

## Medieval Correspondence

### Cynehild Cynesigesdohtor

#### Types of Correspondence

- Two major categories
  - Letters patent – *Litterae patentes*
    - Letters that **didn't** need the seal broken to be read.
    - A good SCA analogy would be the scrolls that come with awards.
  - Letters close – *Litterae clausae*
    - Letters that **did** need the seal broken to be read.
    - Letters close issued by the English kings were recorded on the Close rolls beginning in 1204 CE. THIS IS AN AMAZING RESOURCE!
- Within these categories, you might find
  - Personal Correspondence
    - Private letters between family and friends
  - Business Correspondence
    - Letters requesting payment/invoices
    - Letters reminding someone of a debt
  - Religious Correspondence
    - Papal Bulls were pretty popular for a while
  - Governmental Correspondence
    - Missives from the King or other regional authority
    - Diplomatic correspondence

#### Anonymous of Bologna's *Rationes dictandi*, c. 1135

- Salutation
  - The Salutation is an expression of greeting conveying a friendly sentiment not inconsistent with the social rank of the persons involved.
  - General format of a salutation
    - To [recipient's name and description], [sender's name and description], [sending statement]
      - The recipient always precedes the sender, unless the sender is of greater rank
      - The sending statement should run something like "sends greetings and good cheer" or "conveys due reverence" or something to that effect.
      - One of my favorites is the salutation of a teacher to his pupil:
        - "N\_, promoter of the scholastic profession, wishes N\_, his most dear friend and companion, to acquire the teachings of all literature, to possess fully all the diligence of the philosophical profession, to pursue not folly but the wisdom of Socrates and Plato."
      - And the response:
        - "To N\_, by divine grace resplendent in Ciceronian

charm, N\_, inferior to his devoted learning, expresses the servitude of a sincere heart.”

- Salutations can be prescribed, subscribed or circumscribed
  - Prescribed
    - The name of the recipient is written first, followed by titles or description
    - To Miles, most august King of the West...
  - Subscribed
    - The titles or description of the recipient precede the name
    - To the most august King of the West, Miles...
  - Circumscribed
    - A little unclear, *Rationes* says “A salutation is said to be "circumscribed" if the name of the recipient is written in several places in this way: ‘To Innocentius, revered in Christ our Lord, by the grace of God the highest Pontiff and universal Pope of all the holy church, R\_, the bishop of Verona conveys due reverence in Christ.’
- Salutations can also be used to chide someone
  - For example:
    - For instance, if someone wanted to chide someone else who seemed to have deserted good customs and devoted himself to vicious ones, he should express his greetings thus: "Alderic, indecently devoting himself to vicious conduct and presenting himself otherwise than is proper, N\_ his brother" or "once his close friend," "advises him to abandon vices altogether and to return to the pursuit of honor."
    - "N\_, bishop of Faventia although unworthy, to John, presbyter of the church of Holy Mary, sends greetings and pardon according to merit," "greetings as they have been deserved," "pardon insofar as it is considered deserved," or "greetings proportionate to his iniquity" and the like.
- The Securing of Good Will
  - The Securing of Good Will is a certain fit ordering of words effectively influencing the mind of the recipient.
  - Good will may be secured if:
    - The sender mentions something about his achievements, duties, or motives
    - The sender praises the recipient sufficiently.
    - The sender demonstrates in the letter that good will would be beneficial to both parties or “in the purpose of things”, or if the sender connects the giving of good will to things like affection, fellowship, or fatherly feeling
    - The sender demonstrates the future importance of the matter at hand. This type of securing of good will is often employed at the close of a letter.
  - One should continue, throughout all parts of the letter, to secure the good

will of the recipient by praising them and addressing them with due reverence.

