travels, *Li Livres du Grant Caam* (Gilbert 2015, 123–126). For Gilbert (2015, 126), the manuscript's inclusion of *Alexander and Dindimus*, "affirms the outward orientation and global reach of alliterative verse" and "not only translates culturally diverse material into a sophisticated po-

etic verse form, but also commands cosmopolitan and politically astute audiences across and beyond English lands". While *Alexander and Dindimus* may be more than merely an "exercise in *dictamen*", Gilbert's conclusion supports Lawton's 1979 suggestion that this Alexander text may be an exemplar for a translational attempt at a "sovereign" style, one that seeks to combine alliterative verse with "epistolary rhetoric".

The manuscript context for *Alexander and Dindimus* also compels us to reconsider traditional divisions between poetry and prose, which provides insight into what Lawton calls the "peculiarities" of alliterative poets, such as John Clerk and the *Wars of Alexander*-poet, who readily translate learned Latin *clausulae* into popular English verse. In the case of MS Bodl. 264, the language environment is ostensibly French, not Latinate, but *Alexander and Dindimus* is interpolated within the dodecasyllabic *Roman d'Alexandre*, which is largely based on the *Historia preliis*, particularly the I<sup>1</sup> recension (Cary 1967, 29–33; Gilbert 2015, 113–114). *Alexander and Dindimus* stands out as the sole English text, but its incorporation within the manuscript suggests that the alliterative fragment obtains a status that is at least equal to the French alexandrines of the romance. On folio 67r, a rubricator introduces *Alexander and Dindimus* by calling attention to a missing French text and referring readers to the English substitute at the end (fols. 209r–215v):

Here fayleth a prossesse of þis rommance of alixand' þe wheche prossesse þat fayleth 3e schulle fynde at þe ende of þis bok ywrote in engelyche ryme and whan 3e han radde it to þe ende torneþ hedur azen and turneþ ouyr þys lef and bygynneþ at þys reson Che fu el mois de may que li tans renouele and so rede forþ þe rommauce to þe ende whylis þe frenche lasteþ

By offering a suggested reading itinerary – urging the reader to flip ahead to the text that fills the gap and then turning back to "þys lef" – the rubrication attempts to mitigate any interruption within the reading experience. As Gilbert (2015, 124) explains, "The rubricator's instructions imply that we are to view the textual fabric of the expanded Alexander narrative as seamless", which appears to reduce any formal and linguistic discrepancies we might discern between French dodecasyllabic and English alliterative verse. Moreover, the manuscript was largely produced between 1338 and 1344 on the continent (likely Tournai) before being completed in England (c. 1400), where and when *Alexander and Dindimus* and Marco Polo's *Li Livres du Grant Caam* were added, along with illustrations interspersed throughout, which present the many parts of the book as a coherent and connected whole (Dutschke 1998, 294; Cruse 2011, 61–102). For Gilbert, however, the inclusion of an alliterative fragment also enhances the learned character of the French romance: "Because *Alexander and Dindimus* contributes a relatively heavyweight intellectual debate to the manuscript's Alexander compilation, it enhances our reading of [the *Roman d'Alexandre*] as a *roman antique*. Strengthening the elements of *clergie*, curiosity, and learning increases the earlier compilation's prestige [. . .]" (2015, 124). This implies a significant transformation of genre to the *romans antiques*, which typically rely on octosyllabic rhyming couplets, the predominant metrical form for French romance. MS Bodl. 264 therefore obtains a the-

matic unity that is animated and elevated by its erudite employment of a surprising variety of languages and their poetic rhythms.

