

## ARTICLES / SAGGI

### POLITICAL AND CULTURAL PERSPECTIVES OF REGIONAL IDENTITY: ANCONA IN TWO "CANZONI" OF THE SECOND HALF OF THE QUATTROCENTO

**Nelia Saxby**

#### **Sommario**

*Le canzoni prese in esame sono di Francesco Palmario di Ancona, le cui "Rime" sono state pubblicate di recente in edizione critica. Nel caso del produttore del testo il suo senso di identità regionale equivale al senso di continuità che esiste fra Roma classica e Roma papale, i cui reggitori sono pure reggitori di Ancona.*

*Si chiariscono i motivi che hanno indotto il Palmario a dedicare i suoi componimenti rispettivamente al Cardinale Prospero Colonna e al neo-eletto papa, Niccolò V, alla luce degli avvenimenti storici del momento della loro composizione (1447-8).*

*L'intervento cerca di illustrare come avvenimenti di carattere municipale vengano connessi per motivi politici a episodi di storia papale. Questo mette in rilievo l'atteggiamento assunto dall'autore e dalla sua città verso il candidato papale e il papa infatti eletto.*

*Le allusioni nelle canzoni al passato classico di Ancona e di Roma traggono il loro spunto non solo da ragioni politiche ma anche da ragioni culturali. Esse vengono fatte risalire alle prime scoperte*

*archeologiche di Ciriaco di Ancona e si cerca di giustificare la loro inclusione in un contesto esclusivamente politico.*

The *canzoni* under consideration are by Francesco Palmario of Ancona. By birth, as a member of one of the powerful families of Ancona and by education, a graduate in law, Palmario was equipped to enter into state or court service as a functionary<sup>1</sup>.

That he was able to compose poetry, like Giusto dei Conti, papal protonotary of the preceding generation or his Urbino contemporary, Angelo Galli, was an appanage which could enhance his standing and his usefulness in service as an exponent of the cultural policy of whichever power employed him. Poetic ability in its turn was a means for seeking and subsequently obtaining an appointment of this nature<sup>2</sup>.

This was a fairly typical career-path for most educated men with literary aspirations. The functionary's own political and cultural standpoints as indices of his regional identity were subsidiary to the policy upheld by the employer and the needs of the State at any particular moment. In relation to his contemporaries Palmario was unique in that he cultivated the form of the political *canzone*, a petrarchan genre. This could also be ascribed to municipal influence as in his area his most immediate model would have been the humanist of the generation preceding his own, Ciriaco of Ancona, who in about

---

<sup>1</sup> Francesco Palmario Di Ancona, *Rime*, a cura di Nelia Saxby, Bologna, Commissione per i testi di lingua, 1996, nos. XXVI, LXIII. This paper develops some of the points raised in the *Introduzione*: xxi-xxv.

<sup>2</sup> Marco Santagata, Stefano Carrai, *La lirica di corte nell'Italia del Quattrocento*, Milano, Franco Angeli, 1993: 59-60.

1424-5 had composed a *canzone* in honour of Antonio Colonna, Prince of Salerno and nephew of Pope Martin V<sup>3</sup>.

In the decade of 1440 the writings of Ciriaco of Ancona which were circulating were: his *Anconitana Illyricaque laus et Anconitarum Raguseorumque foedus* (June 1440) and the *Itinerarium* (1441). Such was Ciriaco's eminence that Francesco Scalamonti was already in the 40s composing Ciriaco's biography, enriching it with the fruits of his conversations with the humanist<sup>4</sup>. It is in Scalamonti's biography that the *canzone* is reported.

Palmario's chances of employment and hence the perspectives he adopted on political and cultural events of his own time reflect the changes which affected the Marches and more closely Ancona as papal fief in the 1430s.

Eugenius IV embattled by the Church Council of Basel which challenged his spiritual authority had been obliged to leave Rome in humiliating circumstances in the April of 1436. Taking refuge in one Italian city after the other together with his retinue, he attempted to restore universal unity to a divided Church through a series of Councils and synods with calls on the

---

<sup>3</sup> Francesco Scalamonti, *Vita viri clarissimi et famosissimi Kyriaci Anconitani*, ed. Charles Mitchell and Edward W. Bodnar S.J. Philadelphia, the American Philosophical Society, 1996: 49-50 for the *canzone*: *Driza la testa omai, inclyta Roma*. For a critical reconstruction of its text: P Angelini, "Poésie et politique chez les Colonna. Une 'canzone' de Cyriaque d'Ancone", *Revue des études italiennes*, n.s. XVII (1971): 14-50; 20-2. Cfr. Guido Arbizzoni, "Ciriaco e il volgare", *Ciriaco d'Ancona e la cultura antiquaria dell'Umanesimo. Atti del Convegno internazionale di Studio, Ancona 6-9 febbraio 1992*, a cura di Gianfranco Paci - Sergio Sconocchia, Reggio Emilia, Diabasis, 1998: 217-233; 219.

