

FRANCESCO PETRARCA TRAVELLING AND WRITING TO PRAGUE'S COURT*

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Abstract: This paper deals with the cultural and political contacts between Francesco Petrarca and the imperial court in Prague. Leaving aside the political motivation of the epistolary exchange between Petrarca and the Emperor Charles IV, we firstly focus on the history of Petrarca's journey(s) to Prague as a curious experience in his life, and secondly on the nature of the "friendship" between Petrarca and the imperial chancellor Jan ze Středy, which we interpret as an obstinate and idle endeavour of self-promotion.

Keywords: Petrarca, Jan ze Středy, Prague, humanism, epistolography

When Petrarca, enthusiastic patriot and bard of Italic primacy, wished to approach the highest exponents of his contemporary society, he had to write letters abroad. Although the Pope and the Emperor boasted to be head of the Roman Church (the former), and of the Roman Empire (the latter), neither of them was settled in Rome. For this reason Petrarca was in touch with Prague and its imperial court, i.e., with a city so far from his Antiquity focusing view. Petrarca's correspondence with the Emperor Charles IV is generally known and we do not want to examine his exhortation to Charles to go to Rome and assume the power, nor the rebukes he made to him for not having

* This paper was written within the framework of Research Development Project (2009, support of young scholars) accorded by MŠMT to Faculty of Arts, Palacký University of Olomouc. I would like to express my thanks to Kristýna Slamová and Patrizio A. Andreaux for having helped me to translate the paper into English.

followed his suggestion and for having escaped from Rome the very day of the coronation in 1355, as previously agreed with the Pope.¹ We would rather like to focus on the side effects of Petrarca's political efforts with Charles: an interesting story of his journey(s) to Prague, and the nature of correspondence with the imperial chancellor Jan ze Středy.²

The expanding House of Visconti, Petrarca's protectors, started to face problems in 1356. Apart from some smaller conflicts in which they were engaged, Giovanni Oleggio, the governor of Bologna, which was gained with much effort, declared its independence, and the Marquise of Monferrato started to conquer the dominions of Milan in Piedmont. Moreover, the information about the Emperor's alliance with the Habsburgs containing Lois of Hungary and the Pope was being spread, which in relation with the cooperation with the Anti-Viscontean League might cause hard times for the Visconti. All the states included in the antiviscontean League desperately asked the Emperor Charles IV to take an action against Milan. However, the Emperor did not feel like taking any radical action and he kept waiting for the Italian ambassadors for the imperial diet in Metz, where the issue should be presented to the arbitrate of Princes of the Holy Roman Empire.³

Petrarca played not a less than minor part in the defence of Milan. His familiar relation to Charles IV seemed to be profitable for the Visconti, and, therefore, they decided to send the poet to the Emperor in Metz to present the demand concerning peace with the League and probably also the vicariate of Pavia, which was given to the Marquise of Monferrato by the Emperor during his first coronation journey (1355).

On 19 May 1356, "while packing his luggage", as Petrarca literary states, he writes to his friend Francesco Nelli about the fact that he had been sent to the Emperor in Basel by Galeazzo to deal with state affairs. He does not know if he succeeds, but in case he does not achieve his aim, he intends to at least criticize Charles face to face for his disgraceful escape from Rome, and to avenge himself, Italy, and the abandoned empire.⁴

¹ We have treated these subjects in J. Špička: *Petrarca: homo politicus*, Praha: Argo, 2009: 161–192.

² Known as well as John of Neumarkt, Środa or Středa, or Johannes Novoforensis, according to the German, Polish, Czech or Latin name for this cosmopolitan Silesian town. About him, see J. Klapper: *Johann von Neumarkt. Bischof und Hofkanzler*, Leipzig: St. Benno Verlag, 1964.

³ See F. Kavka: *Vláda Karla IV. za jeho císařství (1355–1378)*, vol. 1, Praha: Karolinum, 1993: 64, 73.

