LEON BATTISTA ALBERTI AND THE BEGINNINGS OF ITALIAN GRAMMAR

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IT is a commonplace of criticism to speak of the 'universality' of Alberti's genius, and to hold him up as a figure representative of the multifarious interests of Renaissance man. Yet it would be true to say that this 'universality' in him is exceptional rather than typical. No one in his century embraced such a wide range of studies and practical skills. At the same time, though his range was broad, covering both literary and scientific subjects, his learning and understanding were no less profound. The designation of Alberti as a dilettante by some critics (starting from Burckhardt) admits the breadth but overlooks this depth of his studies; but more than that, it fails to recognize what is most characteristic of the man and his achievements: the ability to grasp the essentials of any subject and to contribute in some way to its advancement, either by making a discovery or by writing a treatise—in other words the power of originality. It is this quality of mind combined with wide knowledge and experience that makes him a pioneer and a key figure in the culture of fifteenth-century Italy, in the arts, in literature and language, and in certain sciences. The fact that certain developments and tendencies in these different fields were in some form present in his time and among his contemporaries, in no way diminishes the importance of his initiative as a writer or as an inventor. It was he and not they who composed this or that treatise, devised this or that instrument; and it is a distortion of the truth to regard him as a mouthpiece of others' ideas and practice.

If we want proof of his initiative and originality we can easily draw up an impressive list of 'firsts'. In the arts he wrote the first modern treatises on painting and perspective, on sculpture and on architecture, treatises whose importance and influence are too well known to need elaboration here. In literature and language he was the first to write on emblems and on ciphers; the first to adapt classical metres to Italian poetry; the first to imitate the Virgilian eclogue in Italian; the first to compose humanistic works in the Italian vernacular, whose use

he championed in an age of predominant Latinity. In the sciences
he occupies a first place in geographical surveying and map-
making, while inventions in the fields of optics and hydraulics
have also been attributed to him with a high degree of prob-
ability. In architectural practice his remarkable originality has
long been recognized in the buildings he designed and super-
vised in Rimini, Florence, and Mantua; whilst on some of these
buildings we find, if not the first, at least some of the earliest
examples of the Renaissance revival of antique Roman characters
taken from medals and monuments. This brief list, which is
not exhaustive nor adequate to indicate the full extent and
nature of Alberti's achievement, may here suffice to show that
he stands at the beginning of a wide range of developments in
Renaissance art, letters, thought, and science.[1]

In the context of such diverse original contributions it is
perhaps no surprise to find that Alberti was also the first to
write a grammar of the Italian language, and to do so, as I
hope to show, some sixty years before the far better known and
more influential works of Fortunio and Bembo. The grammar in
question has been known for half a century, but, although Alberti
has been regarded as a strong possible candidate for its author-
ship, no firm proof has until recently been offered that it is in
fact his work. The object of this lecture is to demonstrate his
authorship and to discuss the character and the importance of
the grammar in the history of the Italian language during the
Renaissance period.

That Alberti composed some kind of grammar is confirmed
by his own words in the treatise on ciphers (*De Cifris*) written
about 1466; in which, speaking of the different pronunciation
of *u* and *v*, hitherto rendered by the same letter, he mentions
that he had proposed a distinction in this case: 'alibi cum
de litteris atque caeteris principiis grammaticae tractaremus'
(elsewhere when I dealt with letters and other principles of
grammar).[2] The context of this remark in *De Cifris* is pre-
dominantly Latin, and there is consequently no certainty that
Alberti was referring to a work about Italian grammar. At the

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[1] These facts are well enough known to need no complete bibliography
here. For details see my article on Alberti in *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*,
i (Rome, 1960), 702–9; on antique lettering see also G. Mardersteig, 'L. B. A.
e la rinascita del carattere lapidario nel Quattrocento', in *Italia medievale e
umanistica*, ii (1959), 285 ff. (but cf. M. Meiss, in *Art Bulletin*, xlii (1960),
97 ff.).

[2] A. Meister, *Die Geheimschrift im Dienste der Päpstlichen Kurie* (Paderborn,
1906), 127.

same time, there exists no known Latin grammar attributed or attributable to him, and no other allusion to such a possible Latin work occurs in any other of his writings.

Confirmation that Alberti did write a grammar of the vernacular is found in a letter of Giovanni Augurello which is quoted by Mario Equicola in his *Libro di Natura d'Amore*:

> He was an extraordinary man learned in many disciplines, who, as I have heard, observing the excellence of the Tuscan language, decided to draw up for the first time rules taken from the writings of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, even though he was himself a Tuscan; and he began from the first principles, for, perceiving that the Latin alphabet could not fully express the syllables and words of Tuscan, being in a sense a foreign language alien in part to Latin, he created a new alphabet taking some letters from Latin and adding others . . . . He probably made a fine job of it, like his other excellent works in Latin and vernacular in many branches of learning and especially in architecture and painting, all of which I sought assiduously and found with great delight whilst I was in Florence. But I was never able to discover this work on language; but it was there, according to the reports of reliable persons.[1]

Although Augurello does not name this 'extraordinary man', it is not difficult from the description to identify him as Alberti. Augurello was in Florence between 1474 and 1476, within two years of Alberti's death, and his testimony therefore carries the authority of a near contemporary.[2] Furthermore, his reference to a grammar begun from 'first principles' and to the creation of a new alphabet corresponds fairly closely to Alberti's own allusion in his *De Cifris* to orthographical reforms and grammatical principles. Yet one part of Augurello's letter raises considerable doubts about the reliability of his evidence: the statement that Alberti drew his grammatical rules from the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio—'even though [Augurello adds] he was himself a Tuscan'. This apparently curious qualification needs comment, for it seems to indicate surprise on Augurello's part: it is strange to him, in other words, that a Tuscan like Alberti should base the grammatical rules of the vernacular, not on modern usage, but on the great Tuscan writers of the preceding century; for in doing so he would have been anticipating a principle of linguistic codification established only at

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[1] Quoted and discussed by C. Trabalza, 'Una singolare testimonianza sull' Alberti grammatico', in *Miscellanea Torraca* (Milan, 1912), reprinted in his *Dipanature critiche* (Bologna–Trieste, 1920), 41–71.

