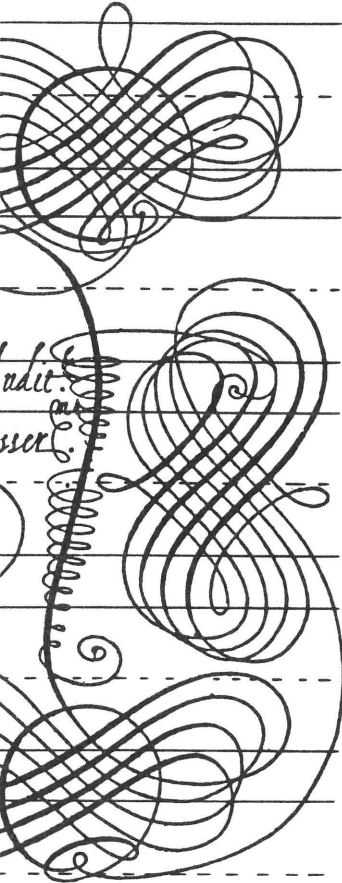


ITALIAN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY
WRITING BOOKS
and the
SCRIBAL REALITY *in* VERONA

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The sixteenth-century copybooks of the Italian writing masters have long been considered to be reflections of the contemporary scribal condition. The impression one gains from reading the works of Arrighi, Taglienti, Palatino, and Cresci, among others, is that *cancellaresca* was the dominant notarial script of the first half of the century, that *cancellaresca formata*, developed by Palatino at mid-century, supplanted it, and that Cresci's *cancellaresca corsiva* reigned supreme at the end. In fact, if we consider the manuscript evidence, specifically the Rosenthal Collection of North Italian Documents at the University of Chicago, we find a very different reality. In sixteenth-century Verona, at least, *cancellaresca*

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was a rather uncommon script. *Cancellaresca formata* indeed appears soon after Palatino's popularization of the script, but it never became popular in Verona. Cresci's claim to have been the inventor of *cancellaresca corsiva* is undermined by the script's appearance prior to the publication of his *Essemplara* (1560). The most common scripts used throughout the century were the italic and the mercantilist. For the common scribes of sixteenth-century Verona, the writing books seem to have had little influence.

It is well known that the invention of printing with movable type in the middle of the fifteenth century greatly disrupted the traditional scribal production of books. Certainly this transformation of the book industry was less immediate and less dramatic than has often been supposed. Book scribes were not put out of business overnight, yet within the course of several decades few scriptoria still continued in the old mode. Some became printing houses, but most simply dissolved. Likewise, some book scribes took up the printer's craft, but most no doubt attempted to continue to earn a living, if not copying books, then by rubricating and illuminating printed books (which had long been an important aspect of scriptorial practice and remained so for many decades into the sixteenth century), or by joining their brethren who worked in the chanceries and business houses, or by becoming writing masters.

We perhaps too often forget that many scribes copied not books, but wrote documents: a scribal process that was beyond the reach of the printing press. With the great increase in governmental bureaucracies on the one hand and a similar burgeoning of capitalistic mercantilism with its vast requirements for clerical and notarial documentation on the other, fifteenth- and especially sixteenth-century Italy provided manifold opportunities for scribal employment. One can almost imagine that many book scribes might have been not at all displeased to give up book production — which was after all a very tedious and demanding occupation — for the comparatively more exciting and varied life as a chancery or mercantilist scribe. The immense numbers of extant documents produced by these scribes provide immediate and incontrovertible testimony concerning the extent of this kind of scribal activity. In comparison, the smaller number

of books produced by scribes illustrates only too well the far greater efficiency of the printing press over hand produced books. It would only be in the late nineteenth century that the machine in the form of the typewriter overtook the scribal function entirely.

The actual occupational nature of a "writing master," often mentioned as a natural alternative for a displaced book scribe, is not entirely clear. Certainly there were a few writing tutors employed by the nobility and wealthy merchants who instructed their children in elegant writing, and certainly there were masters who instructed young chancery clerks, yet comparatively few real opportunities for employment existed in this quarter. A writing master might also be considered as one who had mastered his craft and was acknowledged as a master by his fellows, but this is not an occupational title but rather an indication of achievement. Certainly among the professional chancery or mercantile scribes there were many such individuals. Indeed both of these kinds of writing masters produced writing books, but it is not entirely clear how accurately these writing books reflected the real state of affairs among the great majority of common scribes. Modern calligraphers have seized upon these writing books as models, and as supposed keys to understanding scribal activity during this period. Yet to really understand scribal activity in sixteenth-century Italy it is necessary to consider the entire range of common scribal remains, not just the series of printed writing books made famous by the calligraphic revival of this century.

It is well known that Gutenberg could never have produced his fine types had it not been for the designs provided by Peter Schoeffer, a scribe. It was only natural that the early types looked very like common *textura* and humanistic bookhands, but over the course of several decades, printed books, especially those in roman type, looked less and less like their manuscript precursors, and the Italian roman founts (at least) evolved into a more mature representation of the alphabet which emphasized simplicity and legibility. The set bookhands were thus co-opted by the type designers though the current hands remained as scribal media. Both the roman and italic founts (and the varieties of *cancellaresca*, derived from italic) had their origins in the humanistic hands of Petrarca, Colluccio Salutati, Poggio Bracciolini, and Niccolò Niccoli, yet the nature of type design tended to elevate and rationalize the set humanistic bookhand into a "script" almost impossible to write, but exceptionally easy to read, and conversely the very nature of the notarial scribal habit (i.e., the need for speed) caused the cursive humanistic bookhand to be adapted to form highly current yet still legible hands suitable for the easy and quick writing necessary in the fast-paced chanceries and business houses of Italy. In the main it was this *cancellaresca* which was of most concern in the writing books, which was only appropriate as this was one of the major scripts commonly in use. In addition to the more practical aspects of cutting pens, making ink, and so

THE ITALIAN WRITING BOOKS¹

forth, the writing books contained much on fantastic scripts, the nature of constructing letters by geometrical rules, and the aesthetic qualities of scripts. Unfortunately, much of this less practical material can be highly misleading.

The first of the Italian writing books was produced in Venice in 1514: the *Theorica et practica* of Sigismondo Fanti.² Fanti, a nobleman and professor of mathematics, was neither a scribe nor a writing master. He was certainly familiar with scribal techniques and in the "practica" he offered much sound advice. It was, however, in the "theorica" that he lost touch with the scribal process: unfortunately it was this theoretical aspect — so attractive and so wrong — which influenced many of his successors.