- However! (dun, dun, dunnnnnn!)
  - If however the situation arises for a combative letter to be written, that is, for enemies or opponents, the goodwill could in fact be sought in it according to the persons of the adversaries, namely in that fashion which Cicero introduces in his Books of Rhetoric, this method should be used, by all means, if we would lead our opponents into hatred, jealousy, or contention. If the matter at hand is honorable, or if the auditor is known to be friendly, we should seek goodwill immediately and clearly; if it is not honorable, we should use indirection and dissimulation. As a matter of fact, opponents are led into hatred if their disgraceful deeds are cited with cruel pride; into jealousy if their bearing is said to be insolent and insupportable; and into contention if their cowardice or debauchery is exposed.
  - A salutation can also be essentially left off to declare anger or an indignant mind, for example:
    - "Petrus to Johannes"
    - "Petrus to Johannes, worthless and deservedly forsaken servant,"
  - It may also be left off out of fear on the part of the sender, for example:
    - "Who I am you will learn from what is being sent to you."
- Another name for this part of the letter might be 'Brown-nosing'
- The Narration
  - The Narration is the orderly account of the matter under discussion or a presentation of the facts done in such a way that the matter presents itself.
  - The narration should be brief and clear.
- The Petition
  - The Petition is the sender's request
  - There are nine species of Petition
    - Supplicatory
      - A supplicatory petition is one that entreats by prayers that something be done.
      - "Minors often use this form"
    - Didactic
      - A didactic petition uses precepts.
    - Menacing
      - A menacing petition uses threats.
      - "[S]omeone's official office is in a sense a threat, as for instance when a bishop sends a message to admonish one of his subordinates under the force of his office, or when some lord addresses a slave under threat of cutting out his eyes or head or his right hand, and the like."
    - Exhortative

- An exhortative petition uses urging.
  - Horatatory
    - Not defined in *Rationes* but probably the same (or similar to) exhortative, given that the two words mean basically the same thing.
  - Admonitory
    - An admonitory petition uses admonitions.
  - Advisory
    - An advisory petition advises.
  - Reprising
    - A reprising petition uses chiding.
  - Direct
    - A direct petition ask directly that something be done.
- The Conclusion
  - The Conclusion is the passage with which a letter is terminated.
  - It should bring back to the mind of the recipient the subject of the letter.
  - It can be used to affirm or deny
    - Affirming:
      - "If you do this, you will have the entirety of our fullest affection"
    - Denying:
      - "If you fail to do this you will without doubt lose our friendship."
  - The very end should farewell or salute the recipient.
    - "I salute Petrus and Paulus"; in the second person, 'Farewell, Petrus and Paulus, my brothers and friends'; or in the third person, 'May good fortune be increased for Petrus and Paulus.'"

#### Observed Letter Elements

#### Dates

- The anonymous author of *Rationes* does not address how to add the date to a letter, however, we know from the Lisle Letters and Paston Letters, as well as other surviving correspondence, that the date was sometimes included in the salutation or conclusion.
  - In the Paston Letters the date is invariably in the conclusion.
  - A few other examples have the date in the salutation.
  - There may be examples I am unfamiliar with that include a date elsewhere in the letter.
- The dates appear a number of ways
  - Feast Day
    - On Candlemas.
  - Day of the week before a feast day
    - The Friday next before Michaelmas.
  - Day of the week after a feast day
    - The Wednesday next after St. Andrew's Day

- Day of the Month
  - The 13 day of March
- The date can also be written using the old Roman date
  - “pridie Kalendas Apriles”
  - <http://www.latin.org/datecalculator.php> is a good calculator for this
- The year is less frequently listed
  - In early period documents, the indiction is sometimes used as or with the year.
    - The indiction is a fiscal period of fifteen years used as a means of dating events and transactions in the Roman Empire and in the papal and some royal courts. An indiction year began around September 25, but could also be counted from September 3, December 25, or January 1. Because consistency in these matters is utterly unimportant.
    - To calculate the indiction year, take the year, add two, then take the remainder when divided by fifteen and add one.
      - So,  $2015+2=2017$ ,  $2017/15=134$  with a remainder of 7,  $7+1=8$ , so 2015 is the 8<sup>th</sup> year of the indiction.
  - Another option for the year is regnal years, which pop up from time to time throughout our period.
    - Regnal years reckoned from the date of coronation, not from January 1.
    - They can be written a sentence
      - “In the forty-eighth year of the reign of Henry III.”
    - They can also be written using abbreviations
      - Anno E. IV 18 should be read ‘in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of King Edward IV.’
  - A rarer option is to use the year of the world
    - Based on medieval calculations of the age of the world
    - Take the current year and add 5508
  - Finally, some letters use the familiar “Anno Domini” system

