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The Structure and Strategy of Leonardo Bruni’s *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis*

And, generally speaking, that which is more difficult is preferable to that which is easier of attainment, for it is scarcer . . .

(Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1.7.15)

Leonardo Bruni’s *Laudatio Florentinae Urbis* of 1402-04, a work of epideictic rhetoric designed to praise the city of Florence and its citizens, has consistently been considered an important document in the study of the development of humanism. This is due in large part to its relationship with the historical reality that surrounded it and influenced its composition. The early years of the Florentine Quattrocento constituted a period of significant change on many levels. In particular, there occurred an evolution in cultural climate that witnessed a shift in emphasis from a purely bookish appreciation of classical literature to one in which elements of civic life began to take on equal importance.

The figure of Leonardo Bruni was at the forefront in this period for in many ways he embodied the early humanist ideals. He was a noted scholar not only of classical Latin but also of Greek texts and, furthermore, he displayed praiseworthy civic devotion to Florence through both his actions and his writings. Particularly noteworthy is his contribution to the field of historiography through his *Historiarum Florentini Populi Libri XII* (1440). The pride he felt in the achievements of Florence and her singular position in the world, evident in his major work of historiography, was first expressed in the *Laudatio* and formulated in this brief tract in a manner similar to that employed later in his masterpiece of historiography.

Whereas medieval chroniclers tended to enshroud their writings in the stuff of legend and illustrated a divine plan according to which struggles were often narrated in terms of the Christian pilgrim’s choices during his secular journey, Bruni introduced a new historiographical method characterized by a close analysis of documents which would lead to an indication of cause and effect.¹

The significance of the *Laudatio* for early humanist thought has been dealt with by Baron and Seigel, yet they have held contrasting views on the subject. Baron finds that the new civic humanism expressed in Bruni’s work was a direct result of the political reality of the time. According to him, one particular event,

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the threat to Florence posed by Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan in the summer of 1402, created in the Florentines a heightened consciousness of the importance of their republican political institutions as they faced defeat at the hands of the despotic ruler. The *Laudatio* is a fundamental element in the formulation of Baron’s theory since the dating of the tract and *Dialogus II*, part of another work of his, to 1402 coincides with the Milanese threat. On the other hand, Seigel contends that Bruni’s humanism was not civic, but rhetorical. According to him, the *Laudatio* was intended to show the author’s rhetorical skill and further his chances of attaining the chancellorship of Florence,2 and had no direct relation to the threat posed by the forces of Giangaleazzo Visconti.

While each of these approaches has shed considerable light on the text, they can be supplemented with an investigation into the importance of the relation between new historical insight and rhetorical structure in Bruni’s panegyrical. It is my aim to add to the previous readings of the *Laudatio* by examining the work’s form in relation to its content. The tension that appears between the historical and rhetorical discourses present in the text shall be explored in connection with the depiction of the city of Florence. This tension is due, precisely, to the introduction of historical evidence in a panegyrical composition. The presentation of a new historical truth made in the guise of a rhetorical work tends to upset normal expectations, for the formal structure could be seen to belie its purported accuracy.

In the *Laudatio* the daunting task of doing justice to the marvels of Florence is expressed in the opening *topos* of modesty, where the author claims that there is so much to praise that he does not know where to begin. However, immediately after his initial admission of confusion and disorientation, Bruni lays out the *dispositio* of the work.

Therefore many orators say that they themselves do not know where to begin. This now happens to me not only in 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 of 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 than 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. (*Panegyric* 136)3
In the text the author organizes his description in such a way that the reader progresses from the larger orbit of Florentine influence to the nearby towns, then proceeds to the country houses, to the city walls and suburbs, and finally reaches Florence and the Palazzo della Signoria.

Beyond the country houses there are the walled towns. And what should I say of these walled towns? Indeed, there is no part of the region lying beyond the country houses that is not filled with these impressive and splendid walled towns. The city itself stands in the center, like a guardian and lord, while the towns surround Florence on the periphery, each in its own place. A poet might well compare it to the moon surrounded by the stars, and the whole vista is very beautiful to the eyes. Just as on a round buckler, where one ring is laid around another, the innermost ring loses itself in the central knob that is the middle of the entire buckler. So here we see the regions lying like rings surrounding and enclosing one another. Within them Florence is first, similar to the central knob, the center of the whole orbit. The city itself is ringed by walls and suburbs. Around the suburbs, in turn, lies a ring of country houses, and around them the circle of towns. The whole outermost region is enclosed in a still larger orbit and circle. Between the towns there are castles — these safest refuges for the peasants — with their towers reaching into the sky. (144-45)4