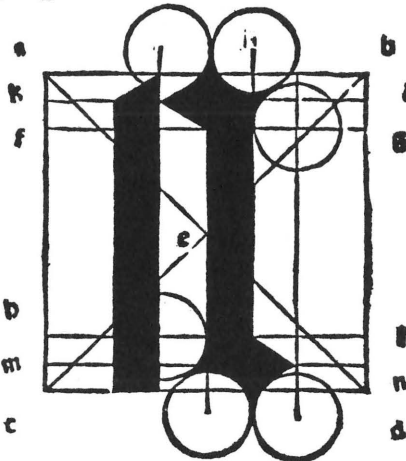
Fanti's work was supposedly directed at scribes (civil and ecclesiastical), secretaries, agents, merchants, artisans, painters, sculptors, and even children. Although each of these potential users might well have found something useful in Fanti's treatise, his work was not aimed at all at the practicing scribe or anyone who had need to write often. It is an intellectual exercise which attempts to explain the shape of letters by means of the so-called divine proportions of Euclidean principles. No doubt a few scribes and perhaps a few more writing masters might have found such exercises of interest, but certainly the bulk of scribal practitioners found the practical advice no more than common knowledge and the geometric theory arcane.

The *Theorica et practica* is divided into four books. The first contains much that is useful. Here he instructs on such basics as cutting the pen, holding the pen, making ink, and on the format of the page (e.g., the width of the page should be $\frac{2}{3}$ the height; the text should be 40 lines of 40 letters; commentaries should be 62 lines of 32 letters). Fanti attempted a brief history of scripts, but made the incorrect assertion that rotunda is the source of all other scripts (I.iii). He then went on to expound his theories on the application of Euclidian principles to writing. Apparently he had critics, as he replied: "Ma pur parlando cum questi tali lo scientifico se piglia gran piacere de quelli; perche epsi dicenno cosae che non stano al cimento. Er se tu li uolessi contradire parlaresti in uano; perche poteristi cosi praedicare al muro o uero pariete. Et bisogna lassarli andare cum il suo errore & proprio fallo. Et in la fouea cum li altri caderano. Intelligenti pauca" (sig. B6v). Fanti discussed the *cancellaresca*, but did not attempt to impose upon it any Euclidian geometry. Where there were to be woodcuts illustrating the script there were only blank spaces. Apparently sufficiently skilled engravers were not to be found who could execute the calligraphic features of the cursive *cancellaresca*.³ Books II, III, and IV are concerned respectively with *rotunda* ("moderna"), *textura* ("Gallica"), and Roman capitals. Each of these scripts is forced to recline upon the Procrustean bed of Euclidian geometry. It is noteworthy that the only script in common use that he considered, the *cancellaresca*, is not so subjected, but that the older bookhands, no longer practiced to any great extent, were so subjected. In any case the *Theorica et practica*

TERTIVS.



Vando la littera.n.gallica desiderarai fabricare.Prima la linea.a.b.in si medesima multiplicarai.Caufando il quadrato.a.b.c.d.Et questo e che adducere lineã in seipsam nihil aliud est nisi super eam diligenter quadratũ describere.Et hoc facto deducera i lã lineã. Cauante li possamenti de la pãna o uero sexto.Et anchora li diametri:li come i le pcedẽte habiamo a pieno dilucidato.Se adũque sopra il possamẽto.l.n.er.p.s.Caufarai le Astã per quello modo medesimo:si come facisti in la doz



astã ultimã de la præcedente littera cioe de lo. M.cum li medesimi pui circuli secũdo la qũtita de la grosseza de la asta naturale : si come habiamo in la. xxxvi. cõsideratione del primo amplamẽte pbato.Et maxie del pdimẽto de la asta p il primo documẽto imaginato. Hauerai la lã.n.optata cũ lineã & diametri:Supficie & circuli designata. Questa littera.n.nõ e molto difficile.Haucndo intelligẽtia. Prima de la præcedente:& anchora de tutã le suã præmissã. Impero che tutã lã cosã creatã o uero ritrouatã o che siano statã in æterno o non siano sempre le infimã hano origine da lã suprànx : qđ erat dicendum.

G iii

provides little insight into the actual nature of scribal practice at this time; rather it gives us an interesting glimpse of the arcane theories of a mathematically minded nobleman. Unfortunately Fanti's arcane theories were quite influential in their own way: scribes could never take them seriously as a means of writing, but authors of writing books often felt constrained to delineate some similar theoretical considerations regardless of their actual relevance to writing.

The 1520s were a propitious time for the production of writing books. Ludovico degli Arrighi produced his *La operina* (Rome, 1522)⁴ and *Il modo* (Venice, 1523),⁵ and Giovannantonio Tagliente produced his *Lo presente libro* (Venice, 1524).⁶ Both of these writing masters (Arrighi was one of the best of the Roman curial scribes and a printer as well; Tagliente was a master writing tutor

Figure 1.

The construction of *textura* or *Gallica* from Sigismondo Fanti's *Theorica et pratica* (Venice, 1514).

in the Venetian chancery) designed *cancellaresca* type for their books, but it was really the superb engraving abilities of Ugo da Carpi and Eustachio Celebrino which enabled the subtleties of the *cancellaresca* to be captured in the printed book. Both Arrighi and Tagliente claimed to have invented this new process of printing entirely from engraved blocks. For instance, Tagliente said, "I have invented, not without a great deal of labor and personal expense, a new way of printing every kind of letter that can be made by the living hand: not printing in the usual way but by a new method never used before in Venice or in her territory."⁷ Arrighi, a more modest man, said, "le'qualitanto se'auicinano alle scritte' a mano, quanto capeua il mio ingegno, & se'puntualmente' in tutto non te rispondono, supplicoti che mi facci iscusato, conciosia che' la stampa non possa in tutto ripresentarte' la viua mano" (sig. A2r).⁸ Yet the technical achievement rests with Ugo da Carpi,⁹ who engraved Arrighi's *La operina*, and with Eustachio Celebrino, who engraved Arrighi's *Il modo* and Tagliente's *Lo presente libro*. Both da Carpi and Celebrino brought out their own writing books: Carpi's *Thesaurus de scrittore* (Rome, 1525),¹⁰ and Celebrino's *Il modo d'imparare de scrivere lettera merchantasca* (Venice, 1525).¹¹ Each of these borrowed in varying degrees from Arrighi and Tagliente.

