

LES *PROGYMNASMATA* EN PRATIQUE,
DE L'ANTIQUITÉ À NOS JOURS

PRACTICING THE *PROGYMNASMATA*,
FROM ANCIENT TIMES
TO PRESENT DAYS

THE PRACTICE OF THE PROGYNMAMATA IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Ancestry and Probability in Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*

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Of the suggestions for composing *encomia* within texts of progymnasmata exercises, among the most common is to begin with praise of a person's ancestry and origins—elements of a category called by the progymnasmata authors “external goods.”² Within the framework described by these texts, ancestry is positioned as an important *locus communis* for the composition of speeches, particularly *encomia* and panegyrics in praise of a notable person or a deceased relative. As an important element of ceremonial and epideictic rhetorical practice, consideration of ancestry and other external goods was integrated into the rhetorical education program represented by the progymnasmata exercises and rhetorical handbooks, reflecting the importance of such speeches in wider civic and ceremonial culture. As Marc van der Poel notes,

it was customary that during funeral ceremonies for deceased men of prominent families, a son or another relative delivered a speech to honour the virtues and successful achievements of the deceased and to foster a spirit of bravery in the audience.³

The *topos* of ancestry was a generative one, an aid to invention that facilitated composition of a variety of texts—be they school exercises or speeches of praise.

Yet *encomia*, taking as their subject people, things, places, animals and even abstract concepts, remained a ubiquitous feature of rhetorical education well beyond antiquity. As Laurent Pernot has shown,

From the Imperial age onward, the *encomium* was included in the standard cycle of rhetoric's “preliminary exercises” (progymnasmata). Praise was a school topic, and scholastic *encomia*, sporadically attested in earlier periods, became conventional in the syllabus.⁴

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2. The earliest use of the term is in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, 1360b. G. A. Kennedy concludes in “The Exercises of Aelius Theon,” in *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks*, p. 1-72, n. 153, that Theon is likely drawing from another, intermediary source rather than Aristotle's text.

3. M. Van der Poel, “The Use of *Exempla*...”, p. 333.

4. L. Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric*, p. 10.

As such exercises became conventional, they became engrained within the texts and culture that writers of the Middle Ages drew from as they produced their own works of rhetorical theory: the same precepts that once guided civic compositions in praise or blame were now available as school exercises not primarily for orators but for composers of prose and verse. In this essay, I argue that medieval understandings of the *topoi* of external goods, including the *topos* of ancestry, reveal the continued echoes of progymnasmata-like theories and exercises. My suggestion is that these exercises influenced theoretical approaches to poetics in the 12th century, an argument I pursue by analyzing the *Anticlaudianus* of Alan of Lille.

In doing so, I hope to complicate the view that the ancient progymnasmata had little impact on medieval rhetorical education and practice, showing that medieval adaptations of the progymnasmata likely informed a mode of education that prioritized not a rigid system of formulae, but a highly adaptive and creative compositional method that was attentive to the role of probability and verisimilitude in the creation of poetic discourse.⁵

The *Topoi* of ancestry in Greco-Roman practice

Attention to probability and truthfulness in relation to descriptions of persons and places can be seen throughout the progymnasmata and other rhetorical works of antiquity, especially in relation to speeches of praise. Indeed, the advice for composing *encomia* is relatively consistent across the works of multiple ancient authors and is often dependent on probabilistic appeals. Aelius Theon, for instance, notes that the three primary things to be praised in an *encomium* are goods of the mind, goods of the body, and external goods.⁶ The first of the external goods mentioned by Theon is ancestry and good birth, and he suggests praise of this sort should immediately follow the *prooemion*.⁷ Hermogenes includes among topics related to external goods national ancestry, citizenship in a *polis*, as well as friends and ancestry.⁸ Aphthonius agrees with Theon that praise of ancestry should follow the *prooemion*, but further suggests that this praise be divided between nation, homeland, ancestors, parents, and the quality of the person's upbringing.⁹ Nicolaus the Sophist states that the first heading for composition under the genre of *encomium* is *apo tou genous*, (from origin), and should also derive from nationality, city, and

5. The progymnasmata are frequently associated with a rigid composition method. See, for example, G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric...*, p. 27-28 and J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p. 41-42.

6. Theon, "The Exercises of Aelius Theon," in G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks*, p. 50.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 50-51.

8. Hermog., "The Preliminary Exercises Attributed to Hermogenes," in G. A. Kennedy, *ibid.*, p. 73-88, in part. p. 82.

9. Aphth., "The Preliminary Exercises of Aphthonius the Sophist," in G. A. Kennedy, *ibid.*, p. 89-128, in part. p. 108.

immediate ancestors.¹⁰ The consistency across these texts speaks to the level of standardization this element of practice underwent. As Laurent Pernot notes,

This system, as prescribed by the theoreticians and put into practice by the orators, was in some ways a kind of “grammar” of praise, a body of rules and usage through which the speakers expressed themselves and conveyed their messages.¹¹

Roman rhetorics, too, would take up issues of praise in relation to persons, places, and things, associating them more clearly with probability. For instance, in *De inventione*, Cicero recommends that the attributes of persons be used to support a wide variety of propositions. These attributes, he notes, can be divided into several main categories: “We hold the following to be the attributes of persons: name, nature, manner of life, fortune, habit, feeling, interests, purposes, achievements, accidents, speeches made.”¹² Cicero reminds us that these topics are not intended to embellish, but rather to provide the basis of probable reasoning, noting,

all argumentation drawn from these topics which we have mentioned will have to be either probable or irrefutable. For, to define it briefly, an argument seems to be a device of some sort to demonstrate with probability or prove irrefutably.¹³

Ostensibly concerned with characterization and display, in reality these topics provide a form of probabilistic invention applicable to both epideictic and other forms of discourse. Moreover, as James Allen notes, Cicero’s thought reflects Greek and, more specifically, Aristotelian rhetorical theories; in his own works, Cicero rendered *pithanon* (persuasive, plausible) as *probabile* and *eikos* (likely) as *verisimile*, employing both terms throughout his works.¹⁴ As we will see, these Latin terms continued to be employed and remained influential in medieval rhetorical and poetic theories, speaking to a degree of continuity between these traditions.

