
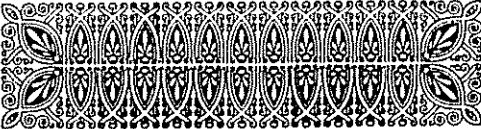


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 THE
EARTHLY
REPUBLIC

ITALIAN HUMANISTS
ON GOVERNMENT
AND SOCIETY EDITED BY
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LEONARDO BRUNI
*Panegyric to the City of Florence**



Translated by BENJAMIN G. KOHL

Would that God immortal give me eloquence worthy of the city of Florence, about which I am to speak, or at least equal to my zeal and desire on her behalf; for either one degree or the other would, I think, abundantly demonstrate the city's magnificence and splendor. Florence is of such a nature that a more distinguished or more splendid city cannot be found on the entire earth, and I can easily tell about myself, I was never more desirous of doing anything in my life. So I have no doubt at all that if either of these wishes were granted, I should be able to describe with elegance and dignity this very beautiful and excellent city. But because everything we want and the ability granted us to attain what we wish are two different things, we will carry out our intention as well as we can, so that we appear to be lacking in talent rather than in will.

Indeed, this city is of such admirable excellence that no one can match his eloquence with it. But we have seen several good and important men who have spoken concerning God himself, whose glory and magnificence the speech of the most eloquent man cannot capture even in the smallest degree. Nor does this vast superiority keep them from trying to speak insofar as they are able about such an immense magnitude. Therefore, I too shall seem to have

* Complete translation of Leonardo Bruni, *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*, edited by Hans Baron in his *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 232-63.

done enough if, marshalling all competence, expertise, and skill that I have eventually acquired after so much study, I devote my all to praising this city, even though I clearly understand that my ability is such that it can in no way be compared with the enormous splendor of Florence. Therefore many orators say that they themselves do not know where to begin. This now happens to me not only as far as words are concerned but also concerning the subject itself. For not only are there various things connected one with another, here and there, but also any one of them is so outstanding and in some way so distinguished that they seem to vie for excellence among themselves. Therefore, it is not an easy thing to say which subject is to be treated first. If you consider the beauty or splendor of the city, nothing seems more appropriate to start with than these things. Or if you reflect upon its power and wealth, then you will think these are to be treated first. And if you contemplate its history, either in our own day or in earlier times, nothing can seem so important to begin with as these things. When indeed you consider Florentine customs and institutions, you judge nothing more important than these. These matters cause me concern, and often when I am ready to speak on one point, I recall another and am attracted to it. Hence, they furnish me no opportunity to decide which topic to put first. But I shall seize upon the most apt and logical place to begin the speech, even though I do indeed believe that other topics would not have provided an improper point of departure.

1

As we may see several sons with so great a resemblance to their fathers that they show it obviously in their faces, so the Florentines are in such harmony with this very noble and outstanding city that it seems they could never have lived anywhere else. Nor could the city, so skillfully created, have had any other kind of inhabitants. Just as these citizens surpass all other men by a great deal in their natural genius, prudence, elegance, and magnificence, so the city of Florence has surpassed all other cities in its prudent site and its splendor, architecture, and cleanliness.

So we see that in the beginning Florence observed a principle of

great wisdom: Do nothing for ostentation nor allow hazardous or useless display, but instead use great moderation and follow solid proportion. This city was set neither in the high mountains, so that it would present itself impressively, nor in a broad plain of fields, so it would be open on every side. Rather, this city has both advantages according to the most prudent and best opinion, for one cannot live in high mountains without intemperate climate, without harsh winds, without storms, without great discomfort and hazard to the inhabitants; nor are immense and vast plains without the drenching rays of the sun, without impurity of air, without a hazy humidity. Therefore, having avoided these potential discomforts, Florence very prudently was situated where it is midway between the dangerous extremes (a proven principle for all things), both remote from the evils of the mountains and distant from the dangers of the plains. Hence, though Florence knows both kinds of environments, it possesses a mild and pleasing climate. The mountains of Fiesole face north like a kind of bulwark for the city and repel the immense force of the cold and the headlong rush of the strong northern wind. To the east, where the force of the wind is less, the hills are smaller. And in the other directions, the fields lay open to the sun and to the southern breezes. Therefore, in the area of the city there is a great tranquility and a fine climate, so whenever you leave Florence, in whatever direction you set out, you meet either a greater cold or a hotter sun.