#### Locations

- A common element of the conclusion in the Paston letters is the location where the author is sending the letter from. For example:
  - Written at [city name]...
  - Written at my place in [city name]...

#### Signature block

- An element that shows up in the Paston letters is the closing and signature familiar from modern letters.
- In some cases the signature is in the hand of the scribe who wrote the rest of the letter, in others it is in the hand of the sender.
- In some cases there is a closing but no signature and in others a signature but no closing.

- Likewise some letters employ initials instead of signatures. The same variations for signatures and closings above appear with initials.
- A few examples include titles or abbreviations of titles.
- Examples:
  - Your son and lowly servant, JOHN PASTON the youngest
  - By yours, M. P.
  - By your mother
  - John P., K. (for knight)
  - By your cousin DAME ELIZABETH BREWS, otherwise shall be called by God's grace. (This may be the fanciest option, and only appears once)
  - Your lover, J. NORFOLK (In this sense 'lover' meant friend)
  - Yours, J. PASTON

Two Compositions According to the Rules and Observations Above

To Their most pre-eminently esteemed and most worthy majesties of the West, Miles and Æsa, Cynehild Cynesigesdohtor, Their subject, earnestness in the highest loyalty.

Nothing can be said to be truer of Your Majesties than that You are benevolent and gracious rulers who reign over Your Kingdom of the West with a fair and generous hand. Indeed, the reputation of Your munificence is known and celebrated throughout the known world, not unlike stories of His Majesty's skill upon the war field and Her Majesty's beauty and talent with a needle. This ancient Kingdom of the West is fortunate to have such inspiration in art and war and Your subjects owe Your Majesties every filial honor and due reverence. Upon your magnanimity I pray you recognize the many good works of Mistress Clare Elena de Montfort, who is my dearest cousin and the widow of the Earl of Chugiak. To wit, this honorable and worthy peer of Your realm has, on many occasions and by Your worthy example, acted with great charity and kindness to the poor of her manor and lands and has, each feast day, provided food for no fewer than fifteen invalids. She has also, in great piety, caused to be constructed a chapel whereat she maintains through yearly pay, one priest, four chanters, and no fewer than five invalids who say mass daily for her departed husband's soul and the maintenance of Your realm. Therefore, upon Your Majesties' pious generosity, I pray with my whole heart that you grant an annual stipend to the worthy Mistress of 300 pounds so that she may continue to reflect Your noble example. If Your Majesties deign to grant Your unworthy subject's request You will have my eternal love and gratitude.

No more I have to write to your gracious Majesties at this time, but Almighty God have you in his keeping, and send you victory over your enemies and worship increasing to your life's ending. Written at Eskalya on the vigil of the Feast of St. Benedict.

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To Nathan, Viscount but also her student, Cynehild, Mistress of the Laurel sends greetings insofar as they are deserved.

Since I know truly that you are bound to me both by the tie of kinship and by oaths of fealty, I do not hesitate to offer you remonstrance for the reports of idleness and indolence that have come to me. I have received word that, rather than applying yourself diligently to your studies, you have been neglecting your work and acting in a manner not befitting your station. I implore you, therefore, to turn your back on those of your companions who are leading you astray and return to your work. You should do this for the love you bear your teacher and oaths you swore. If you refuse, I will have no choice but to repudiate you as my student.