One confusing, but insightful, element of the rubricator's note is the reference to "engelyche ryme", especially since most alliterative poems, including the *Wars of Alexander* and *Alexander and Dindimus*, do not regularly rhyme. On the one hand, this characterization could suggest that, for this scribe, there is no meaningful difference between the concussive rhythms of alliterative verse and the lilting tones of rhyming couplets. On the other, "ryme" could merely indicate that the substituted section is written in poetry, as opposed to the subsequent prose of Marco Polo's *Li Livres du Grant Caam*, which was added to the manuscript in England at the same time as *Alexander and Dindimus* (Gilbert 2015, 123–126). Combining these two possibilities, I want to suggest that this confusion arises precisely because alliterative verse occupies a kind of middle space between prose and poetry, rhythm and rhyme. Consider, for example, Geoffrey Chaucer's narrator in the *House of Fame*, who wants "To make bookys, songes, dytees, / In ryme or elles in cadence" (622–623).<sup>12</sup> Chaucer appears to oppose "ryme" with "cadence", which could stand for "poetry" and "prose" or indicate a difference between rhyming and alliterative verse. By differentiating rhyme from "cadence", Chaucer may be highlighting his frequent use of *cursus* rhythms in his *Boece*, which correspond to the dactylic patterns and initial syllabic stress of its alliterative vocabulary (Johnson 2013, 55–91). Even if we cannot confidently equate "cadence" with alliteration, we can reasonably connect "cadence" with its Latin equivalent "cadencia", which Simon O. uses in his early fifteenth-century writing manual, probably composed at Oxford, to describe *distinctiones*, the rhythmical punctuation of final clauses. For Simon cadence is the key to an elegant dictaminal style:

Dictamen est litteralis edicio venustate sermonum et egregia sententia coloribus ornata, per quam quidem diffinicionem, que et qualis sit cadencia, attente scire poterit perspicuous indagator, cuius venustatis [ardentia] extat, quia cadencia nichil aliud esse poterit nisi distincionis vel scissure et precipue diccionum finalis clausura. (Pantin 1929, 334)

*Dictamen* is a written utterance decorated in elegant words and a striking statement decorated with rhetorical colors. From this definition a sharp investigator who has a passion for elegance may, with care, learn what sort of thing *cadencia* is. For *cadencia* could be nothing other than the final closure of clauses [*clausura*] or phrases, and especially of words. (Cornelius 2010, 322)<sup>13</sup>

If we did not know that this statement refers to prose *cursus*, we might think that "cadencia" refers to poetic meter, perhaps even the *laissez* of the *Roman d'Alexandre*, which are bound by the concordant rhymes and assonances and the end of each line (Lote 1951 and 1955, 2.54–56).

<sup>12</sup> The line numbers from Chaucerian texts are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Benson (1987).

<sup>13</sup> Because the scribe often substitutes "ardencia" for "cadencia", Pantin emends "ardencia" to "cadencia". I follow Cornelius, who suggests that "ardencia" should stand as is (2010, 322n95).

When we consider Simon's characterization of "cadencia" within the context of the Oxfordian statutes of 1350 and 1380 that require training in the writing of *clausulae* and the *Wars of Alexander*-poet's use of "clause" to indicate letter writing, however, Chaucer's reference to "cadence" obtains a dictaminal connotation, one that may be confirmed by another word in that collocation: "ditees". If we set aside the numerous uses of this word in his *Boece* as translations of his source that specifically refer to "songs" (1.m.3, 2.pr.2.71, 3.pr.6.3, 3.m.12.48, 4.pr.6.36), this appearance in the *House of Fame* is the only time Chaucer uses this word to characterize writing in English. While "ditees" may offer a redundant emphasis on "songs", I want to suggest instead that Chaucer is specifically using "ditees" to refer to epistles, whether they are written in "ryme" or in "cadence", which indicates alliterative verse or prose. In the two letters to Dindimus quoted above, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet calls the epistolary writing "dities" (4343, 4822), which correspond with a reference to "dete", or letter that he writes to Darius earlier in the poem (2851). Another contemporary, and particularly relevant, use of "dite" appears in John Trevisa's 1387 translation of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon*, specifically in a description of Aristotle's tutelage of Alexander: "Aristotle eyztene 3ere olde among opere tauzte [eloquence] faire and noble spekyng as it is specialliche i-sene in his *Commentis Homerici* and in Ditee of Troye, þe which he bytook Alisaundre, and in his *Dyalogus of Poetis* and in *Tretys of Rethorik*" (3.361). Within the context of the sentence alone, "Ditee" gains a rhetorical association through its juxtaposition with the teaching of eloquence through poetics and a "Tretys of Rethorik". Moreover, Trevisa offers "Ditee" as a translation of Higden's "dictamen" (3.360), which suggests that these words could be used interchangeably.<sup>14</sup> Since Higden is also the author of an *ars praedicandi*, a rhetorical treatise on preaching that follows the structure of the *ars dictaminis*, it seems unlikely that Higden would proffer the term "dictamen" casually and that Trevisa would be unfamiliar with its epistolary connotations.<sup>15</sup> When Chaucer implies that "ditees" may be in composed in "ryme" or in "cadence", he captures the formal flexibility of dictaminal writing, which could include the prosaic Latin of the *Historia preliis*, the rhyming epistles in the *Roman d'Alexandre*, or the alliterative letters of the *Wars of Alexander*.

