



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.

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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

in that it does not have a healthful site. Moreover, every other city is so dirty that the filth created during the night is seen in the early morning by the population and trampled under foot in the streets. Really can one think of anything worse than this? Even if there were a thousand palaces in such a city and inexhaustible wealth, even if it possessed an infinite population, still I would always condemn that city as a stinking place and not think highly of it. In similar fashion, someone who is deformed in body will always be unhappy even though he might possess a great many outstanding qualities. Hence, filthy cities that may in other respects be very good can never be considered to be beautiful. Further, who cannot see that a city that is not beautiful lacks its highest and noblest adornment?

Indeed, it seems to me that Florence is so clean and neat that no other city could be cleaner. Surely this city is unique and singular in all the world because you will find here nothing that is disgusting to the eye, offensive to the nose, or filthy under foot. The great diligence of its inhabitants ensures and provides that all filth is removed from the streets, so you see only what brings pleasure and joy to the senses. Therefore, in its splendor Florence probably surpasses all the cities of the world, and, moreover, in its elegance it is without doubt far ahead of all the cities that exist now and all that ever will. Indeed, such unparalleled cleanliness must be incredible to those who have never seen Florence, for we who live here are amazed daily and will never take for granted this fine quality of Florence. Now what is more marvelous in a populous city than never to have to worry about filth in the streets? Moreover, however big a rainstorm, it cannot prevent your walking through the city with dry feet since almost before it falls the rainwater is taken away by appropriately placed gutters. Hence, the cleanliness and dryness that you find only in the rooms of private palaces in other cities, you find in the squares and streets of Florence.

Perhaps another city is clean, but it lacks beautiful buildings. Another will have beautiful buildings, but it lacks a good climate. Another has a good climate, but it lacks a large population. Only Florence can claim to have all these qualities that are necessary for a prosperous city. And if you are interested in things from antiquity, you will find a great many remains from ancient times in both the public buildings and private homes. Or if you are looking

for contemporary architecture, there is surely nothing more splendid and magnificent than Florence's new buildings. Indeed, it would be difficult to say whether the river that flows through the city gives more utility or more pleasure. The two banks of the river are joined by four bridges magnificently constructed of squared blocks, and these are placed at such convenient intervals that the river never seems to interrupt the several main streets that cross Florence. Hence you can walk through Florence as easily as though it were not even divided by a river. Wherever you go you can see handsome squares and the decorated porticos of the homes of the noble families, and the streets are always thronged with crowds of men. Of the houses built near the river, some are actually on the river's edge so that they are bathed by the water, while others are set back from the river so that there is a street between these houses and the river bank. Here large crowds of people gather to do their business and enjoy themselves. Indeed, nothing is more pleasant than this area, for walking especially at midday in winter and at dusk in summer.

But why do I concern myself with just one part of the city? Must I (like some fisherman) just move up and down along the river? As if this were the splendid part of Florence, and the other quarters not are equally beautiful, or even more so. What in the whole world is so splendid and magnificent as the architecture of Florence? Indeed, I feel sorry for other cities when a comparison is made with Florence. In other places perhaps one or at the most two streets in the entire city are filled with important buildings, while the rest of the town is so devoid of architectural distinction that the townsmen are ashamed to have visitors see these parts. But in our city there is really no street, no quarter that does not possess spacious and ornate buildings. Almighty God, what wealth of buildings, what distinguished architecture there is in Florence! Indeed, how the great genius of the builders is reflected in these buildings, and what a pleasure there is for those who live in them. Among these many buildings in Florence nothing is more impressive in size and distinction of style than the churches and shrines, which are numerous and are (as is proper for places of worship) spread throughout the city. These have been marvelously revered by those who worship in their various parishes, and are treated

with exceeding piety. Indeed, in all of Florence nothing is more richly appointed, more ornate in style, more magnificent than these churches. As much attention has been given to decorating sacred buildings as to secular ones, so that not only the habitations of the living would be outstanding but the tombs of the dead as well.

But I return to the homes of the private citizens, which were designed, built, and decorated for luxury, size, respectability, and especially for magnificence. Indeed, what could be more pleasant and more beautiful to the sight than the entrance courts, halls, pavements, banquet halls, and other interior rooms of these homes? And how beautiful it is to see the well-ordered spaciousness of many of the homes and to view the curtains, arches, the panelled ceilings and richly decorated hung ceilings, and (as in many homes) the summer rooms separated from the winter ones. In these living quarters you find beautiful chambers decorated with fine furniture, gold, silver, and brocaded hangings and precious carpets. But am I not silly to go on enumerating these things? Even if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths, and a voice of iron, I could not possibly describe all the magnificence, wealth, decoration, delights, and elegance of these homes. If there is someone who would like to experience them, let them come here and walk through the city. But don't let him pass through like a temporary guest or a hurrying tourist. Rather, he should pause, poke around, and try to understand what he is seeing. Now, it is very important that in other cities a tourist should not stay too long. In those cities, what they have to show is all publicly displayed and is placed (as it were) on the outward bark. Whoever comes into these cities is seen as a stranger; but if these tourists leave the well-frequented places and try to examine the interiors as well as the exteriors of the buildings, there will be nothing to confirm their first impressions. Indeed, instead of houses they will find only small huts, and behind the exterior decorations only filth. But the beauty of Florence cannot be appreciated unless seen from the inside. Therefore, the sort of careful scrutiny that brings shame to other cities only serves to raise the esteem held for Florence, for behind the walls of the buildings of Florence there are no fewer ornaments and no less magnificence than there is outside; nor is any one street better decorated or more handsome than another, but every quarter shares in the beauty of the city. Hence, just as

blood is spread throughout the entire body, so fine architecture and decoration are diffused throughout the whole city.

To be sure, in the center of the city there is a tall and handsome palace of great beauty and remarkable workmanship. This fine building bespeaks by its very appearance the purposes for which it was constructed. Just as in a large fleet it is an easy matter to pick out the flagship that carries the admiral who is the leader and head over the other captains and their ships, so in Florence everyone immediately recognizes that this palace is so immense that it must house the men who are appointed to govern the state. Indeed, it was so magnificently conceived and looms so towerlingly that it dominates all the buildings nearby and its top stands out above those of the private houses.

