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AHR Forum
The *Crisis* after Forty Years

RONALD WITT

ALTHOUGH HANS BARON first discussed his conception of "civic humanism" in 1925, it was only with the publication of *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance* in 1955 that he revealed the full significance of what he believed to have been a fundamental change in the nature of Italian humanism occurring in the years immediately after 1400.[1] In this work, Baron endeavored to establish his thesis that a sharp break existed between Italian humanism of the fourteenth and that of the fifteenth century. Fourteenth-century Italian humanists had been literary and largely apolitical. Basically loyal to medieval beliefs that monarchy was the best form of government, they preferred the contemplative to the active life and considered Roman history as culminating in the rule of Julius Caesar and Caesar Augustus.

In the opening years of the fifteenth century, however, the young Florentine humanist Leonardo Bruni, originally of Arezzo, revived the ancient Roman republican concept that any form of government short of popular rule was tyrannical, and he insisted that while political freedom stimulates the creative and moral powers of the individual, so the loss of political freedom destroys those powers. Intimately associated with the revival of republicanism was Bruni's insistence that the active life of the citizen was superior to the life of withdrawal and contemplation, and that the decline of the Roman Empire began with the destruction of republican freedom by Caesar and Augustus. Finally, whereas the fourteenth-century humanists looked back on antiquity with melancoly as an age never to be revived, Bruni considered antiquity the source of inspiration for works in contemporary vernacular languages that rivaled ancient Latin literature.

For Baron, these conceptions of civic humanism, first created in early fifteenth-

[1] Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Princeton, N.J., 1955). A revised one-volume edn. was published by Princeton in 1966 and a further revised Italian edn. in 1970. I shall be citing the 1966 volume below. In the same year, his *Humanistic and Political Literature in Florence and Venice* (Cambridge, Mass., 1955) provided a more detailed discussion of certain key texts largely concerning the crisis of 1402. A complete bibliography of Baron's writings until 1970 is found in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Hans Baron*, A. Molho and A. Tedeschi, eds. (De Kalb, Ill., 1971), lxxi–lxxxvii. The first mention of *Bürgerhumanismus* is in Baron's review of *Soziale Probleme der Renaissance*, by F. Engel-Janosi, *Historische Zeitschrift*, 132 (1925): 136–41; compare Riccardo Fubini, "Renaissance Historian: The Career of Hans Baron," *Journal of Modern History*, 64 (1992): 560, n. 78.

When I delivered this paper in January 1995, I was unable to consider in my discussion the article of James Hankins, "The Baron Thesis after Forty Years and Some Recent Studies of Leonardo Bruni," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 56 (1995): 309–38. Because of the summary nature of this analysis, I have tried to limit the bibliographical references to a minimum.

century Florence, never disappeared down through the centuries, and they were to constitute the major gift of humanism to the modern world. Accordingly, to Bruni and his scholarly contemporaries can ultimately be traced our present heritage of republican thought, its focus on the future rather than the past, and its respect for the notion of culture as an expression of political values.

Why did this change in humanism occur at the turn of the fifteenth century? Baron saw the cause of the transformation in the Florentine-Milanese War, which, beginning in 1389, by the summer of 1402 seemed almost certain to end in the victory of Milan and the capture of Florence itself. This dire threat to liberty finally led the Florentine humanists to reflect on their republican way of life and to use their scholarly gifts in the service of their city-state. Although written, according to Baron, between 1403 and 1404, at least a year after the Milanese threat had been dispelled, Leonardo Bruni's *Laudatio florentinae urbis* was nonetheless the first manifestation of the new republican attitude.[2] Having identified its initial statement, Baron devotes the remainder of the *Crisis* to tracing the construction of a republican tradition from Bruni to Machiavelli and its effects beyond the narrow circle of humanists.

I think it fair to say that no scholarly book in the field of Italian Renaissance studies in this century has provoked more discussion and inspired more research than *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*. Baron's dazzling connection between humanism and Florentine political history and culture played a key role in making the study of Renaissance Florence the international industry it has become since the late 1950s. Personally, the book caused me in the early 1960s as a graduate student to turn from medieval French constitutional history to the Italian Renaissance.

