

Notitia Itineris Cuiusdam Per Graeciam in Lingua Italica Redacta, Cum Inscriptionum Apographis (Cod. Ambr. C 61 inf./6)

Luca Salvaggio

Department of Archaeology, Scuola Superiore Meridionale, Naples, Italy

Email address:

lucasalvaggio93@gmail.com

To cite this article:

Luca Salvaggio. Notitia Itineris Cuiusdam Per Graeciam in Lingua Italica Redacta, Cum Inscriptionum Apographis (Cod. Ambr. C 61 inf./6). *International Journal of Archaeology*. Vol. 10, No. 1, 2022, pp. 1-5. doi: 10.11648/j.ija.20221001.11

Received: November 10, 2021; **Accepted:** November 29, 2021; **Published:** January 21, 2022

Abstract: The "Notitia itineris cuiusdam per Graeciam in lingua italica redacta, cum inscriptionum apographis" is a text contained in the Codex Ambrosianus C 61 inf., a manuscript composed of several codicological units. It is an incomplete copy of a lost work, whose author was long unknown. In the 1980s, Luigi Beschi suggested that the original work might have been written by Urbano Bolzanio, a friar from Belluno who lived in the 15th century. It is a travel itinerary to Greece and Constantinople, enriched by the citation of several epigraphs found along the way. The original work, as anticipated by the title of the copy in the Codex Ambrosianus, was to be accompanied by several plates with complete inscriptions. By analysing the manuscript in its historical context, this research will refine the date when Urbano Bolzanio may have undertaken his journey to Greece, i.e. between 1479 and 1489. A comparison with another manuscript, the Codex Cicogna 1874, will also reveal new aspects of the literary circle of the friar from Belluno, who was linked to figures such as Girolamo Bologni and Domenico Bonomino. Clues from the text and references to other manuscripts will thus add to the history of Italian epigraphic collections in the 15th century.

Keywords: Manuscript, Codex, Urbano Bolzani, Girolamo Bologni, Domenico Bonomino

1. Introduction

When talking about the first investigations in the field of Greek archaeology, the first name to be mentioned is certainly that of Ciriaco de' Pizziccoli, better known as Ciriaco d'Ancona (Ancona, 31 July 1391 - Cremona, 1452). Defined by Wilhelm Larfeld as 'the father of the new Greek epigraphy' [9], Ciriaco was the first author to assemble, in the pages of his *Commentaria*, a collection of inscriptions from different sites in the Mediterranean. Because of the raging Turkish-Venetian wars, which inevitably affected travel in the Mediterranean, Ciriaco's work is often regarded as the last expression of Greek archaeology in the Renaissance [2]. Although provocative, this statement risks erasing the testimonies of many other contemporary travelers and scholars.

The outbreak of the first war between the Republic of Venice and the Ottoman Empire (1463–1479), had forcibly stopped the movements between the territories of influence of one and the other faction, preventing travel to Greece. It

should be noted, in fact, that the main purposes for embarking on a journey to the East were merchant traffic and pilgrimages to the Holy Land.

The most significant proof of the impediment caused by the war can be deduced from the text of a clause of the peace treaty stipulated in 1479 between the Republic of Venice and Sultan Mohammed II, in which it was specified that: "(...) the exquisite and illustrious Signoria of Venezia is obligated to return to my Lordship all the castles and places taken away by my Lordship in this war, in the parts of La Morea. That men are free to go where they will like, with everything they own (...)" (translated by the Author) [16].

The resumption of trade and the free movement of people and goods in the Mediterranean, soon undermined by alternating conflicts at intervals of about thirty years, may have favored the resumption of travel to Greece and the autopsy study of inscriptions. The epigraphic sylloge attributed to Urbano Bolzanio [2], subject of this study, dates from this period.

2. The Notitia Itineris and the Literary Context at the Turn of the 15th and 16th Centuries

An article by Erich Ziebarth, published in the *Athenische Mitteilungen* of 1899, highlighted some problematic aspects of a manuscript dating from the second half of the 15th century [19]. Resulting by the combination of seven codicological units [20], the Codex Ambrosianus C 61 inf. contains (folios 88r - 97v - unit no. 6) a travel itinerary describing various places in Greece and Constantinople. Some features of the text had already led Beschi to assume that it was more of an excerptum rather than a complete copy of the original. In addition, there is the special title reserved for part of the codex: "Notitia itineris cuiusdam per Graeciam in lingua italica redacta, cum inscriptionum apographis".