[2] On Augurello see now R. Weiss, in *Dizionario biografico*, cit., vol. iv, 1962.

the beginning of the sixteenth century. I will return to this important point later. Suffice it to say here that the attribution of such a principle of imitation to Alberti would not only be an anachronism, it may be excluded *a priori*. For there is no evidence in his works of adherence to the linguistic models of those great writers. Everything points instead to the probability that, if and when writing of Tuscan grammar, he would base himself on contemporary usage and seek assistance from the forms and rules of Latin. It seems likely, therefore, as has been suggested, that Augurello's letter, which we know only through Equicola, may be of quite a late date, and consequently coloured by the ideas prevailing at the time of its writing. Besides, as he himself says, he never saw Alberti's work on this subject; he speaks from report, and quite probably from memory at some distance in time. It seems not impossible, then, to accept his confirmation of Alberti's composition of a Tuscan grammar containing orthographical reforms without accepting all the details of his description.

If this work of Alberti's was about in Florence in 1474, where could it have been and where is it now? To the first part of the question we may answer that it was possibly in the hands of a relative of Alberti, but soon afterwards passed into the library of Lorenzo de' Medici; to the second part that the complete original is now lost, but a manuscript copy, made in 1508, is now in the Vatican library. An inventory of the Medici library drawn up in 1495 contains a volume: *Regule lingue florentine*—without name of author—which is no longer extant.[1] Codex Vaticanus Reginensis 1370 contains a grammar, copied, as the subscription says, from a manuscript in the Medici Library in Rome in December 1508, and therefore most probably from those missing *Regule*; yet this likewise has no author's name, nor even a title. A later hand added simply: 'Della Thoscana senza auttore.' How then can it be said that this is Alberti's work?

Since the first discovery of the grammar at the end of the nineteenth century,[2] though other attributions have been

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[1] E. Piccolomini, 'Delle condizioni e delle vicende della Libreria Medicea privata dal 1494 al 1508', in *Arch. Stor. Ital.*, 3rd ser., xix, 101 ff. and 254 ff.; xx, 51 ff. (on p. 64, item 357, the entry in the 1495 inventory).

[2] It was first mentioned by A. Torri in his edition *Della lingua volgare di Dante libri due tradotti da G-G. Trissino* (Leghorn, 1850), xxxvi–xxxvii; and more accurately described by P. Rajna, *Il trattato De Vulg. Eloqu.* (Florence, 1896), xliv–xlviii. The text was published by C. Trabalza in an appendix to his *Storia della grammatica italiana*. (Florence, 1908), 531–48 (see also 13–22).

advanced, Alberti's authorship has been regarded as most probable, partly on the evidence already mentioned, and partly on the basis of elements in the text itself, starting from the character of the brief preface to the grammar, which reads as follows:

> Those who affirm that the Latin language was not common to all the Latin peoples but possessed only by a few learned scholastics, as we see is the case today, will, I believe, quit this error when they see this work of mine in which I have brought together in brief form the usage of our language. Great and learned minds did the same first among the Greeks, and then among the Romans; and they called such norms of correct writing and speaking, Grammar. What this art consists in in our language, read me and you will understand.

This statement may certainly at first sight seem very curious; and to one eminent scholar fifty years ago it appeared to contain a *non sequitur*.[1] Yet another scholar, F. Sensi, already perceived that it showed some correspondence with parts of the proem to Book III of Alberti's *Della Famiglia*, and that both were strictly related to the Florentine debate of the mid-1430's reported in Flavio Biondo's *De Locutione Romana*, as to whether Rome had two different languages, Latin and vernacular, or one, Latin, from which the vernacular in some sense later derives.[2] The matter may best be clarified by quoting at some length from Alberti's proem to Book III of *Della Famiglia*:

> Italy was on many occasions invaded and occupied by various peoples: Gauls, Goths, Vandals, Longobards, and other such like barbarous uncivilised nations. And as necessity or inclination dictated, the Italians, partly to be better understood, partly to please their masters in their discourse, learned this and that foreign tongue, and the foreign invaders similarly accommodated themselves to ours, I believe introducing many barbarisms and corrupt forms of speech. As a result of this mixture our original pure and cultured language became progressively more spoiled and corrupted. Nor can I agree with those who, marvelling at such a loss, affirm that the common language we now use existed continuously in Italy at that time and earlier, declaring

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[1] V. Cian, 'Le Regole della Lingua Fiorentina e le Prose Bembine', in *Giorn. Stor. della Lett. Ital.* liv (1909), 120–30 (especially 124).

[2] F. Sensi, 'Un libro che si credeva perduto (L. B. A. grammatico)', in *Fanfulla della Domenica*, xxvii (1905), 34, reprinted in *Bibliofilia*, vii (1906), 211–12; and 'Ancora su L. B. A. grammatico', in *Rendiconti del R. Istituto Lombardo di Sc. e Lett.* xlii (1909), 467–75. For the debate and its context, see my inaugural lecture, *A Renaissance Controversy: Latin or Italian* (Oxford, 1960).

themselves unable to believe that women of that age could know what even very learned men now find obscure and difficult in the Latin language, and consequently they conclude that that language, in which men of learning wrote, was a sort of scholastic art and invention . . . . I would like to ask these people in what language if not in Latin any of the ancients wrote, not on matters of learning, but on ordinary everyday things, to their wives, sons and servants. . . . And I would ask them if they think it less difficult for foreigners to speak correctly and properly the language we use today than it is for us to speak that used by the ancients. Do we not see how difficult it is for our servants to express themselves so as to be understood, simply because they do not know how and are unable from their experience to vary the cases and tenses and make the agreements our language also demands. How many women there were in ancient times praised for their eloquence in Latin . . . ! And why should the ancient writers have striven so arduously to benefit their fellow citizens by writing in a little-known language? But it seems inappropriate to expatiate further on this matter here; perhaps I will discuss it more fully elsewhere.[1]

