

*Ciceronem legisti?* Cicero, Augustine, and the Lingering Utility of *Eloquentia*  
in the Last Days of Roman Africa

*Sapientiam sine eloquentia parum prodesse civitatibus*—in penning this defense of the role of eloquence, Cicero was on firm classical ground. In a world where persuasion was power, and elocution lent authority, verbal elegance might be its own advocate. Some 450 years later, however, in the world of Roman Africa, it was far from clear whether this prescription from the *De Inventione* still applied, and if so, how it might be understood. In a world where mercenary generals controlled the levers of power, could words still turn the hearts of men? In an age where Christianity, not Cicero, was now on the rise, did verbal eloquence still matter?

This paper addresses questions such as these in miniature, by examining a recently discovered letter of Augustine's from late in his life. In this tender letter to a father and son, we see a microcosm of the approach toward classical education that Augustine had refined over his life. We will glimpse how Augustine's long experience with rhetoric both affecting and affected had molded a philosophy of eloquence that avoided extremes of his contemporaries. And finally, in the intimacy of Augustine's letter we will see how Augustine's concept of *eloquentia* became the model of both pedagogical preservation and renewal in the years to come.

#### Selected Bibliography

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