How well have the core elements of the Baron thesis survived under the intense scrutiny they have received since its publication? Generally, critics have attacked the thesis because they question the philological arguments involved in dating crucial evidence documenting the crisis, they deny the originality of Bruni's statement of republicanism, or they question the sincerity of Bruni's republican stance by pointing out inconsistencies between his writings and his actions, as well as the disparity between the realities of Florentine politics and his praise of Florence's republican government.

To take these in order, Baron's thesis rests on the dating, and in several cases redating, of a number of Florentine writings, which up to his time had received only cursory attention. The *Laudatio* was the key document, and Baron, disagreeing with the hitherto-accepted date of 1400/1401, assigned a date to the work of 1403/1404. A second work by Bruni, the *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*, in which the chief speaker, Niccolò Niccoli, appears to change his mind between the first and second of two

[2] For the text of the *Laudatio florentinae urbis*, see Hans Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago, 1968), 232–63. V. Zaccaria has published another edition in *Studi medievali*, 3d ser., 8 (1967): 529–54. An English translation of the text is found in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, B. G. Kohl and R. G. Witt, eds., with E. B. Welles (Philadelphia, 1978), 135–75. For the dating of the work, see Baron, *Crisis*, 191–224; and *From Petrarch to Bruni*, 102–37. Baron further elucidates his thesis in response to the criticism of Jerrold E. Seigel's " 'Civic Humanism' of Ciceronian Rhetoric?" *Past and Present*, 34 (1966): 3–48, in Hans Baron, "Leonardo Bruni: 'Professional Rhetorician' or 'Civic Humanist,' " *Past and Present*, 36 (1967): 21–37.

dialogues, Baron dated as 1401 and 1403–1406.[3] He explained the altered attitude of Niccoli as a result of the summer of 1402. Proof that Coluccio Salutati, the old humanist chancellor, was also affected by the Milanese threat to the city is found, according to Baron, in Salutati's *Invectiva contra Antonium Luschum Vicentinum*, which was Salutati's reply to the bitter verbal attack on Florence made in 1397 by a humanist in the pay of the duke of Milan.[4] Although the work is known to have been finished in 1403, Baron saw in the text remains of an earlier version, perhaps contemporary with Loschi's pamphlet, much less republican in its character than the final version completed after 1402. Finally, convinced that a work by Cino Rinuccini, *Risponsiva alla invectiva di messer Antonio Losco*, containing republican themes found in Bruni's *Laudatio*, represented an immediate response in 1397 to Loschi, Baron argued that a non-humanist, unfettered by the tradition of Trecento humanism, grasped the issues at stake in the war before a humanist did.[5]

Despite efforts by critics to impugn Baron's dating of the *Laudatio*, James Hankins has definitively vindicated Baron by dating the work to the summer of 1404.[6] As for the *Dialogi*, scholars now generally consider the two dialogues to have been conceived as an integrated work from the beginning. Consequently, the second does not represent, as Baron insisted, a later changed attitude of the author. An argument has been made by L. B. Mortensen for dating both parts of the *Dialogi* between 1403 and 1406, and Hankins maintains that the work can be dated even more precisely to between September 1404 and March 1405.[7] I am, however, convinced by Riccardo Fubini's argument that the *Dialogi* reflects a reworking of the issues involved in the heated exchange of letters between Salutati, the leading humanist in the generation after Petrarch, and Poggio Bracciolini, one of his disciples, conducted in the early winter of 1405 and March 1406. Consequently,

[3] The text is found in *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Istrum*, in *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, E. Garin, ed. (Milan, 1952), 39–99; for the English translation, see *The Three Crowns of Florence: Humanist Assessments of Dante, Petrarca and Boccaccio*, D. Thompson and A. F. Nagel, ed. and trans. (New York, 1972). For the dating, see Baron, *Crisis*, 225–90.

[4] The work was published by Domenico Moreni (Florence, 1826). For Baron's dating of the work, consult his *Humanistic and Political Literature*, 38–47. For the importance of the work for Baron's thesis, see *Crisis*, 83–91, 484–87.

[5] See Baron, *Humanistic and Political Literature*, 49; as well as *Crisis*, 95–96, for its importance.

[6] James Hankins, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1990), 2: 371.

