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The Emotions of the State. A Survey of the Visconti Chancery Language (Mid 14TH- Mid 15TH Centuries)

Although emotions as a field of historical research have come to the fore since the late 1990s, the interest aroused by this subject among the scholars of the Italian Renaissance state has been limited, at least so far. Apart from an important study on Lombard factions by Marco Gentile, and the very recent insight of Isabella Lazzarini into the Florentine diplomatic records, nothing else has been published. 1 On these grounds I have decided to take up some suggestions coming from scholars of other periods of the Middle Ages, and to analyze the case-study of the duchy of Milan from the angle of the relationship between politics and emotions. 2 Unlike Isabella Lazzarini, I am not going to predominantly focus on diplomatic records, which also, of course, represent an extraordinary source for the duchy of Milan but I am more interested in probing into the relations between governors and governed; between the duke and his subjects. In order to appreciate the distinctive features of the latter, it is probably necessary to take the former as a starting point, to have a term of comparison. Therefore let us have a very quick look at the language of diplomatic practice and its emotional register.

Since the beginning of their rise to power, the Visconti deployed emotionality in their diplomatic correspondences. Politics was, and still is, the art of persuading, so it is hardly surprising that foreign affairs were edged by the Visconti’s chancellors within the framework of friendship/enmity, love/hatred or happiness/sadness. Let’s consider first a letter sent by Galeazzo II to Ludovico Gonzaga and brothers, lords of Mantua in 1366. In concerns a very minor subject, the Visconti laments the bad treatment received in Mantua by a merchant from Monza, but in its very ordinariness rests its significance:

“Magnifici fratres carissimi (= close familiarity). Mercatores nostri Modoetie nuper coram nobis laceramibiler sunt conquesti (= sadness and complaint) [...] die quarto seu quinto mensis instantis ipsa mercimonia conductoribus coram fuerunt per vestros super tertorio vestro Mantueae nequiter derobate et in civitate Mantue violenter conducte (= frustrated rage)”. 3

In a sole document, moreover a routine document, the Visconti’s chancery could display a very large gamut of feelings and emotions. Let alone in letters concerning state-affairs, like a declaration of war. We can think of the letter by Gian Galeazzo to Antonio Della Scala in 1387, which is entirely formed on the contrast between the love of Gian Galeazzo for Antonio and the hatred of Antonio for Gian Galeazzo. For the record, Antonio’s reply turned around the argument: in line with the platonic philosophy, he calls on mankind’s distinctive features, sense and reason, which are supposed to tackle passions. Gian Galeazzo is represented as being gripped with disordered feelings, which are contrasted to the purity of Antonio’s emotions. Indeed, it is with a bleeding heart and after renewing his love for Gian Galeazzo that A

The Visconti’s chancery could also switch to a different emotional register, depending on the


3 Documenti diplomatici tratti dagli archivi milanesi, ed. by L. Osio, I, Milan 1864, pp. 136-137; 1368 November 22, Milan.

effect desired. Let us consider the letter sent in 1428 by Filippo Maria Visconti to the Emperor, who had just reported his decision to set off to Italy, after a long period of vacillation:

“Liberarunt me littere serenitatis vestre, quas cum debita reverentia nuper accepi, a multa expectatione et cura, in qua meus erat animus constitutus. Prestolabar enim dictum cum desiderio ea grata nova sentire, que nunc scribit vestra maiestas de suo ad hanc partes accessu, et exinde quidam ita letus et consolatus factus sum ut iam oblivus videar omnium malorum eventum, qui michi actenus contingerunt [sic]. Gratulor, princeps invictissime, et ultra modum exulto. Ridet animus, ridet spiritus, cum iucundam scriptum literarum vestrarum intueor, que non solum pollicentur quod semper optavi, sed affirmant et in actu esse dicunt”. 5

In summing up, it is possible to argue that there are three main aspects that emerge from this look at the Visconti’s diplomatic records:
- Firstly, the chancery was very familiar with the emotional register.
- Secondly, the chancery could deploy the entire scale of emotions, none excluded, depending on the occasion and relevant audience.
- Thirdly, and lastly, discursive resources became, at the turn of the fifteenth century, richer and more subtle than in the late fourteenth century, mainly thanks to an increased prevalence of a sophisticated humanistic culture.