Indeed, I do not think that I ought to call this building simply a "fortress" but, rather, "fortress of the fortress." The minute you step away from the city walls you are surrounded on all sides by many buildings, so that the latter ought to be called the "city" while this thing surrounded by walls would more correctly be called the "fortress." And as Homer writes of the snow that it falls thickly on the mountains and hills and covers the ridges of the mountains and finally the fertile fields,¹ in like fashion handsome buildings cover the entire region outside the city and all the mountains, the hills and the plains, so that they seem more to have fallen from heaven than to have been constructed by the hands of men. How magnificent, how well designed, how well decorated are these buildings! Indeed, these country houses are even more spacious than those in Florence, for they were designed and constructed on very spacious sites and greater care was taken to make them comfortable and pleasant. As a result, no one who lives in them lacks room, or colonades, or gardens, or stands of trees. What can I possibly say of the rooms and banquet halls, which are more magnificent and ornate than anything imaginable? And near these homes you find wooded groves, flowery meadows, pleasant river banks, sparkling fountains, and—best of all—the nature of the place itself fit for delight. Indeed, the very hills seem to laugh and to exude a certain joyfulness, of which visitors never seem to tire and which never grows stale. Thus, this whole region is rightly

1. An echo of Homer *Iliad* 12.278–86.

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.

able to take him by force (a feat that we read was performed by Polydamas⁴); and if someone would tell me, already dumbfounded by these deeds, that these reported feats were really seen, and, more than this, add that, if someone actually saw and inspected this boxer's powerful body, no one would be greatly amazed about these stories, and even more fantastic ones would be believed. Now, I say, if someone were to relate and swear these things to me, immediately this image of a very strong man would necessarily come to mind, showing his powerful body and graceful movements and the strength of his members. In like fashion, once this magnificent and splendid city is seen, it dispels all doubts about its greatness and converts former disbelievers to the truth. To do so the city must have a peerless magnificence and grandeur in its construction. How would such a complete change of mind, judgement, and opinion happen if it were not for the fact that Florence is, in truth, more majestic and magnificent than the tongues of narrators can describe or the minds of the listeners comprehend? Indeed, let everyone praise this city, let them always praise it. There has never been anyone who actually saw Florence who did not find it much more impressive than he had imagined when he had merely had it described to him. For this reason I do not fear that many will condemn me for being rash and reckless in attempting to describe the greatness of Florence. Seeing such a city, I have never been able to control my total admiration for Florence, and admiring it thus, not to sing its praises. Therefore, if I cannot accomplish this goal adequately, which no one ever has been able to do, my failings should be excused rather than censured. But let us return to our subject.

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

4. Perhaps known from the account of Polydamas, the great Thessalian athlete and victor in the olympic games of 408 B.C., in Valerius Maximus, *Memorabilia* 9.12.ext.10.

one ring is laid around the other, 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 of refuges for the peasants—with their towers reaching into the sky.

Now the number of farmers is so great that all the available land is under cultivation. What shall I say of the abundance and quality of the crops? What of the large harvests of the fields? Indeed, these things are known to everyone and obvious to the beholder, so that they do not require proof. But I shall say this much: It is not easy to find a region that grows such a great multitude of inhabitants! Now there are many cities that do not have as many inhabitants as the Florentine countryside; still, it gives this population together with the populous city not only the necessity of life but even makes them independent of outside help either for necessities or even for luxuries. For this reason Florence, both inside and outside the city walls, should be judged as the most fortunate city in the entire world.

Now if there is anyone who would say that Florence is deficient because it is not a seaport, he errs, in my opinion, and considers a vice what is really a virtue. Proximity to the sea is perhaps useful for buying and selling products, but otherwise it is too salty and offensive. Indeed, there are a great many inconveniences that beset seaports and, worse still, dangers that they must of necessity undergo. When Plato of Athens, without question the greatest of all philosophers, established in his book how a city might live well and happily and investigated diligently what must be present and what must be avoided, he believed it was very important for a city to be rather distant from the sea.⁵ Nor did that very wise man consider that a city could ever be fortunate if it were placed either on the seashore or anywhere near the lappings of the waves. He discussed at length the harm and discomforts to a happy way of

5. Plato *Leges* 704–7, the beginning of book 4.

life that proximity to the sea entails or necessitates. Indeed, if we should wish to discover how serious it is for a city to be situated in such a position, we need only consider the danger felt by seaports from Tana and Trebizond all the way to Cadiz. Not only do these cities have to worry about what their neighbors are doing, what policies neighboring peoples debate, what they are planning, and what their attitude is toward us and be aware of their internal conspiracies as well as frontal attacks; but, in addition, these seaports have to reckon with possible dangers at the hands of the Egyptians, the Syrians, the Colchians of Greece, the Scythians, the Moors, the men of Cadiz, and many other strange and barbarian peoples besides. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to know the policies of neighboring states; how much more difficult it is to know what distant peoples are planning. Land armies, which are usually very slow, sometimes arrive before anything is suspected. Therefore, what is to be expected from the speed of fleets? And even if seaborne attacks do not presently happen, we are not entitled to believe that they will never occur in the future since we know for certain that they occurred in the past. Moreover, it would be very foolish when you might live securely and quietly to throw yourself into the path of danger.

But if you who love the sea and its shore so much are not moved by this line of reasoning, perhaps you will be convinced by examples from antiquity. Read the Roman and Greek historians, and consider in those works how much ill fortune, how frequent the destruction of maritime cities, how many cities, even while they flourished with wealth, men, and money, have been captured by an enemy fleet before they could undertake their own defense. If the skeptics will reflect upon these examples, they will begin to understand that this city that is not a seaport lacks nothing but, rather, possesses (as it does in other matters) a gift of Divine Providence. Troy, "the most noble capital of all Asia" and (as the tragedian says) "an outstanding creation of the gods,"⁶ was twice captured and destroyed by a fleet: the first time by the sudden arrival of Hercules and Thelamones, the second by the trickery of Agamemnon and Ulysses. That flourishing city could not have been captured in any way except for the opportunities afforded by the

6. Seneca *Troades* 7–8.

nearness of the sea. A decade had been consumed in useless land-based assault when finally the attackers left in a fleet upon the waves—a very useful element for disguising plots. Then the Trojans believed that they were at last free of the lengthy siege, and, since no hostile force appeared before them, they suspected nothing, "but the Argive host with marshaled ships was moved from Tenedos, amid the friendly silence of the peaceful moon."⁷ And a little later: "Others sack and ravage burning Pergamum, are you only now coming from the tall ships?"⁸ These are the rewards of the sea! For such reasons is proximity to the sea deemed praiseworthy.

