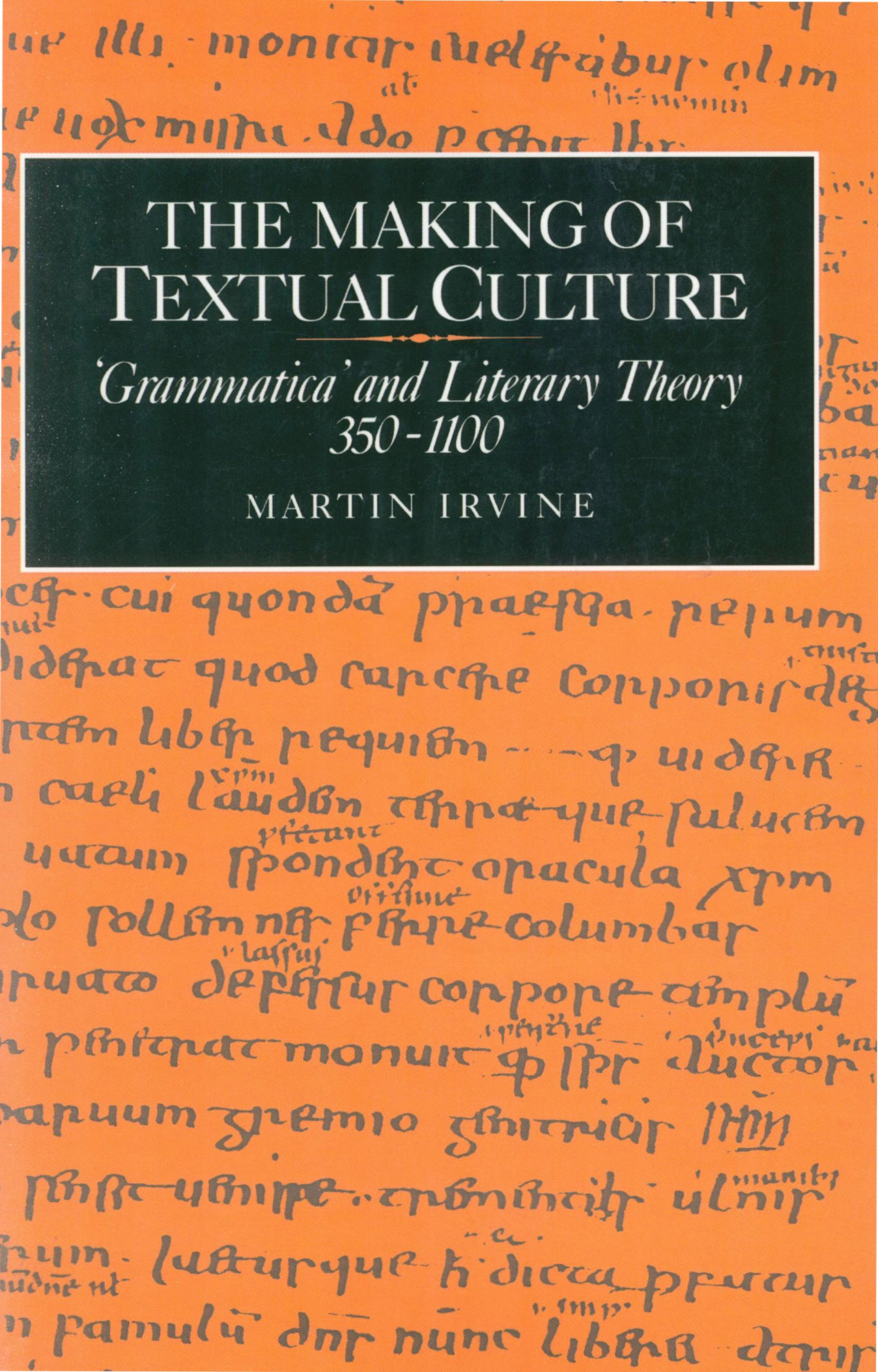

THE MAKING OF TEXTUAL CULTURE

'Grammatica' and Literary Theory 350-1100

MARTIN IRVINE

The Making of Textual Culture

'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350–1100

MARTIN IRVINE

Georgetown University

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Preface

Grammatica is the science of interpreting the poets and other writers and the systematic principles for speaking and writing correctly; it is the source and foundation of the liberal arts.