Cicero’s later works also reflect concerns for ancestry and probability as an important *topos* for the composition of praise. In *De oratore*, Cicero’s Antonius suggests that the topics related to external goods do not in reality correspond to traits that are worthy of praise—they are, however, one of the few reliable indicators of virtue. As such, the traditional topics of praise continue to operate in the realm of probable reasoning. For instance, Antonius states:

the qualities that are desirable in a person are not the same as those that are praiseworthy: family, good looks, bodily strength, resources, riches and the rest of the external or personal gifts of fortune do not in themselves contain any true ground for praise, which

10. Nicol., “The Preliminary Exercises of Nicolaus the Sophist,” in G. A. Kennedy, *ibid.*, p. 129-172, in part. p. 156.

11. L. Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric*, p. 29.

12. Cic., *Inv.*, 1, 24.34, trans. H. M. Hubbell (*Ac personis has res attributas putamus: nomen, naturam, victum, fortunam, habitum, affectionem, studia, consilia, facta, casus, orationes*).

13. Cic., *Inv.*, 1, 29, 44 (*Omnis autem argumentatio quae ex eis locis quos commemoravimus sumetur, aut probabilis aut necessaria debet esse. Etenim, ut breviter describamus, argumentatio videtur esse inventum aliquo ex genere rem aliquam aut probabiliter ostendens aut necessarie demonstrans*).

14. J. Allen, “Aristotle on the Value of ‘Probability...’,” p. 47.

is held to be due to virtue alone; but nevertheless, as it is in the employment and wise management of these that virtue itself is very largely discerned.¹⁵

Since these external goods are often the only metric by which praiseworthy virtues and behavior are measured and detected, the successful rhetor must learn to discern and praise true virtue which at best can be detected through the presence of more superficial qualities.¹⁶

Likewise, Quintilian largely conforms to the advice of the progymnasmata writers, consistently employing similar stock *topoi*. For instance, in his discussion of panegyric, Quintilian notes:

The praise of men is more varied [than other forms of discourse]. First of all, it is distinguished with respect to time, that which was before them, that in which they themselves lived, and in regard to those who are dead, that also which followed their death. Antecedent to the birth of a man will be his country, parents, and ancestors, to whom we may refer in two ways, for it will be honorable to them either to have equaled the nobility of their forefathers or to have ennobled a humble origin by their achievements.¹⁷

Ancestry, then, forms the basis of a form of probable reasoning—if one’s ancestors were great and praiseworthy, then to equal or even to surpass them is no surprise, but to fail them is worthy of blame and censure. Similarly, if one lacks noble ancestors, then one’s achievements might be even more praiseworthy, as that person has transcended the conditions of their birth and the achievements of their forbearers.

Quintilian generalizes this advice to other scenarios, noting that while it is primarily applicable to the praise of notable people and the gods, it is also applicable to other things such as animals or inanimate objects.¹⁸ His discussion, however, is consistently framed in terms of the praise of men and he notes the ways compositions praising other categories overlap. For instance, in reference to epideictic compositions in praise of men, Quintilian notes that:

A speaker who tells how Romulus was the son of Mars and was reared by the she-wolf might offer as proofs of his divine origin (1) that, when thrown into the running river, he could not drown; (2) that his actions were all such as to make it credible that he was the son of the god of war; and (3) that his contemporaries had no doubt that he was himself in person taken up to heaven.¹⁹

15. Cic., *De Or.*, 2, 84, 342, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (*[A] lia esse in homine optanda, alia laudanda; genus, forma, vires, opes, divitiae, cetera quae fortuna dat aut extrinsecus aut corpori, non habent in se veram laudem, quae deberi virtuti uni putatur; sed tamen quod ipsa virtus in earum rerum usu ac moderatione maxime cernitur, tractanda in laudationibus etiam haec sunt naturae et fortunae bona, in quibus est summa laus non extulisse se in potestate...*).

16. Cic., *De Or.*, 2, 85, 348-9.

17. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7, 10, trans. H. E. Butler.

18. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7, 6.

19. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7.5-6: [...] *ut qui Romulum Martis filium educatumque a lupa dicat in argumentum caelestis ortus utatur his, quod abiectus in profluentem non potuerit extinguere, quod omnia sic egerit ut genitum praeside bellorum deo incredibile non esset, quod ipsum quoque caelo receptum temporis eius homines non dubitaverint.*

Quintilian emphasizes ancestry and probability as key to the composition of praise, stressing the logical overlap of praising people and more abstract things such as nations or concepts, using analogy to show how similar *topoi* inform the composition of a speech of praise for an abstract concept. For example, Quintilian notes that:

Children bring fame to their parents, cities to their founders, laws to their proposers, arts to their inventors, and institutions to those who initiated them; for example, from Numa came our tradition of worshipping the gods, and from Publicola the practice of lowering the *fascēs* before the people.²⁰

Likewise, within his discussion of invective, he notes that: “Lowness of origin has been a reproach to many, while noble birth has itself made some more notorious for their vices and more hated.”²¹ Ancestry, then, is a potent *topos* not only for praise but also for blame.