The description of Florence and the countryside, particularly the idea of the city being the geometric centre of several circles, has been keenly perceived by Baron as the first attempt made "to discover the secret laws of optics and perspective that make the Florentine landscape appear as one great scenic structure" (Crisis 201). What emerges is a design based on principles of symmetry in as much as the path through the city is described by means of a series of descriptions which suggests a movement through a set of six concentric circles.5 Bruni's oration proceeds from praise of the physical aspect of the city, to the city's heritage and foreign policy, culminating finally in the acclaim of its domestic institutions. The intention of conferring on Florence the appearance of perfect, harmonious symmetry is conveyed by the numerous descriptions which suggest this quality in geometrical, architectural, and even musical terms.6 The transition from an appreciation of the natural physical beauty of the city's location to praise of the splendor found within the city walls in the works of art produced by its citizens conveys the idea of the perfect harmony between nature and art.

Almighty God, what wealth of buildings, what distinguished architecture there is in Florence! Indeed, how great the genius of the builders is reflected in these buildings, and what a pleasure there is for those who live in them. (139)7

The circular design was employed by Bruni in his description of Florence undoubtedly because of the symbolic importance of the circle which represents both perfect symmetry and divine creation.8 The vision of concentric circles that dominated medieval cosmology figures prominently in Dante's Divine Comedy, for example. In analogous fashion, labyrinths, sometimes involving interwoven
circles, were also popular symbols in the medieval consciousness as proven by their depiction in medieval cathedrals. While many early studies tended to see these depictions of labyrinths as chemins à Jérusalem for the faithful to follow on their knees, intended as a substitute for pilgrimages to the Holy Land, more current research favours the interpretation of their being "an aesthetic hallmark of artistry or an intellectual and moral challenge to be overcome with divine aid" (Doob 117).\(^9\) Thus arduous, circular journeys to challenge the spirit and intellect were prominent concepts in the mentality of late medieval and early modern Europe and Bruni would have been familiar with them.

On the secular plane, the depiction of the circular city coincides with the rise of the Signoria, and exhibits, as Le Mollé terms it, a drift towards, "la ville idéologique" which exerts a centripetal force drawing the observer from the periphery to the centre (304).\(^10\) However, even in this connection there remains a dual nature to the image, since circular structures can also be considered potentially labyrinthine and therefore confusing because passage through them always implies a circuitous route (Doob 204n).\(^11\)

The labyrinthic nature of the Laudatio — suggested by Bruni's initial avowal of confusion and by his repeated backtracking and frequent digressions which delay progress along his projected route\(^12\) — indicates a deliberately chosen structure on the author's part, and requires interpretation by the reader. Because of the complexity of works of this kind there is the risk to literary interpretation that, in the words of Doob, "apprehension of the whole may be thwarted by inextricable immersion in its parts" (192). In the case of the Laudatio this danger may be circumvented by identifying and following the historical discourse that weaves its way through the rhetorical framework. When this interpretive strategy is applied to the text's structure, the work acquires fuller dimensions. The structure of the Laudatio seems to enhance the point that the nascent studia humanitatis, with its ideological centre in Florence, could provide a cultural redemption. As the philosopher Georges Gusdorf asserted, the humanists of the XV and XVI centuries confirmed the centre of secular existence to be the rediscovered classical culture:

On peut parler d'une sacralisation de la culture: elle est l'objet d'une vénération passionnée de la part des humanistes du XV\textsuperscript{e} et du XVI\textsuperscript{e} siècle. Leur vie est une course au trésor, recherche des manuscrits et des œuvres d'art, mais aussi quête passionnée du sens que recèlent les textes. L'Antiquité grecque et romaine se propose et s'impose comme une deuxième histoire sainte, qui n'abrite pas la première, mais parfois le fait oublier [...]. Puisque l'antiquité est la nouvelle espérance de l'humanité, le moindre détail revêt une importance immense; il met en jeu la vie spirituelle dans son ensemble . . . (345)

Accordingly, the Florence of the Laudatio is depicted as the centre of democracy and new learning, contrasted against the tyrannical threat of Giangaleazzo Visconti's Milan. Given the political situation at the time in which the author was writing, the basic idea of the labyrinth, which also functions as a means of pro-
tection for the forces of order against the threat of chaos, seems quite applicable to the strategy employed in the *Laudatio*.  