The *Wars of Alexander*-poet recognizes the plasticity of *dictamen* by translating the dactylic rhythms of the Latin *cursus* into his alliterative "dities", which are juxtaposed with reference to another poetic meter, the hexameter line. Where the fragment of the poem ends, a description of a monument that celebrates Alexander's imperial dominion calls attention to the metrical form of its inscription:

And þai ware visid all in vers[is] in variant lettirs,  
Sum in Latens lare, sum langage of Grece,

<sup>14</sup> For the full line from Higden, see the epigraph to this chapter.

<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of the dictaminal background for Higden's manual, see Jennings' introduction to her (and Wilson's) translation of Higden's *Ars componendi sermones* (2003, 1–23).



Assisid all of sex foote & sett in betwene,  
 Ay thre paire on a plate qware a point ristis.  
 (5777–5780)

The “vers[is]” that are “Assisid all of sex foote” likely refers to hexameter verse, which is the form that the language of the subsequent inscription takes in the *Historia preliis* (Cornelius 2009, 81–83). Since the *Wars of Alexander*-poet cannot adequately replicate this Latin meter within the consistency of the alliterative rhythms, Ian Cornelius (2009, 83) suggests that “the poet acknowledges this loss of formal distinction and tries to make amends by naming the Latin verse-form and calling attention to his own distance from the Original. This act of naming the difference between alliterative verse and Latin hexameter contrasts with the assimilation of alliterative writing to Latin rhythmical prose”. Even though the alliterative line appears to have more in common with the dactylic cadences of the prose *cursus* than those of the Latin verse, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet still proceeds to translate the hexameters into alliterating units, forcing a rearrangement of the proper place names from geographical to alphabetical proximity. For example, rather than follow the regional logic of his source, which places England and Scotland in the same line (123.9), the *Wars of Alexander* collocates England, Italy, and India because of the alliteration of their initial letters: “Ingland, Itaile & Yndee, & Ireland costis” (5789). Apparently, the *Wars of Alexander*-poet is so dedicated to the consistency of the alliterative form that any resulting reduction or confusion of geographical distance between the far reaches of Alexander’s empire is an acceptable sacrifice. Or perhaps the poem ends as a fragment here because the poet recognized that the alliterative line could not accommodate this geographical survey of Alexander’s dominion. This commitment to poetic uniformity is also reflected in the presentation of texts within MS Bodl. 264, which centres its focus on the alexandrine lines of the *Roman d’Alexandre*. By referring to *Alexander and Dindimus* as written in “ryme”, the rubricator of MS Bodl. 264 proffers a formal consistency between the end-rhymes of the romance’s *laissez* and the headlong cadences of alliterative verse, a pretension to equivalency that is even more obvious than the awkward attempt of the *Wars of Alexander*-poet to establish metrical coherency within imperial chaos.

## ***The epistolary style of the Wars of Alexander***

As I have suggested above, efforts to collapse formal distinctions between types of writing emerge from a much longer history of rhetorical and poetic instruction that we can trace back the extension of the *ars dictaminis* into what appears to be non-epistolary prose and poetry, such as Guido’s *Historia* and the *Historia preliis*. This attempt at dictatorial coherence within and between prosaic and poetic forms is also evident within rhetorical texts and manuscripts composed and compiled as early as the thirteenth century. One commonly included text within these manuscripts is Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria*

*nova* (c. 1210), which includes a section on differences between prose and poetry, focusing on distinctions in rhythmical freedom, syllabic limitations, and phrase endings.