Within Quintilian’s framework of praise, cities, laws, arts, and institutions have lineages that may be appealed to when composing *encomia*. As he states:

Cities are praised on similar lines to men. The founder stands for the father, age gives authority (as with peoples said to be autochthonous), and the virtues and vices seen in actions are the same as with individuals, the only special features being those which come from the site and the fortifications. Citizens are a credit to cities as children are to parents.²²

As is clear from the aforementioned examples, ancestry is repeatedly emphasized as a key *topos* within the composition of speeches of praise in ancient texts. My point in reviewing Roman rhetorics alongside the progymnasmata is not to discount the possible influence of the exercises themselves; rather, my goal is to show the extent to which both potential sources (Roman rhetorical theory and progymnasmata exercises) complimented one another in their suggestions and advice for composition. Both the exercises themselves and Quintilian’s advice about the applicability of topics of praise and blame to things beyond public figures and the gods—generally filtered through other authors—would provide literary inspiration to writers in the Middle Ages, providing one of the primary motivations, I suggest, for allegorical writings influenced by the precepts communicated in the progymnasmata.

Medieval epideictic and the progymnasmata

Medieval authors were more varied in their treatment of the genre and in their level of influence from the progymnasmata, but there are nonetheless consistent references to a practice of epideictic composition and speech. Indeed, a variety of

20. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7, 18-19 (*Adferunt laudem liberi parentibus, urbes conditoribus, leges latoribus, artes inventoribus, nec non instituta quoque auctoribus, ut a Numa traditum deos colere, a Publicola fascēs populo summittere*).

21. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7, 19-20 (*Nam et turpitudine generis opprobrio multis fuit et quosdam claritas ipsa notiores circa vitia et invisos magis fecit...*).

22. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7, 26 (*Laudantur autem urbes similiter atque homines. Nam pro parente est conditor, et multum auctoritatis adfert vetustas, ut iis qui terra dicuntur orti, et virtutes ac vitia circa res gestas eadem quae in singulis: illa propria quae ex loci positione ac munitione sunt. Cives illis ut hominibus liberi sunt decori*).

classical forms and genres of epideictic were copied throughout the Middle Ages. As John O. Ward notes,

The longer (*maiores*) and shorter (*minores*), or, as in the case of the declamations of Seneca the Elder, the ‘excerpted’ forms of late Roman declamatory exercises survive in manuscripts from the ninth and tenth centuries A.D. can be explained only by the fact that medieval scholars in the post-Carolingian period thought them useful enough to copy out.²³

Martin Camargo similarly notes that “many elements of the pedagogical program leading up to the declamations were retained and adapted to new uses [,]” including progymnasmata exercises.²⁴ This connection is important to note because declamation, as Quintilian observes, is closely related to the exercises of the progymnasmata—after all, it was declamation that the progymnasmata were preliminary to. The sequence of exercises served as a system for bridging the disciplines of grammar and rhetoric.

The use of the complete series of progymnasmata, however, seems to be somewhat limited, though individual progymnasmata-inspired exercises are relatively more common—for example, Marjorie Curry Woods has observed that medieval students were frequently assigned speeches of impersonation, or *ethopoeia*, in which they compose as women in intense emotional situations.²⁵ John Ward suggests that Priscian’s *Praeexercitamina* are the chief example of medieval transmission of the progymnasmata, noting that while the texts of Priscian were frequently copied, the progymnasmata genre was not otherwise popular, with authors such as Aelius Theon being little known.²⁶ Ward further notes that scholars such as Halm and Clarke place the number of manuscripts containing the *Praeexercitamina* between 400 and 1000. Manfred Kraus, however, disagrees with these estimates, noting that only about 6% (*i. e.* 45) of the surviving recorded manuscripts actually contain the text of the *Praeexercitamina*, despite the immense popularity of Priscian’s other grammatical works.²⁷ Kraus notes as well that copies of the *Praeexercitamina* are most likely to be combined and transmitted with grammatical treatises, suggesting the progymnasmata were not particularly important as an element of rhetorical pedagogy.

While it is important to understand the transmission of the manuscript tradition, especially in terms of surviving copies of the *Praeexercitamina*, I want to suggest in the following paragraphs that these numbers alone do not tell the whole story. Classroom exercises and pedagogical materials are among the least likely to survive and be preserved, as they held little interest to those who maintained and preserved medieval manuscripts. Moreover, general descriptions of the exercises circulated in a variety of works, both classical and medieval. As such, authors such as Alan of Lille might have encountered descriptions or allusions to the exercises in a variety of works, even if complete copies of progymnasmata exercises did not commonly

23. J. O. Ward, *Ciceronian Rhetoric in Treatise...*, p. 120. Ward notes as well that medieval authors such as Anselm of Besate continued to write in the style of *controversia* and that some medieval schools engaged students in judicial declamations based on classical models.

24. M. Camargo, “Epistolary Declamation,” p. 346.

25. M. C. Woods, “Weeping for Dido,” p. 284-293; see also, “Boys Will be Women,” p. 143-166.

26. J. O. Ward, *Ciceronian Rhetoric...*, p. 79.

27. M. Kraus, “Progymnasmatic Exercises in the Medieval Classroom,” p. 176-177.

circulate. As such, I will proceed in this essay from the premise that references to or descriptions of progymnasmata exercises in the medieval period reflect at least some knowledge of the exercises and their general character and implementation.

In any case, despite the number of surviving texts, the most likely candidate for direct transmission of progymnasmata exercises in the period is through Priscian's *Praeexercitamina*. Priscian's exercises largely conform to the advice for composing *encomia* offered by Hermogenes. Following Hermogenes, Priscian treats the *topos* of ancestry in relation to praise and blame and observes that the general lines of argument for the praise of an individual are race, citizenship, and lineage.²⁸ These topics provide the basis for further praise related to other deeds and accomplishments. As such, Priscian's advice and common topics follow the general pattern of Greco-Roman advice from progymnasmata texts—to begin with external goods such as ancestry and lineage before moving to a discussion of deeds and works. His works are thus reflective of the “grammar of praise” discussed by Pernot.