Since the centre of a labyrinth is the zone of sacred and absolute reality around which all interest revolves, Bruni’s panegyric too must be explored with an eye to the intended meaning, the Palazzo della Signoria which occupies its centre. With all labyrinthine structures, the attainment of the center is realized only after an arduous and often circuitous path has been completed. In essence, it is a process of initiation often requiring patient endurance. The structure of the text must therefore be carefully analyzed in an attempt to penetrate to the center wherein lies the truth, without falling prey to “error.”

It is in relation to “error” that Bruni first signals that the historical discourse ought to be followed in order to arrive at the true reason for Florence’s distinction. After having dwelt on the city’s physical attributes, the author realizes that an examination of the population and an investigation into the city’s founders would be more revealing of the source of the city’s greatness.

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.

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.”(149)

Error may be considered a characteristic trait of rhetoric, in the sense that whereas, in the system of the *studia humanitatis*, grammar dealt with the description of correct language, the province of rhetoric was its “improper” use, that is to say, figurative language. Specific to rhetoric was the probable, the true-seeming, and its purpose was not the attainment of absolute truth, but merely the agreement of the listener or reader.

Among the more widespread rhetorical strategies employed by humanist writers was the use of the commonplace-book, a catalogue of passages extrapolated from previous readings. It provided scholars with a ready repertoire of classical quotations for a variety of occasions. A particularly fertile source for commonplaces were works of history for, as Bruni himself declares in *De studiis et litteris liber* regarding proof in the *dispositio*, history was the ideal source from which one could draw examples to illustrate certain points. The careful study of the past enlarges our foresight in contemporary affairs, and affords to citizens and to monarchs lessons of incitement or warning in the ordering of public policy. From history, also, we draw our store of examples of moral precepts.
There exists another fundamental connection between history and rhetoric since historical writings are literary works, cognizant of their dependence on language and its inherent instability.\(^1\) Despite Bruni's advances in historiographical methodology, history-writing in this period was still largely a rhetorical art motivated by ideological considerations. According to Gossman, it was "an art of representation rather than a scientific inquiry, and its problems belonged to rhetoric rather than to epistemology" (4). In fact, in his letter of 1440 to Francesco Piccolpassi, the archbishop of Milan, Bruni openly declares that this work is not a history but rather a panegyric and therefore not restricted to remaining truthful to the facts in the same way as a historical composition would be.

History is one thing, and eulogy another. History is supposed to stick to the truth, while a eulogy extolls its subject far beyond the truth, as Aristides did in his eulogy of Athens.\(^2\)

Although the *Laudatio* may be the first example of the nascent humanist historiography of the early Quattrocento, its rhetorical framework denies it any possibility of being considered a work of pure history. The results of Bruni's historical research which are included in the text were actually put to direct political and ideological use in Florence's struggle with Milan to substantiate his argument that only a republican government could guarantee its citizens the freedom of discussion and frank dealing. The despotic rule of the Milanese state, by its very nature, denied the possibility of free and open debate.

The tension inherent in the work caused by the mixture of rhetorical and historical discourses is discernible in its very structure. The set of circles which characterizes the external treatment of the city and its surrounding area constitutes the elements of descriptive ornamentation particular to panegyric. In his attempt to detach his work from medieval precedents, and perhaps to surpass classical examples, Bruni carries out a process of penetration of these circles toward the centre and thus goes beyond the purely rhetorical to arrive at the truth which lies at some fixed point in the centre. The means by which this is effected is the incorporation of new historical insights which are at the basis of his writing.

In typical fashion the *Laudatio* adheres to the principles of rhetoric and, more precisely, to the epideictic genre since it amplifies and embellishes its theme of praise as it presents Florence as the ideal city in every respect. While it may possibly alter the attitude of the readers, it does not call upon them to act or reach a decision, as would be the case in other genres of rhetoric. However, the topics treated in the *Laudatio* set the work apart from others of the same genre and give it a particular historical importance, reflecting the political atmosphere in which it was written.

In particular, Bruni's work radically departs from the medieval tradition of city *laudes*, which were often no more than a haphazard list of positive attributes. It includes, instead, considerations of cause and effect and dispenses with the previously accepted legendary aspects of the city's founding in favour of historical confirmation. A comparison between the *Laudatio* and Bonvesin da la Riva's
De magnalibus Mediolani of 1288 illustrates the gulf that separates the medieval work from the humanist one.

