

## UBERTO DECEMBRIO: A HUMANIST IN PRAGUE AT THE END OF THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

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### ABSTRACT

Two brief letters, written by Uberto Decembrio during a diplomatic mission on behalf of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, provide a lively sketch of Bohemian life and customs at the end of the 14th century, as seen through the eyes of an Italian humanist. In the wake of the travel reports, the epistles also offer subject matter related to the cultural policies of Charles IV, creator of the the Studium Generale as well as a tireless promoter of the development of the arts. The Italian scholar reveals his intellectual curiosity and ethnographic interests as well, describing aspects and the unusual habits of the city of Prague, while not shying away from expressing a personal opinion.

*Keywords:* Bohemia – Italian Humanism – Charles IV – the Prague University – geographical and chorographic literature

Uberto Decembrio has received little attention from scholars, and only a few of his writings are available in print today. We know very little about his family and his youth.<sup>1</sup> He was born in Vigevano around the middle of the 14th century and probably studied in Pavia. From 1391 onwards, Decembrio was secretary to Peter Filargis of Candia, a theologian at the Visconti court who became the bishop of Piacenza (1386), Vicenza (1388) and finally of Novara in 1389 (Vigevano belonged to this diocese). In 1409 Filargis ascended the papal throne as Alexander V (1409–1410), elected by the Council of Pisa.<sup>2</sup> Decembrio followed the bishop during his diplomatic mission to Prague seeking the title of duke for Gian Galeazzo Visconti (1351–1402).<sup>3</sup> The latter pursued a policy of expanding his territory, aimed

<sup>1</sup> For Uberto Decembrio see Mario BORSA, *Pier Candido Decembrio e l'Umanesimo in Lombardia*, Archivio Storico Lombardo 10, 1893, pp. 5–75, 358–441; Id., *Un umanista vigevanasco del secolo XIV*, Giornale Iugustico 20, 1893, pp. 81–111, 199–215; Paolo VITI, s.v. *Decembrio, Uberto*, in: Dizionario biografico degli Italiani 33, Istituto dell'Enciclopedia Italiana, Roma 1987, pp. 498–503.

<sup>2</sup> After so many years of division within the Catholic Church (1377–1417), many cardinals and theologians became aware of the need for an ecumenical council that forced the popes to the agreement or will appoint another which all Christendom would obey. Several cardinals adhered to this movement, among them Baldassarre Cossa, the future Pope John XXIII, and Peter Filargis. On March 25th 1409 the Council of Pisa was started in order to restore unity in the Church. It is noteworthy that neither Gregory XII, the legitimate pope, nor Benedict XIII recognized the authority of the Council. All the attempts to deal with the two pontiffs were in vain, so in June the Council pronounced the sentence of deposition of Gregory XII and Benedict XIII, starting the conclave to elect a new pope. Peter of Candia was consecrated Pope in July. See Walter ULLMANN, *The Origins of the Great Schism: a study in fourteenth century ecclesiastical history*, London 1948; Marzieh GAIL, *The Three Popes: an account of the great Schism*, New York 1969; Paolo BREZZI, *Lo scisma d'Occidente come problema italiano*, Archivio della R. Deputazione romana di Storia Patria 10, 1944, pp. 392–450.

<sup>3</sup> James HANKINS, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, II, Leiden – New York – København – Köln 1991 (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, XVII/1), pp. 105–117.

at the formation of a vast centralized state, and therefore would have taken advantage of the contemporary crisis of the major Italian powers. His main purpose was to receive official recognition from the emperor, because it would not only enhance his personal prestige, but also legitimize his claim to territories already conquered.<sup>4</sup>

The exact date of Decembrio's journey is uncertain, it probably took place at the end of the 1393, or perhaps at the beginning of 1394, and they stayed there till August 1395. On 5 September 1395, Decembrio had surely returned to Milan, because Visconti was proclaimed duke and Filargis delivered a Latin oration.<sup>5</sup> Years later, in a letter written to the duke and the duchess of Milan in 1477, his son Pier Candido, seeking to reclaim a house that had belonged to Uberto, said his father had stayed there 'per spacio de tri ani'.<sup>6</sup> During the long period of his stay in the Bohemian capital, Uberto was able to observe some of the peculiar aspects and habits of the city of Prague and its University.

