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Present Concerns: Pier Candido Decembrio and translating political philosophy for English audiences

At the end of the 1430s, sad news reached England: Leonardo Bruni - Humphrey was informed - had died. By the time his obituary was relayed back to Florence, Bruni was alive enough to retaliate. He wrote to the rumour-monger, Francesco Pizolpasso, Archbishop of Milan, reprimanding him for spreading such morbid gossip. What concerned the Florentine Chancellor as much as the misinformation itself was the identity of the person whom Pizolpasso was trying to mislead. Bruni was able to surmise why the rumours reached the Duke of Gloucester:

Deinde, quid sibi voluit tanta festinatio ac properatio scribendi, praesertim de re tibi dolorosa et illi ipsi minime placitura, cui significabas? ... Instabat, ut video, Candidus ac te impellebat: conceptam ex illo duce spem labi non patiebatur.¹

The Milanese humanist Pier Candido Decembrio, Bruni had concluded, had few scruples in his bid to gain the English patronage he himself had recently sought.

It was certainly no secret that Decembrio was at this time ingratiating himself to Humphrey. Pre-advertising Bruni's death was one of the more unusual - and less honourable - ways in which Decembrio tried to secure English patronage but it was not atypical of his advances. For one thing, Decembrio regularly employed intermediaries, most distinguished among whom was Pizolpasso. What is more, the image Decembrio cultivated for himself in his dealings with Humphrey was as both Bruni's critic and his

¹ Mehus, VIII/6 (VIII/13). This letter is usually dated to the first half of 1440 [eg. V.Zaccaria, "Pier Candido Decembrio e Leonardo Bruni", *Studi Medievali*, viii (1967) pp.504-554 at p.517] but it may be earlier. Bruni includes a comment that *nec unum mittens librum alios retinui, sed ut erant octo libri uno volumine simul omnes* [Luiso, p.146]: this may not be as much a defence of his own action as a sideswipe at Decembrio who sent Book V of his *Republic* to Humphrey, via Pizolpasso, in 1438 [on this see p.209]

natural successor. Frequent references are made in letters from the Milanese circle of Bruni's 'defrauding' Humphrey of his translation of Aristotle's *Politics*, at the last minute diverting the dedication to Eugenius IV.¹ Indeed, Pizolpasso, showing scant respect for the supposedly dead, repeated these accusations in his obituary of Bruni; they were claims against which Bruni vehemently defended himself in his letter to the Archbishop. For his part, Decembrio determined to put right the insult by presenting the Duke of Gloucester with his own translation of Plato's *Republic*.

A previous chapter discussed briefly the series of humanists who sought Humphrey's patronage without ever contemplating a visit to England.² Rather than being as peripheral to the humanists' careers as Britain was in their mental map, these long-distance contacts had, I suggested, a symbolic, as well as financial, importance: dedicating a work to the Duke of Gloucester provided the cachet of being seen to educate a foreign prince. The edifying reading-material they presented to Humphrey were often Latin translations of Greek texts. Fifteenth century Englishmen have traditionally been berated for their penchant for reading these translations but it should be remembered that these were the works that a Bruni or a Decembrio packaged for international audiences - not, surely, as a mark of discourtesy but precisely because they were determined to make a good impression.³ A translation paraded a humanist's bilingual credentials; the right choice of translation also helped the humanist to market himself as the philosopher's heir. In this chapter I will critically examine this vogue for translations. The focus will be on one particular example - Pier Candido Decembrio and his translation of the *Republic* - comparing Decembrio's presentation of Plato's

below]. Pizolpasso's offending letter does not survive nor is it clear how Bruni came by his information: did one of the Italians in England inform him?

¹ Sammut, pp.177 (ll.22-9), 181 (ll.21-5), 203 (ll.14-6).

² See c.iv pp.122-6 above.

³ Weiss, "Bruni", *passim*; Rundle, "Virtue and Weiss", pp.192-4.

political philosophy with Bruni's packaging of his *Politics*. The intention is two-fold. In the first place, it is to ask how well these translations could fulfill the several objectives assigned to them: could they both demonstrate their translators' command of Greek and, at the same time, present the humanists as political educators in their own right? How far, in other words, did the humanist's role and independent thought become subsumed to that of the philosopher he was translating. The second purpose is to investigate another, more practical limit on the humanists' role as princely educators. That is, how well could the humanists' interest in Humphrey's patronage endure when the humanists found there were more pressing, more immediate concerns? How far, in other words, did the humanists' *otium* become subsumed to the activities of their *negotium*.

The primary evidence for this chapter, as for others in this thesis, are the extant manuscripts of Decembrio's translation. The letters concerning the mechanics of Decembrio's contacts with Humphrey have been thoroughly researched; there has also been some discussion of aspects of Decembrio's translation.¹ It is my contention, however, that the manuscripts themselves can provide more information than has so far been garnered. In particular, the marginalia Decembrio himself added to many of the extant copies of his *Republic* can provide insights into his attitude to his work and also into his changing perception of Humphrey. Moreover, close study of the marginalia reveals a hitherto unsuspected element in the history of Decembrio's English dealings:

¹ On Decembrio generally, see V.Zaccaria, "L'epistolario di Pier Candido Decembrio", *Rinascimento*, 1st ser., iii (1952) pp.85-188; *id.*, "Sulle opere di Pier Candido Decembrio", *Rinascimento*, 1st ser., vii (1956); *id.*, "Pier Candido Decembrio, Michele Pizolpasso e Ugolino Pisani", *Atti dell'Istituto Veneto di Scienze, lettere ed arti*, cxxxiii (1974-5) pp.187-212; P.O.Kristeller, "Pier Candido Decembrio and his unpublished treatise on the immortality of the soul" in *id.*, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters* ii (Rome, 1985) pp.281-300; *DBI sub nomine*. On the translation, see esp. V.Zaccaria, "Pier Candido Decembrio traduttore della 'Repubblica'", *IMU*, ii (1959) pp.179-206; R.Fubini, "Tra umanesimo e concili" in *id.*, *Umanesimo e secolarizzazione* (Rome, 1990); Sammut, pp.29-53; Everest-Phillips,

it now appears that the humanist sent a copy of the Plato to another English reader besides Humphrey; this copy, in fact, contained the most copious set of annotations of any of the surviving manuscripts. This discovery will be discussed in the final paragraphs of this chapter.

Through the 1430s, Pier Candido Decembrio had delusions of being Leonardo Bruni's nemesis.¹ His enterprise of translating Plato in contradistinction to Bruni's Aristotle was only the last of three occasions on which Decembrio imagined himself to be the Florentine's antagonist. Earlier, Decembrio had involved himself in the 'Ethics controversy', at first refuting with Alfonso Garcia de Cartagena, Bishop of Burgos who had about 1430 launched a lengthy attack on Bruni's style of philosophical translation, but eventually supporting Cartagena's traditionalist views.² Pointedly, when Decembrio came to translate Plato, he dedicated the sixth book to the Bishop of Burgos; the prefatory letter begins by thanking Cartagena for having corrected *non meam solum sed multorum ignorantiam*.³ In case the allusion was lost on his readers, Decembrio added a marginal gloss - *Intellegit pro disputatione habita inter Burgensem ex una parte & leonardum Aretinum cum candido ex altera pro nova traductione ethice Aristotelis*.¹ So, on Decembrio's reckoning, he had displayed the maturity to change his mind, while Bruni still wallowed in his errors.

The other aspect of the Bruni/Decembrio rivalry is not advertised in the *Republic*. In the mid-1430s, a work of Bruni's youth, his *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*,

pp.253-78; Hankins, pp.117-154. Sammut, *loc.cit.*, also notes Decembrio's activities as Humphrey's book-buyer, on which see also de la Mare, pp.115-121.

¹ For what follows, see V.Zaccaria, "Decembrio e Bruni", *passim*.

² On the 'Ethics controversy', see Griffiths, *Humanism*, pp.201-8. For Decembrio's part, see Zaccaria, "Decembrio e Bruni", pp.506-14. Copies of the controversy certainly reached England, see c.iii p.76n above.