But why do I discuss such a distant example? We read that the very fine Italian city of Genoa was captured and leveled to the ground during the Second Punic War by a single sudden assault by Mago, the son of Hamilcar.⁹ Do I need to remind you of the destruction of the Phocaeans and the Syracusans, of Alexandria and Athens? Who does not know that at the time when the Roman people ruled over the entire earth the sea was infested for many years by predatory fleets, so that a number of cities belonging to the Romans suffered complete destruction? And this people who had conquered the entire world could not preserve its seaports from the incursions of hostile fleets. Add to this the polluted air, the changeable weather, the debilitating diseases that derive from the unhealthfulness of coastal regions, and the harshness of the entire area of the seashore. In view of these and so many other adverse conditions, is it not surprising that a prudent city avoids a harbor so that it would be as secure as a ship in port? It prefers to do without the waves of the sea in order to avoid undergoing waves of invasions?

What indeed would a city without a harbor lack? Although I fear how my views will be received, still I shall say what I feel. As in all other respects, in this matter Florence has benefited from sage advice and Divine Providence. Florence is distant enough from the coast to be entirely free from all the difficulties that proximity to the sea carries with it, yet near enough to seaports so that it is not at all deprived of the use of the sea. It is only in nearness to the

7. Vergil *Aeneid* 2.254–55.

8. Vergil *Aeneid* 2.374–75.

9. From Livy *Ab urbe condita* 28.46.

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, Corrunani, 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

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

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.

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.

3

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

of excellence because of their great deeds, so that it becomes very easy to recognize in them their Roman virtue and the greatness of spirit. On this account, while Florence has been honored by the accomplishments and the splendor of its descent, it is even more honored by its own excellence and achievements.

But I think that I have already said enough concerning the brilliance of the city's origins—indeed, this is clearly manifest of itself. Concerning the excellence of the state, that is, how Florence has prospered at home and abroad, we should now speak. But I shall be very brief, and this speech does not allow a complete history of Florence; rather, I shall limit myself to the highlights. Before I come to this topic, however, I think that it would be appropriate and advisable for me to explain something and alert the reader, lest anyone, having gotten a false impression, might condemn me for being rash or ignorant. The former derives from levity, the latter from stupidity, and both are to be avoided. Now I do not doubt that a good many foolish men will suspect me and think that I wish with this my panegyric to win the good graces of popular acclaim, that I want to curry the favor of the mob, and that I am trying to capture men's minds as much as possible. Thinking this way, they believe that I have overstepped the bounds of truth and that in embellishing my speech I have mixed the false with the true. I want to advise such men, or rather disabuse them, so they will no longer think this way and will banish all their suspicions of my motives. Although I certainly wish to be loved and accepted by everyone (and I openly confess that I wish and desire this), still I have never been so driven by this desire that I would pursue it by means of flattery and adulation. For my part, I have always thought that one ought to make himself esteemed by others through the practice of virtue; not of vice. And I have certainly never expected or asked for any favors as a result of this panegyric. Indeed, I would be very stupid if I thought that I would be able to purchase the favors of a large citizen-body with this literary trifle. But once I had seen this beautiful city, once I had come to admire its fine site, architecture, nobility, comforts, and great glory, I wanted more than I can tell to try and describe its great beauty and magnificence. This is why I am writing this panegyric—not to curry favor or win popular acclaim. Indeed, it is so far from being the case that I undertook this labor in order to gain favor so

that I would consider myself to be very lucky if I didn't generate more ill-will than good feeling against myself as a result of this speech. Rather, the great danger, as I see it, is that all those who have hated to see Florence flourishing will become my mortal enemies as a result of this panegyric. In fact, even now I continue to fear this. Thus my panegyric will make me an enemy of all those who are envious of or hostile to Florence and of all those men who have ever been troubled, beaten, or conquered by the Florentines or whose forebears were so effected—all these men will hate me. Accordingly, I am very much afraid that this work of mine will cause only hostility toward me. But I shall strike a bargain that no reasonable person can refuse. If I say in this speech anything that is false, self-seeking, or impudent, I shall gladly suffer the hostility and enmity of my listeners. But if what I say is true and if I express it with a becoming moderation, my listeners have no grounds to be angry with me. What bargain could be fairer than this? Who could be so perverse and evil that he could be angry with me if all I were trying to do was to provide the city of Florence with an appropriate and true panegyric?

Now, from all that I have just been saying, it ought to be clear that I have not undertaken the composition of this speech to win favor, nor can anyone justify becoming angry with me. But such are the various and natures of men that I do not doubt that there will be many who will hold that the line of reasoning I have just given is of little value. And, indeed, there will be others for whom truth itself is hateful and vexatious. There will be still others who, either because of the baseness of their natures or their ignorance of the subject matter, will hold nothing to be true except what accords with their self-interest. These men will accuse me of vanity and will bring charges that I have written nothing that is genuine. To these I say that they should not try to treat me cunningly nor hasten to accuse me rashly; rather, they should always realize that their views are reprehensible and should especially remember that I am not talking about the virtue or excellence of individual citizens but about the entire community. Indeed, if one or another citizen in Florence has lapsed into some small sin, this is no good reason to reprove and calumniate the entire city, especially since in Florence the deeds of evil citizens are not imitated but are criticized and corrected.