Legibus arctetur metrum, sed prosa, vagatur / Liberiore via, quia prosae publica strata / Admittit passim redas et plaustra; sed arcta / Semita versiculi non vult tam grossa [. . .] / Prosaicus versus res grossior: omnia verba / Indistanter amat, nisi quae postrema reservat [. . .] / Cetera non variat ratio, sed, carmine metri / Legibus astricto vela ab ejus lege soluto, / Ars eadem semper [. . .] (Geoffrey of Vinsauf, ed. Faral 1923, 1853–1856, 1863–1864, and 1873–1875).

Meter is straightened by laws, but prose roams along a freer way, for the public road of prose admits here and there wagons and carts, whereas the narrow path of a line of verse does not allow of things so inelegant [. . .]. A line of prose is a coarser thing; it favors all words, observing no distinction except in the case of those which it keeps for the end of periods [. . .]. For the rest [i.e. besides particular syllabic restrictions], the method of prose and verse does not differ; rather the principles of the art remain the same, whether in a composition bound by the laws of meter or in one independent of those laws.<sup>16</sup>

The “principles of the art” that Geoffrey emphasizes here are developed fully throughout his treatise, which include treatments of rhetorical techniques, including amplification and description, that could be activated within the *clausulae* of prose letters or lines of verse epistles. One thirteenth-century manuscript, Glasgow, Hunterian MS V.8.14, places Geoffrey’s *Poetria nova*, as well as his *Summa de coloribus rethoricis* and *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi*, alongside a number of other poetic and dictaminal manuals, including Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria*, Gervase of Melkley’s *Ars poetica* and *Dictamen prosaicum*, and a number of examples, such as “Pergama flere volo”, an immensely popular poem on the fall of Troy (Faral 1936, 18–119; Boutemy 1946, 233–244). While this compilation is primarily poetic in focus, the inclusion of the *artes dictandi* of Geoffrey and Gervase suggest a kind of epistolary consistency and, what Rita Copeland calls, a “pedagogical coherence” across the treatises (139). We might even call this an anthology, much in the same way that MS Bodl. 264 is an anthology of Alexander material, that establishes the foundation for the instructional combination of verse and prose instruction that we see in the language of the 1350 and 1380 Oxford statutes. For Copeland, “the collection in Hunterian V.8.14 is neither simply rhetorical handbook nor poetic anthology, but rather an anthology of style” (2021, 142–143). When we consider the consistency with which the Alexander material – from the amplified recensions of the *Historia prelii* to the alexandrine lines of the *Roman d’Alexandre* to the alliterative cadences of the *Wars of Alexander* – incorporates the principles of both the *artes poetica* and the *artes dictandi*, we can detect the development of an epistolary style that attempts to “rhyme” Latin prose with vernacular poetry.

At the same time that we acknowledge these attempts at formal syncretism within late medieval treatments of the Alexander corpus, we must also consider why the alliterative long line is the preferred translational medium for three out of the four surviv-

16 This translation is adapted from Geoffrey of Vinsauf, ed. Nims (2010), 72–73.

ing English versions of the *Historia preliis*. If we agree that the dictaminal nature of the Latin source material – particularly its epistolary formulae, its dactylic rhythms, and its rhetorical colours – matches the formulaic salutations, concussive cadences, and ornamental amplifications of alliterative verse, then we should explore the possible influences and translational dispositions that motivate the production of these poems. In a previous examination of contemporary romances that were, like the *Wars of Alexander*, also produced in northern England, namely John Clerk's *Destruction of Troy*, the *Siege of Jerusalem*, the alliterative *Morte Arthure*, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, I argued that these alliterative translations reflect a “clerical voice” that is highly Latinate, politically provincial, and strikingly sceptical of aristocratic assertions of sovereignty (Mueller 2013, 219–222). The learned background and anti-imperialism of these poems are also exhibited in the *Wars of Alexander*, not only through its rhythmical and rhetorical use of a Latin source in the I<sup>3</sup> recension of the *Historia preliis*, a text that reflects its own resistance to empire-building, but also through its depictions of scholarly figures such as Alexander's Egyptian father, Anectanabus, who is described as an intellectual equal to Aristotle:

Þe iapis of all gemetri gentilli he couth,  
 And [as] wele as Aristotill, þe artis all seuyn.  
 Þare preued neuir nane his prik, forpassing of witt,  
 Plato nor Piktagaras ne Prektane himseluen.