³ Hankins, pp.535-6 (ll.8-9).

was enjoying a second round of publicity. Its author was having it circulated in an attempt to entice the General Council of the Church to relocate in Florence. In response, Decembrio wrote a *De Laudibus Mediolanensium Urbis Panegyricus* which was, effectively, a rival brochure advertising Milan's charms.² The prestige and profit of hosting a General Council provided sound practical reasons for this outburst of inter-city competition. In the process, however, it also raised a larger ideological clash between republican and signorial rule.³ In response to Bruni's claims for the liberty and justice of republican Florence, Decembrio poured scorn on some and paid others the compliment of reiterating them in praise of Milan. To these passages, his *Panegyricus* also added a rhetorical description of the Milanese constitution in Platonic terms. Decembrio did not, as might have been expected, flourish the well-known doctrine of the philosopher-king; instead, he claimed his city was an example of the second-best constitution: a timocracy. He defined this as:

Cum vir quispiam honoris victorieque avidus principatum capit non ut cuiquam violentiam aut necem inferat sed ut ingenue belli gerendo rem publicam diligenter et egregie tuendo, sibi laudem, patrie vero utilitatem pariat.⁴

So, just as Rome had its timocrat in Lucius Brutus, the founder of the Republic, so Milan had its in Giangaleazzo Visconti, the city's first Duke. With this curious blend of Platonic doctrine and Roman history, Decembrio defended the monarchical government of his city.

¹ **Durham: Dean & Chapter Library, MS.C.iv.3**, fol.110^v. Cf. **BAV, MS.Vat.lat.10669**, fol.113^v.

² Printed from one late copy in *RIS*, xx/1 (1928) pp.1013-25; for other manuscripts, see Kristeller, "Decembrio", p.562 & *Iter*, iii, p.114. On its context, see E.Garin in *Storia di Milano*, vi (Milan, 1955) pp.581-2; Zaccaria, "Decembrio e Bruni", pp.520-7; P.Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze* (Rome, 1992) pp.137-196.

³ Baron, *Crisis*², pp.191-211; M.Lentzen, "Die Rivalität zwischen Mailand und Florenz in der ersten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts", *Italienische Studien*, ix (1986) pp.5-17; on the *Laudatio*, see c.ii pp.36-7 above.

⁴ *RIS*, xx/1, p.1017; Hankins, pp.140-2.

Now, Decembrio's use of Plato raises a possibility: was there in the contrasting translations of the *Republic* and the *Politics* an ideological clash like that between the *Laudatio* and the *Panegyricus*? After all, Bruni's new Aristotle certainly had immense implications for political thought, repositioning this central text in a Ciceronian tradition which emphasised the legitimacy of not only the *civitas* but also the *res publica*.¹ To this, Plato's monarchism could be said to provide a contrasting political outlook. Yet, while an ideological conflict between translations would thus seem possible, close study of the process of presenting these translations reveals how difficult it was for the translators to guide 'their' texts and to employ them, even if they wanted, for political ends. To elucidate this issue, I wish first to discuss briefly Bruni's approach to translations. It is worth beginning with an example of how Bruni clearly did use a Greek work for overtly political ends. This takes us back to the beginning of his career.

In the first five years of the fifteenth century, Bruni was prone to producing manifestos. These statements of the ideological or intellectual positions that he - if not all the group around him - held not only included the *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis* and the *Dialogi*; they also involved a pair of translations made in 1402-3, each of which was dedicated to one of the *Dialogi*'s interlocutors.² So, the venerable Chancellor, Salutati, received Bruni's rendition of Basil's homily on the use of studying pagan texts - appropriate reading for the scholar who was writing a riposte to criticisms of the *studia*

¹ J.G.A.Pocock's communitarian history, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton, 1975) gives an important part to both Aristotle and Bruni but does not connect the two closely [pp.66-76, 86-91]; for a closer linking, see, eg., E.Garin, *L'Umanesimo Italiano* [rev.ed.] (Rome, 1994) pp.52-4; F.Rico, *El sueño del humanismo* (Madrid, 1993) p.53; see also c.ii p.30n above.

² On the *Dialogi*, see c.iii p.65 above. Baron, *Crisis* ignored these translations nor is much made of them in Griffiths, *Humanism*.

humanitatis.¹ Meanwhile, to Salutati's heir apparent as the *arbiter elegantiarum* of this clique, Niccolò Niccoli, Bruni dedicated a rather different text: Xenophon's dialogue, *Hieron*.² In this, the eponymous tyrant and the poet Simonides sit down together to ponder the different lives of a private citizen and a despot. Hiero bemoans his existence to the point of contemplating suicide; Simonides consoles his companion and the dialogue concludes with his advice to Hiero which reads like the well-known Aristotelian tips for tyrants. Modern commentators may be in a quandary about interpreting this *opusculum*, but Bruni seems to have suffered no such headaches.³ For him, the dialogue's meaning is manifest.

The preface gives some idea of how Bruni wishes to use this work. In it, Xenophon's life is briefly (and inaccurately) described: his Socratic education, his military successes - achievements which triggered his expulsion from Greece *ab invidibus civibus* and his retirement spent in philosophical studies.¹ In his supposed equanimity, Bruni's Xenophon is implicitly like an Athenian Scipio, combining action and contemplation, ruling and being ruled. If the preface thus presents an image of a political or civic existence, the dialogue provides the obverse, demonstrating the utter misery of a despot's life. In Bruni's translation, this is even more emphatic than in the original Greek. For one thing, though basically accurate, Bruni makes a few alterations to the text. It is not just that he, as it were, straightens out the work, turning Hiero's catamite into a wholesome young female; more importantly, he omits short passages

¹ The relation between Salutati's interests and this translation are explicit in its preface: Baron, *Bruni*, pp.99-100. For this context and the quality of the translation, see N.G.Wilson, *From Byzantium to Italy* (London, 1992) pp.14-6. Both Latin and original available in *Discorsi ai giovani*, ed.M.Naldini (Florence, 1984).

² Preface edited by Baron, *Bruni*, pp.100-1; the translation itself is only available in manuscripts or early printed versions: see D.Marsh in V.Brown, ed., *Catalogus Translationum et Commentariorum*, vii (Washington, 1992) pp.149-155. For Humphrey's copy of these translations, see **BL, MS.Harl. 3426**; for examples of English copies, see **Cambridge: Corpus, MS.472** and **Bod., MS. Auct. F.5.26**.

³ L.Strauss, *On Tyranny*, ed.V.Gourevitch & M.Roth (New York, 1991).

suggesting, for example, that tyrants are viewed with envy or as heroes.² However, the one element which on its own does the most to increase the sense of opprobrium is a natural function of translation: the Greek τυραννος does not bear so great a pejorative weight as does its transliteration, *tyrannus*. If Bruni recognised the distinction, he had no compunction about ignoring it; indeed, he emphasises these overtones by crucially turning the tract's subtitle into the translation's name: *liber qui dicitur Tyrannus*.³

Bruni, then, is using the Xenophon as a counterpart to his translation of Basil; one is a manifesto of scholarship, the other is a political declaration. It is yet another work which could be added to the list of 'civic humanist' productions. Now, if it is to be believed that Bruni's republican commitment was only a temporary rhetorical façade, this ironically increases the importance of the years around Giangaleazzo Visconti's last advance on Florence. For, in those remarkable five years, Bruni did so much to fashion his (and Florence's) republican reputation; what is more, whether he liked it or not, his international image became wedded to these early translations as they achieved such a wide circulation. It does not matter that Bruni's reading of the *Hieron* as a discourse on the woes of tyranny was an incomplete - even shallow - interpretation of the text; it was, none the less, one that was accepted in England as elsewhere.⁴

This short excursus has demonstrated that choice and careful management of text can endow the act of translation with some political purpose. How far was a similar process occurring in the rendition of Aristotle's *Politics*? How far, in other words, did

¹ Baron, *Bruni*, pp.100-1.

² Xenophon, *Hieron*, I.31-2, I.9, VII.2. The removal of homosexual elements was common practice among humanists (except Panormita); see Hankins, pp.41, 138.

³ **BL, MS.Harl.3426**, fol.167. BAV, MS.Vat.lat.4507, which is said to be autograph [Marsh, *Catalogus*, p.154], entitles the work *Xenophontis philosophi de tyrannica et civili Liber* (fol.76).

⁴ See, for example, Whethamstede's use of the work [c.iii p.92n above]. An Italian example is BAV, MS.Vat.lat.2951 where the *Hieron* is followed by a section of quotations entitled *De Vita Tyrannica*.

Bruni present the work he agreed to translate at Humphrey's bidding as a republican tract?