⁴ There is an excellent collection of Petrarca's mentions of Germany and German affairs:

The poet accepted the commitment with pleasure, as his old passion for travelling was back. He set off on 20 May or slightly later. In Basel, which he liked very much and where he found new hangers-on, he waited for Charles for a month in vain. The Emperor kept putting the date of the assembly off, probably due to unsolved negotiations with the French king and the inner conflict with the powerful Czech magnate family of Rožmberk.⁵ Petrarca had to leave the elegant city of Basel and meet the Emperor in Prague, which was not pleasant for him, because it meant spending the whole summer travelling and not in some delightful place in the countryside, as he usually did. He remembers his departure in *senilis* 10.2 addressed to his old friend Guido Sette: "I left Basel [...], after I had been waiting here for our emperor for a month. He is good and kind, but slow in all respects. Finally, I had to look for him at the very end of the barbarian regions."⁶

Accompanied by Sagremor de Pommiers and a German fellow called Martin, the poet left for Prague at the end of June, where he arrived in the middle of July and stayed for approximately another month (the letter *Fam.* 19.14 addressed to Nelli, which is dated the 20 September, had already been written in Milan). Years later Petrarca briefly reminds Sagremor of the shared experiences from the journey in the extensive letter *Sen.* 10.1: Sagremor's company and their conversations should have been the only comfort for Petrarca during the risky journey throughout the barbarian regions, which included dangerous roads full of raiders. Martin also accompanied him along with several armed men with pulled bows and drawn swords.⁷

There are no archive documents on Petrarca's visit to Prague and he himself left only a few passing notes. However, apart from his *grand tour* throughout the Flanders and Germany in his young age and his usual trips between Italy and Southern France, this was the only other important journey he

P. Piur: *Petrarcas Briefwechsel mit deutschen Zeitgenossen*, Berlin: Weidmann, 1933: 161–253, together with an excellent critical edition of all the correspondence between Petrarca and Prague.

⁵ See F. Kavka: *Vláda Karla IV. . . .*, *op.cit.*: 65. About the conflict with the House of Rožmberk, see J. Šusta: *Karel IV. Za císařskou korunou 1346–1355*, Praha: Jan Laichter, 1948: 406–415.

⁶ *Sen.* 10.2.57. Edition cited: F. Petrarca: *Le Senili*, 2 vol., ed. E. Nota & U. Dotti, Torino: Arango, 2007. We should make it clear that in *Fam.* 17.7.4 Petrarca distinguishes among barbarian regions those more civilized in Rhineland and those more backward on the East. Another recall of this journey in *Sen.* 17.2. Edition cited: F. Petrarca: *Epistole*, ed. U. Dotti, Torino: UTET, 1983: 860.

⁷ I believe that the dramatisation of the danger is quite calculated in this context, because the letter celebrates Sagremore's entry in monastery and compares the difficult pilgrimage of the secular life with a meditative journey to Christ.

made. The earlier journeys enabled him to look for the relics of Roman civilisation everywhere. But during his journey in the Heart of Europe he did not find anything, which could satisfy his interest in monuments from ancient times.⁸

Concerning the affairs of the Visconti: Petrarca did not succeed, and Bayley even thinks that Charles did not take the poet's diplomatic mission too seriously.⁹ He probably met the Emperor several times, and prominent members of the court were introduced to him. He might have come into touch with the Italian community in Prague, including his admirer Angelo of Florence, who was a botanist and a famous pharmacist working in Prague. His pharmacy was situated on the Little Square (Malá Strana) in the place of the present house № 144/I. He is also known as the founder of the botanic garden which was spreading on the very place where the Central Post Office is located now (Jindřišská Street 909). According to some Czech scholarly literature, Petrarca stayed at Angelo's place (before Petrarca he also should have given shelter to Cola di Rienzo). He chatted with Charles when he was strolling in the garden. Even though this might have been possible, without any reliable evidence it remains only a legend.¹⁰

After having returned to Italy, Petrarca writes to Prague's Archbishop Arnošt z Pardubic (Ernest of Pardubice) and he mentions his visit in a rather enthusiastic tone remembering Arnošt's compassion with Petrarca, who found himself among barbarians (*Fam.* 21.1.4):

However, I declare not to have seen anything less barbarian and more human than the Emperor and the noblest men around him whose names I will leave out on purpose, but I repeat: they are reputable and honourable men who deserve acknowledgement. Their kindness makes me think they had been born in attic Athens.

⁸ See especially *Fam.* 1.4–5; 3.1. About Petrarca's fixation on monument of Antiquity when travelling, see J. Špička: 'Petrarca viaggiatore attraverso la realtà e attraverso la letteratura', in: J. Łukaszewicz & D. Artico (eds.): *Il viaggio come realtà e come metafora*, Łask: Leksem, 2004: 51–61.

⁹ C. C. Bayley, 'Petrarch, Charles IV, and the "renovatio imperii"', *Speculum* 17, 1942: 323–341, p. 332.