<sup>4</sup> On Ciriaco's antiquarian research in Ancona in general and on Trajan's arch in particular, Augusto Campana, "Giannozzo Manetti, Ciriaco e l'arco di Traiano ad Ancona", *Italia medioevale e umanistica* Vol. II, 1959: 483-504; 485. On the legend of Fides, Rinaldo Rinaldi "Libertas e 'origines' di Ancona: antiquaria e ideologia nel Quattrocento marchigiano", *Studi umanistici piceni*, Vol. XIV, 1994: 179-91. Palermo Giangiacomo, *Traiano e Ancona*, Ancona, Stampa, 1936: 118.

Orthodox and the Eastern branches to unite with the Western Church. Indefatigably he reiterated the need for a crusade against the Turks.

He was to return to Rome only in the September of 1443. His absence had left the city a prey to adventurers and unscrupulous papal champions, while the Papal States had become the battleground for ambitious mercenaries and were at the mercy of the whims of the more rapacious papal legates<sup>5</sup>.

The most intelligent of these mercenaries was Francesco Sforza. His campaign in the Marches had begun as the Pope's champion in 1434 and continued until 1446-7. His definitive withdrawal was brought about not only by the shift of alliances between the Italian powers but also by the death of his employer and father-in-law Filippo Maria Visconti. The Visconti's death had opened up for him the way to the succession of the Duchy of Milan, a prize far greater than the Marches<sup>6</sup>.

In the February of 1447 when Sforza's hold on the Marches was visibly weakening, Eugenius was dying. It was clear that his death would change the form of government by proxy which had obtained in Rome itself and in the Papal States. It was a period of uncertainty for the cities held in fief by the Papacy. Their future

---

<sup>5</sup> For historical facts in the period 1431-1439 Ferdinando Gregorovius, *Storia della città di Roma nel medioevo*, cura e traduzione di Vittoria Calvani e Pia Micchia, Roma, Newton Compton, 5 vols; Vol. V, 1972: 22-44; for the years 1447-8: 58-68. For the years 1442-46, Pio Paschini, *Roma nel Rinascimento (Storia di Roma Vol XII)* Bologna, Cappelli, 1940: 151-5. Ludovico Von Pastor, *Storia dei papi dalla fine del medio evo*, traduzione di Angelo Mercati, Roma, Desclée; Vol. I, 1958, *Storia dei papi nel periodo del Rinascimento: 290-362*, for the period 1431-1447.

<sup>6</sup> Giovanni Bennaduci, *Della signoria di Francesco Sforza nella Marca e peculiarmente in Tolentino: dicembre 1433-agosto 1447*, Bologna, Forni, 1980 (reprint); *Cronache malatestiane dei secoli XIV e XV* a cura di Aldo Francesco Massera, "Raccolta degli storici italiani dal '500 al 1500", Bologna, Zanichelli, 1922, Vol. XV, pte 2: 80-135; Agostino Peruzzi, *La storia d'Ancona dalla sua fondazione all'anno MDXXXII*, 2 vols., Bologna, Zanichelli, 1976 (reprint), Vol. II: 318-326.

welfare depended on the appointed successor to the Venetian pope.

Palmario must have established himself already as a man of letters and a spokesman for Ancona by 1445, as in the June of that year he was at the Sforza stronghold of Jesi to pronounce a *Coniugalis sermo* before Francesco Sforza and Biancamaria Visconti<sup>7</sup>.

The conventional nature of the fragment of the *Sermo* which has survived would lead one to suppose that Ancona had a diplomatic motive for sending before the Sforza one of its representatives. In short, it could be interpreted as a gesture of goodwill on its part towards him, a reminder of a communality of interest between Sforza and the city, anxious to preserve its economic and military autonomy from what it considered to be the unjust fiscal demands of the then Papal Legate, Scarampo<sup>8</sup>.