This city, covering an area of both mountains and plains, is surrounded by an extensive crown of wall, not, however, of such a mass that the city would seem timid or fearful of its power, nor, on the other hand so neglected that it can be called imprudent or indiscreet. And what shall I say of the throngs of people, of the splendor of the buildings, of the decorations of the churches, and of the unbelievable and admirable magnificence of the entire city? By Jove, everything here is striking and decorated with outstanding beauty. But it is better to know things in comparison with other things than from themselves alone. Therefore, only those who have been away for some time and return to Florence fully understand how much this flourishing city excels beyond all the others. For there is no other city in the whole world that does not lack perfection in some important way: one lacks its population, another in the decoration of its buildings, still another suffers the least of these

considered and called a paradise—unequaled in grace or beauty by any other area in the whole world. Surely anyone who comes to Florence is amazed when at a distance he sees from the top of a mountain the massive city, beautiful and splendid, surrounded by many country houses.

Nor does Florence's beauty at a distance become sordid when you come close, which happens when something is not really beautiful. But all things are so arranged and gleam with such true beauty that the closer you come to this city, the greater grows your appreciation of its magnificence. Thus the villas are more beautiful than the distant panorama, the suburbs more handsome than the villas, and the city itself more beautiful than its suburbs. Hence, when newcomers enter the city they forget the beauties and architecture of the outlying area because they are so stunned in their admiration for the splendor of the city itself.

Now I want to discuss another topic that I usually consider one of the chief arguments for demonstrating the greatness of this city. Florence has fought a great many wars and has been victorious over some very powerful enemies. It has fought several growing and formidable powers, and by its sound strategy, by its wealth and sheer willpower, Florence has even overcome those enemies to which it was judged to be very inferior and even incapable of resisting under any circumstances. Very recently Florence fought for many years against a very powerful and resourceful enemy with such great force that it filled everyone with admiration. For this Duke,² who had by his resources and power been a source of fear to the nations north of the Alps as well as to the rest of Italy, and who was elated in his hopes, prideful in victory, and destroyed, like a storm, everything in his path with an incredible success, found himself confronted by this single city that not only repulsed the invader and delayed the impetus of his conquests but even overthrew him after a long war. To these things done by Florence we shall devote time and space a little further on. For the moment, however, let us return to our subject.

I say, therefore, that everyone was so amazed by the dimensions of this conflict and by the duration of the struggle that they were wondering how a single city could muster the great number of

2. An allusion to the recent war with Giangaleazzo Visconti, which Florence eventually won as a result of the dissolution of the Visconti empire following Giangaleazzo's death in September 1402.

troops and immense resources, not to mention the vast amount of money needed for the war. But this wonder, the great amazement of everyone, lasts only as long as men have not seen this beautiful city nor observed its magnificence. When men actually have seen Florence their amazement at its achievements ceases. Indeed, we see that this happens to everyone; no one ever comes to Florence who does not admit to this experience. As soon as they have seen the city and have inspected with their own eyes its great mass of architecture and the grandeur of its buildings, its splendor and magnificence, the lofty towers, the marble churches, the domes of the basilicas, the splendid palaces, the turreted walls, and the numerous villas, its charm, beauty, and decor, instantly everyone's mind and thought change so that they are no longer amazed by the greatest and most important exploits accomplished by Florence. Rather, everyone immediately comes to believe that Florence is indeed worthy of attaining dominion and rule over the entire world. For this reason one can understand how extraordinarily wondrous this city is whose beauty and magnificence cannot be adequately comprehended or related in words. For just as actual sight has more effect than a report, so opinion is inferior to a report.