This passage, when read beside the short preface to the Vatican grammar, clarifies the historical perspective in which the grammar should be seen. The vernacular is a corruption of Latin due to barbarian influences; but fundamentally it is still in a sense the Latin language. It is not a survival of an ancient vernacular which co-existed in ancient times with Latin. It possesses cases and tenses and requires agreements just as Latin does. In writing of this matter in 1437–8 Alberti shows here clear awareness, not only of a kind of historical evolution, but also of grammatical principles inherent in the modern language; and he proposes to discuss the matter further elsewhere. This 'elsewhere' could well be the Vatican grammar, for in the same context of the preface we have just quoted, the purpose of the grammar becomes clear: to dispel the error of believing that Latin was and is the language of a few, and therefore distinct and different from the vernacular, the grammar will show their continuity in words and forms and by using the categories of Latin grammar. It will thereby prove that the vernacular is also a regular, grammatical language, and that its origins lie, not in an ancient language different from Latin, but in Latin itself. It is, therefore, a kind of historical grammar. It is not difficult to imagine from the evident correspondences of outlook and expression in the passages quoted that the author of the grammar and the *Famiglia* are the same person.

[1] Translated from the Italian text in L. B. Alberti, *Opere volgari*, ed. C. Grayson, i (Bari, 1960), 154–5.

The imagination has, however, other and still more convincing evidence to rest on. The grammar begins, immediately after the brief preface, with a table of letters in which not only is a distinction made between the forms of *u* and *v*, but accents are used to differentiate between open and close vowels; which accords closely, as scholars were quick to perceive, with the statement in *De Cifris* about orthographical reforms. Sensi also laid stress on a phrase used in the grammar to exemplify the difference between the perfect and the past definite: 'Hieri fui ad Ostia, oggi sono stato a Tibuli': this would identify the author as a Tuscan resident at the time of composition in Rome—which fits Alberti's situation in the years after 1443. The presence of gallicisms and germanisms in the text could also be explained, if Alberti were the author, by his residence in cosmopolitan Rome and his journeys abroad with Cardinal Albergati. Finally, the conclusion of the grammar seemed to echo the spirit of civic pride and usefulness typical of Alberti: 'Fellow citizens, I beseech you, if my efforts are of some avail with you, to welcome this desire of mine to honour our land, and to correct rather than criticize me if you find any mistakes in its execution.'

These were, in brief, some of the main arguments advanced in favour of Alberti's authorship up to 1912, the year in which Trabalza found and published the Augurello letter. This confirmed that Alberti wrote an Italian grammar, but gave it, as we have seen, a character alien to Alberti's outlook, and remote also from the basis of the Vatican grammar, which has nothing to do with Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. In the intervening years opinions have remained divided with the balance of probability inclined in Alberti's favour.[1] It is now possible to ascribe the Vatican grammar to him with absolute certainty, both on further examination of internal evidence and on fresh external evidence which has very recently come to light. I will deal first with the internal evidence.

Analysis of the language of the grammar in the Vatican MS. shows that it abounds in words and phrases typical of Alberti's usage; in almost every case exact correspondences and parallels are to be found in his Italian works. These are too numerous to

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[1] L. Morandi's attribution to Lorenzo de' Medici (or even Leonardo da Vinci) was early rejected (see his articles in *Nuova Antologia*, Aug. 1905, Oct. 1909; also his volume *Lorenzo il Magnifico, Leonardo da Vinci e la prima grammatica italiana* (Città di Castello, 1908)). Various other names have been put forward: Landino, Poliziano, Pulci. The present view is summed up by B. Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana* (Florence, 1960), 267.

illustrate fully here.[1] I select, as examples, two lexical elements which appear to me particularly decisive: first the verb *congettare* which occurs at the end of the grammar evidently with the sense of 'to compose'. 'Si questo nostro opuscolo sarà tanto grato a chi mi leggerà, quanto fu laborioso a me el *congettarlo*, certo mi dilecterà haverlo promulgato . . . .' It is so rare that I can find it in no dictionary or glossary, and one might even be tempted to think it an error, were it not for the fact that this verb occurs in an autograph letter written in 1470 by Alberti to Lodovico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, about his design for the church of S. Andrea. Alberti criticizes the model prepared by Manetti, finding it unsuitable for the marquis's purpose. He goes on: 'Pensai e *congettai* questo qual ve mando. . . . S'el ve piaserà darò modo di notarlo in proportione . . . .'[2] It is apparent from this example that the verb *congettare* is literally a term of art meaning 'to sketch': it is the first step in architectural design, followed, after general approval, by complete drawings in proportion, as the basis for actual construction. This meaning has, by a happy coincidence, been amply confirmed but a few days ago by the publication of a volume on the architect Filarete, who used the term frequently: the author, knowing the example of the substantive *congetto* in Alberti's *Pittura*, believes, in my opinion correctly, that Filarete inherits it from Alberti.[3] It is very significant that Alberti should use this verb when speaking of his grammar; for its use in this context clearly indicates that he regarded the work in the nature of a 'sketch'— the first outline, as it were, for the construction of a grammatical edifice 'in proportione'.

The second example is the participle *seiuncto*, a crude Latinism used adjectivally in the grammar with the meaning 'separate'. This word is likewise missing from the dictionaries, and the only other example I can find is in Book IV of Alberti's *Famiglia*.[4] At the same time, it is typical of a long series of Albertian

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[1] A full analysis will shortly be available in a new edition of the Vatican grammar to be published during 1964 by the Commissione per i Testi di Lingua, Bologna. The material of the present lecture was collected during preparation of this edition in 1961–2.