– Glosses on *grammatica*, ninth-eleventh centuries

When I first began the research for this book, I thought that I would write an account of the literary aspects of medieval *grammatica* comparable to recent studies of the history of rhetoric, logic, and the liberal arts. But the more I investigated the sources, especially the manuscripts associated with the grammatical curriculum and grammatical methodology, the more I became convinced that the subject demanded a different approach. I began the study anew, considering the role of *grammatica* in forming the textual culture of the eighth through twelfth centuries.

Two discoveries shaped the way I approached this study. First, I found that manuscripts associated with *grammatica* – both curriculum authors and *artes grammaticae* – form quite possibly the largest part of the archival record of the medieval West after biblical, theological, and liturgical texts. I did not expect to find so much; 800 or so manuscripts later, I felt like an archaeologist who had stumbled upon a large but uninvestigated layer in a well-known dig. And second, it became clear to me that *grammatica* always had important social functions and was never conceived or practiced apart from its larger cultural work. Read in a historical and ideological context, the formal definitions and concepts that can be recovered from *artes grammaticae* and other treatises become statements in a more far-reaching social practice, statements that cannot be understood apart from the system of discourse in which they were embedded. I found that *grammatica* can be understood not so much as the name for a distinct and self-circumscribed *ars* or *disciplina* but as the central node in a larger network, the gravitational center of several other institutions and practices – schools, libraries, scriptoria, commentaries, canonical texts and language.

I also discovered that rather than maintaining and promoting

literacy in some kind of neutral or universal sense – that is, literacy as a form of practical knowledge taken to be basically the same wherever and whenever it appears in culture – *grammatica* was responsible for producing a special *kind* of literacy, the effects of which we continue to experience in Western societies to the present day. Investigating *grammatica* in the full range of its cultural effects opened up a whole new way to understand medieval textual culture and, consequently, the textual culture of the Western world.

Grammatica thus had a status unlike the other medieval arts and sciences since it functioned as the only point of access to all of the orders of textual knowledge. Rather than one discipline among many, *grammatica* had an essentially constitutive function, making a certain kind of literacy and literary culture possible *per se*. Both the textual objects defined or constructed through grammatical discourse and the social relations enacted and replicated through the institutional practice of the discipline are inscribed everywhere in medieval culture. As a culture of The Writings (*scriptura*) and canonical texts both Christian and classical (the *auctores*), medieval culture was fundamentally textual and therefore fundamentally }grammatical in the medieval sense of the term. This book is an attempt to describe the larger cultural work performed by *grammatica* in its varied functions.

The historical boundaries of my study are roughly from the middle of the fourth century, when imperial Roman *grammatica* took on its final codification, to around 1100, the era before the rise of the twelfth-century schools. I consider the development of *grammatica* in late antiquity and describe the textual communities that emerged from grammatical culture, with a special emphasis on Anglo-Saxon and Carolingian literary culture. A final chapter is devoted to grammatical culture in Anglo-Saxon England and the implications of *grammatica* for the study of Old English literature.

This book is the first part of a projected two-volume study of *grammatica* and medieval textual culture. In a future study I will continue the argument developed here to investigate the implications of *grammatica* for twelfth- to fourteenth-century literary culture.

A note on sources and quotations

Since the primary sources of medieval grammatical theory are not well known, I have included full quotations from many of the central texts. When the precise wording of a text is important for my argument, I have cited the text in the original and have supplied a translation. In other cases, I have simply provided a translation with a reference to the edition or manuscript source from which it was taken. Translations throughout are my own.