Now I do not know what others might say, but, for my part, I think my argument is so persuasive that it alone is able to confirm conclusively the incredible excellence of Florence. Once someone has seen the city, it is no easy matter to cancel and erase the general impression of the city's greatness. The only way that this could happen would be if even stronger evidence of nobility and beauty in this very city not just weakened but even cancelled the impression of wonderment caused by the magnitude of its deeds. This would be analogous to the case of someone telling me of the incredible and unparalleled accomplishments of strength by a boxer in a series of contests; for example, I might hear that this one boxer wore out others with his fists and laid out others with his glove. If I heard that this one had knocked down and beaten a great many other boxers, or that he had stopped a speeding heavy chariot with his bare hands or carried a live bull for a hundred yards (a feat that is claimed for Milo of Croton³); or if I heard that when this boxer stood upon an oiled bronze shield no one was

3. This description of the feats of the Greek athlete Milo of Croton probably derives from Cicero *De senectute* 3.10.33, and Pliny *Naturalis historia* 7.28.83.

sea that Florence is vanquished by seaports, and in this matter the vanquished city is in reality the victor. To be sure, seaports derive some advantages from their harbors and beaches, but these advantages are always accompanied by dangers and alloyed with vexations. Indeed, Florence profits from its nearness to the sea but derives only pure advantage from its situation; it is never disturbed by misfortunes or threatened by dangers. The comfort of Florence is never vexed or threatened by pestilential climate, by fetid and impure air, by the humidity of the water, or by autumnal fevers. Rather, its utility is as pure as can be, not dangerous and total. Indeed, it seems to me that Florence is distant enough from the western Mediterranean to enjoy at the same time the benefits of proximity to the Adriatic. This happy situation cannot be praised enough. If Florence were situated on either coast in addition to being plagued with innumerable different vexations because of its nearness to the sea, it would be inconvenienced because it was too distant from the other. Hence, it would suffer from being at two extremes at the same time: both too near to and too far from the coast. But since Florence is equidistant from either coast, it seems not content with one of them but has sought to utilize both coasts at the same time; almost as the queen of Italy, Florence sits equidistant between the Tyrrhenian and Adriatic seas. It is set in a very healthy climate and is not far from either plains or mountains. Here lie very fertile fields, there arise smiling hills. Florence is further supplied by a river flowing through its midst, which is both of great beauty and of even greater utility. And in the city there are admirable splendors, incomparable beauty, stupendous architecture, and enormous magnificence. Moreover, the surrounding villas provide great and unheard of delicacies, amenities not of this world, and indeed complete joyfulness, pleasantness, elegance. Indeed, Florence is so filled with greatness and splendor that it excels by a long way not just the cities of Italy but even those of all the provinces of ancient Rome.

This abundance of beautiful things, which affords such rich material for easily describing the city, has seized me so completely and forcefully that I have not had any opportunity to rest. Perhaps I have constructed my speech so disjointedly that in attempting to describe all the fine ornaments of Florence I have passed over the first and best ornament of all. Occupied with describing the other

beauty and magnificence of this great city, I had almost forgotten that I should really be talking about the people, the size of the population, and the virtue, industry, and kindness of the citizen-body, which is Florence's greatest treasure and among the first things that ought to come to mind. Therefore, it is time for me to return to my point of departure and to render those who inhabit Florence their due. So we ought to acknowledge that we have wandered a bit, and we ought to return to the subject of our speech. At this time we ought to collect our thoughts, leave behind those topics that we have already treated, and turn toward the subjects that we ought now to discuss, so that we don't persist in this error any longer.

2

Therefore, now that we have described what Florence is, we should next consider what manner of citizens there are here. As one usually does in discussing an individual, so we want to investigate the origins of the Florentine people and to consider from what ancestor the Florentines derived and what they have accomplished at home and abroad in every age. As Cicero says: "Let's do it this way, let's begin at the beginning."¹⁰

What, therefore, was the stock of these Florentines? Who were their progenitors? By what mortals was this outstanding city founded? Recognize, men of Florence, recognize your race and your forebears. Consider that you are, of all races, the most renowned. For other peoples have as forebears refugees or those banished from their fathers' homes, peasants, obscure wanderers, or unknown founders. But your founder is the Roman people—the lord and conqueror of the entire world. Immortal God, you have conferred so many good things on this one city so that everything—no matter where it happens or for what purpose it was ordained—seems to redound to Florence's benefit.