The offices of the city of Milan and their relation to the citizens are described by da la Riva in the following manner:

27. There are 120 jurisconsults practicing both kinds of law, and it is believed that their court is unequalled anywhere in the world in both number and acumen. All of them, willing to dispense justice, readily accept payment from the litigants.

28. There are over 1500 notaries, many of whom are very skilled in the drawing up of contracts.20

The presentation of the offices of Florence is carried out in a significantly different way by Bruni:

Thus all conditions of men must submit to the decisions of these magistracies, and they must pay due respect to the symbols of these offices. In many ways care has been taken that these upholders of the law to whom great power has been entrusted do not come to imagine that, instead of custodianship of the citizens, a tyrannical post has been given. Many provisions are made so that these magistrates do not lord it over others or undermine the great freedom of the Florentines. First of all, the chief magistracy that is commonly viewed as possessing the sovereignty of the state is controlled by a system of checks and balances. Hence there are nine magistrates instead of one, and their term is for two months, not for one year. (169)21

Bruni’s decision to distance himself from medieval works on cities and examine some classical antecedents in his search for an appropriate model illustrates the conscious effort of the Florentine humanist to fix his work on a firmer foundation. That the Panathenaic Oration, a minor work written in ancient Greece by Aelius Aristides, was chosen as a structural model is of considerable importance because the Laudatio is possibly the first humanist composition to take advantage of the emerging Greek studies introduced to Coluccio Salutati’s circle of humanist scholars by Manuel Chrysoloras in the late fourteenth century. In addition to the Oration, as Rubinstein has pointed out, Bruni may also have consulted the rhetorical manuals of the Greek rhetorician Menander for the rules pertaining to ancient epideictic rhetoric (20).

The choice of Aristides’ Oration over the more illustrious works of epideictic rhetoric by writers like Isocrates is also particularly revealing for it shows the degree to which the immediate concerns of the author’s own time influenced his thoughts. The program for the unification of Greece under the leadership of Athens advocated by Isocrates was thought to be less pertinent to the needs of Bruni’s Florence than Aristides’ depiction of Athens as the liberator of Greece from the Persian threat of oppression and its consequent emergence as the cultural and political centre of Greece. As Baron argues convincingly, Bruni “found in the Greek work conceptual patterns which he could use to impose a rational
order upon his observations of the world in which he lived" (From Petrarch 158), and which consequently allowed him to draw parallels between Aristides' Athens and his own Florence.

The introduction of new historical thinking into the rhetorical framework is evident in the theory that Florence was founded by Rome during the republican period, contrary to the traditional belief that it was established by Caesar. This theory, first conceived by Bruni's teacher Coluccio Salutati, was further developed by Bruni to explain Florence's adherence to the republican tradition and its consequent greatness. The claim of autochthony of the inhabitants of Attica in Aristides is replaced by "the idea of a special psychological and ideological legacy that the Respublica Romana had bequeathed to Florence at its founding" (Baron, From Petrarch 162). This point clearly demonstrates how Bruni manipulated his material by enlisting history in the service of rhetoric.

The change that occurs in Bruni's analysis as a result of this added historical element provides a valuable clue to the interpretation of the Laudatio. The procedure of moving from the exterior to the interior part of the city becomes more pronounced; this penetration suggests the author's quest to understand the intrinsic reasons for the exalted position of Florence. The action of penetrating the external elements to arrive at those within, rendered particularly clear in the case of the location of the Palazzo della Signoria, may be considered a metaphor for the methodology employed by the author. Bruni's inward progression from considerations of the city's external, geographical beauty to the contemplation of the architectural splendour displayed within the city walls, culminates with his reflections on the nature of Florence's citizens and institutions. These are seen as the basis for the city's grandeur and the reason for its ability to withstand the overwhelming power of its adversary, Milan.