Written at Eskalya on the Friday next before Lady Day, in the first year of the reign of Miles, King of the West.

### Examples from Period

Example Letter From Boniface to Abbess Eadburga, c. 735

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/basis/boniface-letters.asp>

To the most reverend and beloved sister, Abbess Eadburga, Boniface, least of the servants of God, loving greetings.

I pray Almighty God, the Rewarder of all good works, that when you reach the heavenly mansions and the everlasting tents He will repay you for all the generosity you have shown to me. For, many times, by your useful gifts of books and vestments, you have consoled and relieved me in my distress. And so I beg you to continue the good work you have begun by copying out for me in letters of gold the epistles of my lord, St. Peter, that a reverence and love of the Holy Scriptures may be impressed on the minds of the heathens to whom I preach, and that I may ever have before my gaze the words of him who guided me along this path.

The materials [gold] needed for the copy I am sending by the priest Eoban.

Deal, then, my dear sister, with this my request as you have so generously dealt with them in the past, so that here on earth your deeds may shine in letters of gold to the glory of our Father who is in heaven.

For your well-being in Christ and for your continual progress in virtue I offer my prayers

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Example from British Library Add. MS. 8167,<sup>1</sup> fol. 108v. From Carlin, Martha, and David Crouch, eds. and trans. *Lost Letters of Medieval Life* English Society, 1200-1250. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013, at 84.

The king to a sheriff, greetings. I direct and firmly command you that, with no excuse or delay, you cause what wine you can find at B. to be commandeered for my use. I also order you to arrange whatever wagons and horses you can discover in the nearby villages to be taken, and cause the said wine to be transported. If you find anyone who resists, place him on pledge and surety to come to the king's court and answer to the king for his defiance. Farewell.

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Example from Add. 8167, fol. 126r. From Carlin and Crouch, at 115.

The sheriff of Cambridge [*Vicecomes Cantebrig*] to the serjeants of a hundred, greetings. I have received the lord king's writ that I should make a common summons throughout Cambridgeshire of all who owe the lord king service. Therefore I order you to make that summons so that everyone who owes service to the lord king may be

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<sup>1</sup> British Library Additional Manuscript 8167, *DICTAMINAL TREATISES*: collection of dictaminal treatises, etc., formerly belonging to Westminster Abbey; early-mid 13th cent.; Latin.

ready to make the crossing at Portsmouth, on the morrow of the feast of St. N., as they care for themselves and their properties, lest their lands be taken back into the king's hand for their default. Farewell.

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Example from British Library Add. MS. 8167, fol. 104r-v. from Haskins, Charles H. "The Life of Medieval Students as Illustrated by Their Letters." *The American Historical Review* 3, no. 2 (1898): 203-29, at 210. Also in Carlin and Crouch, at 249. The sentence in brackets is omitted in Haskins.

B. to his venerable master A., greeting

This is to inform you that I am studying at Oxford with the greatest diligence, but the matter of money stands greatly in the way of my promotion, as it is now two months since I spent the last of what you sent me. The city is expensive and makes many demands; I have to rent lodgings, buy necessaries, and provide for many other things which I cannot now specify. Wherefore I respectfully beg your paternity that by the promptings of divine pity you may assist me, so that I may be able to complete what I have well begun. For you must know that without Ceres and Bacchus Apollo grows cold. [Therefore, I hope that you will act in such a way that, by your intercession, I may finish what I have well begun.] Farewell.