The uneasy relations between Bruni and Humphrey are difficult to reconstruct, not least because Bruni seems to have been less concerned than Decembrio later was to preserve his correspondence with the Duke.¹ As if this were not problematic enough, we also lack a crucial piece of information - Humphrey's presentation volume of the *Politics*. Yet, despite these lacunae, a couple of insights can be added to the usual narrative of their correspondence. In the first place, I want to raise the possibility that Bruni's attitude towards Humphrey may not have been, from the beginning, as straightforward as it might seem. Bruni opens his reply to the Duke's first letter with an elegant compliment: princes are fortunate in that their actions are much more gratefully received than the same deeds done by other men. So, to begin with small matters (*ut a parvis incipiam*), if both a prince and any other man greet someone in friendly fashion, it is remarkable how much more pleasure the prince's salutation evokes. Bruni continues in this vein, concluding that he was extremely grateful to receive the Duke's unsolicited letter.² This would be an ordinary piece of flattery, if it were not for the fact that it is a quotation from another of Bruni's works: his *Tyrannus*.³ To anybody who noticed this link, the re-employment of Bruni's *primitiae* at the start of this correspondence could tinge the praise with irony.⁴ Yet, even if this escaped a reader's intention, he could not ignore Bruni's use of the other technique to which republican humanists resorted when addressing princes: turning an occasion for praise into a

¹ Weiss, pp.47-9; Zaccaria, "Decembrio e Bruni", pp.514-20; Sammut, pp.7-14, with first letter [pp.146-8] redated by E.Fumagalli, *Aevum*, lvi (1982) pp.343-351; L.Gualdo Rosa, "Una nuova lettera del Bruni sulle sua traduzione della 'Politica' di Aristotele", *Rinascimento*, xxiii (1983) pp.113-23, with corrections to Sammut's transcriptions.

² Sammut, pp.146-8 (ll.2-13).

³ Xenophon, *Hieron*, VIII.3 (BL, MS.Harl.3426, fol.174^{r-v}).

⁴ For an outline of this technique, see c.ii pp.41-3 above.

philosophical lesson. Like Simonides advising Hiero, Bruni reminds his correspondent of how a prince should act - specifically, that he should spend his time learning *cognitio rerum ac omnis bene vivendi ratio*.¹ He follows this by saying that he has decided to accept Humphrey's suggestion that he should translate the *Politics*.

If this opening chapter of the contact is promising - with the potential irony of a republican humanist setting himself up as the teacher of a barbarian prince - the rest of the narrative may seem disappointing. When the latinised *Politics* was eventually dispatched to Humphrey it apparently bore little sign that the Duke was supposed to learn particular lessons from it. It not only arrived without a dedicatory letter; the text itself was also unadorned by scribal or authorial annotations (in the way that Decembrio's Plato later was).² The probable appearance of the codex reflected, in part, humanist taste: large, blank borders emphasised that the text itself stood on its own. The absence of a dedication was, in part, because Bruni had changed his mind: for whatever reason, he had decided to dedicate the work to Eugenius IV rather than Humphrey. It was only belatedly that the Duke received what perhaps concerned him most: a letter to be kept with the manuscript as a sort of proof of status, confirming that the work had been sent specially to him by its author.³ Bruni may have been spurred to write this by the criticisms levelled at him by Decembrio and Pizolpasso; this could explain the letter's slightly petulant and remarkably understated fashion. What is most noticeable is that it avoids addressing Humphrey in the obvious rhetoric about this

¹ Sammut, p.147 (l.27).

² This lack of marginalia can be inferred from the copies made from it: Bod., MSS.Auct. F.5.27 & Barlow 42. Other copies with scribal marginalia are discussed below.

³ Sammut, pp.148-151; that this was stored with the Oxford manuscript is suggested by the colophon at Bod., MS.Barlow 42, fol.1 on which see *DHL*, p.91. Bod., MS.Auct.F.6.2 includes this letter without the text of the *Politics*. It may be that this letter, contrary to what is usually supposed, actually postdates Mehus VIII/6 (VIII/13) [discussed p.194 above]: in the latter defence of his dealings with Humphrey, Bruni fails to mention this letter which would have provided support for his case. That the two letters may

work being a particularly princely read. One might have expected comments like:

Politicorum Aristotelis libros ... magnum ac dives instrumentum Regiae gubernationis ac propriam Regis supellectilem. But these phrases occur not in his correspondence with Humphrey but in the covering note to a copy which Bruni later sent to Alfonso the Magnanimous.¹ It was not, then, that Bruni had become averse to reprising the part of princely educator, only that he no longer wanted the English Duke to act the opposite role.

The letter to Humphrey does include an outline of the subject-matter of the *Politics* - one which repeats the description provided for the Pope.² Yet, once again, this is notable for what it lacks: it does not present any particular interpretation of the *Politics*. The contents are briefly discussed book-by-book and well-known features are mentioned like the division of constitutions with kingship the highest of the three legitimate *res publicae*. Like this letter, the translation's preface has little to say about particular doctrines; after emphasising the general importance of the work, Bruni spends much of his time explaining why he felt a new translation was needed.³ While this is understandable, the consequence is that - in contrast to the early work on Xenophon - Bruni is failing to manage his text; whatever the 'civic humanist' implications of the text, they are not highlighted by the minimal ancillary material the translator provides. Indeed, the repetition of Aristotle's praise of kingship as the highest form of government has encouraged the view that there was a shift in Bruni's political outlook in this period. This shift is supposedly also apparent in the contemporaneous *Περὶ τῆς πολιτείας τῶν Φλωρεντινῶν*, where Bruni uncharacteristically interprets

have been written about the same time is also suggested by their shared emphasis on Bruni's good faith: cf. VIII/6 [*si promississem, observassem*] with Sammut, p.148 (II.7-13).

¹ Mehus, IX/1 (IX/2)

² Mehus, VIII/1 (VIII/4).

³ Baron, *Bruni*, pp.73-4.

Florence as a mixed constitution, rather than as a popular republic.¹ On this interpretation, Bruni's close reading of Aristotle had moved him away from his earlier use of the *Politics* in an anti-monarchical manner.² Yet, the evidence for this shift is less than overwhelming; for one thing, in the late 1430s, Bruni was still capable of praising his city for its *popularis gubernatio*.³ Again, to assume that the Περὶ τῆς πολιτείας can be placed alongside Bruni's Latin works is perhaps to mistake its purpose; intended for a Byzantine audience, its description of Florence as a mixture of aristocracy and δημοκρατία surely works outside the Aristotelian tradition.⁴ Finally, I would suggest that the presentation of the *Politics* - such as it is - is weak evidence for any shift in political outlook.

Bruni was certainly eager that his translation should reach a wide audience - he sent copies not only to secular and ecclesiastical princes but also to the Signori of Siena - and emphasising the work's encyclopedic importance could obviously assist this circulation.¹ Moreover, in wishing to replace the old version, Bruni claimed his translation's superiority lay in its accurate readability: it provided a clearer presentation of Aristotle's thought. This (rather than any attempt to subordinate Aristotle's philosophy to his rhetoric) surely explains the preface's emphasis on the philosopher's

¹ Griffiths, *Humanism*, c.2, esp. pp.114-5; also Baron, *Crisis*², pp.427-8. The Greek tract is edited by A.Moulakis, "Leonardo Bruni's Constitution of Florence", *Rinascimento*, 2nd ser., xxvi (1986) pp.141-90; for its dating, see P.Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze* (Rome, 1992) pp.194-5; for discussion, including comment on the development of Bruni's translation of Aristotelian terminology, see R.Dees, "Bruni, Aristotle and the mixed constitution" in *Medievalia & Humanistica*, ns. xv (1987) pp.1-23; see also N.Rubinstein, "Political theories in the Renaissance" in A.Chastel, ed., *The Renaissance* (London, 1982) pp.153-200 at pp.170-1.

² See c.ii p.32 above; also note the criticisms of monarchy in the *Oratio in funere Iohannis Strozzeae* (1428) [J.D.Mansi, *Stephani Baluzii ... Miscellanea* (Lucca, 1764) iv, p.3] could in part have been derived from Aristotle, *Politics*, 1286b.

³ Viti, *Bruni e Firenze*, p.160.