If the copy in our possession is a reliable one, there would be a collection of inscriptions as part of a travel report or itinerary. In the version that has come down to us, the structure of the text is divided in two parts. The narrative text, with short quotations from the epigraphs, had to be followed by the proper epigraphic sylloge, in which the inscriptions should have been mentioned in their entirety. We do not know the details of the transcriptions, nor do we know whether they were a true-to-life apograph, as can be assumed in the case of Cyriac. The few inscriptions that have been handed down to us are largely contained in the third volume of Ludovico Antonio Muratori's *Novus Thesaurus* and later in August Böckh's *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* (CIG) [13].

For reconstructing the history of the manuscript, we will take in consideration a particular inscription, partially cited during description of the Temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens [15].

The identification this epigraph by Ziebarth (IG II/III2 13209), resulting from a comparison with a transcription published by Muratori under the heading "ex schedis Ambrosianis", allows some additional considerations on the history of the manuscript. Another less complete version, in fact, is part of the fifteenth-century collection of Girolamo Bologni, the Codex Cicogna 1874. A note by Bologni on the same sheet with the transcription of the epigraph reads "habui ex Dominico Brixiano".

To identify this name, it is necessary to make some preliminary observations. Starting from the obvious consideration that he must have been a man of letters, certainly a scholar of classical literature, one must somehow narrow down the field of potential candidates. A reading of Bologni's texts reveals a reference to the rather controversial figure of Domenico Bonomino, a man of letters and humanist [4, 7, 12, 14].

Born in Brescia in the first half of the 15th century and died in Treviso in 1516 or 1530, he taught Classics in Padua, where he held the record for teaching ancient Greek [7, 12]. A man of great culture, he received the praise of numerous humanists of his time, such as Nicolò Leonico Tomeo and Pietro Bembo, so much so that the latter described him as "vir cum Optimus tum Graecis et Latinis litteris pereruditus" [1, 6-7].

We do not know the exact date of Domenico Bonomino's death, although it can be deduced from some clues. We do know that it must have preceded 1517, the date of death of Girolamo Bologni, who composed a funerary epitaph for him, handed down by Bartolomeo Burchelati (1616) [4]. According to the latter, Bologni was referring to a certain Domenico di Bonomo who died in Treviso in 1348, a hypothesis later rejected by Giammaria Mazzuchelli [12]. The few lines, in fact, can only be linked to the famous man of letters, both for the reference to his place of birth and for the fact that the epitaph of his homonym, who had died about two centuries earlier, mentioned a different profession: "Anno Domini MCCCXLVIII. Indit. Prima, die quinto mensis Augusti obiit strenuus, et discretus vir Dominicus de Bonhomo Jurisperitus cujus corpus jacet in hoc sepulchro suo, et suorum Heredum" [4].

There is a second detail, concerning the epithet Brixianus. First, it would have made sense only if Dominicus had operated outside his hometown, which Bonomino did at least until 1497 [12]. It should also be noted that both Bembo and Tomeo used to call him Dominicus Bonominus Brixianus, an epithet that must have been given to him in Padua or Treviso. An important testimony to this usage is a letter written by cardinal Girolamo Aleandro in 1504 and published in note by Mazzuchelli. The phrase "hunc Brixianum" [12], in a speech in which Domenico Bonomino is mentioned as the first among all in the knowledge of Greek literature, leaves little doubt about this use of the locative.

Both for his closeness to Girolamo Bologni and for his prominence in the Italian academic environment at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, the Dominicus Brixianus mentioned in the Codex Cicogna 1874 cannot but coincide with the man of letters Domenico Bonomino born in Brescia.

It may not be by chance that this name is linked to a copy of the epigraph in the Codex Ambrosianus C 61 inf. (IG II/III2 13209). Following the identification of the author with Urbano Bolzanio, Domenico Bonomino would therefore be a contemporary. The scanty information on the life of the latter, compared with the chronology of Bolzanio's life, does not allow a direct comparison between these two figures. Although the two worked in different environments, one in Venice and the other in Padua and Treviso, the two humanists must certainly have known each other, at least indirectly. Both were in fact friends of Pietro Bembo, and Bolzanio's pupil was Leonico Tolmeo himself, who dedicated the introduction of his dialogue "De Alica" to the late Bonomino.