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Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many friends and colleagues for their support, assistance, and encouragement throughout the course of this project. I owe a special debt of gratitude to the late Morton Bloomfield, who supported and encouraged my early investigations into *grammatica* and medieval literary theory, and to Herbert Bloch, who provided important direction and support in the early phases of my research. William Alfred and Larry Benson have given support and encouragement over many years. I am grateful to Paul Meyvaert, who introduced me to paleography and codicology and who provided many hours of collegial conversation on Bede and medieval Latin. David Staines, Jan Ziolkowski, David Howlett, Michael Lapidge, Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, Mark Amsler, Rita Copeland, Winthrop Wetherbee, Seth Lerer, and Penn Szittya have read parts of this study at various stages of its progress and have offered helpful suggestions and comments. The late O. B. Hardison, Jr. and the late Judson Allen generously shared their learning and offered support at important stages of my research. Thanks must also go to Alastair Minnis for his editorial assistance and support of my project and to Vivian Law for her generous responses to queries about manuscripts and grammatical texts. Allen Frantzen's friendship and critical insight have been a valuable resource throughout the final stages of this project.

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City; the Stiftsbibliothek, Einsiedeln. I would also like to thank the following institutions for their kind permission to reproduce the plates in this book: the British Library; the Bodleian Library; the Cambridge University Library; Corpus Christi College, Cambridge; the Bibliothèque Nationale; the Bibliothèque municipale, Orléans; the Burgerbibliothek, Bern.

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Abbreviations

Arts Libéraux	*Arts libéraux et philosophie au moyen âge. Actes du Quatrième Congrès International de Philosophie Médiévale.* Montreal: Institut d'Études Médiévales, and Paris: J. Vrin, 1969.
ASPR	*Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records.* Ed. G. P. Krapp and E. V. K. Dobbie. 6 vols. New York: Columbia University Press, 1931–42.
Barwick	Karl Barwick, *Remmius Palaemon und die römische Ars Grammatica, Philologus* 161, 15 (Leipzig, 1922).
BL	British Library, London
BM	Bibliothèque municipale
BN	Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris
Bonner	Stanley Bonner, *Education in Ancient Rome from the Elder Cato to the Younger Pliny.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977.
CCCM	*Corpus Christianorum, Continuatio Mediaevalis.* Turnhout: Brepols, 1966– .
CCSL	*Corpus Christianorum Series Latina.* Turnhout: Brepols, 1953– .
CLA	*Codices Latini Antiquiores.* Ed. E. A. Lowe. 12 vols. Oxford, 1934–71.
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum.* Vienna and Liepzig, 1866– .
CUL	Cambridge University Library
Curtius	E. R. Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages.* Trans. Willard Trask. New York: Pantheon, 1953.
GCS	*Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der Ersten Jahrhunderte.* Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1897– .
GG	*Grammatici Graeci.* Leipzig: Teubner, 1878–1910.
GL	*Grammatici Latini.* 7 vols. Ed. Heinrich Keil. Vol. 8 ed. H. Hagen. Leipzig: Teubner, 1857–80.

GRF	*Grammaticae Romae Fragmenta.* Ed. H. Funaioli. Leipzig, 1907.
Holtz	Louis Holtz, *Donat et la tradition de l'enseignement grammatical.* Paris: CNRS, 1981.
Kaster	Robert A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.
Laistner	M. L. W. Laistner, *Thought and Letters in Western Europe, A.D. 500 to 900.* 2nd edn Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1957.
Law	Vivien Law, *The Insular Latin Grammarians.* Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer, 1982.
Manitius	Max Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters.* 3 vols. Munich: C. H. Becksche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1911–31.
Marrou, *Education*	H.-I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity.* Trans. G. Lamb. London: Sheed and Ward, 1956.
Marrou, *Augustin*	*Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique.* 4th edn with Retractio. Paris: Boccard, 1958.
MGH	*Monumenta Germaniae Historica.* Hannover and Leipzig, 1826– . *AA* Auctores Antiquissimi *Epist.* Epistolae *Cap.* Capitularia *Poet.* Poetae *SS* Scriptores *SRG* Scriptores Rerum Germanicarum in usum scholarum separatim editi
Pfeiffer	Rudolf Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship from the Beginnings to the End of the Hellenistic Age.* Oxford: Clarendon, Press, 1968.
PG	*Patrologia Graeca.* Ed. J. P. Migne. Paris: J. P. Migne, 1857–86.
PL	*Patrologia Latina.* Ed. J. P. Migne. Paris: J. P. Migne, 1844–55.
Riché	Pierre Riché, *Education and Culture in the Barbarian West from the Sixth through the Eighth Century.* Trans. John Contreni. Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press, 1976.
RG	*Rhetores Graeci.* Ed. Leonard Spengel. 3 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1885–61.