Yet, as I note above, other authors may also have offered composers such as Alan of Lille a window into the pedagogical practices of the Greco-Roman progymnasmata. Isidore of Seville, for instance, does not follow the typical structure of the progymnasmata even as he reproduces and comments on many of the same exercises. For instance, while he discusses praise in several instances, the *topoi* of external goods play little part in these discussions. When discussing hymns and occasional oratory, Isidore notes that: “‘Hymns’ are translated from Greek into Latin as ‘praises’ (*laudes*)” and that: “*Epithalamia* are wedding songs, which are sung by rhetoricians in honor of the bride and groom.”²⁹ Isidore, however, offers no advice for the composition of such texts. Elsewhere, he states that:

panegyricum is an extravagant and immoderate form of discourse in praise of kings; in its composition people fawn on them with many lies. This wickedness had its origin among the Greeks, whose practised glibness in speaking has with its ease and incredible fluency stirred up many clouds of lies.³⁰

Despite this negative reaction to panegyric, Isidore seems to consider it a distinct genre from epideictic more broadly, or as he describes it, demonstrative, speech. Panegyric receives its description under his section on books and ecclesiastical offices while demonstrative speech is considered in his section on rhetoric and dialectic. Indeed, demonstrative speech is discussed alongside progymnasmata

28. Priscian, “Fundamentals Adapted from Hermogenes,” 61. Latin text from K. F. Halm (ed.), *RLM*, p. 556: *Loca vero laudis vel vituperationis haec sunt: gens, ut a Latinus Graecus, civitas, ut Romanus Atheniensis, genus, ut Aemilianus Alcmaeonides.*

29. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 1, 39, 17-8, trans. S. A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and O. Berghof: *Hymni autem ex Graeco in Latinum laudes interpretantur. Epithalamia sunt carmina nubentium, quae decantantur ab scholasticis in honorem sponsi et sponsae.* The Latin text for the *Etymologies* is from: W. M. Lindsay, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum Libri XX* (available online at: <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/e/roman/texts/isidore/home.html>).

30. Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies*, 6, 8, 7: *Panegyricum est licentiosum et lasciviosum genus dicendi in laudibus regum, in cuius compositione homines multis mendaciis adulantur. Quod malum a Graecis exortum est, quorum levitas instructa dicendi facultate et copia incredibili multas mendaciorum nebulas suscitavit.*

exercises such as *prosopopeia*, *ethopoeia*, and confirmation and refutation.³¹ That the two topics are several books apart from one another seems to indicate Isidore viewed them as different activities. Nonetheless, Isidore appears to understand the ends of epideictic in relatively traditional ways. In his book on rhetoric and dialectic, he notes that “Demonstrative argument is so called because it describes (*demonstrare*) some particular thing, either by praising or by blaming. This class has two species: praise (*laus*) and blame (*vituperatio*).”³²

While the widespread popularity of Isidore’s *Etymologies* offers one possible source of transmission for the general ideas of the progymnasmata, if not direct practical advice,³³ the cathedral school of Chartres was arguably the center of continental learning related to rhetoric and epideictic composition. Home to Bernard of Chartres (the teacher of John of Salisbury—John mentions him frequently in his *Metalogicon*—and likely the teacher of Alan of Lille), Thierry of Chartres (author of important commentaries on *De Inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*), and, if we are to judge from the citation practices of both John and Thierry, the home to at least a partial manuscript of Quintilian, Chartres stands out as a likely center for general rhetorical education. John of Salisbury, for instance, would draw from Quintilian’s discussions of panegyric in his own discussion of the topic in the *Policraticus*. In a section of the *Policraticus* devoted to moderation in bestowing gifts to others, John quotes Quintilian:

[...] ideas or physical acts, although they be palpably good or absolutely bad, incur at times vituperation or praise at the will of him who passes judgment. Aristotle however thinks that the place where panegyrics or denunciations are delivered makes a very considerable difference, for much depends upon the character of the audience as well as upon generally accepted convictions. He teaches in his *Rhetoric* that general credence is given particularly to those virtues which people approve of in the person praised; or, on the other hand, in the case of one denounced, the same credence is granted those vices which all dislike, and as often as possible the advantages accruing to the people individually should be emphasized (for all approve the expedient, while views on integrity are divergent). Literary activities will win less honor in Sparta than in Athens, endurance and fortitude perhaps more. The inhabitants of the former city deemed it honorable to live by plunder; those of the latter held law in respect. Frugality would probably be hated by the Sybarites, while to the ancient Romans self-indulgence was the greatest crime.³⁴

31. *Ibid.*, 2, 12-14.

32. *Ibid.*, 2, 4, 5: *Demonstrativum dictum, quod unamquamque rem aut laudando aut vituperando demonstrat. Quod genus duas habet species: laudem et vituperationem.*

33. Several scholars have commented on the possibility of Isidore’s *Etymologies* as an influence on continued use of the *progymnasmata*. See G. Knappe, “The Rhetorical Aspect of Grammar Teaching in Anglo-Saxon England,” p. 16; C. D. Lanham, “Freshman Composition...,” p. 121; J. Loveridge, “How do you want to be wise?,” p. 71-94.

34. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus*, 8, 2, 231-232, trans. by J. B. Pike. Latin text from Clemens et Webb, 8, 2, 713a-714a: *Corporis autem uerisimilis est commendatio sed perfecta numquam; nam bona eius queunt semper auferri inuito; nature enim eius et debilitari potest iugiter et corrumpi. Aduentitiorum uero perfunctoria gratia est, et nec ueram nec perfectam habent laudem, imo nec uerisimilem. Sufficit eis si uel probabilem imitentur; siquidem in utramque partem flectuntur facile et, nisi possidentium iuuentur usu, non ad laudem sunt quam ad uituperium proniora. Nan diuitiae et potentia et gratia, cum plurimum uirium dent, in utramque partem certissimum faciunt experientum morum, fitque possessor ab eis quondoque melior interdum peior. Ceterum opera ipsa mentis aut corporis, etsi simpliciter bona uel absolute mala sint, uituperationem interdum aut laudem contrahunt pro arbitro iudicantis. Vnde et interesse plurimum putat Aristoteles ubi quidque laudetur*

Here, John echoes both Cicero's suggestion that only true virtue should be praised, as well as Quintilian's discussion of Aristotle and the variability of audience when composing and delivering *encomia*. Indeed, John's discussion of the variability of audiences in Sparta, Athens, and the Sybarites is lifted wholesale from Quintilian, who uses the same examples to make a similar point.³⁵ John also discusses exercises similar to the progymnasmata in his *Metalogicon*, noting that Bernard of Chartres was accustomed to explaining to his students that "the poets and orators who were to serve as models for the boys in their introductory exercises in imitating poetry and prose."³⁶

Less prominent and even anonymous works also seem to reflect knowledge of the progymnasmata, and these discussions are often centered on the relationship between rhetorical expression and probability. For instance, an anonymous rhetorical tract contained in the manuscript Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, Latin 7530 offers a relatively complete discussion of the *encomium urbis* genre.³⁷ The author of this text notes that

The dignity of the founder furnishes the first praise of cities, and pertains to famous men and even gods, as Athens is said to be founded by Minerva: and these things should not seem fabulous, but true (*et ne fabulosa potius quam vera videantur*).³⁸

This short excerpt is important to note, because even anonymous rhetorical texts seem to recognize the applicability of ancestry to composing speeches or literary works. Moreover, this text also reproduces the language of probability that is common in Quintilian and other Greco-Roman texts. In the following section, I hope to demonstrate the continued influence of the progymnasmata in medieval rhetorical and literate culture by closely analyzing several sections of Alan of Lille's *Anticlaudianus*. In doing so, I highlight how Alan consistently appropriates the

aut vituperetur. Nam plurimum refert qui sint audientium mores, quae publice recepta persuasio; docetque in Rhetoricis ut illa maxime quae probant esse in eo qui laudabitur publice credant, aut in eo contra quem dicitur ea quae omnes oderunt, eritque quotiens fieri poterit singulorum docenda utilitas (quod enim expedit, omnes approbant, etsi honestum aliud aliis uideatur). Studia litterarum minus honoris merentur Lacedemoniae quam Athenis; forte plus patientia, fortitudo. His raptu uiuere honestum, aliis cura legum; frugalitas apud sibaritas fortassis odio foret, ueteribus Romanis summum luxuria crimen.

35. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7, 23-25: "Aristotle however thinks that the place where praise or blame is given makes a difference. For much depends on the character of the audience and the generally prevailing opinion, if people are to believe that characteristics of which they especially approve are present in the person to be praised, and those which they hate in the person to be denounced. In this way, there will be no doubt about their judgement, because it will have preceded the speech. One should also always put in some praise of the audience itself, for this makes them well disposed; and whenever possible, this should be combined with serving the interests of the case. Literary learning will earn less honour at Sparta than at Athens, endurance and courage more. Among some peoples, it is honourable to live by plunder, in others to respect the laws. Frugality might seem repulsive to the Sybarites, luxury the worst crime in the eyes of the Romans of old." (*Interesse tamen Aristoteles putat ubi quidque laudetur aut vituperetur. Nam plurimum refert qui sint audientium mores, quae publice recepta persuasio, ut illa maxime quae probant esse in eo qui laudabitur credant, aut in eo contra quem dicimus ea quae oderunt; ita non dubium erit iudicium quod orationem praecesserit. Ipsorum etiam permiscenda laus semper [nam id benivolos facit], quotiens autem fieri poterit cum materiae utilitate iungenda. Minus Lacedaemone studia litterarum quam Athenis honoris merebuntur; plus patientia ac fortitudo. Raptu vivere quibusdam honestum, aliis cura legum. Frugalitas apud Sybaritas forsitan odio foret, veteribus Romanis summum luxuria crimen.*)

36. John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon*, 1, 24., trans. D. D. McGarry.

37. Link to digitized manuscript: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b84900617>

38. The translation here is my own. Latin text from K. F. Halm (ed.), *RLM*, p. 587: *Urbium laudem primum conditoris dignitas ornat idque aut ad homines inlustres pertinet aut etiam ad deos, ut Athenas a Minerva dicitur constitutas: et ne fabulosa potius quam vera videantur.*

language of probability and the progymnasmata, most especially in his discussions of the “ancestry” of the seven liberal arts.

Praising the liberal arts

Alan of Lille, termed the universal doctor for his broad knowledge, was born at the beginning of the 12th century. He very likely knew John of Salisbury, and certainly studied at the University of Paris and at Chartres cathedral school, or, at the very least, in the company of those trained at Chartres (most likely Thierry).³⁹ He is known primarily for his two literary works, *The Complaint of Nature* and the *Anticlaudianus*, the latter of which will be discussed here (though he is also the author of an art of preaching, among other works). The full title of Alan’s poem is *Anticlaudianus de Antirufina*, (*The Antithesis of Claudian’s Against Rufus*); Claudian’s *Against Rufus* was a text that attempted to represent a completely evil man, while Alan’s poem sought to do the opposite—to describe the completely good man.

