HUMANISM

I

IN THE ITALIAN RENAISSANCE

HUMANISM AND PLATONISM

JAMES HANKINS

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RACCOLTA DI STUDI E TESTI

STORIA E LETTERATURA
1. Period of maximum function improvement (1413)

Text here

1982. I am proud to be Des Moines for the commission to publish the text of a new family letter then discovered by D. Martin in the archives of the New Testament. The text, however, was not published in the form of a book. Later, after a period of preparation, the final text was published by the same family in 1984. The Cumulative Index to the Papyri of the NT, a comprehensive list of references to the NT, was published in 1985. The text was included in the Cumulative Index to the Papyri of the NT, and is as far as I am aware, copyrighted. Of course, my work is published in order to bring the text to the attention of those who might find it useful.
first three ("Scritti umanistici", "Scritti polemici", and "Scritti biografici") might be described broadly as embracing his literary works, while the last heading ("Scritti cancellereschi") contains mostly public writings composed on behalf of the Signoria or the Parte Guelfa. His fourth heading, "Scritti politici," includes works that occupy a kind of borderland between literary works published in propria persona and public writings composed for official civic bodies in Florence. Under this heading are subsumed, for example, the Laudatio florentinae urbis, which began life as a literary work (composed 1403/4), but was later recirculated by Chancellor Brun in 1434 as part of an official campaign by the Signoria to encourage the Council of Basel to transfer itself to Florence. The De militia, too, appears as a literary work under Brun’s own name, but is very likely to be associated with the reform of the Parte Guelfa undertaken after 1420 by Rinaldo degli Albizzi and others. In the Funeral Oration for Nanni Strozzi, composed while he was chancellor, Brun stresses its character as an official publication, while the Difesa contro...

(Reproduced from 2001.1) The Novella di Antico is found in G. Papanti, ed., Novella di Leonardo Bruni Aretino (per nozze), Livorno 1870, and G. Lecella, ed., Novelle italiane di quaranta autori, Leipzig 1879, pp. 238-242. An edition of the Epistolarum familiarium has been undertaken by Lucia Guido Rosa. The chief desiderata of Brun scholarship at present are modern editions of the De crux et ecclesiasticis in the middle ages, and the De bolla italico adversus Gothos. Brun was also responsible for the reduction of many hundreds of papal bulls during his ten years as apostolic secretary; these will be surveyed in the third volume of my Repertorium Brunianum.

14 The heading is perhaps misleading, but there is at present no evidence that Brun ever worked officially for the Parte Guelfa, while his speech as ambassador to the Holy See in 1426 (Discorso al sommo pontefice Martino V) was composed before he was appointed chancellor in December of 1427.

15 See P. Viti, Leonardo Bruni e il Concilio di 1439, in Firenze e il Concilio del 1439, Convegno di Studi (Firenze, 29 novembre-2 dicembre 1989), ed. P. Viti, Firenze 1994, pp. 509-575. [See now the introduction, p. xxv ff., of Stefano Baldassarri to his critical edition cited in note 12, above.]

16 See my article, "Renaissance Knighthood, The Case of Leonardo Bruni’s De militia," forthcoming in the proceedings of The Transformation of the Medieval Knight in Renaissance and Early Modern Europe, a conference sponsored by the Forum for Renaissance Studies at the University of Kopenhagen, 23-25 September 1999.

17 Viti (in BRUNI, Opera, cit., p. 706) repeats his erroneous view that this oration was delivered publicly during the peace celebrations in May of 1428; for the evidence against this assumption see HANKINS, The Baron Thes, cit., p. 334 [and Appendix II, below]. Viti’s position is also rejected, with additional arguments, by Daur, Leonardo Bruni Rede, cit., pp. 331-335 (Zur Festlichkeit der Oretto funere). [Petrarca’s chronicle has now been published as Paolo di Matteo Petrarch, Matteo di Borgo Rinaldi: Priorista (1407-1439), ed. J. A. Gutwirth, Rome 2001; the relevant text is on p. 211.]