The transition from the external qualities to the internal ones marks the point where the rhetorical and the historical elements of the Laudatio come together. This is noticeable in part two of the tract where, after the shift from considerations of the city's appearance to the nature of her citizens, the theory of Florence's republican origin is introduced and elaborated:

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 [...]. Rather, still growing there was that sacred and untrampled freedom that, soon after the founding of the colony of Florence, was stolen by those vilest of thieves. (151)

The relationship between the Respublica Romana and Florence is strengthened by the parallel Bruni draws between the two republics. It is based on historical investigation and fuelled by the author's acute sensitivity to its potential impact on the feeling of civic pride and protection against the threat of tyranny felt by the citizenry of Florence.
The impressive artistic output of contemporary Florence is also compared to the greatest cultural period of Rome as Bruni declares that republics nurture the sense of intellectual and artistic freedom which is necessary for the creation of outstanding works of art. Baron defines the goal of Bruni's *Laudatio* as an attempt to "establish the center of history of the ancient world in the rise and fall of civic freedom and energy" and, further, "to understand the Florentine city-republics as a resumption of the work accomplished in ancient city-states" (*Crisis* 64). To this end, the *amplificatio* of Bruni's panegyric includes an in-depth analysis of Florence's laws and constitution that is intended to emphasize his position. Similarly, the later *Historiarum* takes as the central motif of the city's history the formation of a public space where *libertas* is equivalent to freedom of expression (Struever 118).

The relevance of structure to interpretation is paramount in the case of the *Laudatio*. The conception of a panegyric informed by historical fact, undoubt edly innovative for the period, is a reflection of the perceived compatibility between the notion of the historian's commitment to truth and his engagement as rhetorician. The humanists' technical knowledge attained through rhetorical training, which by means of its persuasive powers focused on the relation of discourse to action, opened the way to political persuasion in the public arena. Their literary activity was also considered a public duty for they envisaged cultural renewal through the cultivation of the arts. For the humanists, then, rhetoric was basically thought of as conflict or dialogue, politics was the dialogue of power, and history was seen as the articulation of this power dialogue (Struever 125). The fact that Bruni structured his work as a panegyric with a distinctive historical quality reveals his dual intention of surpassing previous works of the genre and achieving a precise political and ideological purpose. He became both proponent of the new humanist learning and champion of the Florentine cause against Milan.

Due to its intricate structure and the corresponding reading strategies required, Bruni's *Laudatio* is a text to be deciphered by exploring the paths in it that eventually lead to the truth at its core. The reader must interpret the elaborate design of the author's *dispositio* by following the historical discourse, like Ariadne's thread, which in this case leads to the centre of the work. Here we find the Palazzo della Signoria, the seat of the Florentine republican government and the principal cause of the city's greatness. Since Bruni's text simultaneously exhibits regular arrangement and intricate design, it is by paying particular attention to the historical elements that the reader is directed to the truth at the core of the work and is not absorbed in the contemplation of external elements or rhetorical flourishes.

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NOTES

1 Cochrane describes how Bruni adhered to historical truth and destroyed many previous myths (4). Santini’s monograph documents the sources relating to the mythical founding of Florence, a notion that was popular prior to Bruni’s history (30-34). See also Griffiths; Hankins; and Thompson.

2 The debate over Leonardo Bruni’s civic humanism is treated by Seigel in his article, which is intended as a response to the theory of Baron. The latter’s essay “Leonardo Bruni: ‘Professional Rhetorician’” is a rebuttal to Seigel and a defence of the concepts of Florentine civic humanism presented earlier in his Crisis.

3 All English translations of the Laudatio have been taken from this edition. “Quod igitur a plerisque oratoribus dictum est: nescire se unde initium sumant, id profecto nunc michi evenire non verbis, quemadmodum illis, sed re ipsa intelligo, non solum enim quia multe sunt res et varie inter se ultra citroque connexae, verum etiam quia ita preclare omnes et quodammodo egregie sunt ut inter se ipsas de excellentia certare videantur, nec facilis sit deliberatio quenam in dicendo sit antependenda. Sive enim pulcriterudinem ac nitorem urbis intueare, nichil dignius viden potest de quo quam primum enarretur; sive potentiam atque opes, illud omnino censebis preferendum. At si res gestas vel in nostra etate vel superiori tempore contempleris, nichil tanti videri potest ut illis antependatur. Cum vero mores insti-taque consideres, nichil omnino arbitriris prestantius. Hec me dubium tenent, sepeque de altero dicere parantem alterius recordatio ad se revocat, nec deliberandi permittunt facultatem. Ego tanem unde aptissimum et congruentissimum putabo, inde initium dicendi sumam; quod quidem credo etiam ceteros non esse improbaturas” (Laudatio florentinae urbis 120). All Latin quotations are from this edition.