(43–46)

Whereas the I<sup>3</sup> recension only emphasizes his expertise in astrology and mathematics (8–9), the *Wars of Alexander* amplifies the learning of Anectanabus, who is trained in all seven of the liberal arts, including logic, represented by Plato, and grammar, represented by “Prektane” or Priscian (Steiner 2016, 393). This invocation of Priscian, who flourished nearly a millennium after Alexander, reflects the importance of his canonical grammatical text for the *Wars of Alexander*-poet, who likely received rhetorical training from grammar masters, especially if the instruction followed the model at Oxford, which required it after 1350 (Camargo 2007, 67–87). According to James Simpson (2002, 116), this celebration of clerical learning also exhibits a resistance to imperialism: “Philosophers, not kings, are triumphant in this work. Alexander is even born of a runaway king-cum-philosopher ([An]ectanabus); ‘clerkes’ produce kings, just as the king's own messages, always in the form of clerically composed letters, express the transience of earthly possession.” Given the preponderance of epistles that pervade the poem, the clerical voice is synonymous with an epistolary voice, which reflect a style that attempts to produce a vernacular authority synonymous with Latinate authority.

To arrive at a conclusion about the stylistic choice of the alliterative long line for translating Latin prose, we should consider the nature of other non-alliterative translations, particularly those working from the same texts. For example, whereas John Clerk translates Guido's *Historia* into the alliterative *Destruction of Troy* (c. 1390), John Lydgate, a Benedictine monk educated at Oxford, renders Guido's rhythmical prose

into rhyming couplets in his *Troy Book* (1420), an attempt to match the “souereinte of stile” (ed. Bergen 1906–1935, 373) of his “Guydo maister” (ed. Bergen 1906–1935, 372), the Trojan authority who surpasses all others. As soon as Book Two, however, Lydgate, dramatically announces his failure to translate the *Historia*’s *clausulae* into Chaucerian iambic pentameter:

I am so dulle, certeyn, þat I ne can  
 Folwen Guydo, þat clerke, þat coryous man,  
 Whiche in latyn hath be rethorik  
 Set so his wordis, þat I can nat be lyke.  
 To sewe his stile in my translacioun,  
 Word by word, lyche þe construccioun,  
 After þe maner of gramariens,  
 Nor lyke þe stile of rethoricyens,  
 I toke nat on me þis story to translate;  
 For me to forther Clys com to late,  
 þat in swyche craft hath gret experience;  
 I leue þe wordis and folwe þe sentence.  
 And trouþ of metre I sette also a-syde,  
 For of þat arte I hadde as þo no guyde  
 Me to reducyn, what I went a-wrong;  
 I toke non hede nouþer of schort nor long,  
 But to þe trouþe, lefte coryouste  
 Boþe of making and metre be.  
 (Lydgate, *Troy Book*, ed. Bergen 1906–1935,  
 2.169–2.186)

While Lydgate surely exaggerates his ability to “Folwen Guido”, his epideictic confession offers considerable insight into his rhetorical training and the limitations of his poetic form. By claiming that he cannot “sewe his stile in my translacioun”, Lydgate suggests that the syntactical and syllabic restrictions of Guido’s prose, which rely on “þe construccioun, / After þe maner of gramariens”, cannot be replicated within heroic couplets in a “Word by word” manner. The invocation of “gramariens”, like the reference to Priscian in the *Wars of Alexander*, gestures towards the dictaminal education that grammar masters would have provided to clerks like Lydgate. He then claims to “leue þe wordis and folwe þe sentence”, which requires that he “sette also a-syde” the “trouþ of metre” in order to proceed. If we understand the “trouþ of metre” to be a consistent rhythmical cadence, Lydgate is admitting that his rhyming iambic translation cannot produce the same stylistic effect as the *clausulae* of his Latin prose source.

