The year 1492 saw the composition of Angelo Poliziano’s *Lamia*, a *praelectio*, or preliminary oration, which he delivered in the fall of that year to open the course he was teaching on Aristotle’s *Prior Analytics* at the Florentine university.¹ In the work, Poliziano is responding to objections from contemporaries, who suggested that he did not have the training necessary to carry out this task, since he was not a “philosopher.” The work seems, in hindsight, to be an alternate version of the mission of philosophy, even as it is a response to debates that were taking place in the intellectual world of Italian humanism in the late 1480s and early 1490s. To understand the *Lamia*, it is necessary to set it in the context of Poliziano’s teaching career, before moving on to an analysis of the text.

Why was Poliziano, the best philologically oriented humanist of his day, teaching the *Prior Analytics*, that staple of the logic curriculum and integral part of the six-work *Organon* of Aristotle? First, we know from a recent article of David Lines that the opposition between “humanism” and “scholastic” university culture has always been overdrawn, the product of modern scholars reading too literally humanists’ stock complaints about scholastic language. Lines shows that, from the days of Coluccio Salutati on, many if not most Italian humanists spent significant amounts of time at universities; that universities on the whole were no more resistant to humanism’s new disciplinary emphases than one would expect institutions of higher education to be, inherently conservative as they are; and that as time went by in the

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fifteenth century there actually occurred a fruitful interaction between
humanists and universities, even if traditional subjects retained their
hold and professors of those subjects earned higher salaries than those
teaching humanism.2

Second, we know that Poliziano had an early and abiding interest
in philosophy of all sorts, including Aristotle. Jonathan Hunt’s work
has shown that in 1480, when Poliziano was in his middle twenties, he
engaged in an intense set of philosophical conversations with Francesco
di Tommaso (c. 1445–1514), a Dominican based at Santa Maria Novella
in Florence.3 Di Tommaso memorialized his and Poliziano’s interac-
tions in a dialogue entitled De negocio logico, representing Poliziano
as the interlocutor “Angelus.” Early on, too, Poliziano studied with the
Byzantine émigré Andronicus Callistus. Poliziano celebrated Callistus
in his Elegy to his respected humanist friend Bartolomeo Fonzio, say-
ing that Callistus “loosed the knots of high-flown Aristotle.”4 Poliziano
was also a student of Johannes Argyropoulos (1415–87), well recog-
nized by contemporaries as a teacher of Aristotle, and someone whom
Poliziano himself called in his Miscellanea “by far the most famous
Peripatetic of his day.”5 Finally, Poliziano’s relationship with Giovanni
Pico della Mirandola also pushed him toward the posture of excluding
no philosophical text, whatever its disciplinary provenance.

Poliziano testifies in numerous places to these interests, and the
course of his career, as well as various interactions with his contem-
poraries, shows the directions in which he was willing to travel. His
early years saw him break onto the cultural scene in Florence after
translating books two through five of Homer’s Iliad, which he worked
on from 1469 until 1475, a fitting accompaniment, as Francesco Bausi
has pointed out, to Lorenzo the Magnificent’s military adventures,

2 D.A. Lines, “Humanism and the Italian Universities,” in C.S. Celenza and K.
Gouwens, Humanism and Creativity in the Italian Renaissance: Essays in Honor of
3 J. Hunt, Politian and Scholastic Logic: An Unknown Dialogue by a Dominican
Friar (Leiden: Brill, 1995).
4 Angelo Poliziano, Ad Bartholomeum Fontium, in idem, Due poemetti latini, ed.
doctum me confero ludum / Qui tumidi nodos laxat Aristotelis.” For the meaning
here of “tumidi” see Bausi, ad loc.
5 For the Poliziano quotation see below, n. 10; for Argyropoulos and Aristotle see
A. Field, The Origins of the Platonic Academy of Florence (Princeton: Princeton Uni-
versity Press, 1988), 107–26; J. Hankins, Plato in the Italian Renaissance, 2 vols. (Lei-