4 “Post villas autem castella sunt. Castella autem, imo vero nichil est ex omni illa regione que villas cingit, que non splendidissimis ac celeberrimis referta sit oppidis. Urbs autem media est tanquam antistes quedam ac dominatrix; illa vero circum adstant, suo queque loco constituta. Et lunam a tellis circumdari poeta recte diceret quispiam; fitque ex eo res pulcerrima visu. Quemadmodum enim in clipeo, circulis sese ad invicem includentibus, intimus orbis in umbelicum desinit, qui edius totius clipei locus: eodem hic itidem mod videmus regiones quasi circulos quosdam ad invicem clausas ac circumfrasas. Quorum urbs quidem prima est, quasi umbelicus totius ambitus media. Hec autem menibus cingitur atque suburbis. Suburbia rursus ville circumdant, villas autem oppida; atque hic omnis ex- tima regio maiore ambitu circuloque complectitur. Inter oppida vero castella sunt arcusque in celum minantes et agricolarum tutissima refugia” (Laudatio 30-32).

5 Santosuosso provides a diagrammatic rendering of the concentric circles in the Laudatio in relation to Aristides’ Panathenaic Oration (32).

6 Bruni relates the idea of the harmony and symmetry of the elements comprising the city to the point in the middle of the circle, “the center of the whole orbit” (145), “quasi umbelicus quidam totius ambitus media” (Laudatio 32). The harmonious character of the city goes beyond the physical aspects to include the more fundamental harmony between its government and subjects. On this topic, Bruni writes: “There is proportion in strings of a harp so that when they are tightened, a harmony results from the different tones; nothing could be sweeter or more pleasing to the ear than this. In the same way, this very prudent city is harmonized in all its parts, so there results a single great, harmonious constitution whose harmony pleases both the eyes and the minds of men” (168). “Quemadmodum enim in cordis convenientia est, ad quam, cum intense fuerint, una ex diversis tonis fit armonia,
qua nichil auribus iocondius est neque suavius, eodem modo hoce prudentissima civitas ita omnes sui partes moderata est ut inde summa quedam rei publice sibi ipsi consentanea resultet, que mentes atque oculos hominum sua convenientia delectet” (Laudatio 82).

“For the importance of the circle as cultural archetype see Jung: “the circle signifies the roundness of heaven and the all-embracing nature of the pneumatic deity . . .” (95) In relation to its relevance to the construction of cities, the social anthropologist Mircea Eliade declares: “Man constructs according to an archetype. Not only do his city or his temple have celestial models; the same is true of the entire region that he inhabits, with the rivers that water it, the fields that give him his food, etc. The map of Babylon shows the city at the center of a vast circular territory bordered by a river, precisely as the Sumerians envisioned Paradise. This participation by urban cultures in an archetypal model is what gives them their reality and their validity” (The Myth 10). Bachelard explains its importance in relation to literary works: “I repeat, images of full roundness help us to collect ourselves, permit us to confer an initial constitution on ourselves, and to confirm our being intimately, inside” (212). The process by which the spiritual and material are combined is known as “squaring the circle,” where the four elements of material creation are made to correspond to the celestial realm, which Campbell describes as “the secret of the transformation of the heavenly into earthly forms” (42). This quadrature of the circle is present in Bruni’s Laudatio when he describes the four bridges that span the river Arno running through the circular city. “Quatuor enim ex lapide quadrato magnificus structi pontes fluvii ripas utrinque coniungunt, ita percommode inter se dimensi ut nulla celeberrimarum viarum interven- tu alvei abruptionem patiatur, nec minus comode per urbem incedas quam si a nullo porsus amne asset divisa” (Laudatio 18).

“Doob makes the important point that labyrinths also provide “protection, to impede access to sacred places or to deny a quick escape to thieves or the sacrilegious” (23). This aspect takes on greater significance when one considers that Bruni wrote the Laudatio during the period of conflict between Florence and the armies of Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan. Regarding labyrinths’ association with chemin à Jérusalem, see Auber; and Matthews.

Le Mollé traces the development of the depiction of the ideal city in Renaissance Italy with careful attention to the current socio-political changes of the great cities on the peninsula (275-310). In reference to the influence of the political climate on the depiction of the city, Le Mollé declares that the “naissance des seigneuries” brought with it a tendency to envisage the city as a circle in which the seat of power was at the center: “la ville centrée est centnèpte: de la périphérie vers le centre” (304). While in Bruni’s Florence we do not have the despots who create an example of Le Mollé’s “espace fermé,” there is a deliberate attempt to guide the reader from the countryside to the center of Florence where we find the municipal palace, the seat of power. See also Argan (13-26).