Indeed, no city has ever been so well governed and established that it was completely without evil men. But just as the good qualities of a few men cannot really free the foolish and perverse mob from its infamy, so the perversity and evil of a few ought not to deprive an entire nation of being praised for its virtuous deeds. Now there are both public and private crimes, and there is a great difference between the two. A private crime derives from the intentions of the individual wrong-doer; public ones are the result of the will of the entire city. In the latter case it's not so much a question of following the opinion of one person or another as it is of following what has been hallowed by law and tradition. Usually the entire city follows what the majority of the citizen-body would like. While in other cities the majority often overturns the better part, in Florence it has always happened that the majority view has been identical with the best citizens. For this reason these accuse me falsely and do not let them point out to me the evil deeds of a few individuals. This would be just as fallacious as reproving the law-abiding quality of the Romans because of the corruption of Verres or the bravery of the Athenians on account of the cowardice of Thersites.¹⁴

Now if my auditors want to comprehend how outstanding a city Florence is (and I have justifiably praised it at length), let them travel through the entire world and select any city they wish and compare it with Florence—not just in splendor and architecture (although in these things Florence is unrivaled in the whole world), nor just in nobility of its citizens (though all other cities cede to Florence first place in this category), but in virtues and accomplishments as well. If they will do these things they will begin to understand what a difference there is between Florence and other cities, for they will find no other city that can compare in any of these praiseworthy categories to our Florence.

I have said "any," and so I shall prove it forthwith. If they find some city that is judged in the common opinion of men to stand out in some kind of virtue, let them give proof of that same quality in

14. The corruption of Verres, the partisan of Sulla who exploited Sicily during his proconsulship there in 73–71 B.C., was known to Bruni probably from Cicero's famous *Orationes Verrinae*. It seems probable that Bruni is thinking of the Aeolian coward of the *Iliad*, Thersites, who was not an Athenian as Bruni suggests. The precise reference remains obscure.

which the city is said to excel. I do not think they will find any city that, even in its own specialty, is not inferior to Florence. In short, a city cannot be found that equals Florence in any given category—not in devoutness of belief, nor in economic might, nor in concern for fellow citizens, nor in the achievements of its people. Let them enter in this competition whatever city they like; Florence will take on all challengers. Let them search throughout the entire world for a city that is thought to possess great glory in one special kind of activity, and let there be a comparison of the most outstanding accomplishments in the field in which their city appears to excel; they will be unable to find anything—unless they simply want to deceive themselves—in which Florence is not far superior. Indeed, the excellence of this city is a real marvel, and as a city worthy of praise in every kind of activity, it is really without equal.

Now I'm not going to discuss practical wisdom, a quality that everyone has always conceded to Florence in any case and that we have always seen practiced here with great capacity. Was there ever such beneficence as this city has displayed and displays now? For this quality seems intended to help as many as possible, and all have heard of the city's liberality, especially those who have needed it most. Because of Florence's reputation for generosity, all those who were exiled from their homeland and uprooted by seditious plots, or dispossessed on account of the envy of their fellow citizens, have always come to Florence as to a safe haven and unique sort of refuge. Hence there is no one in the whole of Italy who does not consider himself to possess dual citizenship, the one of the city to which he naturally belongs, the other of the city of Florence. As a result Florence has indeed become the common homeland and quite secure asylum for all of Italy. Here everyone, when he has need, comes and is received by the Florentines with complete goodwill and supreme generosity. Indeed, the zeal for generosity and concern for others are so great in this state that these qualities seem to cry out in a loud voice and are openly acknowledged by everyone. Hence, no one will ever think that he really lacks a homeland so long as the city of Florence continues to exist. The acts of generosity performed actually are even greater than this policy might seem to require, for exiles are not only received with a welcome hand if they are not completely unworthy but also are

often helped with gifts in kind and in money. Maintained by such gifts, the exiles can remain in Florence with complete dignity or, if they prefer, they can return to their own homeland and try and recover their property there. Are these not the facts? Have even the malcontents of Italy ever dared to deny it? No, this policy has been witnessed by an almost infinite number of people who, when they had been struck with poverty at home or had been exiled from their own cities, were helped from the public treasury and were restored to their homeland by the goodwill of the city of Florence.

There is, further, the example of many cities that, when they were oppressed by the conspiracies of neighboring states or the violence of domestic tyrants, were sustained by Florentine advice, aid, and money and thus brought through a difficult crisis. I shall omit the embassies sent wherever trouble has broken out to reconcile opposing viewpoints, for indeed this city has always been very prompt to use its authority in reconciliation. Can a city that has undertaken so much for the benefit of neighboring states not be called beneficent? Can it really be praised enough for its great virtue and many achievements? Florence has never tolerated injuries to other cities, nor has it ever allowed itself to be an idle onlooker while other states were in trouble. First Florence always tries with all its might and moral authority to settle disputes through negotiations and, if it can, to reconcile differences to persuade the parties to make peace. But if this cannot be accomplished, Florence always aids the weaker party, which has been threatened or harmed by the more powerful. Thus, from the very beginning Florence has always extended its protection to the weaker states, as though it considered its duty to ensure that no people in Italy would ever suffer destruction. Therefore, Florence has never in its history been led by a desire for leisure or has it, because of fear, allowed any other state to suffer great harm. Nor did it think that it had the right to remain at ease and at peace while any other city or ally or friendly state or neutral nation was in danger. Rather, Florence has always immediately stirred itself, taken up the cause of other cities, and shielded them from attack. Thus it has protected those states that seemed to be lost and aided them with troops, money, and equipment.

Who, therefore, could ever praise Florence enough for its beneficence and liberality? What city in the entire world can

surpass Florence in this sort of achievement? Has not Florence expended vast sums and undertaken incredible risks for the defense of other states? Has it not protected many states when they were in danger? Since Florence has defended those states in time of peril, they have naturally begun to acknowledge it as their patron. And since Florence has become such a patron, who will deny that it surpasses other cities in dignity, might, economic power, and authority?

To this beneficence and liberality there has been added an admirable faithfulness to allies that this city has always preserved inviolate with complete constancy. It was with a commitment to this principle in mind that Florence always carefully considered whether it could really provide complete protection before it entered into any league. As a result, when Florence agreed to something it never went back on its promise. Therefore, when Florence has thought something out from the beginning and come to believe that its cause is just, no manner of expediency has ever been able to influence Florence to break any pact, treaty, league, oath, or promise that it has made. For nothing can be judged more proper to the dignity of a state than a reputation for observing all its commitments. Conversely, nothing is worse than betraying promises. The latter is the action of evil criminals who are the greatest enemies of the states. They are the sort who (according to Cicero) say: "I have sworn with my tongue, but in my mind I have sworn no oath."¹⁵ That is a deceit that a just city can never tolerate. Therefore, a good city ought always to make its commitments after due consideration. And once it has committed itself to something, it should never consider permitting anything to be changed except for those things that are not in its power.