Lydgate’s commentary suggests that his early fifteenth-century audience was, at least to some degree, expecting to encounter in his *Troy Book* a literary style worthy of its Latinate predecessor. Given his avoidance of alliterative rhythms and subsequent embrace of Chaucerian rhymes, Lydgate may have seen the writing on the wall, the long literary future of the heroic couplet and the short literary future of the alliterative long line. The fact that alliterative poets, like the author of the *Wars of Alexander*, chose

instead to follow the cadence of the words, even if it meant occasionally leaving the “sentence”, suggests that they preferred an epistolary style that amplified the Latinity of their verse form, perhaps to their eventual detriment. Ultimately, when we compare Lydgate’s claim that he cannot “sewe” Guido’s “stile” into his translation with the *Wars of Alexander*-poet’s amplification of the rhythmical and epistolary features of the I<sup>3</sup> recension, we can begin to see that the Alexander romance obtains a kind of rhetorical power that exceeds its imperial potential within late medieval England. As Christine Chism (2002, 152) suggests, the *Wars of Alexander* “pursues in extremis a chivalric ambition that at once defines and disarticulates itself by its own historical impossibility”. Put another way, *translatio studii* outpaces *translatio imperii*, elevating alliterative verse to a claim to a “sovereign” English style, even as its dictaminal character undermines that assertion. In the case of the Alexander romance, translating language through letters, and by the cadence of the letter, produces an epistolary style that seeks to satisfy the Latinate, rhythmical, and anti-imperialistic tastes of its clerical writers and audiences.

## Works cited

### Primary sources

- Benoît de Sainte-Maure. *Le Roman de Troie*. Ed. Leopold Constans. Paris: Firmin Didot, 1904–1912.
- Cary, George. *The Medieval Alexander*. Ed. D.J.A. Ross. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956, 1967.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. Ed. Larry Benson. *The Riverside Chaucer*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Dares. *De Excidio Troiae Historia*. Ed. Ferdinand Meister. Leipzig: Teubner, 1873.
- Dictys. *Ephemeridos Belli Troiani Libri*. Ed. Werner Eisenhut. Leipzig: Teubner, 1973.
- Geoffrey of Vinsauf. *Poetria nova. Les Arts Poétiques du XII<sup>e</sup> et du XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècle*. Ed. E. Faral. Paris: É Champion, 1923.
- Geoffrey of Vinsauf. *Poetria nova*. Revised edition. Trans. Margaret F. Nims. Medieval Sources in Translation 49. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 2010.
- Gests of Kyng Alexander of Macedon*. Ed. Francis P. Magoun. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1929.
- Guido de Columnis [Guido delle Colonne]. *Historia destructionis Troiae*. Ed. Nathaniel Edward Griffin. Cambridge, Mass.: Mediaeval Academy of America, 1936.
- Guido delle Colonne. *Historia destructionis Troiae*. Trans. Mary Elizabeth Meek. Bloomington & London: Indiana University Press, 1974.
- Higden, Ranulph. *Polychronicon. Together with the English Translation of John of Trevisa and an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*. Ed. Churchill Babington and Joseph R. Lumby. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1869.
- Higden, Ranulph. *Ars componendi sermones*. Trans. Margaret Jennings and Sally A. Wilson. Paris: Peeters, 2003.
- History of Alexander’s Battles (Historia de preliis – the J<sup>1</sup> Version)*. Trans. R. Telfryn Pritchard. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1992.
- Die Historia de preliis Alexandri Magni Rezension J<sup>3</sup>*. Ed. Karl Steffens. (Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 73). Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1975.

- John Clerk of Whalley. *The Destruction of Troy: A Diplomatic and Color Facsimile Edition, Hunterian MS V.2.8 in Glasgow University Library*. Ed. Hiroyuki Matsumoto. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002.
- Lydgate, John. *Troy Book*. Ed. Henry Bergen. Early English Text Society. Extra Series 97, 103, and 126. London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1906–1935.
- Nicola da Rocca. *Epistolae*. Ed. Fulvio Delle Donne. Florence: Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2003.
- Pantin, W.A. Ed. 1929. “Medieval Treatise on Letter-Writing, with Examples, from Rylands Latin MS 394.” *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 13: 326–82.
- Statuta antiqua universitatis oxoniensis*. Ed. Strickland Gibson. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931.