From internal evidence it is more than likely that in the different climate of the years 1447-1449 Palmario was seeking to place himself professionally with one of the main powers in the region. His choice, as a citizen of Ancona, was limited: either he should look for service in the Curia or with the strongest Signore who had links with the Papacy. In the ascendant was the star of a militarily and territorially formidable neighbour, Sigismondo Malatesta, ruler of Rimini<sup>9</sup>. On the physical decline, literally at

---

<sup>7</sup> Hamburg Staats und Universitätsbibliothek, Cod. philol. 325a, 109v-110r; Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Iter Italicum*, Vol. III, London Warburg, 1983, No. 564b.

<sup>8</sup> Peruzzi Vol. II: 317-20. In the August of 1444 Sforza had reoccupied most of the March except Ancona. In the November of 1445 the papal army had encircled Ancona which had then been obliged to enter into a league with Venice and subsequently to treat for peace with Sforza (March 1446); Bennaduci: 358; *Cronache malatestiane*: 109.

<sup>9</sup> P.J. Jones, *The Malatesta of Rimini and the Papal State*, Cambridge, University Press, 1974: 176-201.

death's door, was the disliked venetian Eugenius IV, no friend to Ancona.

A strong candidate for the succession was Prospero Colonna, whose uncle, pope Martin V, had brought an end to the schism at the Council of Constance, had taken up residence in Rome in 1420 and had restored order to and maintained it in both the city and the Marches until his death in 1431. Martin had done so by placing members of his own family in strategic administrative positions<sup>10</sup>. His successor, Eugenius, had demolished the Colonna hold over the papal administration and one of his victims had been Prospero. Once reconciled with Eugenius, Prospero had played his part in the Councils and synods promoted by the Pope<sup>11</sup>.

In the Marches Prospero had strong connections through the marriages of his two sisters, Caterina and Vittoria, respectively to the Montefeltro of Urbino and the Malatesta<sup>12</sup>. He had therefore more than a passing interest in events and alliances taking place in the Marches<sup>13</sup>. It was understandable that hopes in his election were high in those regions. From Palmario's point of view it was significant that Prospero had already made a name for himself as an antiquarian and was an avid collector both of classical texts and of men with humanist learning.

---

<sup>10</sup> Brian Pullan, *A History of Early Renaissance Italy from the mid-thirteenth to the mid-fifteenth Century*, London, Allen Lane, 1973: 243-245.

<sup>11</sup> F. Petrucci s.v. *Colonna*, *Dizionario biografico degli Italiani*, Roma, Treccani, Vol. XXVI, 1982: 416-8; Gregorovius: 22-44; 58-68.

<sup>12</sup> Prospero Colonna, *I Colonna dalle origini all'inizio del secolo XIX*, Roma, Ist. Serono, 1927: 90.

<sup>13</sup> As, for example, in the marriage arranged between Sveva of the Montefeltro of Urbino and Alessandro Sforza in the latter part of 1447 early 1448 (B. Feliciangeli, *Sulla monacazione di Sveva Montefeltro-Sforza signora di Pesaro*, Pistoia, Flori, 1903: 5-10).

Between February 1447 and the election of Nicholas V on 6 March 1447, Palmario composed the first of his political *canzoni*, addressed to Rome, as Ciriaco's had been, but with the intent of commending the candidature of Prospero.

Viewed from the perspective of political propaganda, the *canzone* is a masterpiece of diplomacy. There is covert flattery and by contrast, implied criticism of the previous papal administration; there are classical reminiscences which delicately establish a complicity of cultural interests between Palmario and Prospero. Topical events in which Prospero himself was involved are highlighted while the immediate, unpleasant past, such as Eugenius's hostile attacks on the Colonnas are tactfully ignored<sup>14</sup>.

The message of the *canzone* is clear: Rome, the Papal States, even Christendom itself are in a state of upheaval and turmoil and in need of a strong support (a column, or more precisely, a Colonna) to fulfill (Rome at any rate) its destiny as ruler of Europe and to wage the crusade against the infidels<sup>15</sup>.

Palmario conveys his message in an extended discourse. He dwells on the present decadence of Rome (vv. 1-48), the propitiousness of present circumstances for a renewal (vv. 49-64), the wars in the Marches of 1434-1447 (vv. 79-80) seen as emblematic of the division of the Catholic world, itself menaced by schism (vv. 65-78)<sup>16</sup>. He alludes to the workings of the Ecumenical Councils for the unification of Christendom<sup>17</sup>, to

---

<sup>14</sup> Petrucci: 416.