In Alan’s *Anticlaudianus*, the key to the perfect man’s process of perfection is the influence of the liberal arts. The poem begins with the allegorical Nature mourning that her creations are always flawed. To perfect her work, she calls upon the virtues, and Prudence suggests that they assist Nature in her goals (a course of action that the other virtues support after hearing Prudence’s wise counsel). Prudence notes, however, that together with Nature they will only be able to create the body of the perfect man and will therefore need a soul from God. Prudence, after much demurring, eventually agrees to serve as the ambassador for Nature, the other virtues, and for the perfect man himself. Reason then orders the Seven Liberal Arts to construct for Prudence a chariot that might take her safely to God. As they begin their work on the chariot, The Liberal Arts are introduced one by one through elaborate descriptions, and together they fashion the various components of the chariot so that Prudence might complete her journey.

Though the poem of course continues well past this point, with Prudence and Reason eventually reaching God successfully through the aide of Theology, my concern lies within Book II and III of the text, which focus on the Liberal Arts of the Trivium and their role in the construction of the chariot for Prudence. In these books, Alan introduces each of the Arts in turn, beginning first with Grammar, then Logic, then Rhetoric (reflecting the students’ typical progression through these disciplines). The introductions of each of Art follows a carefully organized approach, beginning with a general description of the Art’s physical qualities, a description of its goals and functions, and finally a detailed genealogy discussing the major figures associated with that Art. This organization, I suggest, shows the influence of the *topoi* related to external goods and ancestry discussed in Greco-Roman progymnasmata texts which I have discussed above.

39. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, J. J. Sheridan (ed.), “Introduction,” p. 11.

While Alan's descriptions of the disciplines begin with physical descriptions of the allegorical Arts, before moving on to their social and disciplinary functions, they end with a discussion of the discipline's lineage of thinkers and practitioners. These individuals are positioned analogously to the lineage and ancestry of a person, which I contend suggests Alan is adapting advice from rhetorical handbooks or progymnasmata exercises to inform his compositions (the general organization may stem from Quintilian's discussion, for example). Matthew of Vendôme, a contemporary of Alan, also seems to suggest a similar structure for praise of the arts in his *Ars versificatoria*, though he omits the description of lineage that is emphasized by Alan at the end of his own sections of praise:

Philosophy then, painted without artificial charms, seems to breathe out, as it were, by some special prerogative a divine reverence and to scorn by inferences of many kinds the frailty of human nature. A severe brow signals the inflexibility of matronly modesty; a spirited eyebrow indulges itself with no sign of petulance; the ardor of the eyes proceeding with direct and penetrating regard refuses to be turned away to secondary things. Lively complexioned cheeks banishing from itself the adultery of fashioned color, proclaims active living; alert lips touch another modestly, lest from too much talking they venture to wander, and such nobility makes its face beautiful, because from proper purpose of mind it proclaims activity; an appearance shaped from unfailing vitality is determined to disavow fragile nature. Her stature of indeterminate description cannot at all be defined in fixed terms. Her garments, as Boethius asserts, perfected of delicate threads, with clever craft and lasting material—in revealing its character and attributes, human ingenuity becomes infirm, eloquence goes begging, and human discretion confesses itself to suffer offense. Indeed, while maintaining watch on school books it does not cease to bestow the joys of an eloquent heart among the nourishing and servant arts...⁴⁰

Like Alan, Matthew begins by describing the physical characteristics of the allegorical Philosophy before discussing the discipline's goals and functions. Alan differs primarily in his addition of the Arts' lineage or ancestry at the end of each description, as we will see momentarily. These similarities suggest that modeling epideictic composition was an increasingly common activity, and that the *topoi* discussed by Cicero and the authors of the progymnasmata continued to function as generative

40. Matthew of Vendôme (*Mathei Vindocinensis*), *Ars Versificatoria*, 2, 5: *Haec igitur, nullius artificii picturata deliciis, quadam speciali praerogativa quasi divinam videtur expirare reverentiam et multimodis conjecturis humane nature fragilitatem fastidire: frontis severitas matronalis modestie rigorem pollicetur; virile supercilium nullo nutu petulantiae praenuntio luxuriat; ardor oculorum directo et penetrabili procedens intuitu ad partes collaterales renuit obliquari; genarum vivida superficies, yprocrite coloris a se relegans adulterium, studiose mentis praedicat exercitium; labia succincta sibi invicem modeste vicinantur, ne ex frequentia multiloquii praesumant evagari, et tanta vultum eius venustas generositas, quod ex legitimo mentis proposito praedicat exercitium; facies informata vigore inexhausto naturam fragilem destinat diffiteri. Eius statura descriptionis ambiguae certo termino nequaquam potest circumscribi. Vestes eius, ut assertit Boethius, filis <sunt> perfecte tenuissimis, subtili artificio, indissolubili materia, ad cuius habitum et proprietates explicandas humanum languescit ingenium, mendicat facundia, humana discretio offendentium se pati profitetur. Haec siquidem dum discipulis invigilat documentis et facundi pectoris delicias, inter artres alumnas et pedisequas non cessat dispensare...*

lines of argument for poetic composition. Moreover, Matthew indicates some knowledge of progymnasmata-like exercises in this same treatise. He states:

What follows is the treatment of the material in which certain poorly instructed students are accustomed to be crackbrained and stray shamefully from the path of proper doctrine; in school exercises (*scolastico exercitio*) they paraphrase the poetical fables and work out an expression after each word as if they intended a metrical commentary on the authors. But since undisciplined transgression should gain forgiveness, and perhaps when they are being misled by misleading teachers, their good interests should be looked to so that in the treatment of material they may try to imitate the customary outcomes, namely, so they may speak the truth or the probable (*ut scilicet vera dicantur vel veri similia*).⁴¹

As we will see momentarily, this language echoes that of Alan of Lille, who also alludes to such exercises as well.