¹⁰ See V. V. Tomek: *Dějepis města Prahy*, vol. 2, Praha: František Řivnáč, 1871: 250–251, 485–487. The lack of information gave birth to another legend: there are some Italian verses written in one of the towers of the imperial Karlštejn castle. Some believe that it was Petrarca who wrote them during his visit of the castle, see A. Molnár: 'Cola di Rienzo, Petrarca e le origini della riforma ussita', *Protestantesimo* 19, 1964: 214–233, p. 217; F. M. Bartoš, 'Záhadný nápis na Karlštejně a italský básník Petrarca', in: *Devět stíží z českých dějin*, Praha: Pokrok, 1948: 18–28.

These words are often cited in petrarcollogical writings. But was Petrarca really so enthusiastic? I do not think so. Similar acknowledgements have to be seen as an act of courtesy, which hardly reflect the real attitude of the poet. In other letters there is not a single hint at Petrarca's stay in Prague, there are only some references to the landscape and climate of Central Europe which were not pleasant for him. In *familiaris* 19.15 (31 May 1356) the poet writes to Nelli that as he was travelling throughout the barbarian regions he started to know his home country better, and as he looked at "Germany" (in this case Switzerland), he realized how beautiful Italy was. Several months after his return from Prague, Petrarca goes back to this issue in another letter addressed to Francesco Nelli (*Fam.* 19.14 dated 20 September 1356). He confesses to him that the more he travels the less he likes it. The most beautiful country for him is Italy, which is unfortunately spoiled by the pride and envy of its inhabitants. Any other concrete Bohemian experiences were affected by *damnatio memoriae*.

Less than five years later, while the correspondence with the court of Prague continued and the invitations from the Emperor became more urgent, Prague got into Petrarca's diary again. Finally, the poet decided to set off for Bohemia and, which is absolutely stunning, he intended to move his books to Prague: and this might reflect his will to stay in Prague for longer or even for good!¹¹

However, it is difficult to decide whether the planned stay in Prague was a result of a mature consideration or just one of the attempts to run away from the Italian chaos. In *senilis* 1.2 (the end 1361–the beginning 1362), Petrarca writes to Francesco Nelli that the Roman emperor and the French king invited him, and even did so the Pope, who had previously taken him for a wizard, and now wanted him as a secretary,¹² "So far it is not clear what to do with my life"; the poet confides, "and if anything new occurs, it is possible that I will write to you in a few months from a solitary place from behind the Alps. I am fed up with the Italian affairs" (*Sen.* 1.2.24). Half a year later, on 8 July 1362, he informs Nelli that on 10 January he left Padua for Milan to continue over the Alps to Avignon, because he was disgusted with the endless conflicts in Italy. In Avignon he wanted to recommend Nelli for the

¹¹ About a possible move of Petrarca's library in Prague see M. Pastore Stocchi: 'La biblioteca del Petrarca', in: *Storia della cultura veneta*, vol. 2 (*Il Trecento*), Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 1976: 536–565, pp. 542–544.

¹² About Petrarca's alleged sorcery, see *Sen.* 1.4 to the Cardinal Hélie de Talleyrand (April–May 1362).

position of the Pope's secretary and to feed his desire to see Vacluse again, the beloved place of his earlier years. Petrarca had no official letter; the Pope let him know by compatriots that in case he rejected the offer of the working places in *curia*, the poet should have taken the person who would suit the post best. However, since the journey was made impossible by the war, Petrarca changed his destination: on 21 March 1362 he confirms in *familiaris* 23.9 to Charles his intention to go to Prague. On 11 May he returns from Milan to Padua, which should be the starting point for the journey to the emperor. He apparently invites him so urgently that it would have been an offence not to accept the invitation. (*Sen.* 1.3.56). However, even the region of Venice and Austria are at war. To his friend, Moggio Moggi, Petrarca writes that all roads are blocked and not a single person can go through, the merchants are kidnapped and the Lord of Padua, Francesco da Carrara, does not allow him to leave under such circumstances. They should wait for a messenger from the emperor, who should bring some information, and then, hopefully, it will be decided.¹³