18 See P. Viti, Leonardo Bruni e il Concilio di 1439, in Firenze e il Concilio del 1439, Convegno di Studi (Firenze, 29 novembre-2 dicembre 1989), ed. P. Viti, Firenze 1994, pp. 509-575. [See now the introduction, p. xxv ff., of Stefano Baldassarri to his critical edition cited in note 12, above.]

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December 1413 is fragile enough, but the most plausible one given the evidence. As Baron notes, the treatise, if genuine, provides important evidence of Bruni’s development as an interpreter of the Florentine constitution. Indeed, the treatise stands in striking contrast to Bruni’s other description of the Florentine constitution, the Per τῆς τῶν Φλωρεντίων πολιτείας, written in 1439. In the latter document, Bruni describes Florence’s constitution as a mixed constitution in the Aristotelian sense; i.e., as a mixture of aristocracy and democracy, with the predominant power belonging to the noblest (ἀριστοτελής) and wealthiest members of the community. With a strong touch of the realism that would later, in the time of Machiavelli and Guicciardini, be so characteristic of Florentine political thought, he describes the predominance of the ἀριστοτελής in recent times as a result of the use of foreign mercenaries, who naturally sided with the wealthy citizens who paid them. In the 1413 letter, however, Bruni chooses to emphasize the popular character of the Florentine constitution, even to the point of omitting from his description such instruments of oligarchic power as the Parla Guefà, the divieto, the Consiglio del Centotrentuno, and the Consiglio del Duecento. In this sense, the 1413 letter gives a view of the Florentine constitution even more populist than that found in the Laudatio florentiniae urbis.

The contrast between the 1413 letter and Bruni’s later description of the Florentine constitution might be resolved by appeal to the development or maturing of Bruni’s thought, or else by appeal to the rhetorical circumstances under which each text was composed. But the dissonance between the two accounts only deepens the problem of attribution. Already in 1955 Baron recognized that there were difficulties in assigning the text to Bruni, and indeed the difficulties are perhaps even more serious than Baron imagined. The text is attributed to the latter part of the 1420s, but the evidence for a date of 1413 rests on a single reference (the name Marchi) in the Florentine register of civic lawyers under 1414, which Baron notes is at best of waverish (as from 1413 and perhaps as late as 1420). The evidence for a date of 1439 rests on a reference to the position of a member of the magistracy, with no indication whether the member was still alive in 1439. Both the treatise, which the former maintains was written in the 1410s, and the latter in the 1430s, are thus illegitimate and to assign such a manuscript to a date before 1420 without some remarkable details regarding the identity of the addressee and the writer would not be satisfactory, especially as the name Marchi had been used by other members of the same family as late as the present century. In any case, the only way to resolve the question of attribution is by appeal to a surmise about the identity of the addressee or the writer.

Despite these difficulties, Bruni’s account of the Florentine constitution is a well-grounded document, and it is clear that he was familiar with the city’s political life in the 1410s. His account is based on a careful examination of the sources and on his own observations, and it provides a valuable insight into the workings of the Florentine constitution. The text is a valuable contribution to the study of Florentine political history and is a useful source for historians of the Italian Renaissance.

1 The Quattrocento, Cambridge (Massachusetts) 1955, pp. 173-184. Baron says that the text was probably copied in 1429 when Marchi was one of the Venetian prisoners confined by the Signoria after the revolt of 1429 (see below), but there is no evidence that this was the case, and no reason to assume Marchi had access to the text before 1435, the year of the earliest dated text in Riccabonius 1200.

is attributed to Bruni in only one of the three manuscripts, the earliest of which was written more than thirty years after the presumed date of composition. The author implies clearly that he is a Florentine (he speaks of the *formam rei publicae nostrae*), but Bruni only became a Florentine citizen two-and-a-half years after the presumed date of composition of the letter; indeed, he was still being drawn for offices in Arezzo in 1414. It is also suspicious that the author of the treatise, while clearly following Aristotle's classification of constitutions in *Politics III*, mistakenly identifies *democrazia* as one of the "legitimate" forms of government. It is hard to imagine Bruni making such a mistake even if (as Baron supposes) he was away on a legation without access to books when the letter was composed. Even more remarkably, the author of the treatise is vague and inaccurate regarding the number of members who served on the Council of the People and the Council of the Commune. The former had about 300 members, the latter 200 (252 when all the consultative bodies were present); the author of letter estimates both at around four hundred. Only two years before the presumed date of composition Bruni had served as chancellor of Florence for a few months, during which time the Florentine councils would have met frequently two floors below his chancery in the Palazzo Vecchio. While it is possible Bruni never learned the exact strength of the councils, the mistake is a surprising one and cannot but cast doubt on the authenticity of the letter.