Such similarities can be more easily observed through comparisons to Alan's text. Take, for example, Alan's discussions of Logic and Rhetoric. He begins his description of Logic in much the same way Matthew begins his description of Philosophy. Logic, Alan states, is *solers, studiosa, laborans*. She teaches about the topics, what constitutes these lines of reasoning, and reveals to her students how to avoid sophistical proofs.⁴² After an extended discussion examining Logic's function as an art, Alan describes the lineage of logicians. Alan states:

A series of pictures [on Logic's robes] there gloriously displays the logicians of renown to whom fame grants unending life when it does not bury those whom earth cover in their graves... There Porphyry constructs an unwinding bridge and points out the path by which the reader may enter the depths of Aristotle and make his way to the heart of the book. There Porphyry solves mysteries like a second Oedipus, solving the riddle of our Sphinx [Alan means Aristotle]. Our friend, Aristotle, the disturber of words (*verborum turbator*), is here; he disturbs many of us with his turbulence and rejoices that he is obscure. He treats logic in such a way that he gives the impression of not having treated it: it is not that he does this unintentionally here but because he so veils everything with the veil of words that scarce any toil can unveil it. He drapes his words with such covers so as not to prostitute his secrets and by passing on his mysteries, make them finally grow cheap and common.⁴³

Later in this section, Alan also discusses Zeno—as Logic's champion—and Boethius—as responsible for bringing Logic into Latin from Greek—as important members of Logic's lineage. These notable figures are positioned analogically to a

41. *Ibid.*, 4, 1: *Sequitur de executione materie, in qua quidam male disciplinati solent plerumque delirare et a semita doctrinali turpiter exorbitare, qui in scolastico exercitio fabulas circinantes poeticas verbum verbo sigillatim exprimunt tanquam super auctores metricae proposuerint commentare. Sed, quia veniam debet impertrare indisciplina transgressio et forsitan cum perversis doctoribus pervertuntur, eis consulendum est, ut in exequenda materia consuetudinarios eventus studeant emulari, ut scilicet vera dicantur vel veri similia...*

42. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus: Or, the Good and Perfect Man*, 3, 39-41, trans. by J. J. Sheridan.

43. *Ibid.*, 3, 105-122: *Picture series cum fama predicat illic Auctores logice, quos donat fama perhenni Vita, nec sepelit illos quos terra sepultos Velat, sed recolens defunctos suscitatur orbi. Illic Porfirius directo tramite pontem Dirigit et monstrat callem quo lector abyssum Intrat Aristotilis, penetrans penetralia libri. Illic Porfirius archana resoluit, ut alter Edipodes nostri soluens enigmata Spingos. Verborum turbator adest et turbine multos Turbat Aristotiles noster gaudetque latere. Sic logicam tractat, quod non tractasse uidetur; Non quod oberret in hac, set quod uelamine uerbi Omnia sic uelat quod uix labor ista reuelet. Qui tamen iccirco uestit sua dicta latebris, Ne sua prostituat secreta suumque relinquens Archanum, uulgo tandem uilesce cogat.* The Latin text for the *Anticlaudianus* throughout this essay is taken from: R. Bossuat (ed.), Alan De Lille. *Anticlaudianus*.

family or lineage in a traditional epideictic speech, following the advice of Quintilian. Logic, then, is the originator of this prestigious line of thinkers and authors, and therefore deserves Alan's praise due to the accomplishments of these descendants. The descendants of Logic have, in effect, brought honor to their lineage.

As has been shown above, the transposition of topics intended for praising or blaming a person to *encomia* of inanimate objects, such as animals, cities, or abstracts concepts was an accepted practice in Greco-Roman discussions of the progymnasmata. Aelius Theon, for instance, notes that *encomia* for inanimate objects may be composed through the same topics of those intended for people.⁴⁴ Theon later argues that "When we are comparing inanimate things it will probably seem ludicrous to consider good birth or anything like that, but there is nothing to prevent looking at some analogy to such things; for example, the inventors or nature of the things."⁴⁵ Hermogenes too observes that rhetoricians praise things, such as justice, in their speeches in addition to people.⁴⁶ Aphthonius agrees with these positions and even provides an example *encomium* to wisdom.⁴⁷ Quintilian, as we have seen, also observes that while *encomia* are composed chiefly for people, the same precepts can be used to praise the gods or other things.⁴⁸

But what further connection, if any, might Alan's compositions have to the progymnasmata? To answer this question, I will turn my attention to Alan's description of Rhetoric, which also occurs in Book III of his text. After introducing Lady Rhetorica as a golden-locked maiden with a radiant face and garments (a traditional description), Alan begins to describe the items she carries. Alan states "In her right hand she bears a trumpet, her left she decks with a horn and on it she gives the signal for the preliminary exercises of the war (*preludia belli*). A garment covers her: painted in various colours, it rejoices that it is overlaid with various hues."⁴⁹

James J. Sheridan, a translator of Alan's text, interprets *preludia belli* as one of Alan's signature wordplays, connecting it to the Greek progymnasmata, or preliminary exercises (Alan habitually employs such puns throughout the poem—consider the pun stemming from colours as pertaining both to the appearance of the garment and to rhetorical colours).⁵⁰ Indeed, later in his description of Lady Rhetorica, Alan makes another similar word play: he states Rhetoric... discusses the useful, decides what is just, confirms the right (*affirmet rectum*).⁵¹ Given Alan's propensity for wordplay, *affirmet rectum* very well could be a pun on the common progymnasmata exercise of confirmation as well (an exercise that sought to demonstrate the validity or appropriateness of something else, typically based on probability and believability).