The Italian humanist leaves us a vivid description of his impressions in two letters preserved in a manuscript in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan (Ambros. B 123 sup., ff. 221r–222v), of which I hope soon to prepare a critical edition.<sup>7</sup> These letters were sent to a friend, who was erroneously identified as Coluccio Salutati by Attilio Hortis back in 1880<sup>8</sup> – an error probably caused by the fact that this collection of letters includes two actually sent to Salutati.

The letters are preserved in the latter part of the Ambrosian manuscript. During his lifetime, Decembrio had probably never intended to collect and arrange his letters. This may explain the small number of these letters (thirty four, including also those of the recipients),

<sup>4</sup> After Gian Galeazzo's death, Uberto established himself in Milan and in 1404 passed from Peter of Candia's service into that of Filippo Maria Visconti. In Milan Uberto took part in the Greek lessons taught by Emanuel Chrysoloras. Decembrio collaborated with the Byzantine scholar in the drafting of the translation of Plato's *Republic*. With regard to this translation, see J. HANKINS, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, I, pp. 108–117. See also Mario VEGETTI – Paolo PISSAVINO (eds.), *I Decembrio e la tradizione della 'Repubblica' di Platone tra medioevo e umanesimo*, Atti del Convegno internazionale, Pavia – Vigevano 24–27 maggio 2000, Bibliopolis, Napoli 2005 ("Saggi Bibliopolis" 75), in particular, Daniela MUGNAI CARRARA, *La collaborazione fra Emanuele Crisolora e Uberto Decembrio: ideologia signorile all'origine della prima versione latina della 'Repubblica' di Platone e problemi di traduzione*, pp. 211–235; Antonio ROLLO, *Gli inizi dello studio del greco in Lombardia*, pp. 237–265.

<sup>5</sup> The oration, not available in print, can be read in ms. Ambros. B 116 sup., ff. 30r–34v. For its description, Giliola BARBERO, *Coluccio Salutati nel ricordo di Giovanni Tinti e di Antonio Loschi*. Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, B 116 sup., in: Teresa De Robertis – Stefano Zamponi – Giuliano Tanturli (eds.), *Coluccio Salutati e l'invenzione dell'Umanesimo*. Firenze, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, 2 novembre 2008 – 30 gennaio 2009, Mandragora, Firenze 2008, pp. 95–97.

<sup>6</sup> C. MAGENTA, *I Visconti e gli Sforza nel castello di Pavia e loro attinenze con la Certosa e la storia cittadina*. Documenti, II, Milano 1883, p. 388: "Mio padre olim dicto Uberto de Vigievano, homo de bona fama e de reputazione, altre volte fu mandato in Boemia cum lo episcopo de Novaria, dicto domino Petro de Candia, per obtener la dignità ducale da lo imperatore Vincislao a Prago, ove, dimorato per spacio de tre ani, revene cum lo dito privilegio ducale."

<sup>7</sup> The Ambros. B 123 sup. is composed of two different manuscripts, the first 77 folii contain seven books of Petrarch's *Seniles*; and then it gathers the majority of the works of Uberto Decembrio. The codex was probably copied from an original autograph, or in any case very close to the author. One of the scribes was Pier Candido Decembrio, who copied ff. 79r, 131r and 216v–237r and added many rubrics. For the description of the manuscript see Mirella FERRARI, *La "littera antiqua" a Milan, 1417–1429*, in: R. Autenrieth (Hg.), *Renaissance- und Humanistenhandschriften*, München 1989 (Schriften des Historischen Kollegs. Kolloquien 13), pp. 13–29. See also Francesco PETRARCA, *Manoscritti e libri a stampa della biblioteca ambrosiana*, eds. Marco BALLARINI – Giuseppe FRASSO – Carla Maria MONTI, Milano 2004, pp. 55–56, 149.