[7] L. B. Mortensen, "Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogus*: A Ciceronian Debate on the Literary Culture of Florence," *Classica et Mediaevalia*, 37 (1986): 259–302; and Hankins, *Plato*, 371. Mortensen's dating is based on the assumption that the fictive dialogue in which Salutati has a role was written before his death in May 1406. Because the *Laudatio* is mentioned as already composed, the *Dialogi* had to be have been written after its composition about 1403 (p. 268). Hankins, by contrast, reaches his dating of the work by tackling the thorny problem of the manuscript tradition of *Dialogus* I, which is sometimes found circulating as a single work rather than joined with *Dialogus* II. It is the single version that suggested to Baron that *Dialogus* II was added later after 1402. Hankins argues, *Plato*, 373, that Niccoli's criticism of Dante for having mistaken the age of Cato Uticensis in *Dialogus* I suggests that Bruni was working on Plutarch's *Life of Cato* at the time and probably finished it in rough drafted form by March 1405. Given that Bruni was seeking a position in Rome probably from the end of 1404 and had sent "certain writings" to Rome to impress the curial officials before going there in March 1405 to compete, it seems likely to Hankins that, while the work was fully drafted by this time, only *Dialogus* I was in shape to send. *Dialogus* II would have been completed soon thereafter.

the dialogues were almost certainly composed after Salutati's death in May of 1406.[8]

I have myself demonstrated that Salutati's *Invectiva contra Antonium Luschum* does not in fact have a pre-1402 layer but is an integrated work completed in 1403.[9] Furthermore, seeing no indication in the work of the civic humanism found in Bruni's *Laudatio*, I have stressed the traditional character of the *Invectiva*. In my view, civic humanism was an affair of the younger generation of humanists. As for Cino Rinuccini's *Risponsiva*, both Giuliano Tanturgli and I have argued that the work unquestionably belongs to a time after 1406 and that therefore Cino's work is dependent on Bruni, not vice versa.[10]

On balance, current evidence for the dating of Baron's central texts suggests that Bruni's first expression of republicanism begins only in 1404, two years after the crisis in Florence, and only subsequently are his themes taken up by other writers. Salutati, member of the previous generation of humanists, seems to have remained unaffected. Consequently, while the *Invectiva contra Antonium Luschum* and the *Dialogi* no longer provide proof of a dramatic intellectual change occurring in 1402, nonetheless, Bruni's republican writings still appear to be dated after the defeat of Giangaleazzo.

If the new datings attenuate the strength of Baron's assertion that 1402 marked a clear divide in humanist thinking, they have little effect on the validity of the fundamental elements of his *Crisis*. A far more serious attack on the Baron thesis comes from historians who argue that Bruni was only giving his own formulation of the republican ideology that had been circulating in Italy since the thirteenth century. To what extent is this criticism legitimate? Of all the array of putative republican "theorists" discussed by Quentin Skinner, the thirteenth-century Italian *dictatores*, the authors of handbooks for the *podestà*, Brunetto Latini, and in the fourteenth century Ptolemy of Lucca, Remigio dei Girolami, Marsiglio of Padua, the Roman lawyer Bartolus, and the early Paduan humanist Albertino Mussato, only the statements on the nature of liberty and the common good by Ptolemy and

[8] Riccardo Fubini, "All'uscita dalla Scolastica medievale: Salutati, Bruni, e i *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*," *Archivio storico italiano*, 110 (1992): 1082–83. David Quint has convincingly argued that Baron failed to see the consistent republican stance of the principal speaker of the work, Niccolò Niccoli, but his position that no real contradiction exists in Niccolo's attitude between the two dialogues seems to me problematical: Quint, "Humanism and Modernity: A Reconsideration of Bruni's *Dialogues*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 38 (1985), 423–46. Quint, 440, argues that Niccoli's "recantation" in *Dialogus* II of criticisms he had made in the first dialogue of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio was actually no recantation at all. According to Quint, Niccoli's affirmation in *Dialogus* II that Petrarch was superior to Cicero in verse and superior to Virgil in prose was in effect an inside joke, given that antiquity thought little of Cicero's poetry and Virgil's prose; see Anneas Seneca, *Controversiae*, 3 Pref. 8. This, however, is precisely the last position on Petrarch's literary status that Salutati vigorously defended in 1405 against the attack of Poggio, who argued that modern writers, Petrarch included, were incomparably inferior to ancient ones. *Epistolario di Coluccio Salutati*, F. Novati, ed., 4 vols. (Rome, 1891–1916), 4: 143–44. In the light of the ancient context, the position was a weak one from the outset, and its presentation by Niccoli may have served to satisfy the appearance of loyalty while making fun of the argument. The intent, however, is not clear.