[2] Archivio Gonzaga, Mantua, F. II. 8. Published by G. Mancini, *L. B. Alberti Opera inedita* (Florence, 1890), 291–2.

[3] P. Tigler, *Die Architekturtheorie des Filarete*, Berlin, 1963 (*Neue Münchner Beiträge zur Kunstgeschichte*, Band 5), 149 ff.

[4] Ed. cit., p. 326, line 17. In the grammar the word is used of prepositions: 'Prepositioni che caggiono in compositione et anchora s'adoperano *seiuncte*. . . .'

lexical innovations based on Latin. The kind of coincidence exemplified by these two cases is too precise to be attributable to mere chance.

Yet an even closer link between the grammar and Alberti appears in features hitherto unnoticed or not completely understood. Besides the distinction between *u* and *v* there appear in the table of letters at the beginning of the grammar certain accents distinguishing open and close vowels; and in particular two signs which differentiate the verb *e* (3rd pers. sing. present tense of *essere*) and the article *e* (masc. plur.) from *e* (conjunction) [Plate VIII]. The presence of double and triple dots over these signs, which are merely for reference (and incidentally are absolutely characteristic of Alberti's usage in manuscripts corrected by him), baffled earlier scholars, one of whom supposed some connexion with Arabic.[1] Disregarding the dots, therefore, we see that the signs themselves come in fact from Greek, and in the case of *e* verb and *e* article are quite simply the signs of the rough and the smooth breathing applied here to a purpose quite different from their true significance. In which event, unless I am mistaken, we have here the first attempt to adapt Greek orthographical features to Italian, anticipating by more than half a century, in spirit if not in form, the more conspicuous reforms of Gian Giorgio Trissino.[2]

This use of the Greek breathing in the grammar links it in a surprising way with Alberti, because I cannot find that anyone else used such signs at that time. It features as a substitute for the letter *h* in Latin manuscripts between the ninth and the eleventh centuries, but does not seem to have been continued thereafter or reintroduced in later times.[3] As far as I have been able to discover, it does not appear in any Latin or Italian

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[1] F. Sensi, article cited in *Rend. R. Ist. Lombardo.* Cf. C. Trabalza, *Storia della grammatica . . .*, cit., 533, 535. For the use of the 'puntini di richiamo' by Alberti cf. the facsimile of his corrections facing pp. 50 and 62 of my ed. of *Musca, Vita S. Potiti*, (Florence, 1953).

[2] On accents in Italian orthography in the sixteenth century see B. Migliorini, 'Note sulla grafia italiana del Rinascimento', in his *Saggi linguistici* (Florence, 1957), 197 ff. (especially 223–4).

[3] For medieval Latin see Sir E. Maunde Thompson, *Introduction to Greek and Latin palaeography* (Oxford, 1912), 64; M. Prou, *Manuel de paléographie*, Paris, 4th ed., 1924, 187; M.-Th. Vernet, in *Bull. d'Information de l'Institut de Recherche et d'Histoire des Textes*, n. 8 (1959), 9, 14, 29; (for a rare example of the twelfth century) B. Bischoff, *Die Süddeutschen Schreibenschulen und Bibliotheken in der Karolingerzeit*, i (Leipzig, 1940), 140, 198. Against this background must be seen the very rare examples of the fifteenth century cited below at (*a*) and (*b*).

manuscript of the fifteenth or sixteenth centuries except the following, all of them Alberti manuscripts:

1. Cod. Gaddiano 84, Biblioteca Laurenziana, Florence. This manuscript of the late fifteenth century contains two works of Alberti.[1] It is not autograph; but at the end of one of the works, *Cena familiaris*, there appears a table almost exactly similar to that of the grammar, showing the same distinction between verb, article, and conjunction [Plate IX *a*]. Here the form of the conjunction is slightly different, and the smooth breathing has become a mere vertical line, but the rough breathing is unmistakable. Apart from this table there is no trace of these signs in the texts transcribed in this manuscript. Yet any doubts that the presence of this table in a completely Albertian manuscript may be fortuitous are removed by our second example.

2. Autograph letter from Alberti to Matteo de' Pasti, 18 November 1454, now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.[2] This is the well-known letter about the form of the Tempio Malatestiano at Rimini, and it provides the most convincing example for our argument, for it contains two instances of the rough breathing on *e* verb [Plate IX *b*, lines 2 and 8]. Alberti does not use the sign consistently throughout the letter, nor introduce other similar signs; but this fact does not lessen the importance of the two cases, which have no parallel outside these manuscripts.

Two other examples show the use of the rough breathing sign in a different and more conventional way—that is, as it featured in medieval Latin manuscripts. If what I said earlier about this use of the sign is true, then the following cases are unique in the Italian fifteenth century, and consequently may be of some interest to palaeographers:

(*a*) Cod. II. IV. 38, Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, contains the largest single collection of Alberti's Italian works, including the *Famiglia* with autograph corrections and additions. Although there is no trace of Greek signs in these, there are two cases of Greek names written (I believe by Alberti himself) in Latin form with the Greek rough breathing in place of *h*: T̔eophrastus, T̔emistocles [Plate X *a*, *b*].[3]

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[1] For a description see *L. B. A. Opere volgari*, ed. cit., 450–1.

[2] *L. B. A. and the Tempio Malatestiano: An autograph letter from L. B. A. to Matteo de' Pasti*, ed. with introduction by C. Grayson (New York, 1957, with facsimile).

[3] In the margins of ff. 103*v* and 113*r* respectively. On this manuscript see *Opere volgari*, ed. cit., 367 ff.; and for the corrections, *Lingua Nostra*, xvi (1955), 4, 105 ff.