The revival of classics offered a wider array of argumentative strategies. 6 If we bear in mind these features and turn our attention to the Visconti’s communications with their subjects, we cannot help noticing the stark difference – in terms of tones, emotions displayed, categories and constructions – between the diplomatic records and the internal correspondence. The letters addressed by the Visconti to their subjects, especially at the outset of the Signoria, in the 1330s and 1340s, were very bald and dry. There was little room for emotions. 7 We must not get misled by the letter sent in 1329 to the XXIV presidentes negotiorum Communis Mediolani, which is a very peculiar document, but needs to be put in context. After the Emperor Ludwig the Bavarian in 1327 had ordered Galeazzo Visconti to be arrested and the commune of Milan to be taken over by an imperial vicar assisted by a council of 24 Milanese nobles, Azzone managed to reconcile with the Emperor and to get the appointment of imperial vicar over Milan. In the letter announcing the novelty, Giovanni, Azzone and Marco Visconti addressed the XXIV presidentes negotiorum communis Mediolani as “amicis carissimis” (dearest friends) and appealed to the happiness that the 24 members were supposed to feel on the grounds of their friendship for the Visconti’s family (“ad gaudium amicitiae vestrae”). 8 In actual fact, the joy attributed to the 24 members of the Council was wishful thinking, or, someone else would say “an emotive”, 9 as the Council of the 24 represented a sector of the Milanese society which traditionally did not smile on the Visconti’s signoria (and indeed a few weeks later some of those nobles were arrested). 10 From then on, the idea of friendship was no longer deployed on the subjects but was limited to foreign political players, both individuals and communities. A letter of Bernabò Visconti, bestowing a pass to Conradolo da Ponte, makes plain this point:

“Nos Bernabos etc. Cum mittimus Conradolum de pontem, familiarem nostrum, ad diversas partes, rogamus amicos et nostri subditis percipiendo mandamus, quatenus [...]”. 11

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5 Documenti diplomatici tratti dagli archivi milanesi, II, p. 362 ss.; 1428 March 2, Milan.
6 See Lazzarini, Argument and emotion in Italian Diplomacy.
7 La politica finanziaria dei Visconti, ed. by C. Santoro, Milan 1976, passim.
One the one hand the Lord of Milan asks the friends (who are outside the dominion), and on the other hand he orders imperatively to his subjects. It must be noted that under Azzone (1329-1339), Giovanni (1339-1354) and Luchino Visconti (1339-1349), not only feelings of friendship, but any other kind of emotions can hardly be gleaned from the internal correspondence. Letters are very dry; their tone imperative. The only exception is represented by some letters of grants, whose recipients generally represented individuals and not communities as whole, used to be addressed “dilecto, dilectis” (Beloved). But there is nothing else. This is striking, not only because the Visconti’s chancery was familiar with the emotional register, as I showed before, but also because the Lords of Milan were well aware of the importance of communication in their relations with their subjects, as it results for example from the analysis of the prologues of the city statutes, which are quite often very weighty and imbued with philosophical principles that underpin the Visconti’s power. But once again, the arguments claimed are rational and do not play on emotions. In actual fact, communication could also chart its way through fields different from writing: let’s think of artistic representations and of architecture. And it is in this very area that traces of emotion first surface. Scholars have effectively teased out Azzone Visconti’s monumental policy, stretching from the building of new urban fortresses in the subject’s cities to the appropriation, through signs of the signorial power, of places once symbolizing the autonomy of the communes, like the walls or the city halls.

Azzone’s magnificentia has been pointed out by many contemporaneous chroniclers, from Bonincontro Morigia to Pietro Azario to Galvano Fiamma. It is the last of these who suggests a key reading to interpret Azzone’s policy. As Galvano writes, “Magnificentia est pars fortitudinis”. Deeply influenced by Thomas Aquinas, Galvano Fiamma portraits magnificentia as a virtue connected with strength. As Patrick Boucheron has put it, Magnificentia was intended to arouse admiration as well as fear. This is why he could forge the expression “architectura d'intimidation” (architecture to intimidate). But it is worth noticing that Azzone, as Boucheron has put it, did prefer to represent his monumental policy alongside the communal one, rather than separate them. The Lords of Milan seem concerned not to make explicit the intimidating message which was embedded in their monumental policy. Let’s think of Luchino Visconti, who in 1347 encircled the square of Parma with walls but decided to term the enclosed space “Sta’ in pace” (be at peace). It is a very reassuring message, which covered up the underlying reason for that building. Emotions were displayed but filtered!