<sup>8</sup> Attilio HORTIS, *La città di Praga descritta da un umanista nel MCCCXCIX*, Archeografo triestino 7, 1880, pp. 439–451.

despite the wide range of acquaintances and relationships that he must have had with many of his contemporaries during his long stay at the Filargis' service. The extant collection was compiled by his son Pier Candido, who, thirty years after his father's death,<sup>9</sup> had problems in dating them and in identifying their correspondents. From a philological point of view, it should be noted that the collection of letters begins with the following *inscriptio*: *Uberti Decembrii viri eruditissimi epistolarum liber incipit feliciter* (f. 216v). The first letter (ff. 216v–217v) is addressed to Coluccio Salutati (in capital letters we can read: '*Ubertus Colucio pierio sal.*').<sup>10</sup> The third, the fourth, the fifth and the sixth letters have the same addressee, a friend (*ad amicum*), and they present annotations on the margin written by the copyist-editor Pier Candido, concerning contents and recipient. The third deals with the consolation from the miseries of human life; the other three were written while Uberto was in Prague, but only the last two describe the city. Their rubrics read: '*Ad eundem Pragensis urbis et nonnulla de moribus populi in ea existentis*'; '*Ad eundem de eadem urbe et moribus incolarum copiosius*'. But who was this friend?

Certainly he was a member of the Visconti court, if Decembrio referred to him writing '*in cancellaria illustris communis heri tecum plerumque loqui soleo*'. The mystery of his identity is soon solved, with reasonable certainty; we can identify him as Antonio Loschi, a prominent figure of Lombard humanism and a fierce and lively opponent of the positions taken by Salutati during the war between Milan and Florence. Indeed, Loschi's *Invectiva in Florentinos* (1397) provoked the passionate response of his former 'mentor' Salutati, who composed his *Invectiva in Antonium Loscum* as a manifesto celebrating *Florentina libertas*.<sup>11</sup>

The *communis herus*, mentioned by Decembrio in his letter, was undoubtedly the powerful lord of Milan, Gian Galeazzo Visconti, as we can infer from a note in the right margin (mostly likely written by Pier Candido) where we can read: '*Iohannis Galeacii primi ducis Mediolani*.' The letters have a colloquial tone, and they are very different from those sent to Salutati, full of rhetorical devices. Uberto himself at the beginning writes to his interlocutor not to expect an *ornatus sermo*, because he will use his *materna vox*.<sup>12</sup> He describes the efforts of the journey during the freezing winter, between mountains covered with snow and impracticable paths. So these letters represent historical documents of considerable importance, because they are not only one of the most ancient descriptions of Prague made by a humanist (although Petrarch, referring to his journey in Prague in 1356, had already written some reflections on the city),<sup>13</sup> but they are also the result of personal observations.

<sup>9</sup> Uberto died in Treviso, on April 7th 1427. His corpse was then moved to Milan and buried in Sant'Ambrogio's Church.

<sup>10</sup> See Francesco NOVATI, *Aneddoti viscontei. I: Uberto Decembrio e Coluccio Salutati; II: Il viaggio del Decembrio in Boemia e la vera data dell'ambasceria viscontea a Venceslao re de' Romani*, Archivio Storico Lombardo 19, 1908, pp. 193–216. Another letter of the Ambros. B 123 is addressed to the Florentine secretary Salutati at f. 224r.

<sup>11</sup> See Stefano Ugo BALDASSARRI, *La vipera e il giglio. Lo scontro tra Milano e Firenze nelle invettive di Antonio Loschi e Coluccio Salutati*, Roma 2012; Vittorio ZACCARIA, *Antonio Loschi e Coluccio Salutati (con quattro epistole inedite del Loschi)*, Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti. Classe di scienze morali, lettere ed arti 129, 1970–1971, pp. 345–387; *Id.*, *Le epistole e i carmi di Antonio Loschi durante il cancellierato visconteo (con tredici inediti)*, Atti della Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei. Memorie. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche 18, 1975, pp. 367–443.

<sup>12</sup> Milano, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Ambros. 123 B sup., f. 221r: "Non ex me ornatum exigas sermonem. Materna tibi voce loquar quicquid ad os primum defluet."

<sup>13</sup> Francesco PETRARCA, *Le familiari*, IV, ed. Vittorio ROSSI, Firenze 1933–1942. See *Fam.* XXI 1: "Ego vero nichil barbarum minus, nichil humanum magis profiteor me vidisse quam Cesarem et aliquot circa eum summos viros, [...] mites et affabiles, etiam si Athenis athicis nati essent."