⁴ For the claim that the Περὶ τῆς πολιτείας should be read as an Aristotelian "philosophical treatise" see J.Hankins, "The 'Baron thesis'", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, lvi (1995) pp.309-338 at p.326. However, 'democracy' is always a negative term for Aristotle; if Bruni was following the terminology of the *Politics*, he would surely have employed πολιτεία instead. If, on the other hand, he was thinking of

eloquence.² To claim instead that his Ciceronian rendition had re-interpreted the text would, of course, have re-opened the criticisms levelled at his *Ethics* translation. In other words, the emphasis on the comfortable familiarity of his translation can be seen as part of the strategy to help it achieve a wide circulation. The desire to be familiar or unchallenging extended to the act of translation itself.³ The 'medieval' elements of Bruni's Aristotle translations have been noted in recent discussions; at least some of these were perhaps intentional. To correct the errors of the *translatio vetus* would at times have involved removing doctrines that were both attractive and influential. To give one small example: in Book V of the *Politics*, one of the policies of tyrants is said to be φρονηματιας αναρειν (to remove men of spirit). In the old translation, this is mistranslated as *sapientes destruere* - a reading which provided Thomist commentators with a central, anti-intellectual policy for tyrants.⁴ This was so influential, indeed, that Bruni appears unwilling to correct it: though he translates similar phrases correctly, he keeps the same phrase in this instance.⁵ For humanists who claimed their importance lay in teaching princes wisdom, a connection between tyranny and anti-intellectualism was too attractive a misreading to jettison.

On my submission, then, Bruni adopted a series of tactics to make his translation appear an improvement upon but not a radical departure from the medieval rendition. So, his references to Aristotle's comments on kingship (and tyranny) were

Aristotle's discussion of the mixed constitution, which combined democracy and oligarchy [*Politics*, IV.viii-ix] why did Bruni talk about 'aristocracy'?

¹ Baron, *Bruni*, p.143.

² Cf. J.Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism* (Princeton, 1968) c.4 esp. p.115.

³ B.P.Copenhaver, "Translation, style and terminology in philosophical discourse" in *CHRP*, pp.77-110, esp. pp.86-92. His translations are briefly discussed by C.B.Schmitt, *Aristotle in the Renaissance* (London, 1983) pp.67-8.

⁴ *Politics*, 1313a40-1; Moerbeke's translation in F.Susemihl, *Aristotelis politicorum libri* (Leipzig, 1872) p.573 l.10. Note its influence on Ægidius Romanus, *De Regimine Principum*, III.ii.10.

⁵ For example, μικρα φρονειν (1314a16) is translated by Moerbeke as *modica sapiant* [Susemihl, p.578 l.9], again wrongly associating the verb with φρονησις. For this Bruni substitutes the more accurate *animos imminuat civium*.

not intended to suggest that his own position had changed but that the work itself had not been radically altered. To claim that the work was not different, just improved, certainly involved a sleight of hand. Early readers as much as later commentators may have been struck above all by the novelty of some turns of phrase and their implications. It may, indeed, have been Bruni's expectation that these changes would affect their understanding of Aristotle - that, in effect, civic humanism would be introduced under the cloak of familiarity. On the other hand, the sparse marginalia in a couple of early English copies, though possibly unrepresentative, do not reveal this reaction. In one copy of the third quarter of the fifteenth century, the scribe added a handful of annotations to the text, one of which Bruni (at his most oligarchic) might have applauded: next to the discussion of the division of constitutions is the comment *Nota quod decet unum aut pauciores regere*. Yet, the majority of these notes show an interest in the character of monarchs - both kings and tyrants.¹ In another manuscript, written in the 1450s, one early reader has similarly added a note: *nota quare Rex primus creatus fuit*. On the other hand, the infrequent scribal marginalia are confined, apart from one note defining *obeliscus*, to noting Aristotle's criticisms of the community of wives proposed by Plato.¹

This last example of marginalia brings us back to Plato; indeed, it neatly demonstrates how different from Bruni's task was the challenge that Pier Candido Decembrio faced in the late 1430s. While Bruni was working with a well-known masterpiece, Decembrio had to struggle against engrained preconceptions of the *Republic's* immorality: a sympathetic reception was severely hampered by its infamous doctrine of

¹ Cambridge: Corpus Christi College, MS.398, fol.73; also fol.96^v (kings), 106 (tyrants); other marginalia at: fol.46, 46^v, 72^v, 105^v.

the community of wives. Aristotle was only the first critic of this scheme; his critique had been reinforced by the condemnation of the Church Fathers, in particular Lactantius, who complained that under such a system philosopher-kings, free to sleep with whomever they chose, would be reduced to being tyrants. It was, moreover, a tradition reiterated by none other than Bruni.² Decembrio responded to this critical tradition with what might be called a revisionist strategy - he set out to explain how Plato's immorality never happened.

Accordingly, Decembrio began translating at the middle of *The Republic*. Of course, as well as plans for marital communism, Book V included the much better-received doctrine of philosopher-kings but, in Decembrio's project, this was (at least at first) treated as incidental. The book's preface, and much of the marginalia, concentrate instead on his simple, arrogant defence of Plato: all his detractors have failed to read the *Republic*. So, charges of impropriety do not accurately reflect the modest, even chaste, system Decembrio's Socrates was proposing. Decembrio's defence (apart from bowdlerisation) hinged upon the claim that the communist proposal is of limited application.³ Aristotle and everyone after him had claimed that Plato's whole state would be communist, but Decembrio pointed out that his actual words mean that the community of wives applies only to the small class of guardians. Decembrio, like a young researcher armed with a new discovery, repeated this revelation at every possible juncture: he announced it in the preface to Book V, again in the marginalia of all the copies from his workshop and also expanded it further (it seems) in other works of his at this time. The work which Decembrio most frequently criticises is one which

¹ Oxford: New College, MS.228, fol.127 (1285b); 141^v; 100-102^v.

² Aristotle, *Politics*, II.ii (1261a-b); Ægidius Romanus, *De regimine principum*, III.i.18; Lactantius, *Divinae Institutiones*, III. 21. Griffiths, *Humanism*, pp.288-9; Bruni's early *Oratio Heliogaboli* also implicitly mocks Plato's ideas; on this work, see c.ii p.45 above.

³ Hankins, pp.136-8.

Humphrey certainly had in his book-collection: Aristotle's *Politics*.¹ But he did not balk at challenging even the Church Father, Lactantius, against whom Decembrio seems to have had a special animus. His criticisms are not confined to his reading of the *Republic*; in one of the presentation volumes to Humphrey, he marked a passage where Socrates is discussing the proper use of stories: *Audi loquacissime Latanti*.² Nor were his marginalia perhaps the only occasion in his dealings with Humphrey when Decembrio expressed such disrespectful sentiments to Humphrey: if his surviving list of essential reading was anything like the one he sent the Duke, it included, under the section on Church Fathers, *libri Lactancii Firmiani, licet inutiles*.³ Is this the same Lactantius whom Bruni described as *vir omnium Christianorum proculdubio eloquentissimus*?⁴ Clearly, Florence and Milan differed even in their literary tastes.

Manifestly, then, a prime concern of Decembrio's in presenting his *Celestis Politia* was to demonstrate its compatibility with Christian morality. As we shall see, however, this preoccupation was not to the exclusion of other elements nor, indeed, did all readers share Decembrio's sensitivity about this moral issue. Decembrio sent Humphrey (via Pizolpasso) a copy of Book V as a foretaste of his translation; if, though, the Duke found it unpalatable, it was not because of any marital irregularity.⁵ What worried him instead was the book's preface: Decembrio had promised to dedicate his translation to him but what he had in his hands was a book prefaced to one

¹ **BL., MS.Harl.1705**, fol.65 (429 A1) etc.

² **BL., MS.Harl.1705**, fol.35^v (378 B8); cf. fol.83^v (461 A7). On Decembrio's criticisms of Lactantius more generally, see Hankins, pp.134, 148-54.

³ Sammut, p.38. The correspondence between Decembrio and Humphrey disproves Sammut's suggestion that the list he prints may be a direct copy of the one sent to the Duke: cf. *ibid* with Sammut, pp.189.

⁴ Baron, *Bruni*, p.8. On del Monte and Lactantius, see c.v p.166 above.

⁵ This volume is presumably that recorded in the 1452 King's Cambridge list [Sammut, p.87 {no.42}]. There is a problem: the *verba probatoria - laborum experts* - do not occur in the early pages of the later copies of Book V, nor in any of the ancillary material. In Pizolpasso's covering letter sent with this manuscript, however, there does occur the phrase *laborum et operum* [Sammut, p.178 {ll.48-9}]: perhaps the King's entry is a *lapsus calami* for this. If so, it suggests that the covering letter was sent bound with the translation.