Despite all this, the balance of probability is still in favor of Bruni's authorship. Bruni may well have identified himself with Florence even before acquiring Florentine citizenship, and it is possible that he was vague on the details of Aristotle's constitutional theory in 1413, more than a decade before he began work on his own translation of the *Politics*. The surprising mistakes in describing the size of the councils of the Commune and the People might be a case of textual corruption rather than error on Bruni's part; the use of Roman numerals often leads to corruptions of this sort. Clearly, however, the historian must hesitate before placing too much weight on this text in interpreting the character and development of Bruni's thought.

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22 Bruni only became a Florentine citizen in June of 1416; in 1414 he was drawn for the office of prior in Arezzo, an office he refused. See L. BORGIA, *La famiglia dei Bruni d'Arezzo*, in *Leonardo Bruni cancelliere*, cit., p. 194.

The text is preserved in the following manuscripts:

B - Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, ms. 2692, ff. 26r-28v. S. XV 3/4, written by the grammarian Taddeo da Pescia.

M - Firenze, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, Magl. VII 1095, ff. 111v-113r. A zibaldone written in the 1460s and '70s by Tommaso Baldinotti of Pistoia, possibly for Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici (whose name appears on the front and rear fly-leaves).


Stipes codicum sic recenseri possunt:

\[ \Omega \]
\[ \alpha \]
\[ \beta \]
\[ R \]
\[ B \]
\[ M \]

Leonardi Aretini ad magnum principem imperatorem.
Rem magnum ac perdifficilem, generosissime princeps, et non huius angustiae temporis sed longioris uti dignum postulas, formam rei publice nostre et gubernandi figuram tibi per meas litteras ostendi. Que cum sit maxima atque fusissima, quis eam paucis querat absolvere? An vero, si membra hominum describere, quemadmodum et Marcus Cicerino et Lactantius faciit, longa scribendi materia fit, nos [autem] in civitate, quae

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22 HANKINS, Repertorium Brunianum, cit., pp. 56-57, no. 751.

infinitam vim complectitur hominum, describenda breviter id fieri posse existimamur? Preterea non michi visus est, sit ne aliquid in re publica maiorum auctoritate constitutum, sed quamobrem id constitutum, intelligere oportet atque exponere. Causa enim rei scientiam facit. Cause vero et difficiles cognitum sunt et prolixae explicatui. Scribam tibi aliquid quoniam tu ita flagitas; et pro hoc discessu tuo una tecum decurens properabo.


Nostre igitur rei publice gubernatio popularis est, quae tertia species gubernandi legitima fuit a nobis superius nominata. Est eius fundamentum in paritute civium et equalitate, ut de fratribus supra similitudinem induximus. Leges igitur nostre omnes ad hoc unum tendunt, ut pariis sit et equalibus inter se civibus, in quo est mera ac ueris libertas. Hinc est quod nos grandiores familias a rei publice gubernatione repellimus, ne ille auctoritatem publicam nascit in formadibilorem eundam potentiam. Hinc est etiam quod maiores gravioresque poene contra nobilitatem constitute sunt, ut ex eodem maleficio alter nobilis et potens condemnetur et acioribus poenis afflictur quam plebeius aliquis et mediocris. Nituntur enim leges nostre supereminentiam singularum civium quantum fieri potest deprimeret et ad paritatem mediocratatemque reducere.