3. The Lost Original Text: Chronological Problems

Deferring the question of the identification of the author of the Ambrosian Codex C 61 inf./6 to Luigi Beschi's article [2], the problem of its dating is here raised. The date of 1470, proposed by Ziebarth, is in fact inaccurate considering the historical events of the time.

As already noted by the German scholar, the mention of the death of "bertoldo capitano de la S(ignoria)" during the

description of Corinth provides a valuable terminus post quem. The identification with Bertoldo D'Este - a mercenary captain hired by the Venetians in the war against Mohammed II 1463 – proves that the journey had to take place after 1463, the year in which the leader died during the siege of Corinth.

Further proof of the validity of this date is provided by some details implicit in the itinerary. The lack of a description of the Acrocorinth, together with brief references to the Acropolis (the Parthenon and the Palace Acciaiuoli, which stood on the Propylaea, are briefly mentioned) do not seem to derive from an author's missing. If one considers the care taken in the description of the other vestiges of Athens, those at the foot of the stronghold, one would have no reason to think of a lack of interest on the part of the author in monuments such as the Parthenon or the Propylaea, but one might instead think of a consequence of the political changes following the first Turkish-Venetian clashes.

After the conquest of Athens in 1456 by Mohammed II, the city seemed to enjoy a certain stability: the Sultan ensured that each inhabitant retained his rights, issued a specific decree for the preservation of the monuments on the Acropolis, and allowed Christians to continue to profess their faith inside the Parthenon.

The situation changed after only four years, however, when after an attempt to restore the Venetian duchy, Mohammed II decreed the final transformation of the Acropolis into a fortress inaccessible to Christians.

A similar event - that of the closure of Turkish fortresses to Christians - must also have affected the Acropolis in the aftermath of Bertoldo D'Este's failed attempt. The author describes it as follows: "A single road is to be entered and very difficult, nor even if one saw the habitations from any part, except from that and above the mountain; but being on the plain one cannot see anything of the land" (translated by the Author).

To identify a terminus ante quem, the very brief description of Malvasia, a strategic peninsula for controlling the south-eastern coast of the Peloponnese, is instead important. The Venetians came into possession in 1463/4, immediately after the failed attempt to take Corinth, and kept it under their rule until 1540.

The Malvasia peninsula was one of the most important Venetian strongholds in the Morea: several attempts were made to conquer it by the Turks, who never succeeded in taking it despite numerous sieges. The fortress, after seventy-seven years of Venetian rule, was then spontaneously ceded to the Turks along with other strategic strongholds, to conclude a peace that was essential for maintaining trade in the East. A key document for chronologically framing this manuscript is the treaty formalizing the handing over of Nafplio and Malvasia, which reads as follows: "In order that friendly relations may be established on both sides and peace made, he begged that I grant the Venetians my imperial pact accepting the conditions of ceding to my Threshold, the refuge of the world, the fortresses of Enaboli (Nafplio) and Menavsaje (Malvasia) which they possessed in the Morea with the power to take away their fortress cannons, bells and other instruments of war and also to pay my flourishing

treasury 300,000 gold coins. By my imperial mercy I have granted them my noble treaty on the terms herein declared and have given them this joyful imperial rescript" (translated by the Author) [3, 18].

The clause granting the dismantling of fortresses would have no reason to exist unless expressly requested by the Turkish army, especially given the excellent relationship that had been established between the Venetians and the locals. The annexation of Malvasia had not been a real conquest: in fact, sources report that it was the population itself that favored the Venetians' entry into the peninsula for defensive purposes.

The fact that the traveller saw a fortress armed to such an extent that he described it as "munitissima" (very well armed) could therefore make it possible to identify 1540 as a valuable terminus ante quem.

However, based on the historical events of this period, in particular the Turkish-Venetian wars, it is possible to further narrow down this time frame.

We have already mentioned the nature of the manuscript in question and the epigraphs contained in folios 94-96; one of these (folio 95v - CIL III 456) bears the inscription "in Chio insula". If placed in relation to the events of war that characterized the second half of the fifteenth and the beginning of the sixteenth century AD, this detail could be the starting point for a new reflection.

The Kingdom of Cyprus was marked during the first Turkish-Venetian war (1463-1479) by a bitter conflict over the succession to the throne following the sudden death of James II of Lusignan in 1473. A rather ambiguous will, together with the suspicious circumstances of his death, contributed to the rise of James II's natural children against his wife, Caterina Corner. Only the direct intervention of Doge Pietro Mocenigo in 1474 succeeded in pacifying the island, re-establishing Caterina Corner on the throne and placing two councilors and a governor of the Republic of Venice alongside her.