“I do not mean that all circular structures are labyrinths, but rather that circular structures are potentially labyrinthine, especially if they involve changes of direction, backward and forward movement, and so on . . . .”

See, for example, p. 142: “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.”; p. 154: “But now let us return to another topic.”; p.165: “But I cannot laud every great deed with appropriate praise. Not only do I fear that there is not enough time, but larger topics demand my attention.”; p.171: “Hence, a short digression will not be completely useless, I hope, and perhaps worthwhile.”

According to Eliade, settlement in a territory is a form of creation which has as a paradigm-
matic model the creation of the universe by the gods out of the fluid and larval modality of chaos. Since, as a consequence of this *initiatio dei*, the world man has created is a cosmos, any attack from without threatens to make it revert to its previous chaotic form: “Any destruction of a city is equivalent to a retrogression to chaos. Any victory over the attackers reiterates the paradigmatic victory of the gods over the dragon (that is, over chaos)” (*The Sacred*) (48) [author’s emphasis]. Jung explains this function of circular constructions in the following manner: “The enclosure, as we have seen, has also the meaning of what is called in Greek a *temenos*, the precincts of a temple or any isolated sacred place. The circle in this case protects or isolates an inner content or process that should not get mixed up with things outside” (95). Regarding the connection between the city’s shape and the cosmographic method in the early Renaissance see Marconi: “La rappresentazione di un territorio o di una città era fatta presupponendo di individuare un ‘ombelico,’ anzi, *l’umbilicus mundi*” (90).

14 Santarcangeli 168. See also Eliade: “The road is arduous, fraught with perils, because it is, in fact, a rite of passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the center is equivalent to a consacration, an initiation; yesterday’s profane and illusory existence gives place to a new, to a life that is real, enduring, and effective” (*The Myth* 18).

15 In relation to the “errant” reader, see Corti, who describes the written text, following Plato’s observations in the *Phaedrus*, as one that “speaks but does not answer and allows itself to be crossed by the reader in a thousand directions; just like painted images, [...] texts seem alive but do not reply to questions.” (English translation mine) “parfa ma non risponde e si lascia quindi attraversare dal lettore in mille direzioni; come le figure dipinte, [...] i testi sembrano vivi ma non rispondono alle domande” (15). Bachelard supports the idea of “error” as a basic principle of expression when he declares that “often it is in the heart of being that being is errancy” (215).

16 “Redeundum est igitur unde exeriam, et his, qui hanc incolunt urbem, parte suas reddendum. Quin potius quod errore factum est id nos ad oratoriam reducamus; et aliquando nos ipsos colligamus, despiciamusque de quibus rebus iam dictum est de quibusve deinceps simus dicturi, ne diutius in hoc errore versemur. Quilis igitur urbs ipsa sit, demonstratum est. Nunc, cuiusmodi habitatores eius sint, consideremus. Volumus igitur, ut in privatis hominibus fieri solet, ita et hunc populum ab initio inspicere, et quibus parentibus ortus sit, queve eius per omnem etatem fuerint opera domi forisque, considerare. Sic opinor; *a principio* (ut inquit Cicero) *ordiamur*” (*Laudatio* 40-42). Also revealing for the emphasis placed on history is the following passage regarding the dangers that maritime cities must face: “Lege Latinas, lege Grecas historias, et in his animadverte quam multi sint casus, quam crebra exciidaurbium maritimarum, quam multe civitates, cum florent opibus, viris, pecuniis, a classe hostium prius fuerint capte quam quicquam tale potuerint suspicari” (34).

17 “The tractate of Leonardo Bruni d’Arezzo, *De studiis et litteris*” 128. “Dirigit enim prudentiam et consilium praeteritorum notitia, exitusque similium coetorum nos pro re nata aut hortantur aut deterrent. Praeterea exemplorum copia, quibus plerunque illustrare dicta nostra portet, non aliunde, quam ab historia, commodus sumetur” (“De studiis et litteris liber” 17).

18 White illustrates how tropes are not only a deviation “from” one meaning, but also “toward” another meaning (3). The problem that the historian, like any other writer, encounters with language is that any prose description of a phenomenon “contains at least one move or transition in the sequence of descriptive utterances that violates a canon of logical consistency.” Another notable reference regarding the historian’s struggle against language’s inherent instability is provided by Barthes when he speaks of the “referential
illusion," since through his claim of objectivity "the historian claims to let the referent speak for itself" (132).