Summus apud nos magistratus duorum mensium spatio non amplius durat, ne insolescere illo homines vel superbire possint. Nec unus dumnaxat vir hunc magistratum obtinet, sed sunt in eo civis numero novem. Horum unus vestillfer isutitie, ceteri priores appellantur. Summuntur autem hi ex mediocr et pacato ac frugi hominum genere. Hac attributur sunt in consilium duodecim boni viri, et vestillferi societatam sexdecim.

E.g., Cicero, Fin. III, 18; Tusc. IV, 31; Lactantius, De op. bon. I, 2.
Prios estigit cum his viginti octo viris auctoritate rem publicae representant. Nec haec omnia possunt. Nam si quid gravitus ordinandum est, ad consilia referentur operari. Consilia vero civitatis duo sunt: unum populi, in quo circiter quadrangenti viri existent; alterum communis, quod est mixtum ex nobilitate et plebe, pari fere numero com superiori.

Juri vero dicendo causisque civilibus magistratus alias presidet cum potestate publica. Hic non est civis, sed peregrinus probatius aliquis et sapienter vir ad hoc ipsum a civitate defectus: ipsius officii tempus sex mensibus delinuit. Est et alias magistratus qui dicetur capitaesque populi, cuius precipuam munus est iura populi fuisse atque defendere. Est et alias magistratus, qui dicetur executor ordinamentorum iustitiae, fere contra magnos et potentes oppositum. Hi tres magistratus, sed etexamen, capitaneus et executore, non sunt cives, sed externi, nec amplius sex mensibus durant. Et maleficia puniunt et crimina judicant lites; et finito officio examinii subiacent civium; et si quid iniquum aut corruptum in officio suo iudicasse probantur, penas dant, et de suo proprio resarcuunt, illis resistentes qui propter iniquam sententiam iusti sunt fuerunt.

In bello autem administrandis, quanta illa civitatis accident, decem viri cives cum potestate publica creari solent. Hi ea possunt que populus universus. Neque enim expedit tune secreta bellis ad populum referre. Appellatur autem hic magistratus vulgari quodam nomine decem baliae. Qui tamen, si quid magni ponderis accidat, ad priones et corum collegia et ampliorum numerum solent referre et consilium ius postulare. Hi decemviri per electionem constituantur. At priones et duodecim boni viri et vexilliferi societatum non per electionem summantur, sed per sortitionem. De quinquennio enim in quinquennium nomina probatorum civium certo examine sacculis includuntur; postea sua sorte sorte nomina illa promuntur. Cui socii accidunt, is est magistratus. Summuntur autem ex sacculis novem priones et unus vexillifer iustitiae et duodecim boni viri et sexdecim vexilliferi societatum; sed unum quodque istorum officiorum sua tempore, et non simul omnia. Nam vexilliferis tempus est mensium quattuor, duodecim autem bonis viris tempus est mensium trium. Hi tres magistratus, sed etexamen, duodecim boni viri et sexdecim vexilliferi societatum, appellavit vulgo apud nos domini et collegia; et auctoritate publicam, ut diximus, representant.


mission III, pp. 28-29

Nazi, II, pp. 257-260

rana di MM, pp. 307-309

IX, 193-194

retta a MP, pp. 193-194

comportec FM, pp. 213-214

In 1427, following the conclusion of the Third Milanese War, Florence finally succeeded, after many years of discussion, in reforming its fiscal regime. The centerpiece of the new system, the *catasto*, though popular in Florence, was widely resisted in the Florentine *contado*, and a number of communities sent ambassadors to Florence to protest the imposition of the new tax declarations. The most vigorous opposition to the *catasto* arose in Volterra. The Florentines were particularly eager to impose the *catasto* there as it was known that many Florentines owned property "offshore", as it were, in Volterra, under the names of Volterrani citizens, in order to evade Florentine taxes. In the winter of 1428 the Volterrans sent a delegation of eighteen ambassadors to treat with the Florentines, arguing that, as they were not formally a subject community of Florence, they could not be made to accept the *catasto*. The force of their arguments, says Cavalcanti, was undercut by their length, and, the Florentines losing patience, "la forza occupò la ragione," The Volterrani ambassadors were thrown into prison for six months, until at

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