Giovanni Amadeo. Humphrey declared himself perplexed; Decembrio, concerned that he may have offended his patron, responded by hurriedly preparing a manuscript, in his own hand, of the fruits of his labours so far, that was the first five books of the *Republic*. The volume included, as a preface to the translation, a copy of the correspondence between the Duke and his humanist - including Humphrey's recent letter of complaint, to which Decembrio added his explanation: the whole work was to be dedicated to the duke, as well as all but three of the ten individual books. This volume reached Humphrey early in 1439.¹

Despite his speedy work on the first five books, the production of the complete translation took (at least to Humphrey's mind) an excessively long time.² It could be argued that it was worth the wait: when the complete work arrived in England in 1440, it appeared in a resplendent codex.³ Recent scholarly attention has concentrated on this volume but, on my submission, the earlier five-book manuscript is of greater interest to the historian. Its importance lies in its margins. I have already had cause to mention Decembrio's use of annotations; it is a striking feature of all the copies of the *Celestis Politia* produced under his direction - not just those sent to Humphrey - that they employ marginalia as a way of explicating the text. Yet, a couple of misconceptions have arisen about these annotations.⁴ In the first place, it is assumed that the marginalia

¹ This narrative differs from Sammut, p.34, who assumes that Decembrio's reply [Sammut, pp.184-5] to Humphrey's letter [Sammut, p.183] was sent before the manuscript, **BL, MS.Harl.1705**. There are several signs that it was not sent separately: first, stylistically, it does not open with the formalities one would expect of an independent letter. Second, a letter from Decembrio to Talenti [Hankins, pp.576-7] suggests that he had received, via Talenti, Humphrey's letter of complaint [ll.6-8] to which his response was to prepare and dispatch **MS.Harl.1705** [ll.10-11, 17-22]; the covering note also suggests that Decembrio is uncertain of Humphrey's goodwill [Sammut, pp.185-6, ll.15-17]. Moreover, when Humphrey replies [Sammut, pp.186-9] it is explicitly the dedications in the manuscript which have mollified him [ll.4-8]. Notably, Humphrey's reply is also the first time the copying of classical works is mentioned in the extant correspondence [ll.43-5]; perhaps, then, the offer of acting as a book-factor was another way that Decembrio hoped to re-secure Humphrey's favour.

² Sammut, pp.191-5.

³ **BAV, MS.Vat.lat.10669**.

⁴ Hankins, pp.132-4, 412-4.

is consistent across the different manuscripts. Certainly, a core of comments appear in most of the copies but the number and range of notes is unique to each manuscript: this is most notable in the contrast between Humphrey's two presentation codices. The five-book manuscript is one of the most heavily annotated of all the copies produced by Decembrio; admittedly, the marginalia decreases in Book V (the section which Humphrey had seen before) but even there it is markedly more annotated than the full presentation codex. That later manuscript is remarkably sparse in marginal comments; this is unsurprising for the first half of the volume, but it continues through Books VI-X which Humphrey had not seen before. We will return in a few moments to the contrast between the two volumes.

The other misconception is the tendency to overstate the importance of some of Decembrio's annotations. Looking through the full presentation codex, recent commentators have noticed a marginal comment *Attende princeps* and taken this as corroborating proof that the volume was intended for Humphrey.¹ This is better explained, though, as an example of one Decembrio's favourite techniques of annotation: he marks against a section the sort of person who would profit from its teaching. So, next to a passage about acting and imitation, any browsing thespian is addressed: *Lege histrio*.² Moreover, in the manuscript Decembrio later sent to Alfonso de Cartagena, he includes - without any secular ruler in sight - comments like *Nota princeps* and *Lege princeps*.¹ Decembrio's use of the vocative usually addresses the conceptual and generic rather than the concrete and particular.

This, however, is not to suggest that Decembrio never addresses an individual directly. Sometimes, admittedly, the person mentioned is hardly likely to have read the

¹ **BAV, MS.Vat.lat.10669**, fol.152^v (540 A6). Sammut, p.125; *DHL*, no.39.

² **BL, MS.Harl.1705**, fol.45 (395 A5); cf. Hankins, p.553 (394 E8).

comment; so, in copies sent to England, a comment next to a section on jacks-of-all-trades reads *Uguline nota* - a reference to Ugolino Pisani, who was hardly a household name at this end of the world.² However, sometimes Decembrio did address a volume's dedicatee by name. So, in Cartagena's copy, there is a note which reads *Arrige aures, Burgensis optime!*³ Similarly, Humphrey is addressed directly - in the five-book volume rather than the full presentation codex. At the discussion of warfare in Book V, a marginal note reads: *Attende Cloucestrensis princeps illustrissime.*⁴ Moreover, a few pages later occurs the doctrine of philosopher-kings, to which Decembrio has a stock comment about this section being the source of Boethius' worthy comment - but in this volume, uniquely, the annotation is surmounted by a drawing of a coronet.¹ Both this pictorial addition and the earlier vocative indicate more succinctly and more strikingly than any of the prefaces that this manuscript is Humphrey's and that this work is particularly relevant to him.

There may, of course, be a particular reason why these additions occur in this section of the manuscript: as it was the Book V dedication to which Humphrey took exception, it may be that Decembrio felt it especially important that this part of the manuscript should have a visible link with his patron. Whether or not this was the case, the implication is that Humphrey is expected to learn from this work; whatever others might say about the *Republic's* doctrines, it is being claimed to be of political use to this prince. That is to say, these annotations suggest that Decembrio was, in contrast to Bruni, emphasising to Humphrey the political elements of his translation.

¹ Hankins, pp.567-8 (535 D1, 545 D1).

² **BL, MS.Harl.1705**, fol.30^v (370 B4); cf. **Durham: Dean & Chapter Library, MS.C.iv.3**, fol.38. On Ugolino, see Zaccaria, "Decembrio...Pisani", esp. p.193n; at least one work of Ugolino's circulated in late fifteenth century England: see Seville: Biblioteca Colombina, MS.5/5/28, fol.1-18^v {*Philogenia*} (on which manuscript, see c.vii p.247n below).

³ Hankins, p.559 (436 A8).

⁴ **BL, MS.Harl.1705**, fol.87^v (468 A2); noted by *DH & EH*, no.9.

This is, indeed, part of a wider contrast between Bruni's translation and Decembrio's. The latter, following through the logic of the position he had eventually adopted in the Ethics controversy, attempts to accommodate his translation to the scholastic philosophical vocabulary: a commitment reflected in the title he gave his version - *Celestis Politia*. In the text itself, Decembrio is willing to employ transliterations and medievalisms at which Bruni would have recoiled: *aristocratia*, *democratia* or *civilitas*, for example. At the same time, the precision which was the older translations' supposed advantage, was somewhat illusory in this rendition; Decembrio comes unstuck with some of Plato's central terms, not knowing it seems quite what to make of the distinction between guardian and auxiliary.² What is more, some of the transliterations are of unfamiliar words, for example, *eubolia*.³ In such cases, a gloss is necessary, and Decembrio provides it himself in the margin. The result is what might be called hybrid codices: the text attempts to be both fashionably eloquent and conventionally precise, the page combines *lettera antica* with essential exegetical material.

What I am suggesting is that Decembrio's manuscripts can not be viewed simply as translations which happen to have marginalia. For various reasons, both intentional and unintentional, Decembrio's rendition has to be read via the margins.⁴ In the following paragraphs, I intend to do just that, approaching the text by way of these guiding comments. By this method, we can investigate what political attitudes Decembrio expected Humphrey to learn from perusing the five-book manuscript.

¹ *Ms.cit.*, fol.91 (473 C11); cf. **BAV, MS.Vat.lat.10669**, fol.107.

² Compare, for example, his rendition of 414 B4-5 and 458B9 (**BL, MS.Harl. 1705**, fol.56^v, 82). For a similar point, see Hankins, p.138n.

³ Used at 348 D2: Decembrio's gloss - *bonum consilium* - is a fair translation, but it hardly fits the context (**BL, MS.Harl. 1705**, fol.18).

⁴ On the range of presentational techniques Decembrio uses, see Hankins, pp.132-3.