Petrarca's preparations to leave Italy made Boccaccio, a common friend to Petrarca and Nelli, worried. Petrarca informed him about his intentions in a letter, which got lost. Only some parts are known to be quoted or paraphrased by Boccaccio in a letter addressed to another common friend of his and Petrarca's, Barbato da Sulmona.¹⁴ Boccaccio informs him that Petrarca intends to go somewhere in Bohemia or even to Sarmats (which was among humanists a figurative expression for the end of the world), where he wants to stay a longer period of time. The Muses, who were brought by Petrarca from Greece, should be now exported to the worst barbarians! He wrote directly to Petrarca in the same spirit. Petrarca replied in the following manner on 28 May: "Though I cannot get enough admiring Italy, as I wrote to Simonides [nickname of Nelli] some time ago, I'm sick and tired of Italian affairs" (*Sen.* 1.5.7). That is why he often considers escaping not directly to Germany, but to any place in the world, where he could live and die in peace away from wars and envy. For "barbarian countries, where the climate is inclement and the landscape rough," he leaves also because he cannot refuse "a short audience" at the emperor: "it would be a sign of not only pride, but also a rebellion or offence" (*Sen.* 1.5.9).

¹³ *Disp.* 50 dated 10 June 1362. Edition cited: F. Petrarca: *Lettere disperse*, Parma: Guanda, 1994.

¹⁴ G. Boccaccio: *Ep.* 12.11–12. Edition cited: G. Boccaccio: *Epistole*, in: *Tutte le opere*, vol. 5/1, Milano: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1992: 495–856.

These manoeuvres are really noteworthy. First, the fact that the aging Petrarca was ready to travel after so many years he had spent in Italy and after having declared many times that Italy held the primacy among all other countries might be found surprising. Secondly, the continuous changing of destinations in such a desperate way is curious. Is it possible that Petrarca's spleen was really so deep that it would chase him to any country outside Italy, whether barbarian or not? Biographical and historic information does not provide us with any clear reason. If it existed, it must have passed away, because any hint at either moving to Prague or at staying there does not occur in Petrarca's work any more.

But there were letters that kept the relationship between Petrarca and Prague alive for many years. The correspondence with members of Prague's court, Jan ze Středy and to a smaller extent with Arnošt z Pardubic and the Empress Anna of Šwidnica, does not have, apart from some isolated passages, political content that instead is widely present in the letters to Charles IV, but it has a social and political dimension in itself. Thus, Petrarca can show that he was a close friend of the leading members of the empire.

His most common correspondent in Prague was Jan ze Středy, undoubtedly as a representative of the court, who was supposed to maintain a correspondence which was linked to their shared intellectual interest, parallel to the politically engaged correspondence between Petrarca and the Emperor. In the context of the court representation, the chancellor was supposed to show that the court was able to keep up intellectually with the most learned and famous man of letters in Europe. On the other hand, Petrarca wanted to emphasize that his conception of education was being acknowledged at the highest posts of the secular hierarchy, and he rightly assumed that the environment of the court could be a favourable medium through which he could spread his texts and topics all over the empire.¹⁵ This strategy turned

¹⁵ The factor of mutual self-promotion has been several times highlighted by U. Dotti, see, for example, F. Petrarca: *Le familiari*, vol. 1, Roma: Archivio Guido IZZI, 1991: V–XIII. But it is difficult to accept Dotti's view of Petrarca as a "primo e riconosciuto intellettuale europeo", whose mission should have led to the "trionfo dell'umanesimo in Europa", as he claims in F. Petrarca: *Lettere all'Imperatore. Carteggio con la corte imperiale di Praga*, ed. U. Dotti, Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2008: 21. In fact Petrarca should have realized the faulty reception of his humanism, not a triumph, and he was too strongly fixed on Latin-Italian culture to become European. He just was in search of the noblest partners to make them know his ideals and work, in Prague or elsewhere. Dotti published several papers about this topic, see: *Petrarca e la scoperta della coscienza moderna*, Milano: Feltrinelli, 1978: 165–174; 'Le prospettive storico-politiche di Petrarca nella crisi del Trecento', in: L. Secchi Tarugi (ed.): *Francesco Petrarca. L'opera latina: traduzione e fortuna*, Firenze: Franco Cesati Editore, 2006: 205–218; 'Petarch in

out to be successful: we know from Jan's letter *Saphirei fundamenti* that the Emperor read Petrarca's letters again and again and that he shared his pleasure in reading them with many other people.

Both scholars voluntarily played their roles and, from today's point of view, the game escalated to a grotesque level. The correspondence is (apart from *Disp.* 29, which is a special case itself) desperately vapid and helpless, the most vapid in Petrarca's whole epistolary corpus including hundreds of his letters. In fact, both correspondents restrict themselves to their own degradation and reciprocal praise and to various kinds of coquetry, which should lead to further praise by the counterpart.¹⁶ Endless praise goes so far that they themselves become a topic of theorizing.