For the fact that the Florentine race arose from the Roman people is of the utmost importance. What nation in the entire world was ever more distinguished, more powerful, more out-

10. Cicero *Orationes philippicae* 2.44.

standing in every sort of excellence than the Roman people? Their deeds are so illustrious that the greatest feats done by other men seems like child's play when compared to the deeds of the Romans. Their dominion was equal to the entire world, and they governed with the greatest competence for many centuries, so that from a single city comes more examples of virtue than all other nations have been able to produce until now. In Rome there have been innumerable men so outstanding in every kind of virtue that no other nation on earth has ever been equal to it. Even omitting the names of many fine and outstanding leaders and heads of the Senate, where do you find, except in Rome, the families of the Publicoli, Fabricii, Corruccani, Dentati, Fabii, Decii, Camilli, Pauli, Marcelli, Scipiones, Catones, Gracchi, Torquati, and Cicerones? Indeed, if you are seeking nobility in a founder you will never find any people nobler in the entire world than the Roman people; if you are seeking wealth, none more opulent; if you want grandeur and magnificence, none more outstanding and glorious; if you seek extent of dominion, there was no people on this side of the ocean that had not been subdued and brought under Rome's power by force of arms. Therefore, to you, also, men of Florence, belongs by hereditary right dominion over the entire world and possession of your parental legacy. From this it follows that all wars that are waged by the Florentine people are most just, and this people can never lack justice in its wars since it necessarily wages war for the defense or recovery of its own territory. Indeed, these are the sorts of just wars that are permitted by all laws and legal systems. Now, if the glory, nobility, virtue, grandeur, and magnificence of the parents can also make the sons outstanding, no people in the entire world can be as worthy of dignity as are the Florentines, for they are born from such parents who surpass by a long way all mortals in every sort of glory. Who is there among men who would not readily acknowledge themselves subjected to the Roman people? Indeed, what slave or freedman strives to have the same dignity as the children of his lord or master, or hopes to be chosen instead of them? It is evident that it is no trifling ornament to the city of Florence to have had such an outstanding creator and founder for itself and its people.

But at what point in history did the nation of the Florentines arise from the Romans? Now I believe that in the case of royal

successions there is a custom observed by most peoples, namely, that the person who is finally declared to be heir to the king must be born at the time his father possessed the royal dignity. Those offspring who are born either before or after are not considered to be the sons of a king, nor are they permitted to have the right of succession to their father's kingdom. Surely whoever rules when in his best and most flourishing condition also accomplish his most illustrious and glorious deeds. Indeed, it is evident that, for whatever reasons, prosperous times stimulate men's minds and call forth great spirits, so that at such moments in history great men are able to do only what is important and glorious, and what is accomplished then is always especially outstanding.

Accordingly, this very noble Roman colony was established at the very moment when the dominion of the Roman people flourished greatly and when very powerful kings and warlike nations were being conquered by the skill of Roman arms and by virtue. Carthage, Spain, and Corinth were levelled to the ground; all lands and seas acknowledged the rule of these Romans, and these same Romans suffered no harm from any foreign state. Moreover, the Caesars, the Antonines, the Tiberiuses, the Neros—those plagues and destroyers of the Roman Republic—had not yet deprived the people of their liberty. Rather, still growing there was that sacred and untrampled freedom that, soon after the founding of the colony of Florence, was to be stolen by those vilest of thieves. For this reason I think something has been true and is true in this city more than in any other; the men of Florence especially enjoy perfect freedom and are the greatest enemies of tyrants. So I believe that from its very founding Florence conceived such a hatred for the destroyers of the Roman state and underminers of the Roman Republic that it has never forgotten to this very day. If any trace of or even the names of those corrupters of Rome have survived to the present, they are hated and scorned in Florence.