The real turning point is represented by the signoria of Giovanni Visconti’s nephews, Bernabò (1354-1385) and Galeazzo (1354-1378): not only did the emotions pass from the artistic area, but to the area of internal correspondence, where they became more explicitly a device to rule. I think there are some contributory causes, starting from the tandem government of the two brothers, Galeazzo and Bernabò, with each of them carving out his own profile as a ruler so as to differ to one another. Indeed the two brothers tried out different, barely opposite, ideas of government, as shown by the ways they dispensed justice. On the one hand Galeazzo promoted himself as upholder of local customs, never pardoning in order not to overrule local laws; on the other hand Bernabò reserved the right to overrule local laws and customs, in the name of a superior idea of justice that the Lord intended to embody. It is important to recall these aspects because some clues of the diverging ideals which drove the two brothers are also echoed in the internal correspondence.

In Galeazzo II’s missives, for the first time in the Visconti’s history, a feeling of love pours out towards not just a single person but to a whole community. Likewise to the beloved (dilectis) villagers of Palestro, or to the beloved (dilectis) inhabitants of Bra.

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12 La politica finanziaria dei Visconti, passim.
13 F. Cengarle, “Il reato politico contro la civitas come crimine di lesa maestà in due statuti cittadini dell‘età di Azzzone Visconti (Como, 1333; Piacenza, 1336)”, in Medioevo dei poteri. Studi di storia per Giorgio Chittolini, ed. by M. N. Covini, Massimo Della Misericordia, A. Gamberini, and F. Somoini, Rome 2012, pp. 36-75.
16 A. Gamberini, La città assediata. Poteri e identità politiche a Reggio in età viscontea, Rome 2003, p. 249 ss. As a matter of fact, since the beginning of 15th century even the Specula principum started profiling different images of the ideal prince. A. De Benedictis, “Introduzione”, in Specula principum, ed. by to A. De Benedictis, Frankfurt am Main 1999, p. XVII.
In both cases Galeazzo granted privileges to the communities: a new one for the former, a confirmation for the latter. (And it is telling that in this confirmation Galeazzo added the term “beloved”, which is missing in Giovanni’s first privilege).\textsuperscript{17}

Of course, on the face of it, it seems an attempt to create a special relationship, maybe an emotional community, with some subjects rewarded for their loyalty, but I suggest there is another reason. During the fourteenth century, legitimacy of power was a crucial matter for the Visconti and if under Azzone – as Federica Cengarle has recently pointed out his claims were underpinned by the ideal of \textit{politicum dominium}.\textsuperscript{18} In a nutshell: sovereignty belongs to the people, who can transfer its authority to a Lord. His successors shifted to the ideal of \textit{naturale dominium}, whereby the Lord’s power descends from God and is not bound. Of course this was a way to free the Visconti’s authority from popular election – which no longer took place: at best the \textit{signore} was acclaimed, but not elected. It must be noted that this doctrine was very consequential even on emotional grounds. Despite its growth and tendency to become absolute, the Lord’s power still clung on to the achievement of a major pursuit: the well-being of his subjects. This point was so crucial that the subjects who abstained from obeying the Lord were thought to be delinquent. It was in this very context that love became pivotal. As for the Lord, love was at one with common good, a way to highlight that he was embarking upon the well-being of his subjects. It is no accident that such displays of love are generally associated with the granting of privileges. The ducal love is something tangible, not an abstract principle! As for the subjects, their professions of love were recognition of the Lord acting well and trying to establish a special relationship.

As I mentioned before, the earlier steps of this new course can be detected during Galeazzo II’s government, but it was under his son Gian Galeazzo (1378-1402) that the emotional register centered on the mutual love between the Lord and the subjects and this became a distinctive feature of the internal correspondence.\textsuperscript{19} In a surviving letter the nexus between the Lord’s policy and his subjects’ feelings is made plain:

“Quoniam sacro testator eloquio, quod cui plus dimititur et ille magis diligit, idcirco ut nostrorum subditorum dilectionis fervor et amoris in nos ampius ascendatur, per quod et nos ad ubiores gratiarum impensiones erga illos inclinemur, volumus et man[...]

Even more interestingly is the case of the citizens of Asti, whose conditions of submission to Gian Galeazzo are imbued with the language of love. The citizens of Asti begged Gian Galeazzo for some grants:

“atento quod populous et universitas et communis et civitatis Ast ex suis meritis quam maximam affectionem ad ipsum (Iohannem Galeaz) gessit et gerit quodque sibi fuerunt fideles”.

But the inhabitants of Asti were not the only ones ready to promote themselves as fond of the Lord: in 1389 the citizens of Belluno proclaimed themselves “zelatores status sui augmenti” and Gian Galeazzo promptly retorted that he was aware of and happy about their love:

“de cordiali affectione dictorum civium et communitatis certi personalerque contentii”.