In the first letter he seems to be impressed by the living conditions of this foreign people he calls *aquilonalis populus*, to wit, that they build their house with wood instead of stone, and have wood stove instead of fireplace. Decembrio writes that is very astounding *in tam acerbo gelu*, in bitterly cold weather, to see women half-naked, with light clothes, embracing their babies, while he himself was wrapped up in a fur-lined coat. But they think that it's a way to make the babies stronger and to get them used to the frigid climate. Decembrio uses this occasion to draw a parallel between them and ancient Italic people mentioned in a famous passage of Virgil's *Aeneid*: "*Natos ad flumina primum deferimus saevoque gelu duramus et undis.*"<sup>14</sup> At this point the main interest of the writer seems to be almost anthropological or ethnographic. He refers of the strange custom of these women who every Saturday bathe together and show their nudity without shame, while men are everywhere: "*Publicis astantium oculis nuditatem ostendere non verentur in publicum apertis genitalibus.*" On the right margin of the folio there is the following note: '*Attende*'.<sup>15</sup> All that, seems to him, barbaric and shameless ('*inverecundum et barbarum michi prorsus apparuit*').<sup>16</sup> Then he goes on to describe their *domestica convivia* ('family banquets'), in which meat and bread were plentiful: from a large platter in the middle of the table, everyone serves himself with his hands. Rather than wine, they drink beer.

After these observations Decembrio adds that at first glance Prague seems a notable city, and inserts a note of historical interests, namely, that it was here that he met the '*rex Ungarie et totius Alemanie flos*',<sup>17</sup> the king of Hungary and flower of the German nobility, gathered there in order to ensure the harmony of the two Marquises of Moravia. He surely refers to the two brothers Iodocus and Procopius, sons of the Margrave of Moravia. The Italian delegation, led by Giorgio Cavalli, stayed in Prague for a long time but was prevented from acting by unfavorable coincidences including the negotiations for the conclusion of peace between the Marquis of Moravia, Iodocus and Procopius. The dispute ended with the imprisonment of Wenceslas, who was accused of favoring Procopius. Only after the liberation of the Emperor Wenceslas in the autumn, could the skill of the diplomats bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion with the granting of the title of duke so earnestly sought by Visconti.

The letters ends with a comparison between Rome and Prague: both cities are divided by a river, respectively, the Tiber and the Vltava. Decembrio takes the opportunity to recall the famous bridge erected on 16 arches at the behest of Charles IV. Certainly, this was the consequence of the broader project of Charles IV to brighten up the city that had become the archbishopric in 1344. But in this first letter Decembrio limits his description of the city to a sketchy allusion, a simple mention. Then our humanist bids Antonio Loschi farewell,

<sup>14</sup> Ambros. 123 B sup., f. 221r. Cf. Verg. Aen., IX 603–604.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. At this point it seems inevitable the comparison between these lines and the well-known and most famous letter of Poggio Bracciolini on the German baths. In this letter on the baths of Baden, written in 1416, Bracciolini celebrates the freedom of costumes of the natural environment of Baden, where the women-nymphs playfully joke in their chaste nudity, because the purpose of life is pleasure. Poggio BRACCIOLINI, *Lettere*, I/3, ed. Helene HARTH, Firenze 1984, p. 123: "Nam cuivis licet visendi, colloquendi, iocandi ac laxandi animi gratia aliorum balnea adire ac adstare, adeo ut et cum exeunt et cum ingrediuntur aquas feminae maiori parte corporis nudae conspiciantur. Nullae aditus custodiae observant; nulla ostia prohibent; nulla suspicio inhonesti. [...] Ego autem ex deambulatorio omnia conspicebam, mores, consuetudines, suavitatem victus, vivendi libertatem ac licentiam contemplantus. Permirum est videre qua simplicitate vivant, qua fide."

<sup>17</sup> Ambros. 123 B sup., f. 221v.

with the promise that he will write and inform him more accurately as soon as he finds something new: “*Certiora tibi scribam cum plura videro, nunc sum novus incola terre. Vale, Prage IIII. Nonas Martij.*”<sup>18</sup>

Shortly afterwards he wrote the second letter, which clearly reveals a change in the author’s attitude. Decembrio himself says: “*Multa que primus adventus et rei novitas iudicare non permisit experientia propius nota fecit.*”<sup>19</sup> Only at that time, it was clear to him what kind of people lived in Prague, what kind of traditions and customs they had. He seems to be able to understand more in depth the nature of this people. Uberto admires the magnificence of the buildings in the city as well, the buildings stand out for their height and the public squares are adorned and tidy.