Now this interest in republicanism is not new to the Florentine people, nor did it begin (as some people think) only a short time since. Rather, this struggle against tyranny was begun a long time ago when certain evil men undertook the worst crime of all—the destruction of the liberty, honor, and dignity of the Roman people. At that time, fired by a desire for freedom, the Florentines adopted their penchant for fighting and their zeal for the republican side,

and this attitude has persisted down to the present day. If at other times these political factions were called by different names, still they were not really different. From the beginning Florence has always been united in one and the same cause against the invaders of the Roman state and it has constantly persevered in this policy to the present time. By Jove, this was caused by a just hatred of tyranny more than by the well-deserved respect due to the ancient fatherland. For who could bear that the Roman state, acquired with the kind of virtue that Camillus, Publicola, Fabricius, Curtius, Fabius, Regulus, Scipio, Marcellus, the Catos, and countless other very honorable and chaste men displayed, fell into the hands and under the domination of Caligula and other monsters and vile tyrants who were innocent of no vice and redeemed by no virtue?¹¹ To excel in this these monsters were in a competition of mighty proportions, striving with all their power.

As a result of these struggles, every means of cruelty was employed in the annihilation of the Roman citizens, as though the highest prize in the world would be given to them only if they left in Rome no nobility, no political vitality, and even no citizen-body. Therefore, when Caligula had committed as many crimes as he possibly could, and many citizens still survived in that great city, the emperor, weary of killing and massacring and unable in any way to have his cruel desires satisfied, finally uttered that evil saying that serves as a witness to his enormities: "Would that the Roman people had but one neck, so that I could chop it off with a single blow."¹² Clearly he did just that. Not yet satisfied with the blood of the citizen-body, he would have made the city empty had he lived a little longer. In addition, he drove a sword through the senatorial order, he cut down the most outstanding members of the consular ranks, he cut off families at their roots, and he daily slaughtered whatever plebs were still left in the city as if they were cattle in droves. To this monstrous cruelty he added even more monstrous outrages, which indeed are uncommon and unequalled through all the centuries and have never been recalled without a curse. Three of his own sisters were, in turn, ravaged by him, and then they were forced to live openly with their brother as his concubines. Are these the deeds of emperors? Are these our

11. The following anecdotes about Caligula and Tiberius are derived from Suetonius *Gaius Caligula* 24, 30; and *Tiberius* 43-44.

12. Suetonius *Gaius Caligula* 30.2.

splendid Caesars whom many think are worthy of praise? What crimes and outrages are these, and what monsters are these men! For these reasons who will wonder that the city of Rome had such hatred against the imperial faction and that this hatred has even lasted down to the present?

Now has there ever been a more just cause for indignation? Has anything ever touched the people of Florence more deeply than the sorrow of seeing the Roman people, its progenitor and founder, which only a short time before had ruled over the entire world with great ability, suddenly lose its own freedom at the hands of the most criminal of men? These were men who, if the Republic had survived, surely would have been counted among the lowest dregs of society. And what should I say of Tiberius Caesar, although he ruled before Caligula? (There is no need to proceed in chronological order when discussing those matters where there is neither order or reason.) Indeed, what more loathsome, more shameful things have ever been heard or seen than the brutality used by Tiberius in his torturing and extermination of Roman citizens on Capri? What could be worse than that same emperor's lovers and gigolos, who were given to such evil and unspeakable types of sexual behavior that it is, I think, to Italy's shame that such degenerates once lived there? But if these emperors were base and evil, were those who followed better? And who were these? Were they not Nero and Vitellius and Domitian and Heliogabalus? Yes, of course they were. Now it's not an easy thing to point out what was the nature of Nero's virtue and humanity. To be sure, his mother Agrippina praised the piety of her son to the skies; nor could one who showed piety toward his mother be thought capable of being impious and inhuman toward other men. Indeed, this is the same emperor who, in his great mercy, set fire to the city of Rome so his subjects would not be troubled by the cold!