Ludovico degli Arrighi was a well-rounded bookman. He had apparently worked in a printing house as a young man.¹² In 1510 he published what may well be his first book, the *Itinerario de Ludovico di Vartbema Bolognese nello Egipto* in Rome.¹³ It is possible that he may have worked as a writing master in Venice at some time between 1510 and 1517. We know that by 1517 he was working as a copyist for Vittoria Colonna, Cardinal Giulio de'Medici, Machiavelli, and Lorenzo de'Medici: certainly he was no ordinary scribe. By 1522 he was also working in the Cancelleria Apostolica copying papal briefs, but soon after he seems to have lost his position as he subsequently styled himself as a simple public notary. In 1524, under the patronage of Giorgio Trissino, Arrighi set up a printing shop. He designed his own type, which was cut by his partner Lautizio Perugino. The shop continued until Trissino withdrew his support in April, 1525, having produced 27 editions. Arrighi left Rome and sojourned in Venice until the middle of 1526. Returning to Rome, he once again began printing, using a newly designed type, and produced ten editions. He was apparently killed in the sack of Rome in May 1527 by the troops of the Emperor Charles V.

Arrighi tells us: "Pregato piu uolte', anzi constretto da molti amici benignissimo Lettore, che riguardo hauendo alla publica utilita e commodo non solamente' di questa eta, ma delli posterii anchora, volessi dar qualehe' essemplio di scriuere, et regolarmente' formare' gli caratteri e note' delle' lettore' (che Cancellaresche hoggi da chiamano) uolentier pigliai questa fatica" (sig. A2r).¹⁴ *La operina* is much as Arrighi claims it is. Here there are no theoretical digressions, but simple instructions and clear examples for writing the *cancellaresca*. Arrighi plainly rejected any

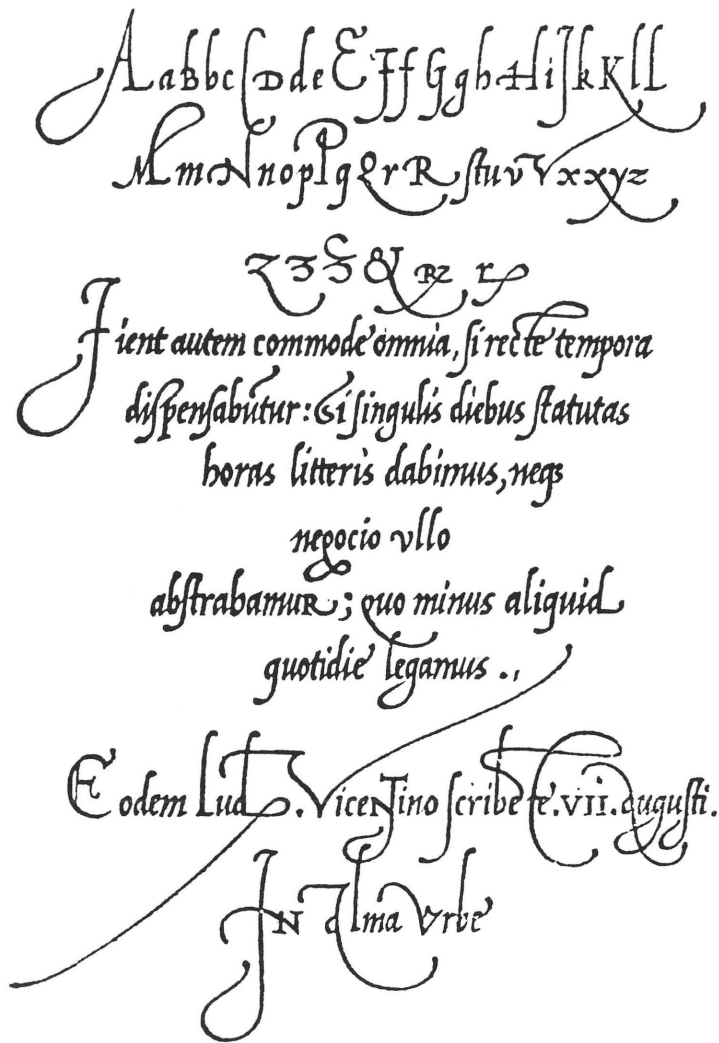


Figure 2.
Ludovico degli Arrighi,
La operina (Rome,
1522).

geometrical notations: “te’ sforzarai di consiliar li con l’occhio, et a quello soddisfare’, il quale’ ti scusara bonissimo Compasso” (sig. A10r). This is certainly a work for those who wish to learn Arrighi’s hand. He reduces the construction of letters to two strokes, broad and thin. From these strokes he develops a bowl from which the round letters derive. His capitals are straight, but his lowercase letters incline to the right. He indicated that words should be separated by the width of an *n*, letters by the space between the legs of an *n*. It is not clear, however, how many professional scribes would have profited from *La operina*, yet for the beginner, at least, here was a clear exposition of the *cancelaresca*.¹⁵

Arrighi’s *Il modo* is more wide ranging: here he considered a variety of scripts. *Il modo* was mostly set in type, rather than being entirely engraved, as was *La operina*.¹⁶ The work is primarily

concerned with cutting the pen: "Hauendoti io descritto, Studioso Lettor mio, l'anno passato un libretto da imparar scriuere littera Cancellaresca, laquale, a mio iudicio, tiene il primo loco, mi pareia integramente non hauerti satisfatto, se ancho non ti dimostraua il modo di acconciar ti la penna, cosa in tal exercicio molto necessaria" p. [3].¹⁷ In addition he had added — he says at the request of many people — additional specimens of other scripts, but they seem to be merely an afterthought. There is no text to accompany the plates of mercantile hands, *rotunda*, Roman capitals, Gothic capitals, etc. It is not clear that these specimens would have been of any real use to any working scribes. It may well be that they are no more than Arrighi's showing off his considerable calligraphic talents.

Figure 3.
Giovannantonio
Tagliente, *Lo presente
libro* (Venice, 1524).

E glie maniffesto che prima lettere, che le lettere Cancellaresche sono de uarie sorte, si come poi ueder nelle scritture uide, le quali to scritto con moure e arte, Et per satisfatione de cui apitise' una sorte, et cui' un'altra, lo to scritto questa' altra uariatione de lettere la qual uolendo imparare offerua la regola del sottoscripto Alphabeto:
A a. b. c. d. e. f. g. h. i. k. l. m. n. o. p. q. r. s. t. u. x. y. z. &c.

Figure 4.
Giovannantonio
Tagliente, *Lo presente
libro* (Venice, 1524).

Le lettere cancellaresche se fanno tonde longe large imitate con matrone Et per cio lo scritto questa' uariatione de lettere la qual imitareai scando li ne hi precati et opate
A a. b. c. d. e. f. g. h. i. k. l. m. n. o. p. q. r. s. t. u. x. y. z. &c.