[9] Ronald Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads: The Life, Works and Thought of Coluccio Salutati* (Durham, N.C., 1983), 387–91.

[10] Ronald Witt, "Cino Rinuccini's *Risponsiva alla Invettiva di Messer Antonio Lusco*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 23 (1970): 133–49; and *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 388–89; Giuliano Tanturli, "Cino Rinuccini e la scuola di Santa Maria in Campo," *Studi medievali*, 3d ser., 17 (1976): 625–74.

Marsiglio attain the level of republican conceptions.[11] Those of the others are merely fragmentary and isolated phrases without elaboration.

Baron was, however, too quick to dismiss the republican thought of Ptolemy of Lucca as lacking a coherent historical critique.[12] Charles T. Davis, the first scholar to demonstrate the breadth of the Dominican's political and historical vision, definitively establishes Ptolemy's claim to be the first medieval defender of republican thought. Here in defense of Baron, however, it is important to note that this Dominican thinker of the early fourteenth century seems to have had no followers among the next generation of Dominicans, and there is no proof that he influenced anyone over the next century. Ptolemy's remarks, blended as they were into his continuation of Thomas Aquinas's *De regimine principum*, perhaps lost their republican contours in a work initially structured to focus on monarchy.

Similarly, in the fourteenth century, Marsiglio of Padua in his *Defensor pacis* clearly chose his home commune of Padua as the model for his discussion of political authority. Nevertheless, seen from the modern perspective as a defense of popular sovereignty, the work with its sophisticated theories and focus on restricting the power of the church seems at the time to have had no effect on Marsiglio's Italian contemporaries' view of republican government. In any case, the effect of Marsiglio's work on the subsequent development of republican thought in Italy has yet to be proved.[13]

Salutati himself was no republican theorist. Despite a number of fragmentary themes articulated within the period of about two years at the height of the War of the Eight Saints in 1376–1377, the Florentine chancellor's republicanism was generally limited to indefinite references to love of liberty and hatred of tyranny together with expressions of patriotic sentiments.[14] In 1400, in an effort to defend Dante's artistic decision to place Cassius and Brutus in the depths of Hell, the old man felt no compunction in defending Caesar's authority in Rome and praising monarchical government, at least at the imperial level.[15]

To summarize: forty years of scholarly investigations of Baron's claim to Bruni's originality require that we shift the grounds for that uniqueness. While Bruni now appears not the first in Western European history to articulate an integrated theory of republicanism, as Baron claimed, he was the first to develop in true humanist fashion a theory of republicanism set in historical perspective, together with a civic ethic embodying the theory as a way of life. Furthermore, giving no indication that

[11] On Girolamo de' Remigi, see Nicolai Rubinstein, "Marsilius of Padua and the Italian Political Thought of His Time," *Europe in the Late Middle Ages*, J. Hale, R. T. Highfield, and B. Smalley, eds. (Evanston, Ill., 1965), 50–59, 62; Charles T. Davis, "An Early Florentine Political Theorist: Fra Remigio de' Girolami," and Davis, "Ptolemy of Lucca and the Roman Republic," in *Dante's Italy* (Philadelphia, 1984), 198–223 and 254–88. Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, 1978), 28–65, discusses not only these two thinkers but also the other groups and individuals mentioned in the text. See as well his "Ambrogio Lorenzetti: The Artist as Political Philosopher," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 72 (1986): 1–56. He uses the term "constitutional theory" to apply to a wide range of statements, often isolated phrases and sentences.

[12] Baron, *Crisis*, 55, 57.

[13] See Ronald Witt, *Coluccio Salutati and His Public Letters* (Geneva, 1976), 79. An anonymous Florentine translated Marsiglio's work into Tuscan in 1363: *Defensor pacis nella tradizione in volgare fiorentino del 1363*, Carlo Pincin, ed. (Torino, 1966). From the marginal comments, it appears that the primary interest of the text was its confutation of papal primacy.

[14] Witt, *Coluccio Salutati and His Public Letters*, 50–56, 80–82.