(*b*) Cod. 146, Biblioteca Classense, Ravenna, which contains Alberti's *De Pictura* (in the Latin text). This is not autograph, but certainly contemporary with the author. There are some indications, however, that Alberti had a hand directly or indirectly in this copy; and one of these is the presence of a single instance of the rough breathing for *h* in the word hebetiorem (written: ėbetiorem). [Plate X *c*].[1]

Amid the great bulk of Alberti's work these isolated examples attest at most to a sporadic use of these signs in practice. They are, nevertheless, a powerful link with the Vatican grammar, and taken together with the linguistic correspondences already indicated, as well as the other external and internal evidence of which we spoke, they suffice to prove beyond reasonable doubt that Alberti was its author.

The very recent discovery of a single folio in what would appear to be Alberti's hand, containing with small but not insignificant variants the material which in the Vatican grammar immediately follows the preface, namely the table of letters, serves to remove any possible doubt about Alberti's authorship [Plate XI].[2] The variants referred to are such as to suggest that the autograph page represents a trial or earlier stage in the composition of the grammar; but it has the advantage over the Vatican copy of the finished work in showing more clearly the exact nature of some of the orthographical innovations proposed by Alberti. These were evidently modified in transcription by the amanuensis of the Vatican MS. In the case of *u* and *v*, the form of *v* corresponds closely to the reference in *De Cifris* to the proposal to write the letter 'hasta inflexa'. Other cases of consonants, where the Latin alphabet is inadequate to represent the pronunciation of Tuscan, Alberti resolves as follows; the velar pronunciation of *c* and *g* by a

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[1] For more detailed consideration of this manuscript see my article on 'L. B. A.'s *costruzione legittima*', in *Italian Studies*, xix, 1964.

[2] This folio (in Cod. Moreni 2, Biblioteca Riccardiana, Florence) was independently discovered by Dott.ssa C. Colombo, and examined in her article, 'L. B. A. e la prima grammatica italiana', in *Studi Linguistici Italiani*, iii, 1962 (published in Nov. 1963), which touches on some of the evidence already assembled by me and used in this lecture (I am grateful to Sig.na Colombo for advance information of her discovery given to me in June 1963). The fragment adds the final proof of Alberti's authorship, but also raises problems, some of which are briefly discussed here, and will be more extensively examined in an additional note to my ed. of the grammar (see n. 1, p. 298). Meantime the plates here reproduced (VIII and XI) give some opportunity for comparison with the Vatican MS.

fusion of these letters with *h*: the distinction between the voiced and voiceless pronunciation of *z* by *z* and *ç* respectively. And these forms are summed up in the exemplary line: 'Io voglio chel ghiro giri al çio el zembo.' None of these forms were without precedent in vernacular orthography, but they here enter a system, and appear more clearly in the autograph fragment than in the Vatican MS.

The representation of vowel sounds in the fragment is, on the other hand, somewhat puzzling, for Alberti here offers two seemingly alternative solutions, with variations in the forms used for open *e* and open *o*. The form for *o* of the second line has entered his examples in the margins and at the foot of the page; but the form for *e* is confused in the examples of made-up sentences: *nęra* and *pœlle*. These discrepancies, which show inconsistency on Alberti's part in the fragment, do not appear in the Vatican MS., where the system corresponds closely to the second line of the autograph. The system in the latter (i.e. the fragment) is as follows: open *o* is distinguished by the acute accent; close *o* by an inverted circumflex; open *e* (and *e* conjunction) by what appears like a diphthong œ, and is probably simply a version of the ampersand (as frequently used by Alberti elsewhere); close *e* by a form of the smooth breathing (or, possibly, an apostrophe); while both these are distinguished from the verb *è*, which carries the rough breathing sign.

In the Vatican MS. this system is simplified further by the removal of the acute accent from open *o*. This fact, and the absence of discrepancies, indicate that the Vatican version derives from another, later, redaction of the grammar by Alberti. None the less, the fragment clarifies certain details, and adds final confirmation to an already overwhelming case in favour of Alberti's authorship of the Vatican grammar.

One part at least, therefore, of Augurello's description of Alberti's grammar is certainly correct: that it attempted to remedy the inability of Latin letters to represent the sounds of Tuscan by introducing new letters and forms. For this purpose Alberti quite clearly had recourse to Greek, and in this, in general, he anticipated both the problems and the proposals of the sixteenth-century reformers of Italian orthography. It is interesting to speculate as to where Alberti got the idea of borrowing elements from Greek. He undoubtedly knew Greek, but it seems possible that this direct knowledge was not the sole inspiration.[1] I suggest as a probable intermediary the

[1] Cf. G. Mancini, *Vita di L. B. A.*, 2nd ed. (Florence, 1911), 44–46.

well-known *Institutiones Grammaticae* of Priscian; for this work not only appears to have provided the scheme and some of the details for Alberti's grammar, but also to have constituted a principal source for his *De Cifris*. Were further proof needed that he wrote the Vatican grammar, this coincidence would offer still more evidence for the attribution.

Priscian's *Institutiones* open with a lengthy treatise on letters and syllables in Latin and Greek, which would seem to have nothing in common with the beginning of the grammar, where the letters are disposed according to their form.[1] It is much more evidently like the *De Cifris*, which like Priscian begins with an inquiry into *litterarum elementa* and their composition in syllables, and for the purpose uses elements and examples which seem to derive directly from the *Institutiones*. Yet Priscian's first book not only contains a clear statement on the dual nature of the letter *u* as both vowel and consonant (I, 17), but deals on three separate occasions with the use and significance of the sign of the Greek rough breathing (I, 12, 24–26, 47). Some words and phrases of Priscian are also echoed in the grammar, and suggest that the *Institutiones* were present in Alberti's mind when he wrote it.[2] This seems to be confirmed by the order in which Alberti deals with the grammatical categories, which correspond in all but one particular with Priscian's. The sequence in Alberti's grammar is: noun, pronoun, verb, preposition, adverb, interjection, conjunction, construction. In Priscian's order verb precedes pronoun. Whatever the reason for this difference, the fact remains that Alberti's scheme appears based on Priscian in general and in some of its details.[3] One instance of details, for example, is that the grammar, under prepositions, deals first with those occurring in composition, and then distinguishes prepositions according to whether they are mono- or polysyllabic.