Le lettere cancellaresche sono molto a parte a grandi tonde, e ad altri, ouado sono fatte con misura, e arte; e tanto piu sono aperte ouado esli lettere e am' uisibili co quali e' regolare fatto si come li uedi qui. Volendo imparare obserua li sequenti modi precati tenendo lo tuo scritto al' abeto per tuo esempio et imparaui a
triv
kidi
viti aduno per uno con li yeloc e uisate tua mano e praticado i fatti suscripti
A a. b. c. d. e. f. g. h. i. k. l. m. n. o. p. q. r. s. t. u. x. y. z. &c.

Giovannantonio Tagliente's *Lo presente libro* is a much more complex work.¹⁸ On the title page, Tagliente claimed that he would teach the true art of writing by geometric rules. In fact, Tagliente seemed only to be paying lip service to Fanti; as an accomplished scribe he must have realized the uselessness of such geometrical principles. Like Arrighi's *Il modo*, *Lo presente libro* is a combination of etched woodblocks and set type. Tagliente experimented with having type cast on a parallelogramular, rather than the standard rectangular, body. This enabled the slanting letters to fit snugly side by side. Apparently, though, this caused endless practical problems in locking up the type.¹⁹

It is difficult to know exactly for whom Tagliente intended the work. He states it is for "ciascuno che si diletta de imparare a scriuere di una o di oiua qualita di lettere, lequali si fanno per geometrica ragione" (sig. A2r) and for secretaries and others. This tells us very little. If, however, we consider Tagliente's career as a teacher of writing and his other educational books, *Lo presente libro* falls into place. In 1515 Tagliente began a series of educational handbooks with the *Thesaurus universale*, a treatise on arithmetic.

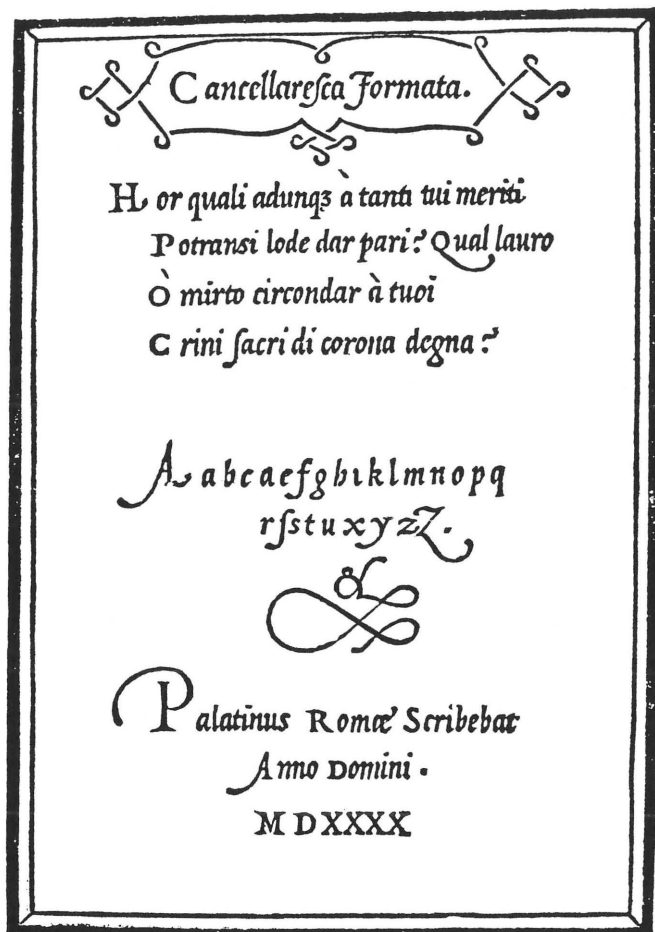
In 1524, the same year in which *Lo presente libro* appeared, he also published the *Libro maistrevole*, a reading book, the *Componimento di parlamenti*, a letter writing book, and a revision of the *Thesauro*, now retitled *Componimento di arithmetica*. About this same time he authored *Il refugio di amanti*, a handbook of love letters, and the *Luminario*, an accounting manual. Finally in 1527 he issued the *Essempio di recammi*, a book of embroidery patterns.²⁰ Thus *Lo presente libro*, issued in shorter and longer versions (both in 1524), fits very well into this series of practical handbooks, this one intended perhaps especially for the sorts of students he had often tutored in the Venetian chancery.

Lo presente libro is a much more ambitious work than Arrighi's two small volumes, though the central concern is still the *cancellaresca*. Like Arrighi, Tagliente discussed the script at length and illustrated it in numerous plates, in a variety of versions. In addition he included specimens of the mercantile hand, certainly a commonly used script in mercantile Venice. However, he also included specimens of the standard bookhands and other less common scripts: *textura*, *rotunda*, Roman capitals, roman upper and lowercase (not a script at all), Arabic, *lettera bollatica*, *lettera imperiale*, Hebrew, decorated Gothic, and Chaldean. Few of these specimens could have served to instruct a student of writing. In the same vein as Arrighi's specimens at the end of *Il modo*, they are examples of a master's abilities to write fantastic and obscure scripts.

Although it is difficult to know how many students profited from these books, or how many scribes improved their hands or learned new ones, we do know that they must have been very popular as all of them went through numerous editions. Arrighi's two works, soon combined, went through about 12 editions. Taglienti's went through at least 34 editions in the sixteenth century, Da Carpi's *Thesauro* went through at least eight editions, but Celebrino's *Il modo* appears to have had only a single edition (although his was a very practical book meant for merchants and may have had other editions read into oblivion; only three copies of the one edition exist).²¹ Certainly it seems likely that the need for scribes was increasing during this period, and these books may have served a need in training them. They may well have served as textbooks in the chancery schools. However, it seems more likely that most scribes, who after all were nothing more than clerks, would have served as apprentices and learned all they needed to know on the job. One cannot help but suspect that the writing books, certainly aesthetically pleasing and engaging to the more educated, were often nothing more than contemporary "coffee-table books" for many of those who bought them, perhaps with the original intention of improving their own handwriting.