The helplessness of the letters is also shown by their minimal length—Petrarca had written such short letters to no one else but Jan. The differences concerning cultural background and the fact that they were not friends brought about a situation where Petrarca and Jan had nothing to say to each other, however they desperately tried to write at least one page, which enabled them to keep the correspondence alive.¹⁷

Let us compare these letters with Petrarca's correspondence with the apostolic secretary Leonardo Bruni, who had the same position in the Church hierarchy as Jan in the secular one. Even though Petrarca never met him personally, their shared interests and mentality were a good basis for a friendship that arose between them, and the poet could write about very intimate topics and ask him for confidential assistance.

The person who initiated the wave of flattery and determined the tone of the future correspondence was Jan ze Středy, who wrote the first letter to Petrarca *Utinam Parnasei*, dated between February 1352 and October 1353.¹⁸

Bohemia: Culture and Civil Life in the Correspondence between Petrarch and Johann von Neumarkt', in: K. A. E. Enenkel & J. Papy (eds.): *Petrarch and His Readers in the Renaissance*, Leiden–Boston: Brill, 2006: 73–87 (in Italian translation: 'Petrarca a Praga. Lo scrittore e il potere', *Belfagor* 60, 2005: 161–172). Dotti also translated and commented the correspondence between Petrarca and Prague: F. Petrarca: *Lettere all'Imperatore*, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ For the detailed catalogue of mutual flatteries and of self-humiliation see H. Hladilová: *Z korespondence Jana ze Středy a Franceska Petrarky* (M. A. thesis), Brno: FF MU, 2003: 74–94. Jan's letters to Petrarca are published by P. Piur: *Petrarcas Briefwechsel...*, *op. cit.*: 21–23, 39–41, 49–50, 55, 63–64, 94–97, 137–139, 145–146.

¹⁷ H. Thomson: 'Learning at the Court of Charles IV', *Speculum* 25, 1950: 1–20, p. 8, thinks, on the other hand, that the letters between Jan and Petrarca were "warmly personal" and "most cordial".

¹⁸ E. H. Wilkins: 'Petrarch in Provence', in: *Studies in the Life and Works of Petrarch*, Cambridge, Mass.: Medieval Academy of America, 1955: 81–181, pp. 167–168, puts the date in Oc-

He apologises for his writing style and asks Petrarca to send him his texts and to develop a friendly correspondence. Petrarca feels flattered, as his fame has gone across the Alps, and pays Jan the flattery back. According to the information given by Jan in the first two letters, Angelo of Florence, the doctor and botanist at court, seems to have been the person who spread Petrarca's fame in Prague. However, there is no evidence concerning Angelo's contact with Petrarca.

In his letters, Jan desperately tries to find topics about which he thinks Petrarca could take an interest. The result of such attempt is a broken style with too many rhetorical ornaments and a huge number of mythological allusions, which—like František Tadra rightly noted—“made his style even worse”.¹⁹ It is evident that Jan did not understand the real nature of Petrarca's humanism, which was based on a profound knowledge of Antiquity, and according to which the intellectual references were not the aim but the means.²⁰

tober 1352 or later. U. Dotti, prefers the second half of 1353, see his notes in F. Petrarca: *Lettere all'imperatore*, *op.cit.* : 43–45. But there is no particular evidence for it, so we prefer, together with P. Piur: *Petrarcas Briefwechsel* . . . , *op.cit.* : 22–23, 25, a wider dating to February 1352–October 1353, i.e., in the period of Jan's episcopate in Naumburg, which is Petrarca's regular titulation of Jan in letters to him.

¹⁹ F. Tadra: *Kulturní styky Čech s cizinou až do válek husitských*, Praha: Královská česká společnost nauk, 1897: 223. The allusions to elements of Antiquity are analyzed by H. Hladilová, *Z korespondence Jana ze Středy* . . . , *op.cit.* : 64–74. Jan's fear to be considered a barbarian leads him to use models that he sees valuable. Hladilová finds in Jan's letters the influence of up to time stylistic models in Prague, the formulary of Enrico d'Isernia (assembled in 1270–1278?) which is with absolute evidence proved in his letter *Aureis redimita*, recycling not only terms and idioms, but whole sentences, see *ibid.* : 103–104. See the model text of this letter in *Invectiva prosotettrasticha in Vlticum Polonum*, ed. R. Psík, Ostrava: Ostravská univerzita, 2008: 121–122. About Enrico and his importance *ibid.* : 16–63. About Petrarca's use of Enrico, see M. Feo, 'Note petrarchesche', *Quaderni petrarcheschi* 7, 1990: 183–203, pp. 183–186.