In the first place, Decembrio's insistence on the propriety of Plato's communism can make for some curious comments. For example, when Socrates describes the difficulties that will be avoided by a communal existence - debt and flattery - Decembrio turns this into a criticism of court-life: *sordes vite aulice*.¹ More striking still is the section immediately following the apostrophe to Humphrey; Plato discusses the rewards which will be given the successful warrior - the *premia virtutis* as the annotation calls them: he will not only be shaken by the hand, he will also be able to demand a kiss from whomsoever he wishes. It is true that Decembrio purifies the text of the explicit bisexual references but he retains the eugenic intention that the best warriors should have *plura connubia ... ut copiosiores ex his pueri gignantur*.² If Humphrey was attending as he was required, he would at least have found here justification for his youthful misdemeanours. On the other hand, one wonders how this section would square with the earlier marginal comment: *principem continentem esse debere*.³ This last example shows how contradictions can be found between the marginal notes but it must be said that comments of a conventionally moral type are the more frequent in this manuscript. Indeed, for the most part the marginalia suggest that Decembrio's philosopher-prince would appear to be rather like the usual ideal *rex*.

For example, an early note - *Lege princeps* - draws royal attention to the dictum that a ruler seeks what is advantageous for his subjects: a statement that would have struck early readers as a repetition of the commonplace of the *bonum commune*.⁴ Similarly, the image of rulers as shepherds may be an *elegans similitudo* but it was hardly a surprising one.⁵ Again, by placing the vocative to Humphrey next to the

¹ BL, MS.Harl.1705, fol.86 (465 C5).

² Ms.cit., fol.88 (468 B-C: the 'Glauconic edict').

³ Ms.cit., fol.42 (389 D9).

⁴ Ms.cit., fol.15 (342 E6).

⁵ Ms.cit., fol.15 (342 E6); fol.72^v (440 D6).

discussion of warfare, Decembrio is highlighting one of the two essential elements of traditional kingship. As Israel said to God when they asked him for a king and set down some job specifications: he will go out before us and fight our wars for us. He would also, they demanded, judge us.¹ In Decembrio's *Republic*, numerous passages discussing justice are heavily annotated. In particular, the marginalia stress that it is the *officium principis* to judge his people.² Finally, these two conventional elements of kingship - the power of the sword and the wisdom of the judge - are nicely combined in one of Decembrio's annotations: *princeps sit prudens & potens*.³

The propensity of Decembrio's political marginalia, then, is to highlight the very familiarity of Plato's doctrines. Like another section of his annotations - those noting the *Republic* as a source for better-known Latin texts - the purpose is to emphasise the work's place within the Western, Christian tradition. Paradoxically, he is attempting with his solicitious presentation of the *Republic* something close to what Bruni achieves with his minimal management of the *Politics*: to make his philosopher's politics seem unchallengingly conventional. In as far as his Plato is thought unsurprising, he would surely have counted his presentation a success. In other words, the latinised *Republic* is intended to contribute to what has been identified as a central preoccupation of *quattrocento* political thought: the eloquent reaffirmation of conventional moral teachings. Now, this may seem disappointing confirmation of the judgement that, before Machiavelli, humanist political philosophy was only humanist in its presentation.⁴ As has been suggested in an earlier chapter, such dismissive terms surely underestimate the influence of humanist restatement and ignore its creative

¹ I Sam 8₂₀.

² **MS.Harl.1705**, fol.68 (433 E4). For other notes on justice, see, for example, fol.53^v-54, 67^v-68.

³ *Ms.cit.*, fol.55^v (412 D4).

⁴ See c.ii p.28 above.

selectivity. Yet, if it is novelty we are after, novelty we can provide. There is one crucial way in which Decembrio's glossing of Plato hands Humphrey unusual advice.

Plato believed in lying. The classic (if unsympathetic) formulation of this doctrine runs:

'Whom do we call true philosophers?' 'Those who love truth', we read in the *Republic*. But [Plato] himself is not quite truthful when he makes this statement. He does not really believe in it, for he bluntly declares in other places that it is one of the royal privileges of the sovereign to make full use of lies and deceit: 'It is the business of the rulers of the city to tell lies, deceiving both its enemies and its own citizens for the benefit of the city.'¹

The *Republic's* rulers, then, are not just permitted, they are positively enjoined to be economical with the *actualité*. Decembrio appears to have had no qualms about this doctrine: in the list of educative doctrines for princes which his marginalia highlight, there appears the importance of being deceitful. At the relevant passage in Book III (quoted above), Decembrio draws a line and hand in the margin and writes: *principibus licere mentiri pro Rei publice utilitate*.² Plato's Machiavellian doctrine - or, rather, the Platonic doctrine later made his own by Machiavelli - has its place in Decembrio's political mentality.

Admittedly, the *Republic's* advocacy of mendacity is less wholesale than some commentators have suggested: Socrates makes a distinction between two sorts of lies - the 'true lie' which is defined as being false to one's soul and 'falsehood in words' which is a mere imitation or image of a lie. It is this second sort of falsehood which Socrates believes can be useful and which presumably the rulers are supposed to employ. This distinction may be a weak defence of Plato but it seems to have convinced Decembrio.³ In the margin, he echoes and indeed magnifies Plato's

¹ K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (London, 1945) p.138.

² MS. Harl. 1705, fol.41^v (389 B7).

³ J. Annas, *An introduction to Plato's Republic* (Oxford, 1981) pp.106-8.

oxymoronic phrasing - the first sort of lie is *verum mendacium*, the second *fictum mendacium* which, to emphasise the point, he notes is *utile aliquando*. This phrasing is echoed in the text itself where, significantly, Decembrio actually slightly reduces the text and makes it more positive:

Quod autem in sermone constitit solum adeo utile habetur aliquando ut nequaquam odio dignum censi debeat sicuti erga hostes atque amicos cum insanuit aut inscitia malum quodpiam conantur operari quod ne fiat ut pharmacum plerumque est proficium. Quemadmodum veritas se habeat videre nequeamus vera falsis commiscentes huiusmodi utile efficitur mendacium.¹

Again, when Plato goes on to point out that the gods would never lie, Decembrio seizes on this as a sign of Plato's compatibility with Christian teaching; for him, it becomes the central message of this passage. It would seem that, on his reading, a difference between the human and the divine is that men do lie and can even be justified in lying.¹

An example of beneficial lying appears later in the *Republic*. Socrates has divided his society into three classes; he is left with the difficulty of persuading the city's inhabitants to accept this social structure. He resorts to the 'noble lie' which the rulers will tell their subjects: everyone is actually a child of the earth born with in them some metal; in those fit to rule, gold; in those with less ability, silver and in the lower orders, iron and bronze. Those of different metals are placed in different classes and it is the oracle's prophecy that if ever those who lack gold in them come to rule, the city will be destroyed. Decembrio responded to this with approbation; his marginalia emphasise the need to uphold the social order and to ensure no one of base metal comes to rule. If Decembrio has any difficulty with this myth, it is not its perpetrating of a lie but its inherent paganism. He stresses that the reference to the earth as the city's god is

¹ **MS.Harl.1705**, fol.38 (382 A4-C7). Note the repeated interrogatives in the Greek and the lack of the same emphasis.

a metaphor; and he makes it the injunction of God, not the oracle, to uphold the class structure.² Now, in all this there is an unsurprising social conservatism; it is not the desired end which is unusual, merely the means counselled to achieve it.

To see how unfamiliar the advice to lie would have been to Decembrio's audience, we need only look at a few of the texts to which Humphrey would have had access. For Cicero, truth is part of natural law and, as such, is a component of justice. On the basis of this, Frulovisi in his *De Republica*, declares that veracity and fidelity are one virtue which above all others provides true glory.³ Even Giles of Rome, who includes such practical proposals for his kings as spying on their people, does not suggest a prince should lie. On the contrary, following Aristotle, he emphasised the importance of being truthful and of avoiding any pretence of being what one is not.⁴ There is, however, one parallel to the Platonic legitimisation of lies; that is, the humanists' perception of their own craft. As was discussed in Chapter Two, one strategy for justifying their encomia was to claim they were educative. This argument was taken to the point of claiming that lies could have a beneficial effect; Coluccio Salutati, for example, defended the hortatory use of praise devised *de falsis*.⁵ If, though, this is the background to Decembrio's comments, there is still something remarkable: the uniting of philosophy and kingship means that princes too are taught the benefits of lying.

However, whatever the interest of the marginalia on mendacity, their importance should not be overstated. They are only a small proportion of the political

¹ He makes this the title of this chapter: *quod in Deum nullum sit mendacium*, as well as adding a marginal comment to this effect at 382 D5.