With Giovambattista Palatino's *Libro nuovo d'imparare a scrivere* (Rome, 1540), the writing book attained a new level of elaboration.²² The major focus, as was standard, was on the *cancellaresca*, but Palatino seems to have introduced a new variety, the *cancellaresca formata*. This is a more formal (hence a bastard *cancel-*

Figure 5.
Giovambattista
Palatino, *Libro nuovo
d'imparare a scrivere*
(Rome, 1540).



laresca), which is written more deliberately and distinctly. James Wardrup has argued that it was thought most appropriate for dedication copies of verse and for books of hours, and finding such a static niche continued long after the current forms had been superseded.²³

In what we now see as a standard feature of the writing books, a repertoire of "standard" hands, Palatino excelled. He included the mercantile, *lettera da bolle*, *lettera da brevi*, a Neapolitan hand, a French hand, a Spanish hand, a German hand, Gothic, *cancellaresca* written backwards, a highly flourished *cancellaresca*, and Roman capitals. Following these "legitimate" scripts are a series of fantastic and obscure scripts: monograms of intertwined Roman capitals, a rebus, and the Greek, Hebrew, Chaldean, Arabic, Egyptian, Indian, Syrian, and Saracen alphabets. The revised edition of 1543 included more of these obscure alphabets: the *rognosa*, the *tagliate*, and the Illyrican and Cyrillic alphabets. Again it seems unlikely such examples could have served very much of an educational purpose; they surely represent the height of Palatino's achievements as a calligrapher, though not as a teacher.

The work also includes an original treatise on cryptography. This might have been useful to any scribe employed by a large international business house or to one in diplomatic service, but to the great mass of scribes the subject of cryptography must have been of little interest. Palatino may well have been inspired to write this cryptographic treatise by his friend Trifone Benzi who was head of the cypher department in the Vatican. It may be that Palatino never envisioned his work as one which was broadly educational, but rather as one which was intended only for the scribal elite, and the members of the *intelligensia* who were interested in such things. We know that he belonged to a select group of intellectuals in Rome, the Academy of the *Sdegnati*, and served as their secretary, among whose members were also Francesco Maria Molza, the Modenese poet; Claudio Tolomei, a scholar, poet, and courtier; Dionisio Atanagi, a scholar and poet; Girolamo Ruscelli, a writer and linguist; Tomasso Spica degli Spinteri, Palatino's closest friend, and a poet and courtier; Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, a great connoisseur of the arts; and Trifone Benzi. Knowing the circles in which Palatino moved, it should not be surprising that his *Libro* is much more than a simple writing book. Certainly it could serve an educational function, but it seems more to be Palatino's statement concerning the great artistic dignity which he believed ought to be afforded to the master practitioners of his craft, thus raising up the writing master to an equal level with the master artist, author, or composer. No doubt there was a small coterie of such masters who deserved to be known as artists rather than scribes. For the majority of common scribes, though, the writing books became less and less relevant.

Yet not all writing books cut themselves off from their educational roots. For example, Domenico Manzoni's *Libretto molto utile* (Venice, 1546), in less than 50 pages, covered reading, writing, and arithmetic.²⁴ Here there is no pretense to artistic calligraphy, but rather it is a simple straight-forward educational treatise. It treats only the *cancellaresca* and the mercantile hand, obviously the latter, if not the former, would have been of great use to common scribes. Other similar books may well have been published which were used until they fell apart, and so no trace of them has survived. These were the true educational writing books, from which many common scribes may have studied. The larger number of extant copies of the more elaborate writing books may well reflect their being little used as writing books, but rather being purchased for their aesthetic qualities.

The artistic writing books continued to become more and more elaborate as each writing master attempted to outshine his predecessor. Even Vespasiano Amphiareo's *Un novo modo d'insegnar a scrivere* (Vence, 1548),²⁵ which was specifically designed to educate boys, included elaborate stylized alphabets of no use to a common scribe. Here we find alphabets constructed of plants, of tree trunks, of *putti* and masks, and of black strapwork letters.



Figure 8.
Tree-trunk alphabet
from Vespasiano
Amphiareo's *Un novo
modo d'insegnar a scrivere*
(Venice, 1548).

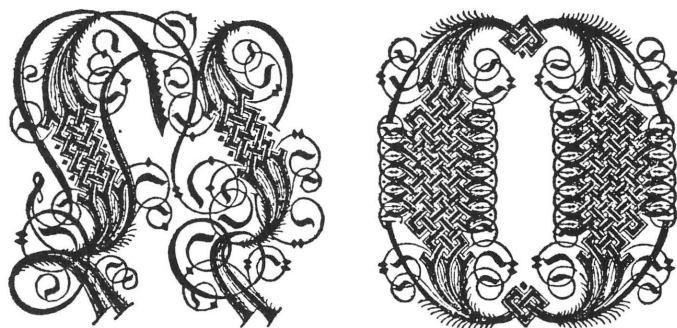


Figure 9.
Black strapwork letters
from Amphiareo's *Un
novo modo d'insegnar a
scrivere* (Venice, 1548).

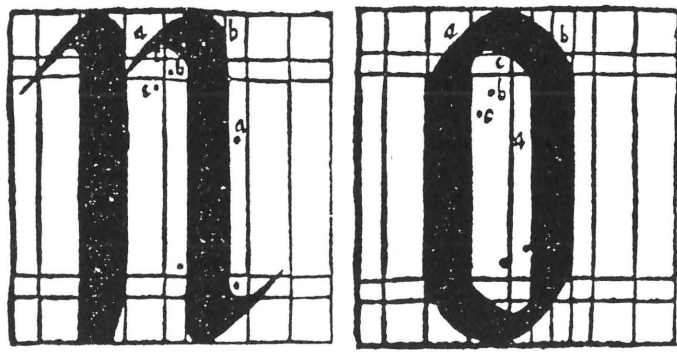


Figure 10.
Geometrical
construction of upright
cancellaresca formata from
Ferdinando Ruano's *Sette
Alphabeti di varie lettere*
(Rome, 1554).

In Rome Ferdinando Ruano, in his *Sette alphabeti di varie lettere* (Rome, 1554),²⁶ not only adopted the elaborate fantastic alphabets of his predecessors, but he took one of the lesser commonly written scripts (*cancellaresca formata*) and several of the other scripts traditionally treated in writing books (Roman capitals, lowercase roman, *rotunda*, *lettera maiuscola bollatica* — decorated round capitals, and *lettera maiuscola Tbedesca* — elaborated gothic capitals) and stretched them all on the rack of geometry. Not only did Ruano fail to consider the most commonly written scripts (*cancellaresca*, common italic, mercantile or notarial), but by forcing the letters into geometric molds, he made his work useless as a writing book. As a theoretical treatise and a work of art it may have succeeded, but as an educational book it had little value.

Figure 11.
Giovan Francesco
Cresci, *Essempiare di piu
sorti lettere* (Rome,
1560).