Moreover, since faithfulness and integrity have been so highly valued in this city, it has scrupulously observed agreements even with its enemies, and, as a result, Florence has never been accused of defaulting on its promises. On account of this it has happened that not even the enemies of Florence have doubted that the city would live up to its agreements, and among them the name of Florence has always carried great authority. This is the obvious reason for the fact that several men, though they had previously

15. Cicero *De officiis* 3.29.108.

been Florence's worst enemies, gladly committed their sons and wealth to the guardianship of this people. They believed in this city's good faith and humanity; they saw that the second quality prompted the Florentines to pardon former injuries and furnish all due services, while the first ensured that the city would scrupulously observe what it had promised. Nor were they disappointed in their expectation. Indeed, it happened that the Florentines administered the property with great diligence and restored it to those to whom it belonged, justifying those who had believed in the good faith of this people. Indeed, their example of committing property to Florence's care was soon followed by others, for this city has always taken pains to give each one his due and in all things to put honor before expediency in all its dealings. Indeed, it has been the case that Florence considers nothing useful that is not at the same time honorable.

But of these many fine qualities with which I find this city has been endowed, I consider none greater or more outstanding or more consistent with Roman virtue and character than a certain loftiness of spirit and contempt for danger. Whose virtue could this be except the Romans? The Romans waged wars at every period in their history, and they engaged in enormous struggles and great military campaigns and—what is very rare and more incredible still—they never, even in times of greatest danger and difficulty, wavered from their purpose or permitted the debasement of their lofty principles. The emperor¹⁶ was angry at the gates, threatening the ruin and destruction of Florence, and there followed him a group of Florence's enemies, resolute and ready to kill. This enemy was encamped within a mile of Florence, and the city resounded throughout with the sound of steel and the shouts of enemy troops. Nor even Hannibal approached the Porta Collina in Rome with more hostile intentions than did this monster plan his assault before the walls of Florence. What was worse, that part of the city most exposed to the enemy was not, at that time, well

16. A reference to the Emperor Henry VII, who pitched camp before the gate of Florence during his descent into Italy in 1312. See the modern account in F. Schevill, *History of Florence from the Founding of the City through the Renaissance* (New York, 1936), pp. 189–191. Cf. Bruni's later account in his *Historiarum Florentini populi libri XII*, ed. E. Santini, *RIS*, n.e. 19, 3 (Città di Castello, 1914):107–11.

fortified. Consequently, it was believed that no Florentine there dared to use his arms or offer resistance. Indeed, this valorous city only showed contempt for the emperor's threats and menaces. While the enemy revealed for several days outside the walls, those inside Florence felt no fear; rather, everyone went about his business as though no danger threatened or no enemy army was nearby. Every workshop, store, and warehouse was open; there was no slackening of industry, certainly none of government. When the emperor discovered this he marveled at the high morale and greatness of the city, and he gave up the siege.

This city has been powerful not only in resisting attacks; it has been even more formidable in applying force in response to previous attacks. Now although Florence has never tried to harm anyone except when it was attacked first, yet when it has been subjected to an attack the city has shown itself to be a most valorous fighter in maintaining its dignity. Every time Florence has taken the offensive, the city has been transformed by its amazing desire for praise and glory. Therefore, Florence has always willingly undertaken great and difficult causes. It has never shunned any cause because of the greatness of the danger or the difficulty of the task. I can call to mind some very well-fortified towns that Florence has captured and innumerable trophies of neighboring cities that the Florentines have seized. There also have been some outstanding feats of military skill performed by Florentine people fighting outside their country. But this is not the place to describe many different wars, nor would it be possible to relate so many great feats. That would require a book of its own, and indeed a big one, which I hope I shall undertake some time in the future¹⁷ and commit to paper, and therefore to memory, how single feats were accomplished by the Florentine people. At present I shall content myself with one or two examples on the basis of which one can readily understand how great has been the virtue of Florence in other events.

Volterra is an ancient and noble town in Tuscany, but because it is situated on a high mountain top, even men who carry no burdens scarcely ever go there. The Florentines undertook a mili-

17. A reference to the *Historiae Florentini populi*, which Bruni later wrote while chancellor of Florence.

tary campaign against this town,¹⁸ for virtue accustomed to overcoming the greatest difficulties did not fear the harshness of the terrain nor the disadvantages of the combat. Therefore, when the Florentine forces sent there began to ascend the mountain, they were met by the defenders rushing down from their higher position, and the two armies were soon locked in mortal combat. The number of troops was about equal, but the Florentines possessed an advantage in fighting ability, while the nature of the terrain greatly favored the Volterrans. They used their superior position not simply to stop the Florentine advance with spears and swords; they also rolled large stones down the slopes. The Florentines, with a great effort of their own, struggled up the slope, and neither the weapons nor the stones nor the enemy troops nor the difficulty of the terrain could stop their assault. So, having fought their way step-by-step to the top of the mountain in the face of the enemy, the Florentines drove the Volterrans behind their walls. With the first assault the Florentines entered the town, although it was defended with very strong fortifications. The Florentine army did all this without any outside help; fighting only with its own troops, Florence courageously covered itself with glory and honor.

This accomplishment ought to seem remarkable to others and especially those who have actually seen Volterra are especially amazed by it, for it is obvious that no town in all of Italy is better fortified. Moreover, the town was being defended by brave men who were fighting valiantly for hearth and home. Yet they were overcome by an even greater valor. Who, therefore, cannot but admire those who captured this well-fortified city in a single day? Who would not praise to the heavens the valor of those who captured Volterra? Such are the deeds accomplished by this city! Such are its virtues and its bravery! With this same high morale, Florence has often conquered the Siense, laid low the Pisans, and vanquished powerful enemies and tyrants.