44. Theon, "Exercises," in G. A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks*, p. 52.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 54.

46. Hermog., "Preliminary Exercises," in G. A. Kennedy, *ibid.*, p. 81.

47. Aphth., "Preliminary Exercises," in G. A. Kennedy, *ibid.*, p. 110-111.

48. Quint., *Inst.*, 3, 7, 6-9.

49. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*..., 3, 165-169: *In dextra gerit illa tubam cornuque sinistram Donat et in cornu signat preludia belli. Claudit eam uestis que, picturata colore Multiplici, gaudet uarios inducta colores.*

50. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, "Book III," J. J. Sheridan (ed.), p. 98, n. 30.

51. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*..., 3, 177-178.

Moreover, Alan continues to use the *topos* of ancestry to structure his descriptions of the arts, ending his section on Rhetoric with a lineage of prominent rhetoricians. He states:

One part of the garment [worn by Lady Rhetorica] has this representation of the art of Rhetoric, the other, however, shows the outlines of its artificers. There Marcus makes Rhetoric a child adopted by him alone or rather fathers it: thus the art will rightly be called Cicero's daughter since Tullius begets her and the art tracing its origin to him may well be called Tullia. There Ennodius bedecks his poems with many a flower and smoothes out all rough edges from his discourse. Quintilian is here, cloaking fictitious cases with the appearance of real ones; he sets forth a new type of hypothetical lawsuit and forces us into the courts with no actual issue at stake [a reference to the practice of declamation]. Symmachus, sparing of words, profound in mind, expansive in intellect, restricted in diction, rich in intelligence, somewhat poor in expression, happy in his fruit rather than foliage, compresses richness of intellect by conciseness of language.⁵²

It is in Alan's description of the artificers of Rhetoric that the influence of the *topos* of ancestry is most apparent. Tullius is portrayed as the father of Rhetoric, an art that may as well be called Tullia (the name of Cicero's actual daughter). Quintilian and some others bear a mention, but Lady Rhetorica is without doubt a direct descendant of Cicero for Alan. Rhetoric is positioned, as Aelius Theon suggests, analogically within a genealogy that includes rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintilian. However, rather than describing rhetoric's practitioners as descendants of *Rhetorica* (as in his description of Logic), Alan describes *Rhetorica* herself as Cicero's descendant. Moreover, Alan's familiarity with Quintilian and the common criticisms surrounding the practice of declamation suggests that he may have had access to texts that described progymnasmata exercises in some detail. While it is unlikely that Alan worked from complete collections of Greco-Roman exercises, he may have been familiar with the progymnasmata indirectly. For instance, based solely on Alan's own citation practices, it seems possible Alan could be drawing from Quintilian's discussions of *encomia* and panegyric, from the Chartres tradition of progymnasmata exercises discussed by John of Salisbury, from Matthew of Vendôme's similar discussions of basic pedagogical exercises, or from as yet unknown sources. My intent here is not to pin down one text and trace its direct influence, but rather instead to highlight the pervasive reference to practices of epideictic composition and to exercises and *topoi* similar to those in the progymnasmata.

52. Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus* . . . , 3, 225-239: Hanc artis gerit effigiem pars unica uestis, Sed tamen artificum loquitur pars altera formas. Illic rethoricam sibi solus Marcus adoptat, Immo parit, quare Cyceronis filla dici Ars merito poterit, quam gignit Tullius, a quo Ars ortum ducens censerit Tullia posset. Illic multiplici presignit carmina flore. Sermonisque notas Ennodius effricat omnes. Quintilianus adest quadam sub imagine ueri Causarum uelans umbras, litesque nouellas Fingit et in litem cogit sine lite uenire. Symacus in uerbis parcus sed mente profundus, *Prodigus in sensu, uerbis angustus, habundans Mente, sed ore minor; fructu, non fronde beatus, Sensus diuicias uerbi breuitate coartat.*

Conclusion

This essay has sought to demonstrate the continued influence of the progymnasmata on the poetic and rhetorical culture of the 12th century. In doing so, it has likely raised as many questions as it has suggested concrete answers. Yet, it has also highlighted the ways in which ancient ideas of probability and ancestry continued to exert influence in both the theory and practice of poetics, highlighting the degree to which these practices were indebted to rhetorical theory. In the case of Alan of Lille, we can see that his general approach to the introductions of the Liberal Arts in the *Anticlaudianus* is structured similarly to discussions of description, ancestry, and *encomia* in progymnasmata texts and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. This approach drew from ideas derived from the rhetorical education program represented by the ancient progymnasmata and communicated through a variety of texts surviving from antiquity. Yet, this new system of poetic composition did not simply reproduce ancient forms. Rather, descriptions of these exercises seem to have suggested to medieval authors a flexible form of composition that could be applied to new ends, including the allegorical poem.

While my goal is certainly to highlight the unique features of these authors' works, I also wish to suggest more broadly that historians of rhetoric remain conscious of the generative potential of medieval epideictic rhetoric and the role the progymnasmata may have played in this form of rhetorical education. While many of the progymnasmata manuals were not available or popular during the period, medieval thinkers nonetheless encountered descriptions and models of the exercises in a variety of works. These surviving descriptions would have contributed to a form of education and poetic composition that emphasized not only literary interpretation or stylistic ornamentation, but a rhetorically-anchored model of invention that was attentive to probability and common belief. In examining these texts, then, I aim not to definitively show that medieval thinkers and educators employed the exercises, but rather to suggest a method for considering the textual echoes of this educational program throughout the 12th and 13th centuries.