19 "Aliu est enim historia, aliu laudatio. Historia quidem veritatem sequi debet, laudatio vero multa supra veritatem extollit, ut in Laudibus Athenarum factum ab Aristide supra ostendimus" (Leonardi Bruni Arretni Epistolarum Libri VIII 8.4). The translation is taken from Griffiths, "Leonardo Bruni" 6. For a summary of the letter, see Luiso 145.

20 "XXVII Sunt enim in ipsa solommodo civitate utriusque iuris periti CXX, quorum colegium numero simil et sapientia in toto mondo non creditur par habere. Hii omnes ad sententias dandas parati litigantium numos libenter accipunt. XXVIII Notarii sunt plures mille quingentis, inter quos quamplurimi sunt optimi contractuum dictatores" (64). (English translation mine)

21 "Magistratibus ergo privati, itemque inferioris gradus homines, parere omnes et obedere coguntur eorumque insignia vereri. Neque ne ipsi legum vindices in summa potestate consti- tuiti arbitrari possint non custodium civium sed tyrannadem ad se esse deletam, et sic, dum alios cohercet aliquid de summa libertate minuat, multis cautionibus provisum est. Principio enim supremus magistratus, qui quandam vim regie potestatis habere videbatur, ea cautela temperatus est ut non ad unum sed ad novem simul, nec ad annum sed ad bi- mestre tempus deferatur" (Laudatio 84).

22 In the "Insectiva in Antonio Luschum Vicentinum" in Prosatori Latinin del Quattrocento (21), he states that Florence’s republican origins are substantiated by Sallust who declares that the city was founded by the veterans of Sulla’s army not long after the beginning of the first century B.C. See also Baron, Crisis 63-64.

23 A possible classical motivation for this method, which also corresponds to the concept of the rite of initiation, is found in Quintilian’s Insitituto oratoria 1.4.6: “But as the pupil gradually approaches the inner shrine of the sacred place, he will come to realise the intricacy of the subject, an intricacy calculated not merely to sharpen the wits of a boy, but to exercise even the most profound knowledge and erudition.” “[... ] sed quia interiora velut sacri huius aduentibus apparebit multa rerum subtilitas, quae non modo acuere ingenia, puerilia sed exercere altissimam quoque eruditionem ac scientiam possit” (64-65).

24 “Hec igitur splendissimia colia eo maxime tempore deducta est quo populi Romani imperium maxime floribat, quo potentissimi reges et bellicosissime gentes armis ac virtute domite erant [...]. Sed vigebat sancta et inconcussa libertas, que tamen non multo post hanc coloniam deductam a sceleratissimis latronibus sublata est” (Laudatio 46).

25 For Bruni, the greatness achieved by Florence is due to its republican government which encourages the exchange of ideas among its citizens. This is the legacy of their republican origins. Despotism, incarnated in Giangaleazzo Visconti, was the traditional enemy of the Florentine spirit for it stifled liberty and was interpreted by Bruni as the cause of Rome’s downfall. See Historiarum: “declamationem autem romani imperii ab eo fere tempore po- nendam reor quo, amissa libertate, imperatoribus servire Roma incepit” (14) (“It appears to me that the decline of the Roman Empire began when Rome, having lost its liberty, began to serve emperors” (English translation mine)). In his Vita del Petrarca (1436) Bruni unequivocally declares that both the Roman and the descendant Florentine republics provide the necessary climate for the cultivation of the arts. See his Le vite di Dante e del Petrarca (55-57).

26 The Historiarum is replete with passages which equate the public will with liberty. The beginning of Book 2 provides a clear example: “[... ] Florentinus populus, iam pridem illorum qui rempublicam occuparant superbiam saevitiamque exosos, capessere gubernacula rerum ac tueri libertatem perrexit, civitatemque totam omnemque eius statum poulari arbitrio continere” (27).
27 The importance of the structure of Bruni’s work in relation to its meaning involves perhaps its best theoretical articulation in Lotman’s *The Structure*: “The plan is the architect’s idea, the structure of the building, its realization. The idea-content of a work is its structure. An idea in art is always a model, for it reconstructs an image of reality [...]. The dualism of form and content must be replaced by the concept of ‘idea’ as something realized in a corresponding structure and non-existent outside that structure” (12).

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