## Secondary sources

- Batzer, Ernst. 1910. *Zur Kenntnis der Formularsammlung des Richard von Pofi*. Heidelberg: Winter.
- Bevan, Kitrina Lindsay. 2013. *Clerks and Scriveners: Legal Literacy and Access to Justice in Late Medieval England*. Diss. University of Exeter.
- Boutemy, André. 1946. “Le poème ‘Pergama flere volo’ et ses imitateurs du XIIe siècle.” *Latomus* 5: 233–244.
- Brunetti, Giuseppina. 2019. “Proposta (accolta) per il giudice. Gli autografi di Guido delle Colonne.” *Critica del testo* 22 (2): 39–59.
- Camargo, Martin. 1994. “Beyond the *Libri Catoniani*: Models of Latin Prose Style at Oxford University ca. 1400.” *Mediaeval Studies* 56: 165–187.
- Camargo, Martin. Ed. 1995. *Medieval Rhetorics of Prose Composition: Five English Artes Dictandi and Their Tradition*. Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies.
- Camargo, Martin. 2007. “If you Can’t Join Them, Beat Them; or, When Grammar Met Business Writing in Fifteenth-Century Oxford.” In: *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present: Historical and Bibliographical Studies*. Ed. Carol Poster and Linda C. Mitchell, 67–87. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
- Camargo, Martin. 2012. “The Late Fourteenth-Century Renaissance of Anglo-Latin Rhetoric.” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 45 (2): 107–133.
- Camargo, Martin. 2015. “La déclamation épistolaire. Lettres modèles et performance dans les écoles anglaises médiévales.” Trans. Benoît Grévin. In: *Le dictamen dans tous ses états. Perspectives de recherche sur la théorie et la pratique de l’ars dictaminis (XIe–XVe siècles)*. Ed. Benoît Grévin and Anne-Marie Turcan-Verkerk, 287–307. (Bibliothèque d’histoire culturelle du moyen âge 16). Turnhout: Brepols.
- Camargo, Martin. 2016. “Epistolary Declamation: Performing Model Letters in Medieval English Classrooms.” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79 (3): 345–363.
- Chism, Christine. 2002. *Alliterative Revivals*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Clark, James G. 2004. *A Monastic Renaissance at St. Albans: Thomas Walsingham and His Circle, c. 1350–1440*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Copeland, Rita. 2021. *Emotion and the History of Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cornelius, Ian. 2009. *Cultural Promotion: Middle English Alliterative Writing and the Ars Dictaminis*. Diss. University of Pennsylvania.
- Cornelius, Ian. 2010. “The Rhetoric of Advancement: *Ars dictaminis*, *Cursus*, and Clerical Careerism in Late Medieval England.” *New Medieval Literatures* 12: 289–330.
- Cruse, Mark. 2011. *Illuminating the “Roman d’Alexandre”: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 264: The Manuscript as Monument*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
- Delle Donne, Fulvio. 2004. “Una Costellazione di epistolari del XIII secolo: Tommaso di Capua, Pier della Vigna, Nicola da Rocca.” *Filologia Mediolatina* 11: 143–159.