Gran differenza è da l'huomo, che si presume huomo senza sapere, & da gli animali senza ragione, che sono senza comparatione piu & utili gli animali per lauorare la terra, che gli ignoranti per seruir la republica, On semplice bue da il cuois per calzare, la carne p mangiare, le forze p auare, La innoceto pecora da la lana per vestire, & il lato per cibare, Ma l'huomo ignorante à niuno gioua, nuoce à tutti, offende Iddio et mangia il pane de
Ioannes Franciscus Crescius Facilio Virtuosj.
Lanen. Rome Scrib.

That this was so was certainly realized by the Vatican master scribe Giovan Francesco Cresci, who, in his *Essemplara di piu sorti lettere* (Rome, 1560), criticized “lettere Maiuscole antiche fatte a tronconi, Maiuscole con ma schere, & fogliami, & altre lettere fatte a cartocci, essemi di Rognosa, o Tagliata” (sig. **1r). Cresci promised to explain “vere & nuoue regole, nuoui modi, & nuoui secreti” (sig. **1v).²⁷ What he did was to throw out the old *cancellaresca* in favor of a highly cursive form of that script. It has been difficult to determine whether this was Cresci’s innovation or was merely a statement of current practice. It is well known that all contemporary scripts exhibit a continual pressure to become more cursive, and this is certainly what Cresci’s “new” script illustrates. While we may probably credit Palatino with the codification of the *cancellaresca formata* (as it goes counter to the historical pressure of increasing cursivity), we cannot credit Cresci with much more than illustrating and defining an existing script. Yet in so doing Cresci’s writing book gave this *cancellaresca corsiva* a stamp of respectability. Here, at least, was the potential to affect common scribal practice on a large scale.

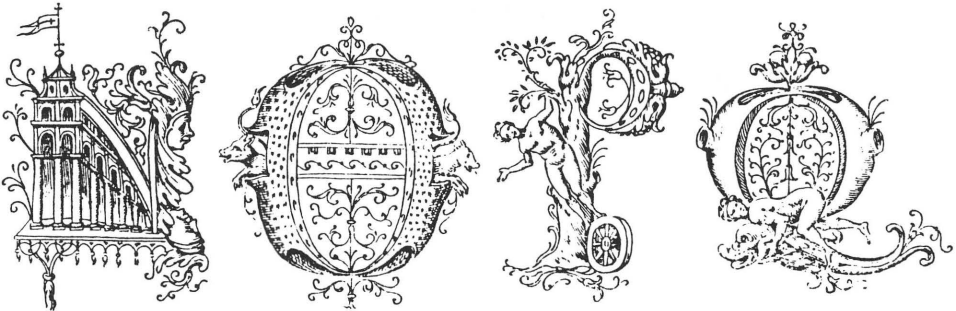


Figure 12.
Giuliantonio Hercolani,
Essempiare utile
(Bologna, 1572).

Certainly Cresci affected subsequent writing books. Although works such as Augustino da Siena’s *Opera . . . nella quale si insegna a scrivere* (Venice, 1565)²⁸ treated the *cancellaresca* and mercantile hands in a traditional manner and included exotic alphabets, the use of copper plates accelerated Cresci’s cursive tendencies.

Giuliantonio Hercolani's *Esemplare utile* (Bologna, 1572)²⁹ was the first Italian writing book produced on copper plates. Here the old *cancellaresca* was treated for the final time, and the newer cursive form was emphasized. The medium of copper plates was especially suitable to the excesses of the *cancellaresca corsiva*. Here we see an increased slope, clubbed ascenders, and a tendency to add flourishes. In addition Hercolani apparently could not resist illustrating his talent with the traditional range of exotic alphabets.

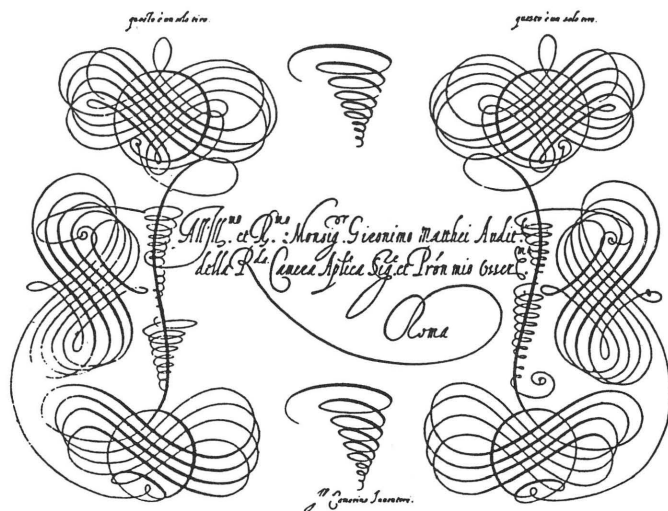


Figure 13.
Marcello Scalzini, *Il segretario* (Venice, 1581).

The writing book at the end of the sixteenth century is best exemplified by Marcello Scalzini's *Il segretario* (Venice, 1581) in which "la lettera cancellaresca corsiva Regina d'ogn'altro carattere" (p. 55), is the only script considered in detail.³⁰ Scalzini and his contemporaries emphasized speed, not legibility. Thus in the writing books at the end of the century we see an elaborated, stylized cursive script which has become more a calligraphic artform than a means of writing legible script. These books are a long way from the simple educational books which initiated the genre in the 1520's.

What then does this series of writing books tell us about the common scribal condition? Were we to accept the writing books *in toto*, we might suppose that *cancellaresca* was the most commonly written script up until about 1580, when *cancellaresca corsiva* replaced it. We might suppose the common varieties of italic or the common medieval cursive bookhand not to have been practised at all, and mercantile and notarial hands only practised occasionally. Further we might suppose that writing could be conducted on geometric principles, and that the many exotic and fantastic alphabets were commonly used. However, if we approach these books critically we may gain some idea of the development of *cancellaresca* at least. With the appearance of Arighi's and Tagliente's works we see a mature *cancellaresca*, a script which had been in use in the Vatican and other chanceries for

nearly a century. Palatino seems to have developed a more formal variety, the *cancellaresca formata* by 1540, and the subsequent writing books give the impression that this was a successful innovation. Cresci claims, in 1560, to have developed the cursive form, *cancellaresca corsiva*, although it is doubtful that he actually invented it. By the 1580s it would seem that this cursive form had become dominant. Unfortunately the writing books are exceptionally misleading, and to understand what was really transpiring among the great majority of common scribes, we must turn to the scribal documents themselves.