Still, what is really remarkable is that Florence has undertaken military campaigns and endured great hardship more often for the benefit of others than for its own profit. It especially ought to redound to its credit and honor that Florence has suffered many dangers for the freedom and security of other states and that it has

18. The campaign against Volterra in 1254 is mentioned in Schevill, p. 122, and in Bruni, *Historiae*, p. 30.

safeguarded the welfare of many others out of its own resources. The Pisans, a nation rarely at peace with Florence, began a war against the people of Lucca who were friends and allies of the Florentines.¹⁹ Finally, it happened that the long-awaited battle was joined between the two peoples, and in this conflict the troops of Lucca were defeated and many of them captured. The Florentines were at that moment making camp in the countryside near Pistoia, and when they heard what had happened to their friends they did not lose courage, nor did they fear the Pisans, who were fired up by their recent victory. Rather, the Florentines immediately broke camp and hurried to catch the victors, so they were able to intercept the Pisan forces before they had reached safety inside the walls of their city. The Florentines immediately joined battle with the Pisans and changed the fortunes of war so that the Lucchese, who had formerly been prisoners, now captured a great number of the Pisans who survived the slaughter and led them in chains back to the city of Lucca. In this way the military prowess of the Florentines saved the Lucchese, overturned the victory of the Pisans, and won for themselves laud and honor.

But what ought to be praised most in this outstanding Florentine triumph? Their military skill, which enabled them to win; or their high morale, which prompted them to pursue the victorious Pisans; or their generous spirit, which led them to undertake so great a battle on behalf of their friends? I think that the three ought to be viewed as one and the same deed that is to be praised. 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.

It has been not simply to this or that city that Florence has shown its beneficence but to the whole of Italy. Indeed, it would be judged properly an act of small import if Florence has undertaken these endeavors only for its own safety, but it is a glorious matter if a great many states have known and enjoyed the benefits of the Florentines' efforts. Indeed, it is a fact that Florence has always been motivated by a desire to protect the safety of neighbor-

19. An allusion to Florence's defeat of Pisa in 1252 when under the *Primo Popolo* the Florentines extended their power in Tuscany. See Schevill, *History of Florence*, pp. 120-21, Bruni, *Historiae*, p. 28, and Giovanni Villani, *Cronica*, ed. by F. Dragomanni, 4 vols. (Florence, 1844-45), 1:274.

ing cities that found themselves at war. Whenever such a state was threatened by some neighboring tyrant or the greedy desires of a nearby republic. Florence always opposed the aggressor, so it has always been clear to everyone that Florence treated these states as its own homeland and fought for the liberty of all Italy. Nor indeed would Florence, so motivated, have accomplished its goal except that many times the pious and just will of God favored the course of action taken by this city. I do not want to go back to old examples but, rather, shall relate what our own age has just seen. I think that it is obvious in any case that the whole of Italy has been liberated from the yoke of servitude by Florence on more than one occasion. But let us omit these other instances and consider only what was done very recently.

Can anyone so feeble of intellect or so devoid of truth be found who would deny that all Italy would have fallen under the power of the Duke of Lombardy had not this one city resisted his power with its troops and sound strategy?²⁰ Who in all Italy then had either power or resources comparable to that enemy? Who would have endured to the end the attacks of an enemy whose very name brought terror to every mortal? Indeed, his reputation struck terror not only in the Italians but in peoples north of the Alps as well! He was well provided with resources, money, and men, but, most of all, he possessed cunning and political wisdom. And he had great and formidable power. All of Lombardy, and nearly all of the cities on the peninsula between the Alps and Tuscany and the Romagna, were under his rule and obeyed his orders. In Tuscany, he held Pisa, Siena, Perugia, and Assisi in his grip, and eventually he even occupied Bologna.²¹ Besides many cities and many powerful noble houses followed his name and fortune, either out of fear or motivated by hope for booty or perhaps led on by his trickery. His followers did not lack in financial rewards, gifts, and counsel. Indeed, the Duke could have been a happy—a very happy—man if he had but put his resources, his energy, and his genius to good purposes. No man ever possessed a shrewder or cleverer mind. He

20. Another reference to the recent war against Giangaleazzo Visconti, which ended in 1402.

21. The chronology of these events is as follows: Giangaleazzo occupied Pisa early in 1399, Siena during the summer of the same year, Perugia early in 1400, Assisi in May 1400, and Bologna in June 1402. See H. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni* (Chicago, 1968), pp. 116, n. 257.

was present everywhere, he left nothing unnoticed, nothing untried. And he acquired friends: some with money, others with expensive gifts, and still others with the promise or semblance of his friendship. Sowing seeds of discord, he set the nations of Italy at one another's throat, and when they had worn themselves down, he stepped in and occupied them with his overwhelming power. So eventually his cunning ways prospered everywhere. Hence many governments, seeing these great powers, became very frightened and began to temporize. But the stout Florentine heart could never know fear, nor could it ever consider surrendering any part of its honor. Florence knew that it was a Roman tradition to defend the liberty of Italy against its enemies, precisely as its ancestors had dared to fight against the Cimbri, the Teutons, and the Gauls. These ancestors had not feared the ferocity of Pyrrhus or the deceits of Hannibal, nor had they ever avoided any undertaking that would preserve their dignity or their grandeur. Rather, they underwent great hardship in order to gain great glory. So the Florentines were ready to do anything if they felt it would vouchsafe for them the good reputation that had been handed down to them by their ancestors. It was with these things in mind that the Florentine people set out for war in great and high spirits. So this people thought that it would live with great glory or perish fighting valiantly for its principles. Moreover, the Florentines believed that the position inherited from their ancestors had to be protected, so that they could never place concern for their wealth before their own self-esteem. Indeed, they were prepared to lose money and life itself to maintain their freedom, considering their situation both realistically and courageously. Now wealth and money and such things are the rewards of the victors. But those who think that in war they should conserve their wealth, since they think they make themselves more secure with this wealth, are in fact serving the interests of the enemy more than their own. With such a high morale was this city endowed, with such a measure of military skill did it meet its powerful and resourceful enemy in combat, that Florence compelled him who shortly before had menaced all Italy and believed that no state could resist him to wish for peace and to quake behind the walls of Pavia. In the end he not only abandoned the cities of Tuscany and the Romagna, but he even lost a large portion of northern Italy.