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{La politica finanziaria}, I, p.p. 42-43 (1349 March 23, Milan); p. 201 (1369 June 2, Pavia); pp. 248-249 (1373 February 9, Pavia)

\textsuperscript{18} See F. Cengarle, \textit{Il crimen lese maiestatis all’ombra del biscione. Dalle città lombarde ad una “monarchia europea”, 1335-1447}, in print.

\textsuperscript{19} In 1378 Gian Galeazzo wrote to the Commune of Pavia: on this occasion not only were the inhabitants called “fideles nostri dilecti”, but the lord showed himself sympathetic with them. “Compatientes vestri gravibus conditionibus et angariis, quibus casibus variis emergentibus actenus pressi estis, et cupientes, sicut nobis semper cordi fuit, super gravitate huiusmodi vestrorum onerum spontaneo et grato animo de alienationibus providere”: \textit{La politica finanziaria}, I, p. 310.

\textsuperscript{20} \textit{La politica finanziaria}, I, p. 310;
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{La politica finanziaria}, I, p. 335
\textsuperscript{22} \textit{La politica finanziaria}, II, p. 90
We can even trace a scale of fondness. The height was reached on the occasion of the submission of two large and for a long time autonomous cities, Pisa and Siena, whose dwellers were called “dilecti filii” (beloved sons) by the Prince.\textsuperscript{23} It is self evident that by calling these citizens “beloved sons” the prince forged an unparalleled relationship with them, which echoed the terms of the special pacts signed with them.\textsuperscript{24} But the emotional register was a double edged sword and the subjects also learned quickly how to make use of feelings to affect the ducal policy. One of the most interesting instances comes from the pleas that some cities addressed to the new duke Filippo Maria Visconti in 1412. During his brother Giovanni Maria’s government (1402-1412), Milan and Como – but also other cities – had seen the dismemberment of their contadi, where many lords of castle and rural communities had gained independence. This is why after Filippo Maria’s rise to power these cities pleaded to the Lord to restore the territorial organization which was in force “tempore felicis dominationis genitoris vestry”.\textsuperscript{25} It is worth noticing that in these pleas also the memory of Giovanni Maria Visconti’s government was recalled, but never in association with happiness [...] (for the record, Filippo Maria generally granted the cities what they had claimed). So, love (or fondness) was one of the major common threads of the Visconti emotional policy since the time of Galeazzo II. But it was not the only one. Let’s go back to mid fourteenth century and focus on Galeazzo II’s brother, Bernabò. He also made use of emotions, but in a completely different way. In looking at Bernabò it can be useful to take as a starting point the many tales which he circulated, especially in Tuscany. Franco Sacchetti, who was amongst the most famous storytellers of the time and was also a Florentine ambassador to the Visonti’s court, wrote:

“Questo signore ne’ suoi tempi fu ridottato da più che altro signore e comechè fusse crudele, pure nella sua crudeltà aveva gran parte di iustizia”.\textsuperscript{26}

As Sacchetti clearly pointed out, two main elements of Bernabò’s behavior hit the imagination of the storytellers: justice and fear, which were generally presented as being strictly interconnected. As for the former, tales limited themselves to echoing and taking up the emphasis used by Bernabò to promote himself as an upholder of justice. He had been deprived of the imperial vicariate, repeatedly excommunicated by the Pope: in a nutshell the bases of his legitimacy as a signore were faltering. So it was to compensate this weakness in the eyes of his subjects that he played on his role as avenger.\textsuperscript{27} As for fear, his punishments were horrific, as they were intended to strike terror into his subjects. But – and this is the point I would like to highlight – Bernabò’s letters also reflected this feature. Not only were they extremely dry and authoritative, but they contained explicit threats. Under his predecessors the Lord’s disappointment was simply expressed by the conventional words (“valde miramur”, or “admirati sumus”), but Bernabò was used to writing in a more colorful and straightforward way. I could cite a number of instances. To induce the podestà of Cremona to comply with the Lord of Milan’s will Bernabò wrote:

“Avisamus vos quod si de cetero non observabitis decreta et mandata nostra, faceremus vobis solvi de veteri et novo testamento”.\textsuperscript{28}

The subjects also experienced Bernabò’s harshness. When some peasants dared to ask the Lord not to grant some privileges to a family of local nobles, Bernabò’ chancellar retorted: “Hoc est dicere quod servus imponat legem domino suo, quod est crudele”: on the basis of this reply, the subject

\textsuperscript{23} Who this way implemented the Aristotelian teaching whereby “l’autorità che il padre ha sui figli è quella del re: il genitore, infatti, ha l’autorità fondata sull’affetto e sull’eta più matura, e questa è la caratteristica dell’autorità regale”.