²⁰ Many researchers saw in Petrarca's influence on Jan something like an early humanism in Czech lands. Obstinate this concept was defended by I. Hlobil & E. Petrů: *Humanismus a raná renesance na Moravě*, Praha: Academia, 1992: 17–26, and E. Petrů: *Vzdálené hlasy. Studie o starší české literatuře*, Olomouc: Votobia, 1996: 190–226. Affirmative, but cautious are A. Cronia: 'La fortuna del Petrarca nella Letteratura Ceca', *Annali della Cattedra petrarchesca* 1, 1932: 27–57, pp. 1–8. A. Cronia: 'L'opera latina del Petrarca nella letteratura ceca', *Studi petrarcheschi* 5, 1952: 299–321; J. Binder: 'Nad českým protohumanismem', *Slovesná věda* 3, 1948–1949: 57–59; J. Nechutová: *Latinská literatura českého středověku do roku 1400*, Praha: Vyšehrad, 2000: 145–151. J. Truhlář: 'Počátky humanismu v Čechách', *Rozpravy České akademie císaře Fr. Josefa pro vědy, slovesnost a umění* 1, 1982: 463–475; B. K. Vollmann, 'Prager Frühhumanismus?', in: J. Heinzle et al. (eds.): *Literatur im Umkreis des Prager Hofes der Luxemburger*, Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1994: 58–66. Other researchers are sceptic even on the fact whether Petrarca's works could be considered humanistic: A. Vidmanová: 'Středolatská beletrie, Jan ze Středy a olo-

It might seem strange that Petrarca does not try to influence Jan, who was a head of the emperor's chancellery, through Roman propaganda, as he tried to do with Charles IV. In this apolitical correspondence only one point concerns the arguments discussed with the Emperor: when Petrarca was named a Count Palatine (*comes palatinus*), he received in the same time a golden bull which he sent back to Prague as a gift for Jan. As he looked at it, he wrote:

a merest glimpse at it gives a man the impression of great majesty and fame and it makes him think about the greatest power of the Roman Empire in its Golden Age with respect. On one side there is an image of our emperor with a crown and sceptre, as he is sitting on the high throne surrounded by the Roman eagle and the inherited lion on one side and Rome with its temples and fortifications on the other side. The holy image of the Eternal City catches the eye in a very pleasant way and the splendour of gold is so impressive, to use the words of David.²¹

This was the only note concerning the importance and fame of the ancient Rome, and it might sound malicious if we take into consideration that Petrarca literally contrasts the Emperor, sitting on the throne, on one side, with the glamorous Rome on the other side of the bull. It seems as if he wanted to point out the contrast between the barbarian Empire of Charles (in which the Roman Eagle is dishonoured by the Bohemian lion), and the real glamour of the City of Rome.

The correspondence between Petrarca and Jan ends in a strange way: the last letter by Jan addressed to Petrarca (*Rogo vos*) is very formal compared to the previous letters, which makes Petrarca wonder, in his response *Fam.*

moucký protohumanismus', in: *Laborintus*, Praha: KLP, 1994: 140–149; J. Pelán: 'La fortuna di Francesco Petrarca in Boemia', *Listy filologické* 118, 1996: 246–259. For general information about the Petrarchan tradition in Czech lands see F. L. Borchard: 'The German Connection', in: A. Scaglione (ed.): *Francis Petrarch, Six Centuries Later*, Chicago–Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1975: 418–431; E. Rauner: *Petrarca-Handschriften in Tschechien und in der Slowakischen Republik*, Padova: Antenore, 1999.

²¹ *Fam.* 21, 2, 6–7. Edition cited: F. Petrarca, *Le familiari*, ed. V. Rossi & U. Bosco, 4 vol., Firenze: Sansoni, 1933–1942. Petrarca probably echoes *Psalm* 68.14 (in the *vulgata* 67.14): "with shining gold" ("in pallore auri"). The bull's description and bibliography for imagery of Rome can be found in P. Piur: *Petrarcas Briefwechsel...*, *op.cit.*: 62–63. *Ibid.*: 221–224, the text and a commentary of the diploma of Count Palatin is published. Rome's figuration on Charles' bull reverses are quite common, being varied the averse. Petrarca's description seems to be identical to a bull of 1346, see its reproduction in O. Posse: *Die Siegel der deutschen Kaiser und Könige*, vol. 2, Dresden: Baensch Stiftung, 1910: image 3/6, 7; Karel IV., *Vlastní životopis [Vita Caroli Quarti]*, Praha: Odeon, 1978: 187, 189, 193.