RLM	*Rhetores Latini Minores*. Ed. Karl Halm. Leipzig: Teubner, 1863.
Roger	Maurice Roger, *L'enseignement des lettres classiques d'Ausone à Alcuin*. Paris: Picard, 1905; repr. Hildesheim: Olms, 1968.
Sandys	J. E. Sandys, *A History of Classical Scholarship*. 3rd edn vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920.
SVF	*Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. 3 vols. Ed. J. Von Arnim. Leipzig 1905–24.

Contents

List of illustrations *page* x
Preface xiii
Acknowledgements xv
Abbreviations xvii

Grammatica: A historical and methodological introduction 1

1 The formation of *grammatica* within classical discursive practices 23
1.1 Plato the *grammatikos*: metalanguage, the problem of authority, and the control of textual culture 25
1.2 Aristotle: the system of discursive objects 30
1.3 The Stoics and the formation of *grammatike* 34
1.4 The institution of a model: hellenistic foundations 39

2 The developing model of *grammatica* in the Roman and early medieval world 49
2.1 The development of the Roman model 50
2.2 The late Roman *artes grammaticae*: form, contents, and medieval reception 56
2.3 The early medieval model of *grammatica*: methodology and the objects of discourse 63
2.4 Methodology for reading: accent, vocalizing, punctuating, oral delivery 68
2.5 *Emendatio, orthographia, latinitas*: authority, correctness, and canonicity 74
2.6 *Grammatica* and ideology in the Empire and early Middle Ages: case studies 78

3 Linguistic foundations 88
3.1 *De voce*: on scriptible speech and writing 91
3.2 *De littera*: on letters and writing 97
3.3 *De tropis*: theories of metaphor and figurative language 104
3.4 The textuality of the *artes grammaticae*: metalanguage and literary object language 107

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4 *Enarratio* I: Commentaries on Vergil from Donatus to Fulgentius 118
4.1 Donatus and the grammatical *accessus* topics 121
4.2 Servius: A model for *enarratio* 126
4.3 Macrobius 142
4.4 Christian allegory and Vergil's *Eclogues*: Philargyrius and the *Scholia Bernensia* 148
4.5 Fulgentius 155
4.6 The commentaries and the developing literary canon 160

5 *Grammatica* and the formation of medieval textual communities: Alexandria to Isidore of Seville 162
5.1 Clement of Alexandria and Origen: the making of Christian *grammatike* 164
5.2 Augustine: the medieval model of *grammatica* 169
5.3 *Grammatica* and the monastic textual community: the Benedictine Rule and Gregory the Great 189
5.4 Cassiodorus and the ideological role of *grammatica* 195
5.5 Isidore of Seville: *grammatica*, the encyclopedia, and literary theory 209

6 *Enarratio* II: interpretation and the grammar of allegory 244
6.1 Allegory and the textuality of commentary 244
6.2 *Grammatica* and the grammar of allegory 247
6.3 Clement of Alexandria and exegetical semiotics 250
6.4 Origen: tropology and the master discourse of the Eternal Gospel 252
6.5 Augustine's grammar of allegory 257
6.6 The primary codes: allegory and typology 262
6.7 Origen, Augustine, and semiotic anxiety 265

7 *Grammatica* and textual culture in Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Europe 272
7.1 Bede and the scope of *grammatica* in the eighth century 272
7.2 Preface to the Carolingian Renaissance: Boniface, *grammatica*, and authority 298
7.3 Carolingian Renaissance and the power of *grammatica* 305
7.4 Alcuin and Carolingian *grammatica* 313

8 The genres of grammatical culture and manuscript textuality 334
8.1 *Grammatica* in the library 334
8.2 The form and contents of grammatical manuscripts: compilations of *artes* and *auctores* 344

8.3 The textuality of the biblical epic poems and some conclusions 364
8.4 The semiology of the page and the layout of glosses 371
8.5 Handlist of compilations of *artes* and *auctores*: *c.* 700–*c.*1100 393