<sup>15</sup> Eugenius had called for a crusade at the beginning of 1443. The Christian army had subsequently been defeated at Varna in the December of 1444 (Paschini: 153).

<sup>16</sup> Gregorovius: 66.

<sup>17</sup> Pastor: 318-326.

which topical anecdote had added the supposed participation of the legendary Prester John (vv. 81-5)<sup>18</sup>. A major place is given to the call for the crusade (vv. 88-96) combined with a prayer for the new pastor to lead the enterprise (vv. 97-106).

Palmario then presents the papal policy of the crusade from the purely municipal point of view of Ancona, highlighting its harbour and its ships. Implied, although not stated is the contrast with Venice, the city's traditional rival, which Eugenius as a Venetian would probably have favoured again for the enterprise (vv. 107-112)<sup>19</sup>.

When, on the election of Nicholas V Palmario's hopes had been dashed, he must have composed the *canzone* to Sigismondo Malatesta<sup>20</sup>. Failing to obtain a position with the Malatesta, Palmario then addressed a *canzone* to the newly elected Pope, weaving into its fabric a homage to the pope's brother, Filippo Calandrini (vv. 110-115)<sup>21</sup>.

Self-interest in this case combined with municipal, political ones, for in the March of 1448 Calandrini had been nominated Papal Legate of the Marches and in the December had been promoted to the rank of Cardinal<sup>22</sup>. He was thus directly responsible for the administration, including the fiscal one, of the

---

<sup>18</sup> Lello Petrone, *La mesticanza*, "Rerum Italicarum Scriptores", Vol. XXIV, pt. 2, Città di Castello, Lapi, 1912: 47-8; Paolo Di Benedetto Di Cola Dello Mastro, *Memoriale*, a cura di M. Pelaez, "Archivio della R. società romana di Storia Patria", Roma, nella sede della Società, Vol. XVI, 1893: 88.

<sup>19</sup> As he did in 1443 (Pastor: 327).

<sup>20</sup> This is no. 2 in the edition.

<sup>21</sup> C. Gennaro s.v. *Calandrini, Filippo*, *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Vol. XVI, 1973: 450-2. He had been elected Bishop of Bologna on 18 December 1447.

<sup>22</sup> Romualdo Sassi, *Documenti sul soggiorno a Fabriano di Niccolò V e della sua corte nel 1449 e nel 1450*, Ancona, Deputazione di storia patria per le Marche, 1955: 5; 80-1.

region and constituted a powerful presence in the Curia, close to the pope himself.

The central theme of the poem is the contrast between Ancona's adherence to Nicholas's call for general peace in Italy (vv. 15-8, 28-32, 43, 50-2, 127-33)<sup>23</sup> and the rebelliousness of certain cities (vv. 19-27, 33-49, 53-4) and individuals to the papal ordinance (vv. 55-108). Hence the exhortations to Nicholas to placate the conflicts and to restore order, to bring the rebels to heel, perhaps with warlike deeds.

But the true intent of the poem is to solicit papal support for Ancona in the series of disputes which had arisen in 1447 with the nearby towns of Osimo and Recanati over strategic strongholds on Ancona's border<sup>24</sup>. Filippo Calandrini, as Legate, was one of the arbiters nominated by Nicholas to settle the disputes which continued until mid 1451<sup>25</sup>.

This banal local matter is placed on the same level of importance as events which had affected the internal stability of the city of Rome itself. The invective against the rebels to papal discipline makes allusion to two such events of the immediate past. The first was the uprising of the Roman populace in 1440 against Eugenius's instrument for maintaining order in the papal dominions during his absence, Cardinal Giovanni Vitelleschi, butcher and murderer, primary cause for the rebellion against

---

<sup>23</sup> Vespasiano Da Bisticci, *Vite di uomini illustri del secolo XV*, a cura di Lodovico Frati, Bologna, Romagnoli, 1892, Vol. I: 48: "nel primo anno del suo pontificato non pensava mai se non a fare pace e unioni e posare Italia in pace".

<sup>24</sup> The dispute with Osimo had begun in about 1447 over the castles of Offagna and Castelfidardo. Ancona had entered into conflict with Recanati over the tower on the river Aspi which marked the border between the respective territories (Giuliano Saracini, *Notizie storiche della città di Ancona, già termine dell'antico regno d'Italia*, Roma, Tinassi, 1675: 259-60; Peruzzi Vol. II: 331-2).