23.14, what happened; and he presumes that there might have been some letters which had not been delivered to Jan. As he did not receive any answer, Petrarca wrote for the last time (the letter *Fam.* 23.16), in which he mentions that Jan was supposed to put through some recommendations by the Emperor concerning some friends. This letter looks as if it was meant to say goodbye, as if Petrarca knew that Jan would not answer and in case he answered, he did not intend to rank his letter into *Familiars*. Bayley interprets Jan's strange behaviour and the silence as a sign of the fact that their friendship became more formal, probably because Petrarca did not appear in Prague any more, although he was evidently expected.²²

An exceptional letter has not been taken into consideration so far. *Disp.* 29, dated on 25 March 1355, which is the time, when Jan accompanied Charles IV during his coronation journey.²³ Petrarca excluded it from his official correspondence and there is only one existing copy of the letter.²⁴ It might seem surprising, since precisely this letter represents what we would expect from the correspondence of Petrarca to Jan, regarding its length, topics and the used motifs. In this letter Petrarca unfolds the topics of the ungratefulness of Rome towards its honourable inhabitants, and contrasts it with the love, which foreign kings expressed to Rome. This long letter represents the necessary arguments for the following praise of Jan, who, even though he was born in a barbarian country, was able to surpass his environment thanks to his hard work and talent, he improved the old-fashioned style of the chancellery (this information was probably given to Petrarca by Jan himself), and is now coming to Italy, the country of Muses, to become a member of the most prestigious society of great personalities of the classical world and their heirs:

Speaking in the name of all famous men of Greece and Italy, who lived, live and will live here for centuries, we are bound to remember your name and to proclaim its eternal fame. [...] Apollo himself with the lyre and the choir of virginal Muses sings thanks to you and they welcome with respect and pleasure such an important guest, who is coming from the end of the world, a guest, who is able to compete with the greatest spirits and to be among the most respectful names.²⁵

²² C. C. Bayley: *Petrarch*... , *op.cit.* : 334.

²³ Date by P. Piur: *Petrarcas Briefwechsel*... , *op.cit.* : 93.

²⁴ Biblioteka Gdańska Polskiej Akademii Nauk, Mar. F 256.

²⁵ *Disp.* 29: 242–244.

What might have been the reason why Petrarca did not write such letters more often? Or did they get lost? Why was this letter not included in his official correspondence? Only speculation might try to answer these questions. I suppose that if the celebrations of Jan did not mean any obstacle in shorter official letters, which were a part of the commonly practiced pathos, here they might seem exaggerated with respect to the rather sober style of the letter. This letter may reflect an exclusively personal and special attention of the poet to Jan, who might have shown his satisfaction concerning his visit in Italy, and his love for this country which was the reason for Petrarca-patriot to pay his compliments back.

Apart from Jan and Charles IV, Petrarca addressed two more letters to the Archbishop Arnošt z Pardubic and one more to the Empress Anna of Świdnica, and he must have known the bishop of Olomouc, Jan Očko z Vlašimi (Jan Očko of Vlašim), who sends regards to him in Jan's letter *Stili magistralis. Fam. 21.1*. Here Petrarca apologizes to Arnošt for not having sent him the documents they had talked about, with the explanation that he will tell him the reason face to face; we may consider this a very peculiar one. As virtue has many enemies, Petrarca keeps these "too informal documents" secret, so that they could be published after his death. He does not exclude, which is a unique case, that he might set them free to find a way to the audience. It is quite sure that the documents mentioned by Petrarca in his letter are *Liber sine nomine* is meant and the whole situation shows that the discussions between Petrarca and Arnošt must have also included the conditions at the Court of Avignon.

On 19 March 1358, the young Empress Anna of Świdnica gave birth to her first child, a daughter named Alžběta (Elisabeth). It is really surprising that Petrarca was included among the people who were given the announcement of the happy news immediately after the birth of the child. Such honour and confidence does not fit the common protocol in the feudal hierarchy, even in such a special case as that of Petrarca. His response shows that he was rather surprised by such an honour. He answers immediately, he congratulates the Empress on the birth of her daughter, and he writes to her that she should not be sad if the child is only a daughter, because even women can carry many virtues. To persuade Anna, he adds a long catalogue of famous women. At the end, he wishes the Empress that in short time she will be able to bring "a nobler and more desired child" to the world, meaning a crown prince. If such a letter would not please a woman of today, however it reflected

the commonly shared attitudes of that time and Charles's anxiety about not having an heir who could carry on his role.