[15] Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 368–86.

he was influenced by Ptolemy or Marsiglio, Bruni becomes the first to make such a theory historically significant. Unlike them, Bruni was not an isolated thinker but had disciples who passed his construction of republicanism with its citizen's ethic down through the fifteenth century and beyond, to make it a permanent possession of the Western heritage.

I turn now to the third general criticism of Baron's thesis, the charge that, given the nature of the Florentine government in Bruni's day, the details of his biography and various statements he made, Bruni's republican commitment was insincere. Among the more serious criticisms of Bruni's sincerity are the following: the Florentine government represented by Bruni in the *Laudatio* as a republic was in fact a tight oligarchy, and Bruni consciously endeavored to hide this reality under a covering of republican propaganda.[16] But Florentine politics by 1400 was far more sophisticated than these critics admit. John M. Najemy describes how the significant increase in citizen participation in government, coupled with centralized control of elections, created a "coexistence of consensus and elitism" by the first decade of the fifteenth century.[17] Consequently, it does not seem to me obvious that Bruni and other Florentines would necessarily have seen their political system as oligarchical at this time. By 1439 perhaps, when Bruni referred to Florence as an aristocracy in *On the Polity of the Florentines*, the oligarchical structure of Florentine politics would have become much more obvious.[18]

Critics also point out that Bruni's departure for the papal curia in 1405 and his eleven years of service with the papacy bring into question his commitment to Florence.[19] Not only do I find it hard to judge Bruni's attraction to a lucrative

[16] This position has been defended by a number of scholars, most notably Peter Herde, "Politik und Rhetorik in Florenz am Vorabend der Renaissance: Die ideologische Rechtfertigung der Florentiner Aussenpolitik durch Coluccio Salutati," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte*, 47 (1965): 141–220; and Herde, "Politische Verhaltensweisen der Florentiner Oligarchie, 1382–1402," *Geschichte und Verfassungsgefüge: Frankfurter Festgabe für Walter Schlesinger* (Wiesbaden, 1973), 156–249. Also see Michael Seidlmayer, *Wege und Wandlungen des Humanismus* (Göttingen, 1965), 47–74; and Jerrold Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaisance Humanism* (Princeton, N.J., 1968), 253. Although it is a general treatment on the oligarchical nature of Italian politics in the period, an article by Philip Jones supports Baron's critics on this point: "Communes and Despots: The City-State in Late-Medieval Italy," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 15 (1965): 71–96; and see Jones's review of the 2d edn. of *Crisis* in *History*, 53 (1968): 410–13. Compare Hankins, "Baron Thesis after Forty Years," 317–18.

[17] John M. Najemy, *Corporatism and Consensus in Florentine Electoral Politics, 1280–1400* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1983), 263–65. As Najemy writes, 315: "The coexistence of an expanding political class and a contracting leadership elite implied no contradiction in the minds of those Florentines, like Bruni and Dati, who assumed that the raison d'être of the electoral politics of consensus was to achieve a greater degree of stability and unity in the governance of the republic, as far as this was compatible with upper-class interests, than had been possible under either a system of decentralized corporatism or the narrowly based elitism that proved so susceptible to ruinous factionalism." Also see his "Dialogue of Power in Florentine Politics," *City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, A. Molho, K. Raabflaub, and J. Emlen, eds. (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1991), 269–88, for a convincing analysis of oligarchic power as it applies to Florence and the relationship between power relationships and the needs for a new political discourse.

[18] G. Griffiths, J. Hankins, and D. Thompson, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* (Binghamton, N.Y., 1987), 115–16, 171–74.

[19] Hankins, "Baron Thesis after Forty Years," 324–25, questions Bruni's loyalty to Florence on the basis of his papal service. The "evidence" of Bruni's intention to seek a position with Carlo Malatesta in 1409 and with Giovanfrancesco Gonzaga in 1418 is largely circumstantial but cannot be dismissed: Hankins, "Baron Thesis after Forty Years," 325; and based on Paolo Viti, *Leonardo Bruni e Firenze: Studi sulle lettere pubbliche e private* (Rome, 1992), 365–73.

position at the Curia too harshly, but from his correspondence he seems honestly to have felt that he could play a role in healing the larger issue confronting Christendom: the schism.[20] Throughout his years with the pope, moreover, he served as an agent of Florentine interests.