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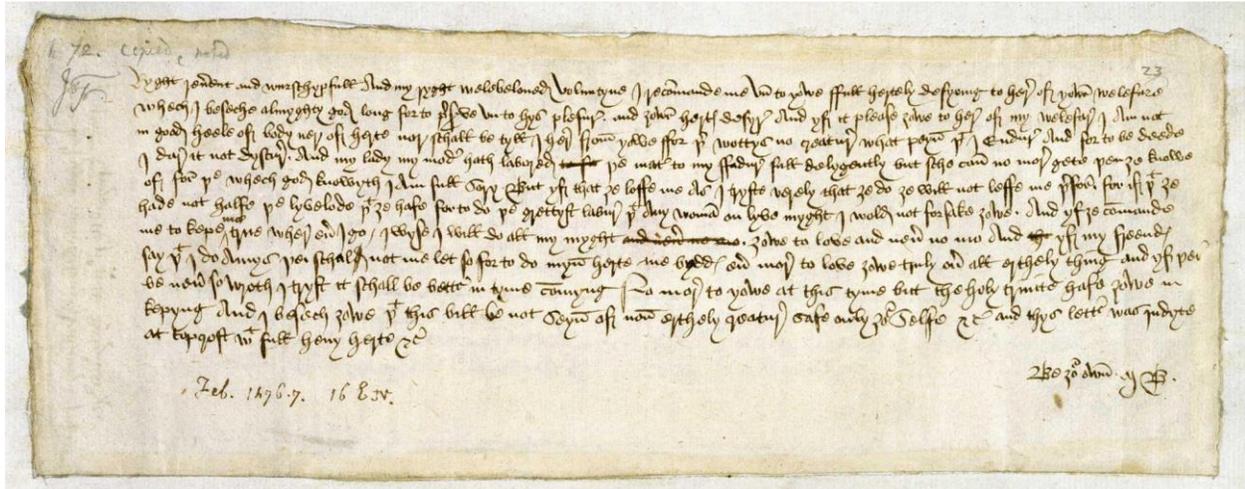
Example from MS. Lat. 8653A,<sup>2</sup> fol. 9, from Haskins, at 214.

To his son G. residing at Orleans P. of Besancon sends greeting with paternal zeal. It is written, 'He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster.' I have recently discovered that you live dissolutely and slothfully, preferring license to restraint and play to work and strumming a guitar while the others are at their studies, whence it happens that you have read but one volume of law while your more industrious companions have read several. Wherefore I have decided to exhort you herewith to repent utterly of your dissolute and careless ways, that you may no longer be called a waster and your shame may be turned to good repute.

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<sup>2</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France Latin Manuscript 8653A, SUMMA DICTAMINIS: decimo quarto saeculo exaratus videtur; unknown date; Latin.

## Examples from the Paston Letters



([http://readingmedievalbooks.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/margery\\_brews\\_to\\_john\\_paston\\_valentines\\_letter\\_c1477\\_01a.jpg](http://readingmedievalbooks.files.wordpress.com/2014/06/margery_brews_to_john_paston_valentines_letter_c1477_01a.jpg))

## Salutations

### Between parents and children:

- Right worshipful sir, in the most lowly wise I commend me to your good fatherhood beseeching you of your blessing. (Let. 52, 1464, John Paston II to John Paston I)
- I greet you well and send you God's blessing and mine... (Common – ex. Let. 74, c. 1466, Margaret Paston to John Paston II)
- Right worshipful and most entirely beloved mother, in the most lowly manner I recommend me unto your good motherhood, beseeching you daily and nightly of your motherly blessing; evermore desiring to hear of your welfare and prosperity, the which I pray God to continue and increase to your heart's desire. (Let. 27, 1459, Elizabeth Poynings to Agnes Paston)

### Between spouses:

- Dear husband, I recommend me to you, &c. (Let 2, 1440, Agnes Paston to William Paston I)
- Right worshipful husband, I recommend me to you... (Common – ex. Let. 17, 1453, Margaret Paston to John Paston I)
- Mine own lady and mistress, and before God very true wife, I with heart full sorrowful recommend me unto you, as he that cannot be merry nor naught shall be till it be otherwise with us than it is yet; for this life that we lead now is neither pleasure to God nor to the world, considering the great bond of matrimony that is made betwixt us and also the great love that hath be, and as I trust yet is, betwixt us, and as on my part never greater. (Let. 85, c. 1469, Richard Calle to Margery Paston)
- Right worshipful and well-beloved Valentine, in my most humble wise I recommend me unto you, &c. (Let. 122, 1477, Margery Paston (née Brews) to John Paston III)
- Mine own sweetheart, in my most humble wise I recommend me unto you, desiring heartily to hear of your welfare, for which I beseech Almighty God

preserve and keep to his pleasure and your heart's desire. (Let. 136, c. 1481, Margery Brews to John Paston III)