Even though Decembrio’s letters exhibit his humanistic formation, they also reveal his intellectual curiosity and ethnographic interests. He writes about the unusual spectacle of cock fights, whose champions are worth more than thoroughbred horses. He warns his friend: ‘*Causam vide*’ (‘Points out the cause’). In simple and coarse Latin, he describes in detail the stages of the contests and reports hearing that these birds were fed with garlic and sour foods to make them more aggressive. He focuses mainly on the custom of these people to bet on ‘*in ancipiti huius cristate avis victoria*’ (‘on the uncertain victory of these crested birds’).<sup>20</sup> The spread and popularity of these shows of fighting between roosters probably have a historical reason in Prague. In fact the cock was associated with San Vito [St. Vitus], the patron of the city. In the Nordic countries San Vito is often represented with a rooster. Besides, the cock was the animal sacred to the pagan god Svantovid, and because of the similarity of that name with Saint Vitus, there had been a transfer of the property from the heathen to the saint.<sup>21</sup>

Subsequently he goes on to describe the relationship between men and women. Decembrio censures the extreme freedom enjoyed by Bohemian women, and a marginal note reads: *Mala consuetudo*. The note is an autograph of Pier Candido, but we don’t know if it derives from the original of Uberto and so it can be considered as a personal opinion of the author, or if his son expresses his own idea. So it seems that he thinks it is immoral that women exert authority over their husbands: “*Dominium, ut apparet, quod est sordidum, in maritos assumunt.*”<sup>22</sup> Most men are feckless and spend most of their time in taverns or brothels, “*ad tabernas meritorias se conferunt.*”<sup>23</sup> Under such conditions, modesty and virtue cannot be observed. The only exceptions are the few men who are artists and teachers of art.

At this point, our author offers some brief remarks on Prague University. When, following the issuance of the Papal Bull in January 1366, the *Studium generale* was founded in Prague at the king’s request, the charter text prescribed the same educational system and customs that were in use in Bologna and Paris. We know that the first phase of university development was completed with the foundation of the *Collegium Carolinum* in 1366, established by Charles IV for masters of the faculties of Arts and Theology. The university of Paris was taken as a model. Probably Uberto Decembrio refers to this study structure when writes: “*Studium hic satis magnum viget*

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Johann Georg KOHL, *Austria*, Philadelphia 1844, p. 18.

<sup>22</sup> Ambros. 123 B sup., f. 222r.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

*in artibus, potissimum in theologica facultate. In legibus vero et medicina non ita.*"<sup>24</sup> Indeed we know the passion, nourished by the king, for the theological writings of St. Augustine. It formed the basis of his spirituality, acquired during his long stay in Italy.

The perplexity of the author could in part be related to the fact that there was a structural difference between Italian universities and most universities outside Italy. Non-Italian universities, with the exception of Montpellier, were composed of four faculties, namely theology, law, medicine, and philosophy (including the arts), among which theology was predominant. Italian universities (except Salerno) were founded as schools of Roman and Canon Law which were supplemented by some preparatory courses in grammar and rhetoric. During the thirteenth century, the teaching of medicine was established in Bologna and elsewhere, and medicine, together with the Aristotelian philosophy, grammar and rhetoric and mathematics came to constitute an independent faculty often competing against law. Italian universities never had a separate faculty of theology; and theological education in Italy was always limited to the schools of the religious orders and to a few sporadic courses within the faculty of medicine and arts.

Decembrio's comments on the study structure of Prague University are limited to these few words, to which he adds that the number of students is around ten thousand.

Immediately after referring to the *Studium*, the attention of Decembrio is focused on the religious architecture of the city. He reminds his friend the work begun under the reign of Charles IV was left incomplete because of his death. He also celebrates the beauty and richness of the marble of the church of the Virgin Mary, where, for two days after his death, citizens could view the mortal remains of the emperor. The humanist is surprised by the fact that, in this church, religious functions are celebrated night and day. Concerning the Chapel of St. Wenceslas I, famous for its mosaics and frescoes, he only relates the story of the prince, revered as a saint by the Catholic Church. The humanist touches on the cruel murder of Wenceslas I, duke of Bohemia, victim of the brutal hand of his brother and his mother. Decembrio manifests all his painful disapproval. It is interesting to note that an allusion to this event is also found in the *Historia Bohemica* of Enea Silvio Piccolomini.<sup>25</sup>

Then there is a brief reflection on the danger of the countryside. Indeed, the risks of traveling were a recurrent *topos* in the literature of that period.