\textsuperscript{25} A. Gamberini, *La città assediata*, pp. 249 ff.

\textsuperscript{26} “This Lord was feared more than any other of the time”: F. Sacchetti, *Centonovelle*, p. 8 (Novella IV)

\textsuperscript{27} Gamberini, *La città assediata*, pp. 249 ff.

\textsuperscript{28} F. Cognasso, “Ricerche per la storia dello stato visconteo, I, Lettere di Bernabò ai suoi officiali in Cremona”, *Bollettino della Società Pavese di Storia Patria*, XXVI (1926), p. 178; 1381 November 26, Desio
nothing more that “serfs” and their claims are labeled as “crudelitas” (cruelty), that is to say an inhuman subversion of the natural order. It is clear the aim that Bernabò intended to pursue by displaying such a language, but we can also try to tease out its origins. Contrary to common belief, the language of fear did not rely upon (or just upon) Bernabo’s alleged bad temper which many chroniclers lingered on and described in detail. In actual fact, it was the outcome of a way of thinking which was still widespread more than a century later, as Machiavelli testifies to. Let’s think of Chapter 17 of Il Principe where he wonders whether it is best for a prince to be feared or to be loved. In polemics with a tradition which stretches back to Cicero and Lucretius and passes through Petrarcha, Machiavelli argues for the latter and cites the example of the Duke Valentino. But quite a lot earlier, Bernabo had taken such a path, not by chance or simply following his nature, but in the wake of a very defined political ideal. Like his brother Galeazzo II, Bernabo also drew on the theory of dominium regale, but he pushed its boundaries in a different direction. In Bernabo’s view the Lord’s power does not simply result from God: the Lord himself is a mirror of God. Even more: somehow the Lord himself is God. Let us consider Bernabo’s monument that he commissioned from Bonino da Campione, one of the most famous sculptors of the day. It portrays the Lord riding a horse, but next to the animal it is possible to see, even in a smaller size, two (of the four) cardinal virtues: Justice and Might (which of course suggests fear). The two left virtues, prudence and temperance, are not represented, as they were not instrumental in conveying Bernabo’s message. So the message is straightforward, but to fully understand it we have to put the statue in its original architectonic context. Historical sources reveal that it was placed in a church – that of San Giorgio al Palazzo (the palace of Bernabo) – and it was in a very telling position, as remarked by an anonymous French traveler:

“Nonne in Mediolano vidi abominabole idolum super altare Dei, hominis scilicet armati imaginem, sedentis super equm de candido marmore fabricatum, et in loco ubi Corpus Christi sacratum consuevit locari vel reponi collocatum?”. 31

So the statue occupied the place traditionally reserved for the son of God. But the analogy pursued by Bernabo goes beyond, as the very fear which Bernabo strikes into his subjects seems to echo the fear of God. This political language, which can be considered as a Bernabo’s hallmark, was no longer successful in the decades to follow. Although statements about fear can be found here and there in the surviving records, the dukes of Milan did prefer to take up the language of love, in the wake of Galeazzo II and Gian Galeazzo tradition. As a matter of fact as early as the death of the count there in the su–

31 I have focused on that aspect in Gamberini, La città assediata, p. 251.
34 See F. Cengarle, Feudi e feudatari del duca Filippo Maria: repertorio, Milan 2007.
to confirm the bounds of the contract between the family and the Visconti that had always been maintained. The relationship was effectively originated as an arbitration, which the juridical doctrine considered as a pact. In 1337 this arbitration had defined the conditions of the cession of the city of Piacenza from the Scotti to the Visconti, providing privileges for the Scotti. However, through the years both parties had moved from the pact. The Visconti by a gradual restriction of the privileges granted to the Scotti and the latter, in particular moments of their history, by attempting to legitimize their political position in the county of Piacenza by using other languages. Sometimes they used the language of factions by presenting themselves as the chiefs of the Guelph faction of Piacenza and sometimes they used the language of the imperial authority whom they asked to sanction their power. 35