O incredible magnificence and excellence of Florence! O Roman people and race of Romulus! Who would not now esteem the name of Florence with great honor on account of the excellence of its spirit and the vast dimensions of its deeds? What greater thing, what more outstanding feat could this city accomplish, or in what way could it better prove that the virtue of its forebears was still alive than by liberating the whole of Italy, by its own efforts and resources, from the threat of servitude? As a result of this feat, Florence daily receives congratulations, praises, and thanks from all nations. But all these accomplishments have been credited by Florence to the will of Almighty God. Always possessing a certain modesty, Florence has preferred to credit its deeds to divine intervention rather than claim them on account of its own virtue. Consequently, Florence has never become inflated in its successes, nor have its victories been accompanied by retribution against those states that Florence could, by right, have hated. Rather, it has always maintained complete humanity toward those whom it has conquered, so that those who knew Florence's courage in time of war experienced its mercy in time of victory. Of the many great virtues of this city this one stands out: to maintain its dignity at all times. Florence has shown no greater concern than making sure that it maintained its dignity in the process of accomplishing great feats. Therefore, Florence did not exult immoderately at its successes, nor did it collapse in times of adversity. It showed modesty in success, constancy in adversity, and justice and prudence in all of its actions. Hence, its great name had acquired even greater glory among men.

4

As Florence is admirable in foreign affairs, so it has outstanding civil institutions and laws. Nowhere else do you find such internal order, such neatness, and such harmonious cooperation. 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 minds of men. There is nothing here that is ill proportioned, nothing improper, nothing incongruous, nothing vague; everything occupies its proper place, which is not only clearly defined but also in right relation to all the other elements. Here are outstanding officials, outstanding magistrates, an outstanding judiciary, and outstanding social classes. These parts are so distinguished so as to serve the supreme power of Florence, just as the Roman tribunes used to serve the emperor.

Now, first of all, great care is taken so that justice is held most sacred in the city, for without justice there can be no city, nor would Florence even be worthy to be called a city. Next there is provision for freedom, without which this great people would not even consider that life was worth living. These two principles are joined (almost as a stamp or goal) to all the institutions and statutes that the Florentine government has created.

Indeed, the magistracies were created to carry out justice; they have been empowered to punish criminals and especially to ensure that there is no one in Florence who stands above the law. 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 the custodianship of the citizens, a tyrannical post has been given to them. 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. This method of governing has been devised so that the Florentine state may be well governed, since a majority will correct any errors in judgment, and the short terms of office will curb any possible insolence. Moreover, the city is divided into four quarters so that each section can never lack its own representative, and from each quarter two men are elected. And these men are not chosen by chance, but they have the approval of the citizens for a long time and are judged worthy of such a great honor. Now, in addition to these eight citizens, the task of governing the state is entrusted to one man, outstanding in

virtue and authority and chosen in rotation from these same quarters. He is the chief of the priorate and bears the standard that is the symbol of the rule of justice over unruly men. The nine men, to whom the government of Florence is entrusted, can live nowhere except in the Palazzo Vecchio, so that they may be in a better position to govern the city. They are not to appear in public without their sergeants, for their dignity demands that they be treated with respect. Indeed, because it sometimes happens that there is a need for a larger council, the Twelve Good Men are added to discuss public matters together with the nine priors. Besides, to these are joined the standard-bearers of the Companies whom the whole population supports and follows since it is necessary to protect liberty with arms. These standard-bearers are also part of the council, and, like the higher magistrates, they are elected by quarter. They hold office for a term of four months.

These three colleges do not have power over all matters to be decided. A great many decisions, once they have been approved by these magistracies, are referred to the Council of the People and Council of the Commune for final action. Florence thinks that what concerns many ought to be decided by the action of the whole citizen-body acting according to the law and legal procedure. In this way liberty flourishes and justice is preserved in this most holy city. In this system nothing can be resolved by the caprice of any single man acting in opposition to the judgment of so many men.

These men oversee the government, uphold justice, repeal laws, and ensure equity. The power to dispense justice according to the legal procedure, and especially the power of life and limb, is given to minor magistrates who are not citizens but foreigners brought to Florence from distant cities and states. This custom is followed not because Florentines don't know how to act as judges (indeed they are employed daily in this capacity in many foreign cities) but, rather, to ensure that, from the judicial system, enmity and feuding will not arise among the citizens. For it often happens that, led on by their desire to be lenient, judges mete out some punishment other than what the statutes allow. Such judges, although they may, strictly speaking, have been judging correctly, cause a great deal of hostility toward their office. More than this, it seems objectionable for one citizen to stand in judgment over the life of another in a free city such as Florence, for whatever a native judge does, even

if he is very just, will be viewed by the other citizens as abominable and horrible. Because of this our judges are imported from distant cities, and for them the procedures are carefully prescribed so that they cannot deviate from them in any way. They enter their office with an oath that, like stewards, they will render account of their administration of justice to the people when they have finished their term of office. Thus, in every particular, the people enjoy freedom and are in control.

Moreover, in order to make it very easy for each person in this vast city to receive his due, that is, so that while the magistracies are busy with some individuals will not lack justice and law, the authority to judge and hand down sentences concerning disputes among their own members has been given to certain groups. In this fashion, the heads of the guilds of merchants and bankers and other guilds have the right to hand down sentences on their members. There are still other magistracies that have been established to ensure the public good and the piety of the people: among these are numbered the officials of the gabelles, the heads of the Monte, and the guardians of wards' property. These are among the more useful offices because they attend to promoting public and private welfare and health and piety in this great city.

But of all the magistracies, and there are many in this city, none is more illustrious, nor founded on loftier principles, than that called the heads of the Parte Guelfa. Perhaps it would not be pointless to say something about the origins of this organization. Hence, a short digression will not be completely useless, I hope, and perhaps worthwhile.