² *MS.Harl.1705*, fol.57^{r-v} (414 B - 415 D).

³ Cicero, *De inventione* II.66 & 161; *De officiis* I.40; Frulovisi, *De republica* in C.W.Previtè-Orton ed., *Opera hactenus inedita T.Livii Frulovisi* (Cambridge, 1932) p.375.

⁴ Giles of Rome, *De regimine principum*, I.ii.29

⁵ C.Salutati, *De Laboribus Herculis*, ed.B.L.Ullman (Zurich, 1951) p.68.

annotations (themselves a subset of the notes) and, as has been shown, the political comments are overall an attempt to be unoriginal. Those restatements of accepted truths had - it has been said - their own importance, but it must be admitted that they do little justice to the ingenious use the humanists could make of their classical sources. In Decembrio's political marginalia, there is, for example, no more than a slight echo of his earlier application of Plato to the praise of Milan's constitution.¹ Nor is there - to return to a point raised near the start of this chapter - any sense of employing his text as a political riposte to Bruni's Aristotle. In large part, this may reflect a sense of what is proper in presenting a translation: the purpose of marginalia is to note, rather than to discuss, passages.² Yet, the implication of what has already been discussed is to suggest that even if he had wished his copies of the translation to present a more engaged reading, Decembrio would have faced difficulties. The *Republic*, like the *Politics*, was already a well-known (if unread) work. Whether it was because of its seminal or its scandalous status, each text came with a weight of tradition which restricted its translator's freedom to manoeuvre. Bruni, as we have seen, was not willing to damage the success of his *Politics* by presenting it as a re-interpretation. Decembrio, on the other hand, had to show his *Republic* was not a handbook of immorality; one strategy for that was to stress the very conventional nature of his other teachings. For their very different reasons, both Bruni and Decembrio were impelled to stress the doctrinal familiarity of 'their' work.

This chapter began by setting two questions, the first of which was how far the translation could be used to express humanist political thought. By now, an answer should be apparent: beyond reaffirming the blatantly commonplace, the potential for

¹ MS.Harl.1705, fol.61 (422 B6).

² For some comments on the practice of annotating, see c.vii pp.265-70 below.

political teaching was limited. This, though, was not inherent in the act of translation - Bruni's version of the *Tyrannus* is evidence of that. Rather, it was a matter of the particular works chosen. If Bruni or Decembrio had wanted to promote their own political outlook, their choice of the *Republic* or the *Politics* was self-defeating. It allowed them to present themselves as the philosophers' heirs, but they had respectfully to remain in their authors' shadow. If early readers wished to know what Bruni and Decembrio thought about their role-models, they needed to turn to the humanists' own - less prestigious but more revealing - compositions, like the *Laudatio* and the *Panegyricus*. Indeed, Decembrio may have sent Humphrey copies of these orations - by the 1450s at least one English reader had read them.¹ Yet, later centuries allowed the copies of these original works to perish, while preserving manuscripts of the translations. And, as has been argued, Humphrey, guided by the marginalia, would have discovered, by and large, familiar political doctrines in his five-book copy of the *Republic*. If, that is, he bothered to read it.

This brings us to the second issue of this chapter: how well did this far-away prince command the attentions of his humanists? It is traditionally assumed in the case of Decembrio that the scholar's interest lasted until he realised he was being undervalued: a year after the completion of the Plato project, Decembrio asked Humphrey to buy him Petrarch's villa; the duke refused.² Though this event, amply recorded in Decembrio's letters, may have caused the final break, I want in this section tentatively to suggest a different chronology. The starting-point is a comparison of the two presentation codices Decembrio sent Humphrey. I have already mentioned that the second presentation

¹ On this see c.vii p.271-3 below.

² Eg. Weiss, p.60.

manuscript includes relatively little marginalia and that it is not in the same way as the five-book copy addressed *ad hominem* to Humphrey. What annotation there is does reflect the same range of interests, but the balance is changed. In particular, there are significantly less political marginalia. It is, perhaps, unsurprising that Decembrio does not bother to mark out again those doctrines he had already highlighted in the first presentation copy; but it is somewhat more perplexing that he failed to guide Humphrey through the teachings of books VI-X. It is especially puzzling since it is in these books that Socrates elucidates the qualities necessary for the philosopher-king and here that he vividly describes the nature of a tyrant and the city he rules. Compulsory and compulsive reading, one would have thought, for any aspirant humanist prince; but Decembrio (who annotates these passages copiously in other copies) lifts his pen at most twice to mark them here.

We shall return in a moment to discuss possible reasons for this decrease in political emphasis. For the moment, I wish to concentrate on what marginalia do appear in the full presentation volume. Instead of a political emphasis, the annotations tend more than anything towards a literary reading of the *Republic*. Already in the five-book manuscript, Decembrio had remarked on elegant or humorous passages and on Socrates' method of arguing. In the sparser notes of the second manuscript, such comments are all the more noticeable - over a fifth of the marginal notes consist of a single word, *similitudo*. Decembrio is not just eager to emphasise Plato's use of metaphors; to his mind, they are much more than a figure of speech, they are central to Plato's method of arguing. For example, in the final pages of the translation, Decembrio writes next to the start of the Myth of Er: reader, understand that this part is

meant allegorically (*mistiche*) by Plato and ought to be read otherwise than literally.¹ The tale of an after-life in which the reward or punishment for one's actions in this world is finite and in which everyone is reincarnated might strike some readers as unchristian but Decembrio rejects such criticism as a literal-minded misreading. For Decembrio, the *Republic's* doctrines can only be understood by appreciating the work's literary quality; Plato's philosophy is indivorceable from his rhetoric.²

This emphasis on Plato's literary skill fits well with what we know of humanists who strove to combine eloquence with philosophy as equal partners.³ Yet, it might also seem ironic: after all, does not Plato eject the eloquent poets from his ideal state? This is a doctrine which seems not to concern Decembrio. When Socrates at the start of the last book praises Homer's skill but insists he must be barred from the city, Decembrio tersely notes: *Homeri laus*.⁴ Earlier in the work, when Plato first introduces his argument against freedom of artistic expression, Decembrio marks the examples of supposedly corrupting verses - but gives no suggestion in this manuscript that such expressions are to be avoided. The translator might be enabling his readers to pick out quotations from other authors but, in the context of the sparse marginalia of the full codex, this presents not just incomplete but potentially misleading guidance to the text.

This returns us to trying to discern why the annotations in this copy are so much less frequent than in other volumes Decembrio produced. There is a temptation to explain the infrequency of marginalia in codicological terms: as we have seen, this codex is a richly illuminated manuscript, so much so that no reader or owner (including Humphrey) felt at leave to scribble in its margins. Perhaps similarly Decembrio, having

¹ **BAV, MS. Vat. lat. 10669**, fol.205^v (619 B2-4).

² On the importance of rhetoric in Plato's works, see R.B.Rutherford, *The art of Plato* (Cambridge, MA., 1995).

³ For a contrasting interpretation, see Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy*.

⁴ **BAV, MS.Vat.lat.10669**, fol.190 (595 B10).

ordered such a gorgeous book, was reluctant to damage its appearance with his annotations; alternatively, the translator may have been rushed - Humphrey was pressing for early delivery - and lacked the opportunity to add all the marginalia. Such explanations, however, fail to explain why Decembrio wrote the comments he did; they could tell us why he wrote fewer marginalia, but not why he wrote disproportionately fewer political annotations. So, we have to explain why, in this particular manuscript, there is a decreased emphasis on directing the reader to the text's political teachings.

As it happens, this change of emphasis does not occur merely in the manuscript's margins; something similar seems to be going on in the prefaces. I mentioned earlier that the first four books are dedicated to Humphrey, as are books VII-IX. In the early prefaces, the political efficacy of the *Republic* is a theme with, for example, Decembrio introducing the third book's discussion of the guardians' education by asking:

Quid enim in hac vita utilius excogitari potest quam homines his moribus et disciplinis instituere ex quibus non sibi solis sed ceteris etiam tum patrie imprimis utiles esse queant?¹

Again, the preface to the fourth book is effectively an encomium to justice.² Yet, such political themes are conspicuously absent from the later prefaces to Humphrey, even though these books are arguably the most relevant to princely rule. What is more, the Duke himself becomes a less significant figure in these later prefaces; most notably, the preface to the ninth book praises Filippo Maria Visconti as a patron of learning. It is as if Decembrio had come to feel his earlier arrangement of dedicatees for each book was a straitjacket. Admittedly, in the preface to the seventh book Humphrey is eulogised as

¹ Sammut, p.207 (II.11-14).