9 The implications of grammatical culture in Anglo-Saxon England 405
9.1 *Grammatica* in ninth- and tenth-century England 406
9.2 The king who writes: King Alfred and a new *grammatica* 415
9.3 Hybrid textuality: writing in Anglo-Saxon England 420
9.4 Textual archaeology: lexicon, gloss, compilation, library, encyclopedia 425
9.5 Cædmon as glossator: the *illiteratus* in the monastic textual community 431
9.6 King Alfred and *compilatio* 435
9.7 Reading like a *grammaticus*: glossing and intertextuality in *The Dream of the Rood* and *Elene* 437
9.8 The Old English *Daniel*: reading, glossing, compiling 449
9.9 *Brunanburh* and the Chronicle poems: textualization, ideology, nostalgia 451

10 Conclusion 461

Notes 467
Bibliography 553
Indexes 599
1. Names and titles 599
2. General 602
3. Manuscripts cited 604

Illustrations

1 Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* with Remigian gloss. Cambridge University Library, Kk.3.21, f.85r. (With permission of the Cambridge University Library.) 18

2 Servius, Commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* 1 (lemmata format). British Library, Harley 2782, f.29r. (With permission of the British Library.) 127

3 Servius, Commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* 2 (text and gloss format). Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 16236, f.79r. (With permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.) 128

4 Arator, *De actibus apostolorum* with glosses. Cambridge University Library, Gg.5.35 f.86r (With permission of the Cambridge University Library.) 359

5 Aldhelm's *Enigmata* with glosses. British Library, Royal 12.C.23, f.83r. (With permission of the British Library.) 363

6 Arator, *De actibus apostolorum* with glosses. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 2773, f.35v. (With permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.) 365

7 Juvencus, *Evangeliorum libri quattuor* with Latin, Welsh, and Old Irish glosses. Cambridge University Library, Ff.4.42, f.6r. (With permission of the Cambridge University Library.) 373

8 Donatus, *Ars grammatica (Ars maior)* with glosses. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. T.2.20, f.26r. (With permission of the Bodleian Library. 374

9 Priscian, *Institutiones grammaticae* with glosses. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 7501, f.2r. (With permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.) 375

10 Priscian, *Partitiones* with glosses. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 13023, f.5r. (With permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.) 376

11 Opening page of Donatus's *Ars grammatica (Ars minor)* with decorated initial P (of 'Partes orationis'), which begins a compilation of grammatical *artes* and poetry. Bern, Burgerbibliothek 207, f.2v. (With permission of the Burgerbibliothek, Bern.) 377

12 Incipit page of the preceding compilation, incorporating highly stylized and decorated display script, runic script, and glosses. Bern, Burgerbibliothek 207, f.2r. (With permission of the Burgerbibliothek, Bern.) 378

13 Opening page of Donatus's *Ars grammatica (Ars minor)* which begins a compilation of grammatical *artes* and poetry. Orléans, Bibliothèque municipale 295, p. 1. (With permission of the Bibliothèque municipale, Orléans.) 379

14 Prudentius, *Psychomachia* with glosses. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F.3.6, f.109v. (With permission of the Bodleian Library.) 380

15 Bern, Burgerbibliothek 167, f.7r. Vergil, *Aeneid* with Servius's commentary as gloss. (With permission of the Burgerbibliothek, Bern.) 381

16 Boethius, *De consolatione philosophiae* with Remigian gloss. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F.1.15, f.5r. (With the permission of the Bodleian Library.) 382

17 Vergil, *Aeneid* with Servius's commentary as marginal gloss. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canon. class lat. 50, f.123r. (With permission of the Bodleian Library.) 386

18 Vergil, *Aeneid* with Servius's commentary in outer column as gloss. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, lat. 10307, f.100r. (With permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.) 387

19 Vergil, *Aeneid* with Servius's commentary as framing gloss. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Nouv. acq. lat. 2059, f.2r. (With permission of the Bibliothèque Nationale.) 388

20 Line drawing of Christ as Wisdom, with Dunstan kneeling. Includes two lines of hexameter verse, most likely by Dunstan. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F.4.32, f.1r. (With permission of the Bodleian Library.) 408