- Doyle, A.I. 1982. "The Manuscripts." *Middle English Alliterative Poetry and its Literary Background*. Ed. David Lawton, 88–100. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.
- Duggan, Hoyt N. and Thorlac Turville-Petre. Ed. 1989. *The Wars of Alexander of Alexander*. (Early English Text Society. Supplementary Series 10). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dutschke, Consuelo W. 1998. "The Truth in the Book: The Marco Polo Texts in Royal 19.D.I and Bodley 264." *Scriptorium* 52: 278–99.
- Faral, Edmond. 1936. "Le manuscrit 511 du 'Hunterian Museum' de Glasgow." *Studi medievali* n.s. 9: 18–119.
- Gilbert, Jane. 2015. "Genus and Genre: The Old French Verse *Roman d'Alexandre*, *Alexander and Dindimus*, and MS Bodl. 264." *Exemplaria* 27 (1–2): 110–128.
- Grady, Frank. 2004. "Contextualizing Alexander and Dindimus." *Yearbook of Langland Studies* 18: 81–106.
- Grévin, Benoît. 2005. "L'Écriture du latin médiéval (XII -XIV siècle). Les paradoxes d'une 'individuation stylistique.'" In: *L'Individu au Moyen Âge*. Ed. Dominique Iogna-Prat and Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, 101–15. Paris: Aubier.
- Grévin, Benoît. 2008a. "Les mystères rhétoriques de l'Etat medieval: l'écriture du pouvoir en Europe occidentale (XIIIe-XVe siècle)." *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 63 (2): 271–300.
- Grévin, Benoît. 2008b. *Rhétorique du pouvoir médiéval. Les Lettres de Pierre de la Vigne et la formation du langage ee politique européen XIII -XV siècle*. Rome: École française de Rome.
- Grévin, Benoît. 2015. "From Letters to *Dictamina* and Back: Recycling Texts and Textual Collections in Late Medieval Europe (Thirteenth-Fourteenth Centuries)." In: *Medieval Letters: Between Fiction and Document*. Ed. Christian Høgel and Elisabetta Bartoli, 407–420. Turnout, Belgium: Brepols.
- Harvey, Barbara F. 1982. "Introduction." In: *The Westminster Chronicle, 1381–1394*. Ed. Leonard C. Hector and Barbara F. Harvey, xiii–lxxv. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Hilka, A. and F. P. Magoun. 1934. "A List of Manuscripts Containing Texts of the *Historia de Preliis Alexandri Magni*, Recensions I<sup>1</sup>, I<sup>2</sup>, I<sup>3</sup>." *Speculum* 9 (1): 84–86.
- Johnson, Eleanor. 2013. *Practicing Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kantorowicz, Ernst. 1957. *Frederick the Second*. Trans. E.O. Lorimer. New York: Ungar.
- Lawton, David. 1979. "Gaytryge's Sermon, 'Dictamen,' and Middle English Alliterative Verse." *Modern Philology* 76 (4): 329–343.
- Lawton, David. 1981. "The Middle English Alliterative *Alexander* A and C: Form and Style in Translation from Latin Prose." *Studia Neophilologica* 53: 259–268.
- Lote, Georges. 1949–1955. *Histoire du vers français. Première partie: Le Moyen Âge*. 3 vols. Paris: Boivin; Paris: Hatier.
- Mooney, Linne R. and Estelle Stubbs. 2013. *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375–1425*. York: York Medieval Press with Boydell and Brewer.
- Mueller, Alex. 2013. *Translating Troy: Provincial Politics in Alliterative Romance*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- Murphy, James J. 1967. "Literary Implications of Instruction in the Verbal Arts in Fourteenth-Century England." *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s., 1: 119–135.
- Parkes, M.B. 2016. "Richard Frampton: A Commercial Scribe, c.1390–c.1420." In: *Pages from the Past: Medieval Writing Skills and Manuscript Books*. Ed. P.R. Robinson and Rivkah Zim. 113–124. London & New York: Routledge.
- Ross, D.J.A. 1955. "Some Unrecorded Manuscripts of the *Historia de Preliis*." *Scriptorium* 9 (1): 149–150.
- Schaller, Hans Martin. 1965. "Studien zur Briefsammlung des Kardinals Thomas von Capua." *Deutsches Archiv für Erforschung des Mittelalters* 21: 317–518.
- Simpson, James. 2002. *The Oxford English Literary History, Volume 2: Reform and Revolution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.



- Steiner, Emily. 2016. "Alliterative Poetry and the Time of Antiquity." In: *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*. Vol. 1: 800–1558. Ed. Rita Copeland, 391–412. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stone, Charles Russell. 2016. "Proud Kings, Polyglot Scribes, and the 1<sup>3</sup> *Historia de preliis*: The Origins of Latin Alexander Romance in Norman and Staufien Italy." *Speculum* 91 (3): 724–744.
- Stubbs, Estelle V. 2015. "Richard Frampton and Two Manuscripts in the Parker Library." *Digital Philology* 4 (2): 225–262.
- Thomson, David. 1983. "The Oxford Grammar Masters Revisited." *Mediaeval Studies* 45: 298–310.
- Thomson, R.M. 2011. *A Descriptive Catalogue of the Medieval Manuscripts of Corpus Christi College, Oxford*. Cambridge: D.S. Brewer.