² Sammut, pp.208-9.

that Platonic ideal, the philosopher-prince, but even here there is something curious.¹ As we saw earlier, in his *Panegyricus* Decembrio avoided suggesting his own Dukes were philosopher-kings; equally, in the early prefaces his preferred comparison for Humphrey is with Augustus.² In other words, when the humanist is constructing credible praise, he usually stops short of the hyperbole present in the seventh preface; perhaps, then, his description of the fifty-year-old Duke of Gloucester combining music and gymnastics and despising every lie was itself a *fictum mendacium* on Decembrio's part.

What I am suggesting, then, is that a close examination of the manuscripts and the prefaces presented to Humphrey allows the hypothesis that Decembrio's perception of his enterprise altered between the production of the first and the second presentation codex. Between late 1438 and 1440, Decembrio appears to have decided that among the purposes of his translation was no longer the political education of his English patron. Unfortunately, this stretches the manuscripts to the limits of their evidence; they can not tell us why Decembrio came to his decision. Perhaps, faced with continuing criticisms of Plato's communism, he became less sanguine about the possibility of employing the *Republic* politically.³ If this is the case, though, it caused Decembrio only a temporary loss of confidence. A few years later, when he had other copies of the translation made, they were replete with political annotations. The other possibility, of course, is that he came to feel that Humphrey was not the prince to be taught by his Plato. I have mentioned in an earlier chapter the Duke's reputation for limited generosity; did Decembrio sense his services were being undervalued several years

¹ Sammut, p.210.

² Sammut, p.203 (1.5); p.206 (1.24); p.207 (1.33).

³ This reading might be supported by a somewhat defensive letter included in the Vatican ms.: Sammut, p.194.

before he broke off contact with Humphrey?¹ I have also suggested that, to some humanists, Humphrey appeared less than a committed reader - may this have come to Decembrio's attention? Neither of these possibilities can be rejected out of hand but there is, equally, no necessity to assume that an altered attitude towards Humphrey was the result of the patron's shortcomings. This change of opinion may be as much an effect of factors closer to home.

At this point, we should reintroduce Leonardo Bruni and his *Politics* translation. Whether or not he promised Humphrey the dedication, Bruni seems to have allowed the impression to circulate that he was translating the work for the Duke of Gloucester: that Decembrio and Pizolpasso could make their accusations is testimony enough to that. Yet, as we have seen, from what we can reconstruct of the manuscript he sent Humphrey, dispatched (as far as we know) before any disagreement arose, it made no attempt to present the work as somehow specially Humphrey's. In other words, it would appear that Bruni created the impression in Italian circles that he was educating a barbarian prince but actually did little to act out that role in his dealings with the Duke. Now, Decembrio certainly expended more energy on humouring his English patron but it may be that, as in Bruni's case, what concerned him most was the appearance of being a humanist by royal appointment. When that seemed to be in jeopardy - after the *faux-pas* of the Book V dedication - he sent off the five-book presentation copy, complete with copious annotation. Having thus reassured himself of Humphrey's sponsorship (if not patronage), it became unnecessary to repeat such a solicitous act.

This sort of scenario does not, of course, exclude the possibility that Humphrey's deficiencies played a part; equally, it suggests that the humanists had

¹ On this, c.iv pp.131-2 above.

higher priorities than continual consideration of a distant prince. Acting the educator to a barbarian prince was played for the domestic market; too eager a performance of that role could actually be counter-productive, diminishing opportunities for home patronage. So, in Bruni's case, by the mid-1430s, his bid to bring the General Council to Florence made offering Eugenius IV the dedication of the *Politics* a more politically astute move than reserving it for Humphrey. A couple of years later, Decembrio was already discovering other princely readers for Humphrey's *Republic*, meaning that the Duke of Gloucester no longer held his attentions as the only pupil in his political-education class.¹ So, on my submission, the main importance of Humphrey to Bruni and Decembrio lasted for the time it took to establish their position as what I have called humanists by royal appointment. Certainly, as was suggested in an earlier chapter, this does not mean that the link between humanist and dedicatee vanished after a work had been completed; Bruni, when he felt he was being traduced to Humphrey, was concerned enough to dispatch to England a belated covering letter for the *Politics*. It was not that a distant patron lacked long-term political use for a humanist, merely that that use was counted less important than more immediate concerns. For both Bruni and Decembrio, a prince as far away as Humphrey could command only a short attention-span. At the same time, the attentions they directed towards him attracted others to approach him as well; so while each contact may have had, as it were, a limited shelf-life, together they provided durable window-dressing of Humphrey as humanist patron.

If, though, Humphrey failed to attract scholarly interest for long, this does not mean that, at least in Decembrio's case, the humanist's interest in the English market was

¹ Sammut, p.191.

confined to this contact. The history of the English circulation of Decembrio's translation is, in fact, a catalogue of surprises. For example, Thomas Bekynton showed interest in some of the letters sent to his sometime employer concerning the latinised *Republic*, but his own transcription of Decembrio's first epistle is significantly different from the version in the surviving manuscripts.¹ In particular, it omits the Decembrio's slighting references to Bruni: was this because Bekynton thought these comments unworthy of copying? Or was it that he was working from a manuscript which did not include the relevant sentences? If the latter, all that can be said is that his exemplar has now been lost without trace. However, the most striking revelations involve a copy written in an English hand of the late fifteenth century.² The dense marginalia in this manuscript show that it was copied not from Humphrey's presentation codex but from another manuscript that Decembrio had prepared for an English reader. Who that reader was and how this copy came to be made is impossible to discern, although one possible owner is William Gray. However that may be, the interest of this manuscript does not stop with its proof that Decembrio's English dealings were not confined to Humphrey of Gloucester. The marginalia in this manuscript include some notable additions to the corpus of annotations.

The subject-matter of the *Republic*, with its emphasis on the education of the young guardians invites comments on the bringing up of children; these occur in most copies of the translation but they are augmented in this manuscript; for example, when the young philosopher-king's curriculum is outlined, this copy has in the margin: *Lege*

¹ Bekynton's copies are in Bod., MS.Ashmole 789, fol.218-9; the letter printed at Sammut, pp.180-1 reads for ll.21-6 (*Cum igitur intelligam Leonardum ... extollere. Felicissime*): *Cum igitur tuam voluntatem intelligam felicissime.*

² **Durham: Dean & Chapter Library, MS.C.iv.3**, where fragments from another copy, seemingly transcribed from the Durham manuscript's prototype are discussed.

iners iuvenis.¹ What makes these additions striking is the inclusion as well of two other notes: *Lege Regis fili* and *Lege Rex puer*.² Now, I have already argued that such nameless vocatives are generic rather than specific (although it might be quibbled that there were few boy-kings around in mid-fifteenth century Europe); we must refrain from too close a link between such comments and Henry VI, who was in his twenties when this manuscript was written.³ At the same time, these additions to the marginalia suggest a concern about the very real political issue of royal minorities. Moreover, anyone who read the passages next to the annotations would find uncomfortable *sententiae*. In particular, the invocation to *fili regis* is placed against Socrates' comment that princes' natures are an inevitable decline from their fathers. If the political maxims Decembrio highlighted were more often than not conventional, that did not necessarily make them conservative.

Whatever is to be made of these notes, the wider significance of this manuscript is to repeat an argument by now familiar in this thesis. That is, that humanist relations with England were, to a larger extent than is often recognised, more various than a simple association with Humphrey of Gloucester. Moreover, the activity that occurred in the mid- and late fifteenth century was less than might be supposed a result of the duke's interest. There is, then, a final irony: if Decembrio's attitude to Humphrey was, in part, affected by his perception of the duke's attentiveness, he did not reckon with the interest of other, admittedly less celebrated, readers. Some of these, indeed, had the opportunity to peruse the full range of Decembrio's marginal comments that Humphrey

¹ **Durham, MS.C.iv.3**, fol.143 (536 D3); cf. fol.13^v (330 E), 44 (378 A3 & C6); see also fol.98^v (465 A5). Cf. **MS.Harl.1705**, fol.35^v (378 A3).

² **Durham, MS.C.iv.3**, fol.122 (502 A6) & 176 (591 A1).

³ See p.211-2 above.

never saw. They were in a better position to judge what political doctrines a prince could learn from the *Republic* than the duke of Gloucester had been himself.