THE COMMON
SCRIBAL HANDS OF
VERONA

The Samuel R. and Marie-Louise Rosenthal Collection at the University of Chicago contains nearly 2,500 documents of North Italian origin.³¹ I have considered 230 of these documents, which originated in Verona and its environs, dating from almost every year of the sixteenth century. These items are almost all common notarial documents involving civil and ecclesiastical jurisdictions. They include absolutions of debts, land sales, renewals of investitures, loans, witnessings of patrimonial and matrimonial divisions, accounts, creations of procurators, land transfers for debts, land investitures, renunciations, absolutions, testaments, codicils, arbitrated compromises, divisions of inheritances, citizenship petitions, receipts, letters, etc. In this collection are represented all the major sorts of common scribal items, with the exception of chancery documents. Nonetheless, this body of documents presents a coherent and full picture of the scribal profession — in terms of script — in Verona.

The most common script in use throughout the century was italic, which was never really considered in the writing books (26%, 61x), though of course the various forms of *cancellaresca* are stylized derivations of italic. Closely following is the notarial or mercantile hand (22%, 51x). This is perhaps not surprising, since a great many of the documents are of a notarial or business nature. What is interesting is that italic is often used for the same kind of document. Indeed a mixed form of italic and the mercantile script is the third most common type (15%, 36x). All of these scripts maintained themselves throughout the century.

Likewise *cancellaresca* was used throughout the century, although the greatest concentration is found from 1570 on. This seems to contradict the later writing books which indicate the demise of the *cancellaresca*. We can, however, see the beginnings of the *cancellaresca corsiva*. In a document written in Castagne on January 17, 1567 involving the sale of land, we can see incipient cursive qualities — such as flourishes — in what is a mixed italic and *cancellaresca*.³² This is five years before Cresci claimed to have developed the *corsiva*. In a document written in Verona on Oct. 11, 1578, again involving a land sale, we see the *corsiva*,³³ and in a document, another land sale, written in Trent on May 1, 1587, the typical clubbed ascenders of the *corsiva* are most pronounced.³⁴ Likewise the *corsiva* is evident in a Veronese document, a dowry concession, of April 25, 1588.³⁵ Thus we see the

Figure 14.
January 17, 1567,
Castagne; MS 1756,
Rosenthal Collection.
Courtesy of the
Department of Special
Collections, University
of Chicago.

& d. huch. seu plurim. rei de bono & gestole, cui Floriani &
suo iuri & Am. au. ^{lio} Jtes. dictus, ibide reat. dedit & n
sua valoris eidem venditori acceptanti in auro & moneta. arg
octo qui sut pro resto & completa solutione dictor. dup. q.

Figure 15.
May 1, 1587, Trent;
MS 1801, Rosenthal
Collection. Courtesy of
the Department of
Special Collections,
University of Chicago.

quing. fru. constitut. sup dicto loco, & sup alio contiguo roma
Donato. Et que affectum illeum reservat ipse Donatus in se,
omni Annis ipsi. S. Vincentis: Et si, & quat. ei placeat, & hui. ca
sentire uellet, & non al. nec alio mo, & saluis illius iuribus

Figure 16.
April 25, 1588, Verona;
MS 1808, Rosenthal
Collection. Courtesy of
the Department of
Special Collections,
University of Chicago.

de iure aut factu sub p. m. dupli. s. d. et refectione d. m. n. q.
ac idem ser. h. l. s. p. in singulis. e. a. h. m. i. n. c. o. n. c. e. s. s. i. o. n. e. s. o. l. e. m. n. e.

Figure 17.
May 2, 1547, Verona;
MS 1721, Rosenthal
Collection. Courtesy of
the Department of
Special Collections,
University of Chicago.

m. g. r. u. l. i. t. n. e. q. d. e. d. i. t. De Emione aut. g. r. e. m. i. t. a. f. u. i. t. d. i. c. t. a. d. n. o. s. d. o. n. o. r. u. m.
i. o. s. p. e. c. t. a. b. i. s. e. q. u. o. : E. t. p. d. i. c. t. a. o. i. a. u. s. i. n. g. u. l. a. s. t. u. a. u. s. p. e. c. i. m. i. s. s. i. s. g. r. e. m. i. a. s.
h. a. b. e. r. e. t. e. n. e. r. e. u. t. e. n. d. e. r. e. u. s. o. b. s. e. r. u. a. r. e. u. s. n. u. m. In alio n. facere ut uenire p. s.

corsiva's increasing use, but it remains a minority script compared to the *cancellaresca*. The *formata* is also evident. All four examples of the script were written in the 1570's, well after Palatino introduced it to wider notice in the 1540's. A mixed *formata/italic* is evident in two instances in 1545³⁶ and 1547,³⁷ perhaps directly influenced by Palatino. Finally, the most common bookhand (also used by notarial scribes) prior to the invention of printing, the cursive gothic bookhand, never considered by the writing books, is well in evidence, mostly in the beginning of the century but continuing throughout (7%, 16x). The table of Veronese scribal hands illustrates the variety and mixture of scripts in five-year segments through the course of the sixteenth century.

The actual nature of scribal activity — at least in Verona — is rather different from the impression given in the writing books. The writing books may well have had some small impact upon the evolution of hands, especially the *cancellaresca*, the *cancellaresca formata*, and the *cancellaresca corsiva*. It seems likely that Palatino's *formata* may have been a genuine development which he popularized through his books. On the other hand it seems more likely that the *corsiva* was a natural development that Cresci merely codified.

In the main it seems that the great majority of common scribes learned their trade and lived their lives in total ignorance of the writing books. By the end of the century the writing books had been transformed into minor works of art which were far more attractive to the intellegensia than to any practicing scribes. Whatever influence they had exercised on the common scribes earlier in the century was now at an end.

1. I wish to acknowledge the excellent resources of the John M. Wing Foundation of the Newberry Library, Chicago, without which this project would have been impossible. For bibliographies of the writing books see A. F. Johnson, "A Catalogue of Italian Writing Books of the Sixteenth Century," in *Selected Essays on Books and Printing*, ed. by Percy Muir (Amsterdam: Van Gendt, 1970), pp. 18-40; and Carla Marzoli, *Calligraphy 1535-1885* (Milan: La bibliofila, 1962).

2. Sigismondo Fanti, *Theorica et pratica* (Venice: Ioannes Rubens, 1514). See A. S. Osley, *Luminario: An Introduction to the Italian Writing-Books of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Nieuwkoop: Miland Publishers, 1972), pp. 5-13.