O Gaius Caesar, what manifest crimes have you visited upon the city of Rome! But I will remain silent on this topic, for there are some who are irate that Lucan, a very learned and wise man, wrote the truth concerning those crimes. Perhaps they do so not without good reason, for although you displayed many and great vices, these were sometimes overshadowed by many and great virtues. Hence, the safest course is not to discuss you at all. For the same reason I shall not treat your adopted son, even though I am not ignorant of the reasons that led you to adopt him. But I am passing

over all this. I shall not call to mind either his fatuous cruelty or his proscription and slaughter of innocent citizens or his treachery to the Senate or his adultery and sexual perversions; for there were in him—as there were in his father—the vestiges of certain virtues that made his faults more tolerable. But those monsters to whom you handed over the empire were redeemed from their vices by no virtues, unless it is perhaps a virtue to destroy the state with all one's might or never to refrain from the vilest crimes. For this reason I shall not recall your other deeds, but I cannot forget, nor do I think that I should not be angry, that you paved the way for so many evils and outrages that your successors perpetrated with every kind of iniquity and cruelty.

But to what end? someone will ask Really there are two reasons: first, to show that Florence has not, without good cause, developed its political allegiances; and second, to make it understood that at the time when Florence was founded the city of Rome flourished greatly in power, liberty, genius, and especially with great citizens. Now, after the Republic had been subjected to the power of a single head, "those outstanding minds vanished," as Tacitus says.¹³ So it is of importance whether a colony was founded at a later date, since by then all the virtue and nobility of the Romans had been destroyed; nothing great or outstanding could be conveyed by those who left the city.

Since Florence had as its founders those who were obeyed everywhere by everyone and dominated by their skill and military prowess, and since it was founded when a free and unconquered Roman people flourished in power, nobility, virtues, and genius, it cannot be doubted at all that this one city not only stands out in its beauty, architecture, and appropriateness of site (as we have seen), but that Florence also greatly excels beyond all other cities in the dignity and nobility of its origin.

But now let us turn to another topic.

Since Florence derives from such noble forebears, it has never allowed itself to be contaminated by sloth and cowardice, nor has it

13. Tacitus *Historiae* 1.1.

been content to bask in the glory of its progenitors or rest on its laurels at ease and leisure. Since it was born to such an exalted station, Florence has tried to accomplish those things that everyone expected and desired it to do. Thus, Florence imitated its founders in every kind of virtue, so that in everyone's judgment the city seemed completely worthy of its fine reputation and traditions.

Moreover, Florence did not refrain from fighting to show that it stood out among the leaders of Italy. It gained for itself dominion and glory not by deceit or trickery, not by covering itself with crimes and fraud, but by wise policies, by a willingness to face dangers, by keeping faith, integrity, steadfastness, and, above all, by upholding the rights of weaker peoples. Nor did Florence strive to excel only in riches; it sought to promote its industry and magnificence even more. Nor did it consider it better to be superior in power than in justice and humanity. With these qualities in mind, Florence strove to be the greatest of states; with these it acquired its authority and its glory. If Florence had not followed this policy, it wisely and truly knew that it would be falling away from the virtues of its ancestors and that its noble forebears would be more of a burden than an honor.

But Florence chose the wisest and best course of action. The same dignity and grandeur of the parent also illuminates its sons, since the offspring strive for their own virtue. And you may be sure that if the descendants had been cowardly or dissolute or had in any way fallen away from virtue, the splendor of the ancestor would not so much have hidden their vices as it would have uncovered them. The light of parental glory leaves nothing hidden; indeed, the expectation that the virtues of the parent will be reduplicated in the son focuses all eyes on the offspring. Whoever fails in these expectations to live up to the brilliance of their ancestors seems to be not noble but rather notorious on account of their descent. However, just as the grandeur of the ancestors scarcely aids those who are degenerate, so this same grandeur magnifies many times those descendants who possess high and noble spirits. Indeed, as their dignity and influence grows, these men are carried up to heaven, and they are placed together with their forebears in one and the same place on account of their own virtue and because of the nobility of their ancestors. Indeed, we have seen it happen in Florence that many men stand out as examples