21 Opening page of Ovid's *Ars amatoria* with syntax marks and interlinear glosses in a quire that was completed by Dunstan. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Auct. F.4.32, f.37r. (With permission of the Bodleian Library.) 410

22 The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (MS A), with the opening of *The Battle of Brunanburh*. Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 173, f.26r. (With permission of the Master and Fellows of Corpus Christi College.) 455

Grammatica: a historical and methodological introduction

Litteras disce. *Disticha Catonis*

For over 1,200 years, textual culture in Western Europe was governed by *grammatica*, the first of the liberal arts, which was known as "the art [or science] of interpreting the poets and other writers and the principles for speaking and writing correctly."[1] But the social effects of *grammatica* were different in kind and degree from other arts and disciplines: *grammatica* was foundational, a social practice that provided the exclusive access to literacy, the understanding of Scripture, the knowledge of a literary canon, and membership in an international Latin textual community. The centrality of *grammatica* throughout *la longue durée* of the late classical to early Renaissance era is itself an astonishing fact of Western culture. Although the role of *grammatica* in the medieval model of the liberal arts is widely recognized,[2] the larger cultural work performed by this discipline – its social, intellectual, and ideological function – has yet to be recovered. This book is an attempt to describe the larger function of *grammatica* in early medieval literary culture.

Rather than approaching the history of *grammatica* simply as a history of theories, educational practices, or the doctrines of a discipline, I intend to disclose the broad social effects of the discipline and to recover the social and intellectual agenda that lies behind the often bewildering mass of sources – from individual treatises and commentaries to entire compiled manuscripts – that document grammatical methodology. This study, therefore, is an attempt to define what I call grammatical culture, the kind of literate and literary culture sustained and reproduced by *grammatica*, considered not only as a discipline with a circumscribed body of knowledge but as a model for textual culture with implications that extend far beyond the apparent objective contents of a discipline.

As the foundation of a series of disciplines, *grammatica* instituted a model of learning, interpretation, and knowledge that defined various regional textual communities and provided the discursive and textual competencies that were preconditions for participation in literary

culture throughout medieval Europe. Grammatical discourse constituted a special field of knowledge – a canon of traditional texts, both Christian and classical (the *auctores*), and a normative written or textual Latin (*latinitas*), the structure and style of which was reduced to systematic description and instruction (*ars*). *Grammatica*, a Latinized Greek term, was also called *litteratura*, the discipline of the written, and one who was grammatically educated was a *litteratus*, competent in reading and interpreting Latin writings.[3] As a discipline sustained by the dominant social and political institutions of medieval Europe, *grammatica* functioned to perpetuate and reproduce the most fundamental conditions for textual culture, providing the discursive rules and interpretive strategies that constructed certain texts as repositories of authority and value. In its foundational role, *grammatica* also created a special kind of literate subjectivity, an identity and social position for *litterati* which was consistently gendered as masculine and socially empowered.

Although *grammatica* was formalized as the first of the arts of discourse in early medieval school curricula, the discipline articulated cultural practices that extended far beyond scholastic institutions and the internal unity of the arts of discourse: by supplying the very conditions for textual culture, the culture of the manuscript book, *grammatica* functioned as an irreducible cultural prerequisite, a status never given to rhetoric or logic. In the terms of medieval scholars themselves, *grammatica* was "the source and foundation of liberal letters"[4] or "the source and foundation of all the textual arts,"[5] not only because *grammatica* was the only point of entry into literate culture but because *grammatica* was universally understood to supply the discursive means for constructing language and texts as objects of knowledge. *Grammatica* thus had an essential constitutive function, and was not simply one discipline among many, or even the first of many; it made possible a certain kind of literacy, reproducing the conditions for textual culture *per se*. The constitutive function of grammatical knowledge was thus presupposed throughout the whole system of text-based disciplines – the arts of discourse, biblical exegesis, literary interpretation, philosophy, theology, and law. The broad social effects of *grammatica* are therefore to be found outside the classrooom: *grammatica* provided the readerly and interpretive skills for the production of literary and textual knowledge across the disciplines.

THE MODEL OF *GRAMMATICA* IN THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES

Since the history of thought is a history of models – an archive of ways of conceiving and representing a world of objects – we must first con-

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