Perhaps one of the most serious objections to the sincerity of Bruni's republicanism is found in his reply to a critic of the *Laudatio*. Thirty years after writing the *Laudatio*, Bruni describes his own work as a juvenile exercise composed for popular consumption and given to exaggeration.[21] While interpreted by James Hankins as proof of the rhetorical character of Bruni's political statements, this description might also be seen as an expression of modesty about the work that launched Bruni's career.[22] Certainly, the one exaggeration in the *Laudatio* he specifically mentions is his boast that the Florentines were the heirs of the ancient Romans, when, he admits, they were not in fact the legal heirs. This would suggest that the exaggerations to Bruni's mind were not about fundamental themes in the work.

Whereas Baron appears to have been wrong to insist on absolute consistency in Bruni's dedication both to republican thought and to his adopted city, this does not mean that we must embrace the interpretation that he was a professional rhetorican, with all that implies.[23] In its most elaborate presentation, the rhetorical humanist interpretation begins by depicting Bruni as willing for personal gain to misrepresent Florentine oligarchical government as a republic, to desert Florence when the opportunity for greater personal advantage presented itself, and to play turncoat by embracing the Medici cause and urging strong punishment against his former friends.[24] Having raised such serious doubts about the moral integrity of Bruni, it is difficult for historians who offer this interpretation to describe Bruni subsequently as sharing "core political convictions" with Italian humanists of the period throughout Italy "about the value of virtue and eloquence and about the value of classical antiquity as providing models of virtue and eloquence."[25] Such a description suggests that Bruni was interested in good government, whatever its constitutional form. The effort to reduce Bruni's republicanism to empty rhetoric renders problematical any claim that Bruni cherished any values at all.

Essentially, however, Bruni's sincerity is irrelevant to the main thrust of Baron's thesis of civic humanism. Whether or not Bruni really saw Florence as the champion of the civic humanism he elaborated, the fact is that Florentine writers such as Cino Rinuccini and Goro Dati almost immediately embraced his identification of republicanism with Florentine political culture, and they were to be followed by others over the next hundred years.[26] More significant, Gene Brucker has shown

[20] Lucia Gualdo Rosa, "La struttura dell'Epistolario bruniano e il suo significato politico," in *Leonardo Bruni, Cancelliere della Repubblica di Firenze: Convegno di Studi (Firenze, 27–29 ottobre 1987)*, Paolo Viti, ed. (Florence, 1990), 382–83.

[21] Hankins, "Baron Thesis after Forty Years," 325–26.

[22] The letter is found in *Leonardi Bruni Aretini Epistolarum libri VIII*, L. Mehus, ed., 2 vols. (Florence, 1741), 2: 110–15. He specifies only one exaggeration he made, p. 113.

[23] The chief proponents of rhetorical humanism have been Peter Herde, Jerrold Seigel, and most recently James Hankins. The focus of Herde's study is Salutati. For Seigel, see nn. 2 and 16 above, and for Herde, n. 16.

[24] Hankins, "Baron Thesis after Forty Years," 325–30.

[25] Hankins, "Baron Thesis after Forty Years," 327–28.

[26] On the lay publicist Goro Dati, see Baron, *Crisis*, 158, 168–71, 175–76, 205–06.

that within a decade of the publication of the *Laudatio*, Florentine politicians in their internal debates about policy were conceptualizing their positions in terms similar to those used in Bruni's work.[27]

In my own view, although I agree with Baron that civic humanism was an innovative and creative contribution to Italian humanism after 1400, I tend to see it as only one of the major lines of humanist thought over the next century and a half, not *the* major one. At the same time, as an explanation for the origins of civic humanism, I stress with Najemy that the Florentine political leadership found it to be an ideal way of representing the new politics of consensus. I would further, however, identify an "internal" cause for its appearance in the massive linguistic shift that occurs generally in humanist writing around 1400.

Petrarch's eclectic theory of stylistic imitation dominated both his own generation and that following of Salutati and Giovanni Conversini.[28] For Petrarch, the styles of Latin authors from the first century BC to the fifth century AD provided a fertile field for the humanist, intent on constructing his own style as expression of his personality. This approach proved highly congenial to Petrarch, interested as he was in writing on a wide range of topics from Roman history to the virtues of the monastic life. His classical lexicon was heavily interlarded with ecclesiastical and early Christian vocabulary. Petrarch's example encouraged Salutati to dilute his classical lexicon even further by introducing scholastic words. In constructing their periods, both Petrarch and Salutati frequently resorted to *cursus*, medieval prose metric.