<sup>25</sup> Saracini: 259; Peruzzi: 332.

papal government in the Marches, destroyer of the Colonna fortress of Palestrina and tyrant of Rome. Yet Rome had decreed in 1436 that a statue should be raised to him bearing the script: *A Giovanni Vitelleschi patriarca di Alessandria, terzo padre dopo Romolo della città di Roma*<sup>26</sup>.

The second allusion is to an event which occurred during the interim between the death of Eugenius and the coronation of Nicholas in 1447. In this instance Rome had been brought almost to the point of civil war by the inflammatory republican speeches of Stefano Porcari<sup>27</sup>.

Nicholas, to Palmario's disapproval, who probably thought that a similar outcome was awaiting the dispute with Recanati and Osimo, had reacted too mildly, conceding certain privileges to the Romans and even appointing Porcari Rector of the Maritime strip and of Campania, a position of great prestige<sup>28</sup>. Hence, in the *canzone*, his reserve towards the pope's "silence" against the rebels and his outburst against the ignorant masses which are instruments of demagogues like Porcari.

For reasons of expediency Palmario in his *canzone* sees fit to reinterpret in a positive key the reign of terror instituted by the papal legate Vitelleschi. He would seem to be advocating an extreme, aggressive solution to situations like that created by the likes of Stefano Porcari in Rome and also, by implication, by the cities of Osimo and Recanati in the Marches, while at the same time declaring Ancona's allegiance to Nicholas's policy for a general peace.

---

<sup>26</sup> Gregorovius: 35-40, 48-50.

<sup>27</sup> Giuseppe Sanesi *Stefano Porcari e la sua congiura. Studio storico*, Pistoia, Bracali, 1887: 41-2, 86-8. Pastor: 508-516.

<sup>28</sup> Pastor: 510.

A rhetorical adornment in both these *canzoni* is constituted by references to Ancona's mythological and Roman past. For these, Palmario drew largely on Ciriaco's works. From Ciriaco, who had first excavated the Roman remains in Ancona's harbour in about 1420-21, is the allusion, in both *canzoni*, to Trajan's arch which incorporates Ciriaco's supposition that it had been crowned by an equestrian figure of the emperor flanked by statues of two of the imperial women<sup>29</sup>. The allusion serves not only as a reminder that in Ancona too antiquarian studies were *vivi e vegeti* but also establishes continuity between Ancona and the Rome of classical times.

It is from Ciriaco that Palmario draws the appellative of *città fedele* for Ancona, alluding to the legend reported by Ciriaco of Ancona's mythical construction by a queen whose name was Fides<sup>30</sup>.

For reasons of professional expediency Palmario's views of contemporary events are orientated to presenting his city, Ancona, as a faithful supporter of papal policy. Hence it is that the city's rebellions to papal administration are glossed over in both *canzoni* and Giovanni Vitelleschi represented in a positive rather than a negative way, while the republicanism of Stefano Porcari, similar in many ways to that of the petrarchan Cola di Rienzo, is severely censured.

Although as the *Sermo* attests, he was not himself a humanist, Palmario stood on the periphery of humanist culture as represented in Ancona by Ciriaco. His borrowings from Ciriaco

---

<sup>29</sup> Campana: 495; Giangiacomo: 118.

<sup>30</sup> Rinaldi: 187-8. For the legend, Lazzaro Bernabei, *Croniche anconitane*, "Collezione dei documenti storici marchigiani antichi inediti ed editi rari", vol I, a cura di Carisio Ciavarini, Bologna, Forni, 1976 (reprint): 11.

underscore the cultural and historical links between Rome and Ancona and in this manner they pay homage to the new culture that was then spreading throughout Italy as illustrated by its local exponent only. Regional identity in the case of Palmario then, also limits his view of culture. Singularly absent from his verse are the humanist republican myths, or the attitude that Rome is the centre of the Universe. Instead, Rome is seen in relation to its fief, Ancona.

Both regional and cultural identity, combined with a degree of self-interest, colour his perspective on political events and influence his choice of subject matter so that the *canzoni* stand alone as historical documents illustrative of a particularly limited and to some extent distorted view of events whose effects reverberated throughout the whole of the Italian peninsula.

(University of Cape Town)