The importance of the relationships between Petrarca and Prague's imperial court lies not only in Petrarca's life and political thought, but also in larger fields of the intellectual self-promotion in front of a ruler, and they represent an important chapter of cultural exchanges in medieval Europe. It is only a part of a greater strategy of the House of Luxembourg and Charles IV himself who introduced to Prague and to the Czech lands closer cooperation with French and Italian civilisations in all the economic and cultural aspects. It is true that the Czechs imported from these countries especially gothic intellectual models, and we do not believe in the existence of something like Czech early humanism in the Fourteenth century, but Petrarca's lesson has definitely been a precious enrichment of this kind of exchanges, although it has not been completely comprehended at that time. What a pity that Petrarca in the end did not move to Prague! The transfer of a cultural asset, as Petrarca was, would have surely changed the cultural map of Europe.

Appendix

Let us summarize Petrarca's correspondence with the Emperor's court of Prague. They consist of letters that are preserved or whose existence we know thanks to the references contained in the preserved ones. The almost exclusive messenger during these exchanges was a knight named Sagremor de Pommiers, who—as we can read in the preserved letters—was supposed also to deliver many oral messages. That is why it is necessary to regard the following list only as a part of what was written and said between all the correspondents:

Petrarca (*Fam.* 10.1; 24 February 1351) > Charles IV | Charles IV (*Laureata tui*; spring 1351–July 1352) > Petrarca

Petrarca (*Fam.* 12.1; February–March 1352) > Charles IV

Jan ze Středy (*Utinam Parnasei*; February 1352–October 1353) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 10.6; March 1352–the end of 1353) > Jan ze Středy

Petrarca (*Fam.* 18.1; response to *Laureata tui*; 23 November 1353) > Charles IV | Jan ze Středy (*Aureis redimita*; spring 1354) > Petrarca

Petrarca (*Fam.* 19.1; October 1354) > Charles IV

Petrarca (*Fam.* 19.4; 25 February 1355) > Charles IV | Jan ze Středy (*Saphirei fundamenti*; March 1355) > Petrarca

- Petrarca (*Disp.* 29; 1355) > Jan ze Středy
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 19.2; June 1355) > Charles IV
- Jan ze Středy (*De fecundo pectore* + the letter of appointment of the Palatin Count; autumn 1356–winter 1357) > Petrarca
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 21.2 + the golden bull; 30. 4. 1357) > Jan ze Středy | Jan ze Středy (*Persuasiva dulcedo* + the golden bull; the end of 1357–the beginning of 1358) > Petrarca
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 21.5; 25 March 1358) > Jan ze Středy
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 21.1; 30 April 1357) > Arnošt z Pardubic
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 21.6; 25 March 1358) > Arnošt z Pardubic
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 21.7; 25 March 1358) > Charles IV
- Anna, the Empress (not preserved, the end of March–April 1358) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 21.8; 23 May 1358) > Anna
- Jan ze Středy (*Stili magistralis*; a response to *Fam.* 21.5; 1358–1364) > Petrarca
- Charles IV (not preserved + fakes of the Habsburgs; March 1361) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.2 + *Sen.* 16.5; both 21 March 1361) > Charles IV
- Jan ze Středy (not preserved) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.6 + *Bucolicum carmen*) > Jan ze Středy
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.3; spring 1361–spring 1363) > Charles IV
- Charles IV (not preserved + a golden cup) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.8; 18 July 1361) > Charles IV
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.7; probably 18 July 1361) > Jan ze Středy
- Charles IV (*Affectu magno*; the end of 1361–the beginning of 1362) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.9; 21 March 1362) > Charles IV
- Petrarca (two and more unpreserved letters) > Jan ze Středy
- Jan ze Středy (*Sicut Astaroth*; the end of 1361–the beginning of 1362) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.10; 21 March 1362) > Jan ze Středy
- Jan ze Středy (*Rogo vos*; the end of 1362–the beginning of 1363) > Petrarca | Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.14; shortly after 11 March 1363) > Jan ze Středy
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.15; 11 March 1363) > Charles IV
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.16; 27 August 1364) > Jan ze Středy
- Petrarca (*Fam.* 23.12; 11 December probably 1364) > Charles IV