The last part of the letter consists of a long discussion of the geographical names of the region, in which the author develops a series of arguments drawn largely from his humanistic formation. Since Visconti was a great patron of learning who collected a noteworthy library containing both Greek and Latin books, Decembrio had been able to broaden and deepen his knowledge through the study of the classics.

Since the middle of the fourteenth century a process of rebirth of geographical and chorographic literature had started and Decembrio does not depart from the methods that were characteristic of the contemporary and their production.<sup>26</sup> In effect, Decembrio's reflections

<sup>24</sup> Ambros. 123 B sup., f. 222r.

<sup>25</sup> Enea Silvio PICCOLOMINI, *Historia Bohemica*, XV, eds. Joseph HEJNIC – Hans RÖTHE, Köln 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Among the many merits attributed to Francesco Petrarca there is also to have promoted these studies, both discovering and putting into circulation the works of Latin authors such as Pomponio Mela (*De chorographia*), Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis historia*), Gaius Julius Solinus (*Collectanea rerum memorabilium*) and Isidore of Seville (*Etymologiae*). It will be also important Chrysoloras' contribution to these studies: coming in Italy in 1397, he brought many Greek manuscripts and one of them contained the *Geography* of Ptolemy. See Sebastiano GENTILE, *L'ambiente umanistico fiorentino e lo studio della geografia nel secolo XV*, in: Luciano Formisano – Gloria

are based solely on the interpretation of classical texts. Thus, his discussion relies on sources like Isidore of Seville, or Lucan's *Pharsalia*. In some cases, he introduces a personal comment, such as '*Hoc non probro, ut existimo*'. It is worth noting what he writes about the name Bohemia. Decembrio argues that the region was once called *Boetia* and that the name derives from the constellation Boeotes.<sup>27</sup> In support of his claim, he cites a passage from Lucan's *Pharsalia*: '*Boetii coiere duces*',<sup>28</sup> but the quotation is inapt, because the Latin author is talking about Boeotians, inhabitants of Boeotia, a region in Greece. We cannot know for sure if Uberto is trying to dignify his statements with recourse to the authority of Lucan, while aware of the misinterpretation, or if, instead, it is an unintentional error due to the fact that he always quotes from memory. Certainly this was not an exception among the humanists. To confirm this, at the end of the letter, Decembrio admits that he has not been able to find a copy of Lucan in all of Prague: '*Nam nunc cum magna librorum hic adsit inopia, quem consulam nescio*'.<sup>29</sup> So he asks his friend to let him know as soon as possible what the Latin author wrote about the names of these Nordic peoples: '*Precor ut aequilonalium nomina populorum a Lucano perscripta transmittas*'.<sup>30</sup>

In conclusion, Decembrio refrains from a negative judgment on the culture of these people who, despite knowing the name of Caesar and having experienced his yoke, are ignorant of Latin culture.<sup>31</sup>

Certainly, we are dealing with a kind of intellectual humanist claim. This is not the place to delve into issues related to the concept that the Italian writers and humanists had of the Nordic peoples. Humanists emphasized the features of the *barbarus* which were contrary to their own value system as men of learning.<sup>32</sup> It was a common practice in Italy call the rest of the world *ultramontani barbari*. In that regard, we recall that the same Petrarch, who had also expressed his admiration for the people of Prague, in some of his letters, extolled the greatness of Italy, protected from the *furor barbaricus* thanks to the Alps.<sup>33</sup> It is worth

Fossi – Paolo Galluzzi (eds.), Amerigo Vespucci. La vita e i viaggi, Firenze 1991, pp. 11–45. Closely related to the renewal of historiographical canon, which introduces in the historical writing excursus of physical geography, anthropology and politics, it started a process of rebirth of geographical and chorographic treatises between Humanism and Renaissance. See, in this regard, the recent contribution of Domenico DEFILIPPIS, *La rinascita della corografia tra scienza ed erudizione*, Bari 2001. See also Numa BROCC, *La geografia del Rinascimento. Cosmografi, cartografi, viaggiatori. 1420–1620*, Modena 1989; Manlio PASTORE STOCCHI, *La cultura geografica dell'Umanesimo*, in: Giovanni Pugliese Carratelli (ed.), *Optima Hereditas. Sapienza giuridica romana e conoscenza dell'ecumene*, Milano 1992, pp. 563–586; Francesco PRONTERA, *Geografia e geografi nel mondo antico*, Bari 1990.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Giovanni BOCCACCIO, *Genealogiae deorum gentilium libri*, VII–VIII, ed. Vittorio ZACCARIA, in: G. Boccaccio, *Tutte le opere*, ed. Vittore Branca, Milano 1964–1998.