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[1] References included in the text are to the edition of M. Hertz, *Prisciani... Institutionum Grammaticarum Libri XVIII*, in the collection edited by H. Keil, *Grammatici Latini* (Leipzig, 1864).

[2] Cf. e.g. the statement in the grammar: 'Ogni parola o dictione Toscana finisce in vocale . . .', with Priscian, *Inst.* i. 9.

[3] For the various schemes in relation to Italian grammar in the sixteenth century see the excellent article by M. Corti, 'Marco Antonio Carlino e l'influsso dei grammatici latini sui primi grammatici volgari', in *Cultura Neolatina*, xv (1955), 196–222. The order of verb and pronoun in Alberti's scheme may have been influenced either by Donatus or by the pseudo-Priscian *De nomine, pronomine et verbo*. For other correspondences between Priscian, *De Cifris*, and the grammar, I must refer to my forthcoming edition, cit. supra.

Priscian had done exactly the same, dividing them more minutely, however, into prepositions of one, two, or three syllables. Again, under construction, the *Institutiones* conclude with a section dealing, *inter alia*, with solecisms and barbarisms; correspondingly we find at the end of the grammar some observations on errors in agreement of number and tense, *nomi barberi* and other *vizi del favellare*.

It would be wrong to pretend that the grammar, a very brief though highly original work, borrowed from the *Institutiones*, which is a vast grammatical-philosophical treatise, more than the scheme, nomenclature, and some particulars of the strictly grammatical part, together with some inspiration regarding letters and orthographical signs. Yet this debt is, in my view, sufficient to show that the first Italian grammar follows, not, as Trabalza wrote, 'gli schemi della grammatica generale latina', but more specifically the model of Priscian; and this same model subsequently served Alberti for another purpose when writing about ciphers in the 1460's. I say 'subsequently' because the grammar must have been composed some sixty or more years before the only surviving complete copy of 1508. It is not possible at present to ascribe a date to the recently discovered autograph fragment; but we may deduce something from the other documents mentioned. I would suggest the letter to Pasti of 1454 as a *terminus ante quem*. The *Cena* is difficult to date, but the corrections on the *Famiglia* MS. suggest a date some ten years earlier than that letter.[1] This would accord more closely with the character of the grammar itself, which, as already mentioned, takes us back to the disputes of the 1430's and the proem to Book III of Alberti's *Famiglia* (1437–8). The example involving Ostia and Tivoli, now we are sure of Alberti's authorship, indicates his probable residence in Rome, that is, after 1443. We may, therefore, with reasonable confidence ascribe the completion if not the entire composition of the grammar to that year or soon after, and certainly to the time when the controversy over the language of Rome was still warm and actual.

Quite apart from that specific context it would seem natural if not indeed inevitable, that the first grammar of Italian, whenever conceived, should base itself on the model of Latin. In this context, however, the Latin basis of Alberti's grammar is dictated by something more than convenience or tradition;

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[1] The *Cena* was written some time after the *Famiglia* (cf. *Opere volgari*, cit., 346); the autograph corrections to MS. II. IV. 38 were probably made before 1443, and perhaps even before 1437 (cf. ibidem, 378–80).

it is a necessary and integral part of the proof that modern Tuscan is its historical if somewhat corrupted descendant, that this vernacular, rather than being a fortuitous or chaotic language, falls by nature into the rules and categories of ancient grammar. Hence the demonstrative rather than preceptive character of Alberti's work. The motive behind its composition is not so much to teach people how to speak and write Tuscan correctly (though this is also implied in the preface), as to show that it possesses a regularity parallel to that of Latin. This major, indeed almost exclusive, purpose is all the more striking because of the author's complete lack of awareness of any other problems of the kind which preoccupied and agitated later generations of grammarians. He addresses his Tuscan grammar to his fellow citizens the Florentines, to those who possess this language and can check and emend his work—to a narrow audience, that is, and without concern for the wider implications of the term 'Tuscan'.[1] There is no assertion within this term of Florentine superiority, no shadow of intention to impose it on others or to rival other regional languages. In other words, there is no wider feeling for an Italian context. The only and constant term of comparison with Tuscan, apart from incidental references to gallicisms and germanisms, is Latin.

The grammar is similarly lacking in literary concerns or prejudices. Its subject and source is ostensibly modern usage: 'l'uso della lingua nostra.' No appeal is made to the past or to literary tradition by way of justifying the existence and virtue of this present language. No mention is made of Dante, Petrarch, or Boccaccio. This is all perfectly in character with the outlook and writings of Alberti; and this feature alone of the grammar should have been sufficient to disqualify several of the candidates put forward at various times for its authorship. In the generation of Lorenzo de' Medici and Cristoforo Landino, failure to include the literary giants of the Trecento would be unthinkable both in theory and practice. With Alberti we are at the beginnings of a new historical awareness and justification by practical utility of the vernacular: an awareness limited to the Latin origins, which dictates dependence on Latin for its regularity as well as for its present and future enrichment. This accounts also for the presence of Latinisms within the Tuscan usage of Alberti's grammar, as it explains the character of the language of his Italian prose writings. To this outlook the generation of Lorenzo

[1] The 'dedication' is contained in the conclusion to the grammar, cit. supra, p. 297.

added a new enthusiasm for the Tuscan literary tradition as a demonstration and justification of the abilities of the vernacular. Later, writers and grammarians of the sixteenth century strove to discount the dependence of the vernacular on Latin typical of Alberti, and to remove the stigma of corruption on the modern language implicit in the fifteenth-century theory of its origins. Principal guarantee of its independence, purity, and regularity became, from Bembo onwards, the literary usage of the great writers of the past.[1]