A general climate of peace, albeit with ups and downs due to excessive Venetian interference in Cypriot affairs, turned, following an alleged plot with Ferdinand I of Naples, into full Venetian rule after the Queen's deposition in 1489.

The onset of the second Turkish-Venetian war (1499-1503) just ten years later, due to the now strained relations between the Republic of Venice and the successor of Muhammad II, Bayezid II, would have made it at least difficult for the author of *Notitia itineris* to pass through Cyprus, bearing in mind the attempted Turkish invasion of the island in 1501.

On the other hand, it would have been impossible to pass through Modone and Corone, the two cities mentioned in the very first verses of folio 88r: "Da modo(ne) a coro(ne) per terra m(iglia) 18, da coro(ne) in porto vitulo et indi a monovasia - poi a porto Cyparis(sia), a napoli di romania, e da napoli per terra verso Athene camminando circa 15 m(iglia) trovassimo un castello chiamato αἰνάρη".

The two localities in the Peloponnese were occupied by the Turks in 1500 and were not reconquered, except for a brief parenthesis of two years for Corone (1532-1534), before the intervention of Francesco Morosini in the 1780s.

As for the crossing of the cities of Mistra and Sparta, it can be well placed in the chronological period between the first and second Turkish-Venetian wars, i.e., between 1479 and 1499, given the presence of a strategic stronghold in Turkish hands since 1460.

This emerges from one of the clauses of the treaty stipulated with Muhammad II on 25 January 1479, written in Greek and translated by the Venetian diarist Marino Sanudo, which stated that: "(...) the exquisite and illustrious Signoria of Venezia is obligated to return to my Lordship all the castles and places taken away by my Lordship in this war, in the parts of La Morea. That men are free to go where they will like, with everything they own (...)" (translated by the Author) [16].

In favor of this chronology, attention is drawn to Beschi's proposal to identify the author of the text with Urbano Bolzanio. According to the biographical details in our possession, the monk from Belluno would have undertaken his journeys between 1474 and 1489. As Beschi has already proved, it would not have been possible for Bolzanio to travel to parts of Greece before 1479 because of the raging of the first Turkish-Venetian war. The news of his stay in Florence shortly before 1489 provides a useful terminus ante quem, allowing us to frame his stay in Greece in the decade 1479-1489.

4. Conclusion

The Codex Ambrosianus C 61 inf./6 is an excerptum of a travel diary probably written by Urbano Bolzani in the second half of the 15th century, which has come down to us in the form of a copy and was originally conceived with a corpus of epigraphic plates attached. Unlike the manuscripts attributed respectively to Girolamo Bologni [10, 17] and Konstantinos Laskaris [8, 11], this is not an epigraphic sylloge stricto sensu, but an itinerary studded with valuable historical and geographical references.

The emblematic title of the work, "Notitia itineris cuiusdam per Graeciam in lingua italica redacta, cum inscriptionum apographis" (report of someone's journey to Greece, written in Italian and with inscriptions), implies that the manuscript reached the Biblioteca Ambrosiana when it was already damaged. We are unable to determine whether the author of the work was already unknown when the volume was purchased by Gian Vincenzo Pinelli for his library in Padua, a change of hand suggested by the old markings Pinelli XX-7 and Pinelli XX-9.

A new network of contacts between men of letters of the same period, Urbano Bolzanio, Girolamo Bologni and Domenico Bonomino, is the result of the comparison between the Codex Ambrosianus C 61 inf./6 and the Codex Cicogna 1874. The clue of the note "habui ex Dominico Brixiano", in fact, has allowed to deepen some biographical aspects related to an important man of letters interested in epigraphy, who lived between the XV and XVI centuries, of which little is known.

Finally, some historical details contained in the text make it possible to narrow down the date of Urbano Bolzanio's journey to Greece and Constantinople, which probably took

place between 1479 and 1489. The amount of evidence gathered on that occasion by Urbano Bolzanio, although only partially handed down to us, has provided valuable material for many epigraphic syllogies of later periods, starting with Ludovico Muratori's *Novus Thesaurus*.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to the referees for their valuable comments. I am also deeply thankful to the editors for supporting me and allowing me to publish in their journal.

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