Between siblings:

- Worshipful and well-beloved brother, I recommend me to you... (Let. 106, c. 1472, John Paston II to John Paston III)
- Right worshipful sir, I recommend me to you... (Common – ex. Let 107, c. 1472, John Paston III to John Paston II)
- Sir, &c. (Let. 78, c. 1468, John Paston III to John Paston II)

Other:

- Right Worshipful and right entirely beloved, I commend me heartily to you. (Let. 141, after 1495, Earl of Oxford to John Paston III)
- Well-beloved friend, I commend me to you... (Let. 138, 1485, Duke of Norfolk to John Paston III)
- Right worshipful and my most reverend master, I recommend me unto your good mastership. (Let. 45, 1461, Richard Calle to John Paston)
- Right worshipful and my chief lady and cousin, as heartily as I can I recommend me to you. (Let. 126, 1477, Margaret Paston (née Brews?) to Dame Elizabeth Brews)

Conclusions:

Between parents and children:

- No more to you at this time, but God have you in his keeping. Written at Stamford on the 13 day of March. By your son and servant, John Paston the older. (Let. 48, 1462, John Paston II to John Paston I)
- This letter was begun on Friday was sevensnight, and ended this day next after Michaelmas Day. God keep you and give you grace to do as we[ll] as I would ye did. And I charge you beware that ye set no land to mortgage, for if any advice you thereto they arn not your friends... (Let. 91, 1469, Margaret Paston to John Paston II)

Between spouses:

- Written the Friday next before Michaelmas. (Common – ex. Let.67, 1465, Margaret Paston to John Paston I)
- Pecock shall tell you by mouth of more things than I may write to you at this time. The Blessed Trinity have you in his keeping. Written at Caister in haste the Monday next after Palm Sunday. (Let. 56, 1465, Margaret Paston to Jon Paston I)
- No more to you at this time, but the Holy Trinity have you in keeping. And I beseech you that this bill be not seen of none earthly creature save only yourself, &c. And this letter was indite at Topcroft with full heavy heart, &c. By your own M. B. (Let. 121, 1477, Margery Brews to John Paston III)

Between siblings:

- God have you in his blessed keeping. Written at London on the Friday before Our Lady's Day the Nativity in great haste. I pray recommend me to mine sister and to mine cousin Clere. By your brother, W. Paston (Let. 22, 1454, William Paston II to John Paston I)
- God preserve you, and I pray you be of good cheer till I speak with you;

and I trust to God to ease your heart in some things. J. Paston (Let. 90, 1469, John Paston III to John Paston II)

- Written at Waltham beside Winchester the day next Holly Rood Day. J.P., K (Let. 96, 1471, John Paston II to John Paston III)

Other:

- Cousin, I pray you burn this letter that your men ne none other man see it; for any my cousin your mother knew that I had sent you this letter she should never love me. No more I write to you at this time, but Holy Ghost have you in keeping. Written in haste on Saint Peter's Day by candle-light. By your cousin, Elisabeth Clere (Let. 12, 1449, Elisabeth Clere to John Paston I)
- And this I remit to your good remembrance, with God's help, to whom I pray to guide your right to his worship and your heart's desire. Written at Sustead on Saint Andrew Day, &c. Yours, J. Damme (Let. 15, 1448, John Damme to John Paston I)
- Written at Norwich on Wednesday, Corpus Christi Even, anno E. IV 18. Your servant, J. Whetley (Let. 128, 1478, J. Whetley to John Paston II)