For this reason alone it is curious that some direct debt of Bembo's *Prose della volgar lingua* to Alberti's grammar should have been argued by Vittorio Cian, for the two works are poles apart in their approach to the regularization of the vernacular: Bembo essentially literary, imitative of the great writers of the past, convinced that a language exists only because such authors have used it; Alberti essentially practical, accepting its existence as an unquestioned fact, and finding its elements in contemporary usage. Cian's argument was based in part on the belief that the Vatican copy of Alberti's grammar was made by Bembo himself. This is undoubtedly not the case; nor are there any other sure grounds for thinking that Bembo had direct knowledge of Alberti's work. The presence of this copy in the Vatican miscellany, which also contains a *De Vulgari Eloquentia* annotated by Bembo, is almost certainly due to a later collector.[2] None the less, whatever the differences of outlook separating these two grammarians and the ages in which they lived, it is still very significant that in 1508, when linguistic controversy was rife, especially in Rome and Urbino, someone with privileged access to the Medici library should have had Alberti's grammar copied; and furthermore, perhaps not long after that date, someone else was sufficiently interested in the work to beg, borrow, or steal the original. As neither original nor copy had the author's name we can be sure that in both cases interest was focused on the content.[3]

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[1] On the growth of these ideas, see also my article, 'Lorenzo, Machiavelli and the Italian language', in *Italian Renaissance Studies*, a tribute to the late Miss C. M. Ady (London, 1960), 410–32.

[2] Cf. V. Cian, article cit. supra. My statement is based on comparison of various Bembo autograph manuscripts with the text of the grammar in Cod. Reg. Lat. 1370. For a more detailed description of this manuscript, its composition and history, see my forthcoming edition of the grammar.

[3] The Medici library was acquired (and brought to Rome) by Giovanni de' Medici on 29 April 1508, and made available to scholars from early in 1510; so that whoever made the Vatican copy in 1508 had special access to the library. See Piccolomini's article, cit. supra, n. 1, p. 294.

Beyond these elements we have little more than conjecture on which to base consideration of the fortune and influence of Alberti's grammar. When Augurello was searching for it in 1474, its existence was evidently known about in Florence, but no one else seems to have been as anxious to find it; and even when it became Medici property, still in Lorenzo's time, though lacking the author's name, no one seems to have been concerned to identify it or make it known. This silence is a clear indication that however dated by the end of the century was the particular controversy over the language of Rome from which Alberti's grammar took its start, his initiative in grammatical thought was a good half-century before its time. When others, as it were, catch up with him at the turn of the century, the situation is already much more complicated by parochial, interregional, and literary concerns. The absence of these complications was in a way an advantage to Alberti rather than a disadvantage. It permitted him to formulate his rules based on usage with great simplicity and brevity. Such an enterprise in the sixteenth century will appear to some quite hopeless in the face of the inevitable questions: what usage? whose usage? present usage? literary usage? and so on. No grammar could begin without explicitly or implicitly resolving the 'questione della lingua'.

These remarks are meant to characterize Alberti's grammar, not to exalt it as a model; it is short and schematic; it omits much, and it includes some things that are, to say the least, curious. The usage it represents is to some extent, inevitably, a personal one, in which popular forms and words co-exist with cultured and latinizing forms and words. But I do not see here, as Cian remarked, 'almost a contradiction between his often latinate exposition and his theoretical inclination for the live language of Tuscany'.[1] There was not and could not be a contradiction in these terms in Alberti's mind. To imagine it would mean ascribing to him a concept of usage of a much later age. There is no opposition or confusion in his work between live usage and learned forms, for no such consciousness of limits was present in him. These criteria come later, for aesthetic more than historical reasons; their absence in Alberti is precisely what permits and explains the co-existence, bland and unproblematic, of learned and popular elements in his grammar.

It seems possible to suppose, nevertheless, that Alberti's grammar was not without some influence in grammatical thought of the sixteenth century. Even though Augurello

[1] Article cit., 125.

apparently never saw it he knew at least, correctly, that it contained proposals for orthographical reform. It is true that none of the particulars of these, with the exception of the acute and circumflex accents, figures in the orthographical treatises of the sixteenth century; which argues the absence of direct influence of the text. But Augurello was not likely, with his marked linguistic interests, to have kept the information to himself in his long and varied career and among his many like-minded friends. The awareness of a problem is the first step towards its solution; and it was not essential to know Alberti's proposals for the knowledge of his awareness to bear fruit. Some reform of the written language was undoubtedly dictated by the advent of printing; but the orthographical question as Alberti had seen it, as Trissino will see it, is scientific and academic rather than strictly practical.[1] It is not a necessity, as the development of modern Italian clearly shows, for it has shrugged off most attempts to interfere with the Latin alphabet, and since the sixteenth century has given up even some elements of that. Whilst it may be possible to see a precedent for this kind of reform in the humanists' concern for the correct orthography of Latin, Alberti appears to have been the first to conceive an interest in phonetics and pronunciation, and to devise some way of bridging the gaps between sounds and representation in the modern language. These are specialized interests which enjoy considerable fortune in the sixteenth century and beyond; and I would like to think of Alberti not merely as a precursor, but as the initiator either through the seed of the problem spread by Augurello, or even through some other knowledge of Alberti's work.