<sup>28</sup> Luc. Phars. III 174.

<sup>29</sup> Ambros. 123 B sup., f. 222v.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.: "Hic enim liber ignotus est, licet Cesaris nomen de quo agit, sit hic et ubique notissimum, cuius iugum maiorum suorum sentire cervices."

<sup>32</sup> Gábor ALMÁSI, *I Valacchi visti dagli italiani e il concetto di barbaro nel Rinascimento*, *Storia della Storiografia* 52, 2007, pp. 49–66; Luca D'ASCIA, *Coscienza della Rinascita e coscienza antibarbaro. Appunti sulla visione storica del Rinascimento nei secoli XV e XVI*, in: Renzo Raghianti – Alessandro Savorelli (eds.), *Rinascimento: mito e concetto*, Pisa 2005, pp. 1–37; Massimo DONATTINI, *Il giardino e la muraglia. Le Alpi nella letteratura geografica del Rinascimento*, in: Rosanna Gorris Camos (ed.), *Les montagnes de l'esprit. Imaginaire et histoire de la montagne à la Renaissance*, Aosta 2005, pp. 183–208.

<sup>33</sup> See Francesco PETRARCA, *Res seniles*, VII/1, in: F. PETRARCA, *Res seniles*, eds. Silvia RIZZO – Monica BERTÉ, Firenze 2006–2014. For Italian scholars of the Renaissance the concept of humanism contrasted with that of barbarism. They used this distinction as a means for expressing a fierce cultural pride.

remembering that the first part of the Ambrosian manuscript, containing the *Seniles*, was copied by Modesto Decembrio, but the rubrics and marginal glosses are Uberto's. He was very familiar with Petrarch.

Our study doesn't represent an attempt to examine the ways Italian humanistic scholars thought about the foreign culture, but it aims to reconstruct a particular moment in European political history through the eyes of one of its protagonists, who, at the same time, while remaining faithful to the principles of the *studia humanitatis*, in some passages, undresses the role of official secretary and lets us see his human and intellectual curiosity.

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## Uberto Decembrio: humanista v Praze na konci čtrnáctého století

### RESUMÉ

Uberto Decembrio z Vigevana se zatím dočkal jen malé vědecké pozornosti a pouze nemnoho z jeho děl bylo vydáno tiskem. Od roku 1391 působil jako sekretář Petra Filargi z Kandie, františkánského teologa na viskonti-ovském dvoře a biskupa novarského, kterého v roce 1393 doprovázel na jeho diplomatické misi do Prahy, v níž strávil přibližně dva roky. Během této doby měl možnost pozorovat některé zvyky a zvláštnosti pražského města i jeho univerzity, již charakterizoval těmito slovy: „*Studium hic satis magnum viget in artibus, potissimum in theologica facultate: in legibus vero et medicina non ita.*“ Své dojmy a postřehy shrnul Uberto Decembrio ve dvou dopisech napsaných svému příteli a zachovaných v rukopise v Ambrosiánské knihovně v Miláně. Oba listy představují historické doklady značné důležitosti, protože poskytují nejenom jeden z nejstarších popisů Prahy od humanistického autora (třebaže Petrarka ve svém popisu cesty do Prahy z roku 1356 již dříve zachytil některé své dojmy z města), ale jsou také výsledkem osobního pozorování. Decembriova práce prozrazuje vedle jeho humanistického vzdělání a studia Platona také autorovu intelektuální zvědavost a etnografické zájmy. Decembrio tak popisuje například kohoutí zápasy, Karlův most se šestnácti klenbami a velkolepost svatovítské katedrály. Druhý dopis končí úvahami o původu pojmenování českých zemí. Uberto Decembrio se dotýká také vraždy sv. Václava a vyjadřuje s ní svůj bolestivý nesouhlas.

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