This is why in the 1420s Filippo Maria, irrespective of the Scotti’s claims, repeatedly attacked their privileges, in a bid to impose heavier fiscal contributions. The matter was very delicate and the awareness that they were acting on a slippery slope prompted the Visconti’s chancery to change strategy and forge new representations of the relationship between the Duke and the Scotti. In some ducal letters the linguistic register of authority, which the Lords of Milan have made use of since 1330s – and which have been expressed by both command verbs (volumus, edicimus, mandamus, iubemus), and menacing expressions (statim et indillate; sub pena nostre indignationis) – started being weaved with the thread of fondness and friendship. It was a big twist, as the latter was evocative, if not of a relationship between peers, at least of more closeness. The earliest example comes from a letter sent in 1422 to the Scotti where the Duke made it clear that:

“quam presentem numerationem quam celerius fieri facens, tanto grandius nos iuvabit cognoscere ardentem affectionem tuam solitam circa nostra beneplacita adimplenda”.

Speed in paying was, according to the Duke, a barometer of the fondness that he places as the basis of the relationship with the Scotti. In another letter the Prince added: “Seis tu quod in necessitatibus cognoscuntur amici [...]”. And with regard to the tax required: “nec illa unquam ex memoria nostra delebitur”. In these letters the language of patronage (above all friendship) permeates the relationship between the Prince and the Scotti, giving a different image. Although it was extraordinary, the playing on love was balanced in the same letters by authoritative expressions which were to make clear the asymmetry in the relationship, the distance between that who commands and that who has to obey. A centuries-old tradition could not be abandoned overnight: hence the coexistence of two opposite linguistic registers. As a matter of fact, the swing of tones in the ducal letters lasted for a long while and friendly missives alternated with other much harsher, like the one in which the Prince, after reproaching the Scotti for its negligence in paying the levy on salt, reminded them that everybody was due to pay that tax, “nullo penitus reservato, non etiam si frater aut filius nobis esset”. 36 But time passed and the Scotti continued to put up a fight. It was then that the Duke started making use of the language of love in a different way, to lay the foundation of their relationship on a new basis. After he reclaimed his rights to infringe upon pacts and promises, the Duke recognized the Scotti’s fiscal privileges, but only by virtue of the fondness they had displayed for him:

“cum tamen civitas ipsa [Piacenza] postmodum a Sacro Imperio fuerit in vicariatum collata dominis maioribus nostris et illustrissimus numquam delende memorie genitor noster ducatus dignitate redimitus licet nobis, si volemus, cuismodi pacta et promotiones infringere et cognoscentes tale avisamentum ex quadam subtili indagatone et affectionem quas circa nostras res continue habuistis et habetis [...] comendamus vos [...]. Itaque disponimus et volumus quod immunitatem et exemptionem ipsam [...] integraliter observavi”. 37

In Filippo Maria’s words the recognition of the Scotti’s privileges ends up relying only on his subjects’ love: a category which absorbs and cancels the fourteenth-century pact, but above all introduces for the Prince the possibility of a constant check.

On the grounds of this survey, it seems to be possible to formulate some brief concluding remarks. Of course deploying the language of emotions was a way to affect the relationship between

35 Gamberini, Lo stato visconteo.
36 ASRe, Archivi Privati, Malaspina Torello, Cartulario Scotti, f. 274r; 1437 July 14, Milan; 1437 November 3, Milan; 1338 December 4, Abbiate.
37 ASRe, Archivi Privati, Malaspina Torello, Cartulario Scotti, f. 173r; 144 November 19, Cusago.
governors and governed, which both the players steadily made use of. But for the state, in particular, it was also an effective conveyor belt of a political message, truly fundamental in underpinning the role of the Lord. If we look at how in a broader context the authorities tried to legitimize themselves, we can appreciate that there has always been a mismatch between the way the political players underpinned their powers on legal grounds, generally to justify their placement on the international stage (let’s think of devices like the papal vicariate, the ducal title, etc.) and the way they used to build up their legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects, which often drew on different arguments and ideas. As for the latter, the discovery of emotions as a discursive resource, that in the Visconti’s state can be dated around mid fourteenth century, represented a very fruitful and consequential thing. Frequently the scholars who have investigated the prologues of the city statutes, which the Visconti always revised, or the Visconti’s decrees, wonder who could really understand the very complicated philosophical principles that those historical records transmit. It is a matter of interpretation by the audience. I suggest the display of the emotional register in written records could help not only fit the purpose of addressing a larger audience – as emotions are easily understood – but it would help us understand how the Lord was able to get in touch with the gut feelings of his subjects, even when behind those emotions it is possible to identify sophisticated doctrines. Many layers of reading and interpretation were possible, but all of them conveyed the same message.