In the more strictly grammatical field it is hardly legitimate to suppose even an influence of a very general nature. At most he was probably known and would excite interest as a forerunner, the first to have seen the possibility of an Italian grammar. Its basis was either unknown or irrelevant to the concerns of a later age; or it was misrepresented by involvement with these concerns, as we have seen in the other part of Augurello's description, which would have Alberti's grammar founded on Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Not that the grammatical

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[1] C. Trabalza, *Storia della grammatica italiana*, cit., 95, describes it as 'un problema d'estetica', which 'risorse col risvegliarsi del sentimento artistico e del culto della forma nel Rinascimento'. For the orthographical reformers of the sixteenth century, see B. Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana*, cit., 367–72.

direction founded on the study of these authors represented the exclusive tendency or the final solution of linguistic regularity arrived at by sixteenth-century grammarians. Amid the vast quantity and complexity of writings on language, one fundamental problem was constantly present—the reconciliation or opposition of literary tradition and modern usage. The sense of Florentinity, which sat lightly on Alberti's shoulders, became for many an incubus, an obsession, making the dilemma of that choice or reconciliation all the more acute. The ownership of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, and the most lively modern idiom of Italy was in this sense an embarrassment, and one which did not afflict non-Tuscans. Yet it also imposed greater obligation, which was ultimately met in its own way by the Accademia della Crusca. This feeling of the natural superiority of the Florentine language was at least as old as the time of Dante, and was alive and vigorous during Alberti's lifetime. So much so that only perhaps a Florentine born and reared in exile, and who lived the greater part of his life outside Florence, could have composed a grammar like this one, exempt from even the slightest taint of *campanilismo*. When compared with later works of this kind, this appears as not the least remarkable feature of this grammar.

In publishing it for the first time (and so far the only time) in 1908, Trabalza alluded in passing to the fact that this grammar accepts the terminology of Latin grammar.[1] But he did not observe, and the fact has apparently so far been overlooked, that this implies the back-dating of many lexical elements of Italian in this field to the middle of the fifteenth century, elements which according to historical dictionaries did not make their appearance until at least the middle of the sixteenth century. Examination shows, indeed, that, as far as is known, some of the terms used by Alberti are hitherto undocumented before the seventeenth or even the nineteenth centuries.[2] It is unlikely however, that he invented all of them or their Italian form. Some of the terms he uses are already to be found in Dante and in fourteenth-century texts; and this suggests that others may well already have existed, even though they were not used

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[1] Op. cit., 21.

[2] Here are some examples: *avverbio, appellativo, articolo, asseverativo, caso, congiugazione, dizione,* &c. (not documented until the sixteenth century); *congiunzione, monosillabo* (subst.) (not documented before seventeenth century); *anormale* (not documented before nineteenth century); *interrogatorii* (subst.) (not hitherto documented at all).

in a vernacular grammar and have not come to light in other documents. They were doubtless commonly employed in the teaching of Latin grammar by means of the vernacular; and from this tradition, which as yet has been insufficiently studied, Alberti might well have drawn.[1] To Alberti the adaptation of Latin terminology to Italian would come naturally, though not necessarily unconsciously. In other fields, where Alberti was aware of being the first writer of modern times, e.g. in painting and architecture, he was obliged to create a technical vocabulary, whose originality has only recently been investigated and emphasized by Gianfranco Folena.[2] If we want further confirmation of this quality as a linguistic pioneer, and of Alberti's consciousness of being an innovator in technical terminology and expression, this time in Latin, we have only to read the opening sentences of Book VI of his *De re aedificatoria*, where he speaks of the 'difficulties (which) every moment arose either in explaining the matters, or inventing names, or methodising the subject'.[3] The ambition to find 'arti e scienze non udite e mai vedute', to improve on or fill the gaps in the inheritance of antiquity, brought Alberti face to face with the problems of communication.[4] These were not questions of style, but more fundamental problems of basic materials needed to convey a practical and useful message; and if they were not to hand, they had to be made. In this context we must appreciate his frequent protestations of efficiency rather than elegance of expression; and in this context we may see also the linguistic innovations of his grammar.

The grammar which we now know to be certainly Alberti's work, has this and all the other marks of his original and inventive mind. If it is not possible to attribute to it much weight in determining the later development of Italian grammatical thought, this does not lessen its significance as a unique achievement. As he writes at the conclusion of his treatise on painting,

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[1] For examples of bilingual grammars cf. R. Sabb: ʿni, in *Studi Medievali*, i (1904), 280–92; A. De Stefano, in *Rev. des langues romanes*, xlviii (1905), 495–529; B. Terracini, in *Romania*, xl (1911), 435, n. 4. For general observations and other manuscript material see especially C. Trabalza, *Storia . . .*, cit., chap. i, 40–41 and relative notes.

[2] 'Noterelle lessicali Albertiane', in *Lingua Nostra*, xviii (1957), 1, 6–10.

[3] Quoted from the translation by J. Leoni, ed. J. Rykwert (London, 1955), 111. The Latin text has: '. . . frequentes difficultates et rerum explicandarum et nominum inveniendorum et materiae pertractandae . . .'.

[4] The phrase quoted comes from the dedication of the *Pittura* to Brunelleschi (cf. edition of L. Mallè (Florence, 1950), 54).

excusing its possible defects: 'no art exists which did not have
its beginnings in things full of errors; nothing is born perfect.'[1]
The first and most essential step is that it should be born.
Italian grammar takes that first step through the agency of Leon
Battista Alberti. Or, to use his own architectural terminology,
he prepared the first *congetto* of Italian grammar, and left to
others the task *di notarlo in proportione*.

[1] Ed. cit., 114 (my translation).

PLATE VIII

PLATE IX

a. Cod. Gadd. 84 (Bibl. Laurenziana, Florence), fo. 7ᵛ

b. Autograph letter of Alberti, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

PLATE X

a. Cod. II. IV. 38 (Bibl. Naz., Florence), fo. 103ᵛ

b. Cod. II. IV. 38 (Bibl. Naz., Florence), fo. 113ᵛ

uc quouuſ loco rugentē colorē. exprīe
ōē. ac debuſ medyſ ſradyſf; te pmirpa
cognitū ē. eofmulto iterū illo dcħ
art ſáemḡ ebctioē agar, demūd
auſ ttaſſe iō ropta c̄ ītā cū uīdē retr

c. Cod. 146 (Bibl. Class., Ravenna)

PLATE XI

Cod. Moreni 2 (Bibl. Riccardiana, Florence)