3. *Cancellaresca* is commonly referred to as *cancellaresca corsiva*, but this is not to be confused with the new *corsiva* associated with Cresci later in the century.

4. Ludovico degli Arrighi, *La operina* (Rome: Arrighi, 1522).

5. Ludovico degli Arrighi, *Il modo de temperare le penne* (Venice: Arrighi and Eustachio Celebrino, 1523).

6. Giovannantonio Tagliente, *Lo presente libro insegna la vera arte* ([Venice: s.n.], 1524).

7. Translated by Osley (p. 18) from an application for a privilege to protect several of Tagliente's works.

8. Also see John Howard Benson, *The First Writing Book: An English Translation & Facsimile Text of Arrighi's Operina* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 3.

Sixteenth-Century Veronese Scribal Hands

Year	Cancellaresca	Cancellaresca formata	Cancellaresca formata/ Italic	Cancellaresca/ Italic	Italic	Italic/ cursive bookhand	Italic/ Gothic	Italic/ Notarial	Notarial/ Mercantile	cursive bookhand	Total
1500-1504	10½(3)			10%(3)	23%(7)		13%(4)		27%(8)	17%(5)	(30)
1505-1509	7%(1)				7%(1)				43%(6)	43%(6)	(14)
1510-1514						40%(2)	20%(1)		40%(2)		(5)
1515-1519	8%(1)			15%(2)	8%(1)	38%(5)			31%(4)		(13)
1520-1524					24%(4)	12%(2)		12%(2)	35%(6)	17%(3)	(17)
1525-1529				9%(1)	18%(2)	9%(1)		46%(5)	18%(2)		(11)
1530-1534	6%(1)			6%(1)	38%(6)			25%(4)	24%(4)		(16)
1535-1539				17%(1)	50%(3)			16%(1)		16%(1)	(6)
1540-1544	28%(2)			14%(1)	14%(1)			44%(3)			(7)
1545-1549			22%(2)	22%(2)	34%(3)			11%(1)	11%(1)		(9)
1550-1554				11%(1)	11%(1)	11%(1)		45%(4)	22%(2)		(9)
1555-1559	12%(1)				63%(5)			25%(2)			(8)
1560-1564				11%(1)	67%(6)			11%(1)	11%(1)		(9)
1565-1569				20%(2)	20%(2)			40%(4)	20%(2)		(10)
1570-1574	9%(1)	27%(3)		9%(1)	37%(4)				18%(2)		(11)
1575-1579	38%(3)	12%(1)			12%(1)				38%(3)		(8)
1580-1584	22%(2)				11%(1)			34%(3)	22%(2)	11%(1)	(9)
1585-1589	5%(1)				52%(11)			29%(6)	14%(3)		(21)
1590-1594	67%(10)				13%(2)				20%(3)		(15)
1595-1599				100%(2)							(2)
Total	11%(26)	2%(4)	1%(2)	8%(18)	26%(61)	5%(11)	3%(5)	15%(36)	22%(51)	7%(16)	(230)

Note: In each instance the percentage refers to the proportion of documents written in a five-year period; the bracketed number is the actual number of documents written in that particular script.

9. See Luigi Servolini, "Il Maestro della xilografia a chiaroscuro: Ugo da Carpi," *Gutenberg Jahrbuch* 12 (1937): 107-114.
10. Ugo da Carpi, *Thesaurus de Scrittori* (Rome: A. Blado, 1525).
11. Eustachio Celebrino, *Il modo d'imparare di scrivere lettera merchantescha* ([Venice: s.n.], 1525).
12. See James Wardrup, "Arrighi Revived," *Signature* O.S. 12 (1939): 26-46.
13. See Stanley Morison, "The Earliest Known Work of Arrighi," *Fleuron* 7 (1930): 167-68.
14. Also see Benson, p. 3.
15. Also see Stanley Morison, *The Calligraphic Models of Ludovico Arrighi* (Paris: Frederic Warde, 1926).
16. On Arrighi's types see the following studies by Stanley Morison: "Toward an Ideal Type," *Fleuron* 2 (1924): 57-75; with A. F. Johnson, "The Chancery Types of Italy and France," *Fleuron* 3 (1924): 23-51 (reprinted in Johnson, *Selected Essays*, pp. 83-109); "On Script Types," *Fleuron* 4 (1925): 1-42; "Towards an Ideal Italic," *Fleuron* 5 (1926): 93-129; "The Italic Types of Antonio Blado & Ludovico Arrighi," *Monotype Recorder* 26 (1927): 3-23.
17. Also see Osley, p. 32.
18. See James Wardrup, "A Note on Giovannantonio Tagliente," *Signature*, N.S. 8 (1949): 57-61.
19. Osley, p. 18.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
21. See Johnson, "A Catalogue."
22. Giovambattista Palatino, *Libro nuovo d'imparare a scivere* (Rome: Baldassare di Francesco Cartolari, 1540). See James Wardrup, "Civus Romanus Sum: Giovambattista Palatino and his Circle," *Signature*, N.S. 14 (1952): 3-39.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 21.
24. Domenico Manzoni, *Libretto molto utile per imparar a leggere, scrivere & abaco* (Venice: Comin de Trino, 1546).
25. Vespasiano Amphiareo, *Uno novo modo d'insegnar a scrivere* (Venice: Curtio Troiano, 1548).
26. Ferdinando Ruano, *Sette alphabeti di varie lettere* (Rome: Valerio and Luigi Dorico, 1554).
27. Giovan Francesco Cresci, *Essempolare de piu sorte lettere* (Rome: A. Blado, 1560); facsimile ed. by A. S. Osley (London: Nattali & Maurice, 1968). Also see James Wardrup, "The Vatican Scriptoris," *Signature*, N.S. 5 (1948): 3-28.
28. Augustino da Siena, *Opera . . . nella quale si insegna a scrivere* (Venice: Francesco de Tomaso di Salo, 1565).
29. Guiliantonio Herculani, *Essempolare utile* ([Bologna?: s.n.], 1572).
30. Marcello Scalzini, *Il segretario* (Venice: Domenico Nicolini, 1581); the quotation is from the 1587 edition. See C. Pasero, "Marcello Scalini e la calligrafia del XVI secolo," *La bibliofilia* 35 (1933): 430-39.
31. James S. Grubb, *Historical Documents from Northern Italy: A Guide to the Samuel R. and Marie-Louise Rosenthal Collection* (Chicago: University of Chicago Library, 1984).
32. MS 1756.
33. MS 1778.
34. MS 1801.
35. MS 1808.
36. MS 1718.
37. MS 1721.