The advent of Baron's civic humanism is closely associated with a revolt against Petrarchan eclecticism in the name of recovering what Poggio refers to as *vetustas*, the flavor of ancient style.[29] The key figure in this change was the almost unknown Giovanni Malpaghini, once Petrarch's amanuensis, who in the last decades of the fourteenth century taught rhetoric in Florence. Among Malpaghini's pupils were most of the major humanists of Bruni's generation, including Bruni himself: Vergerio, Roberto Rossi, Jacopo Angeli, Poggio, Guarino, Victorino da Feltre, and Ognibene Scola. As Flavio Biondo writes on Bruni's authority, "he [Malpaghini] inflamed [them] to love of good letters and the imitation of Cicero, even if he was not able to teach adequately what he did not fully know."[30]

Between 1390 and 1392, Malpaghini's student Vergerio introduced in Padua a new style of oration based on Cicero, replacing the styles of the *artes sermonandi*, manuals on preaching, and *artes arengandi*, manuals on speeches, still used by Petrarch and Salutati. About 1395, Antonio Loschi composed his great work, *Inquisitio artis in orationibus Ciceronis*, a detailed study of the organization and style of eleven of Cicero's orations.[31] The recovery of the historical Cicero that Baron

[27] Gene Brucker, *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence* (Princeton, N.J., 1977), 300–02.

[28] Petrarch's pious humanism replaced the highly secular but relatively shallow humanism of the generations of Lovato and Mussato. This is one of the themes of my forthcoming monograph *The Origins of Italian Humanism*.

[29] For Poggio's criticism of Petrarch's Latin, see Witt, *Hercules at the Crossroads*, 268.

[30] For the responsibility of Malpaghini in introducing the First Ciceronianism not merely to Florence but also to Northern Italy through his disciples, see my forthcoming article in *Rinascimento*.

[31] See Ronald Witt, "Civic Humanism and the Rebirth of the Ciceronian Oration," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 51 (1990): 174–78. Although not named by Bruni, Loschi may have studied with Malpaghini in Florence during 1386–1387.

associates with Vergerio and Bruni, therefore, appears directly connected with the new interest in Ciceronian oration. While Bruni's generation did not espouse a Ciceronianism in the later sense of accepting as proper usage only the syntactical constructions and lexicon used by Cicero, their Latin nonetheless represents a close modeling on Ciceronian linguistic paradigms and vocabulary. Though beautifully adapted for discussions of secular subjects, the new humanist language made it awkward to discuss religious ones and helps in part to account for the secular character of the writings of the first decades of the fifteenth century. The reconstruction of a new religious discourse based on an intensive study of the language of the Latin church fathers required time.

On the one hand, looked at from the direction of the Florentine political situation, these linguistic developments expressed themselves in civic humanism because the Florentines needed a fresh language encoded with new political and ethical associations in order to express the evolving character of their political and civil life. On the other, however, the language evocative of Cicero was not merely a means to express ideas already formed but, rather, the language itself exercised a formative and clarifying role in the generation of the ideas themselves.

It is important to remember that Malpaghini's influence was not restricted only to Florentines. Guarino and Vittorino da Feltre also taught their northern Italian students the lessons they had learned from Malpaghini. If the new Ciceronian language brought with it a mindset that encouraged Bruni to see Florence's conflict with Milan in a context of ancient republican values, the linguistic change, becoming general, also had an effect on political discourse in the writing of contemporary humanists even in dynastic states. Looked at in this larger perspective, the adaptation of these linguistic developments for political purposes promised to provide a new formulation of a civic ethic for both republican and dynastic states as a replacement for the outworn one of the communal governments, on whose wreckage these states were based.

Consequently, if Baron exaggerated in placing civic humanism at the center of the development of the humanist movement in the fifteenth century, he was right to envisage it as at least a major tendency of humanism after 1400 and as marking an abrupt break with the previous two generations of humanists. If 1402 was not the catalyst Baron believed, the Visconti wars were doubtless of significance in forcing Florentines to examine the ideals for which they fought. At the same time, the concept of civic humanism serves to focus the convergence of a new stage in humanism with the demands of a newly evolving political order on the Italian peninsula.

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