After the defeat of the Florentines in pitched battle at Montaperti, it seemed certain that the city could not be defended on account of this great blow to the state.²² Therefore, all citizens of high and noble spirits, so they would not be ruled over in the city by those who had obviously been traitors to Florence, left their homes and hearths, and went to Lucca with their wives and children. In doing this they followed the outstanding and laudable example of the Athenians, who abandoned their own city during the Second Persian War in order to be able to live there someday

22. The defeat of the Florentine Guelfs by the Tuscan Ghibellines at the battle of Montaperti in 1260 is discussed in Schevill, pp. 127-30, and the historical situation is described at length by Bruni in his *Historiae*, pp. 34-40.

in peace and freedom.²³ Therefore, with this in mind, these outstanding citizens, who survived that great battle, left Florence, thinking that by doing this they would have a better chance for revenge than if they remained starving and waiting their fate shut up behind the city walls. So they went to Lucca, and there they joined up with other Florentines who had been scattered in the course of the battle. Very soon they brought together arms, horses, and military equipment, so that everyone marvelled at their energy and resolve. They performed many feats of bravery throughout Italy. The exiles often fought to aid friends and to defeat men of opposing political allegiance by their courage and military skill. Moreover, from every endeavor they always emerged victorious, so that it finally seemed that the time was ripe for what they wanted most: to remove utterly the stain and blot on their homeland. Hence they set out against King Manfred of Sicily, who was leader over different factions in Italy and who had contributed knights to the enemy army at the battle of Montaperti. The Florentine exiles were under the leadership of a great and skillful general whom the Pope had brought from France to curb the insolence of this same Manfred.²⁴ After a while the army came to Apulia—and I would really like to describe in detail the great courage that the Florentines displayed on that occasion, but this is not the place for a lengthy narrative. To put it very briefly, the Florentines fought so well that even their most bitter enemy felt compelled to praise their skill and bravery. Thus, after they won at Tagliacozzo in Apulia and destroyed their enemy, honored and laden down with spoils and booty, the Florentine army returned to Tuscany. Immediately they expelled from Florence those who a little while before had governed the city so evilly, and they wreaked a splendid vengeance on their enemies in nearby cities. At this point the Florentines established a college composed of the chief men who had been the leaders of the Parte Guelfa and had taken a leading role in this noble and just campaign.

23. An allusion to the evacuation of Athens in 480 B.C. under the direction of Themistocles.

24. An allusion to Charles of Anjou, whom Pope Urban IV brought to fight against the Hohenstaufens in southern Italy in 1265. See Schevill, *History of Florence*, pp. 135–40.

From its very foundation, this magistracy has always had great authority in Florence. For almost everything has been placed under its care and vigilance so that Florence would never be turned away from the sound policies established by its forebears, nor would it ever come under the control of men of different political sentiments. What the censors were to Rome, the areopagites to Athens, the ephors to Sparta, these heads of the Parte Guelfa are to the city of Florence. This is to say that these are the chief men who oversee the constitution and who are elected from among those citizens who love the Florentine state.

Therefore, under these magistracies this city has been governed with such diligence and competence that one could not find better discipline even in a household ruled by a solicitous father. As a result, no one here has ever suffered any harm, and no one has ever had to alienate any property except when he wanted to. The judges, the magistrates are always on duty; the courts, even the highest tribunal is open. All classes of men can be brought to trial; laws are made prudently for the common good, and they are fashioned to help the citizens. There is no place on earth where there is greater justice open equally to everyone. Nowhere else does freedom grow so vigorously, and nowhere else are rich and poor alike treated with such equality. In this one also can discern Florence's great wisdom, perhaps greater than that of other cities. Now when very powerful men, relying on their wealth and position, appear to be offending or harming the weak, the government steps in and exacts heavy fines and penalties from the rich. It is consonant with reason that as the status of men is different, so their penalties ought to be different. The city has judged it consistent with its ideals of justice and prudence that those who have the most need should also be helped the most. Therefore, the different classes are treated according to a certain sense of equity; the upper class is protected by its wealth, the lower class by the state, and fear of punishment defends both. From this arises the saying that has been directed very often against the more powerful citizens when they have threatened the lower classes; in such a case the members of the lower class say: "I also am a Florentine citizen." With this saying the poor mean to point out and to warn clearly that no one should malign them simply because they are

weak, nor should anyone threaten them with harm simply because someone is powerful. Rather, everyone is of equal rank since the Florentine state itself has promised to protect the less powerful.

Florence not only protects its own citizens in this way, but it extends the same protection to foreigners. No one here, citizen or foreigner, is allowed to suffer harm, and Florence strives to ensure that each is given his due. Moreover, the justice and spirit of equity in Florence promote toleration and humanity among the citizens since no one can be prideful or disparage others while all men experience the same benign rule. But who can be skillful enough to describe fully, in the short time remaining, the honorableness of life and high moral standards in this city? Certainly there are many men of great genius in this city, and whenever they agree to do something they easily achieve more than other men. Whether they follow the profession of arms or devote themselves to the task of governing the state, to study and scientific knowledge, or to business—in every profession and in every endeavor they undertake they excel far beyond all other mortals. No other people surpass them in any respect. Here they remain patient in their labor, ready in time of danger, eager for glory, brilliant in giving advice, industrious, generous, magnificent, pleasant, affable, and, above all, civil.

Now what shall I say of the persuasiveness of their speech and the elegance of their discourse? Indeed, in this category the Florentines are the unquestioned leaders. All of Italy believes that this city alone possesses the clearest and purist speech. All who wish to speak well and correctly follow the example of the Florentine manner of speech, for this city possesses men who are so expert in their use of the common vernacular language that all others seem like children compared to them. The study of literature—and I don't mean simply mercantile and vile writings but that which is especially worthy of free men—which always flourishes among every great people, grows in this city in full vigor.

Therefore, what ornament does this city lack? What category of endeavor is not fully worthy of praises and grandeur? What about the quality of the forebears? Why are they not the descendants of the Roman people? What about glory? Florence has done and daily continues to do great deeds of honor and virtue both at home and abroad. What about the splendor of the

architecture, the buildings, the cleanliness, the wealth, the great population, the healthfulness and pleasantness of the site? What more can a city desire? Nothing at all. What, therefore, should we say now? What remains to be done? Nothing other than to venerate God on account of His great beneficence and to offer our prayers to God. Therefore, our Almighty and Everlasting God, in whose churches and at whose altars your Florentines worship most devoutly; and you, Most Holy Mother, to whom this city has erected a great temple of fine and glimmering marble, where you are at once mother and purist virgin tending your most sweet son; and you, John the Baptist, whom this city has adopted as its patron saint—all of you, defend this most beautiful and distinguished city from every adversity and from every evil.