

FLORENCE 1438: THE ENCOMIUM
OF THE *FLORENTINA LIBERTAS* SENT BY POGGIO
BRACCIOLINI TO DUKE FILIPPO MARIA VISCONTI

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ABSTRACT: This article presents the critical editions of two texts: a letter by the Duke of Milan Filippo Maria Visconti (but written on his behalf by Pier Candido Decembrio) sent to Poggio Bracciolini on 28 July 1438; and the response written by Poggio on 15 September. Poggio's letter contains a brief treatise in praise of Florence and of the *Florentina libertas*. The documents illuminate a crucial episode in the history of Italian Humanism. The article opens with the discussion of these two letters in their wider historical and intellectual context: on the one hand, the characteristically Florentine «civic humanism» which constitutes the background of Poggio's positions; on the other, the political and cultural competition between Florence and Milan during the first half of the 15th century.

KEYWORDS: Poggio Bracciolini, letters, Pier Candido Decembrio, Encomium of Florence, civic humanism

1. *Poggio and His Letter of 15 September 1438*

Poggio Bracciolini's life and literary activity extended for nearly 80 years after his birth in 1380¹. One can trace his intellectual journey, his travels, his friendships and enmities through the many letters he wrote. Many is not really saying enough – yet, we still have more than 600 of his letters, all written in Latin. From their first appearance, Poggio's letters were widely diffused through Italy, and in fact, they became a model of humanist writing throughout all of Europe.

What we propose here is a small addition to an anthology of Poggio's letters made by Phyllis Goodhart Gordan, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, published in 1974². This letter, dated 15 September 1438, is quite different in content from those exchanged by Poggio and Niccolò Niccoli. As Gordan's title, *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, suggests, the letters between these two treated a shared eagerness for books, while the letter of September 1438 represented, above all, a manifestation of civic pride.

It is important to point out that Poggio was not born in Florence, but in Terranuova, a small town between Florence and Arezzo, which has since been renamed Terranuova Bracciolini in honor of our humanist. His identification as a Florentine citizen was acquired but deeply felt, and

¹ For Poggio's intellectual biography see Walser, 1914: 184–85; Folts, 1976: 188–93, 245–46. The last documentary discoveries are those of Figliuolo, 2016: 386–88.

² For a more recent study of Poggio's books, see also Fiesoli, 2013.

began when his father took him to study and live in Florence as a boy, since he already showed great promise as a scholar and scribe.

The central theme of the 1438 letter is supreme praise for *Florentina libertas*, Florentine liberty. Poggio's praise is directed above all at the city-state's political system. A system which today we might call moderately democratic, a system completely unlike that of the principalities which were the norm in most areas of the Italian peninsula, and notably in the Duchy of Milan, Florence's most powerful rival.

2. *Towards a Critical Edition of the Letter Dated 15 September 1438*

The history of Poggio's correspondence is a complicated business. Starting in 1432, Poggio himself had taken care to gather together many of his letters into three large collections.

Our particular focus, Poggio's letter of 15 September 1438, is found in the beginning of the eighth book of the second collection, completed in late 1438. Many of his letters, including this one, were also widely disseminated beyond the collections of Poggio's letters and can be found in various miscellaneous collections.

Important editions of Poggio's letters were also produced in the age of printing. The most notable early edition was Heinrich Bebel's compilation of his work, printed in 1538 in Basel. In the mid-nineteenth century, Tommaso Tonelli compiled a comprehensive collection of the letters, and this edition was reprinted anastatically in 1964 by the noted scholar Riccardo Fubini. For her 1974 volume *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, Phyllis Goodhart Gordan selected an important section of letters – the exchange between Poggio and his friend and mentor Niccolò Niccoli which she edited, annotated thoroughly, and translated into English. Since the publication of *Two Renaissance Book Hunters*, there has been a more definitive collection made of Poggio's letters by Helene Harth, published in three volumes between 1984 and 1987. Today, every discussion regarding one of Poggio's letters must consider Harth's edition.

For this critical edition of the letter of 15 September 1438, I went beyond Harth's edition and examined all eighteen of the surviving manuscripts of the letter. As a result of this work I can present a new critical edition of the original Latin text. The English translation is by Ann Mullaney and is intended to provide an addition to the anthology of Phyllis Goodhart Gordan.

Right away, a question emerges: Does this new Zaggia-Mullaney critical edition offer any meaningful changes from the earlier Harth edition? We can respond immediately: yes, the novelties (or rather the corrections) from the earlier Harth edition are numerous, and in some instances, major. We see the first example at the beginning of Poggio's letter.

In Harth's edition, Poggio's letter is addressed to «Duke Filippo Maria Visconti, called Angelo». But in reality, all the manuscripts say that he is called Anglo, not Angelo. Granted Anglo is not a common name, and one's first impression might be that Anglo is simply a scribe's mistake. In fact, Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan was named Anglo because his family line was regarded as having sprung from Anglus, a mythical king who in turn was a descendent of Ascanius, the son of Aeneas, the Trojan founder of Rome. These sorts of genealogies, which seem whimsical to us, were taken very seriously at that time. The family tree of the Visconti family is found in the *Genealogia Vicecomitum*, an official text transcribed in two manuscripts of the Visconti library (Mulas, *et al.* 2015–2016)³.

In the letter from Visconti to Poggio, we see another error in the salutation. According to the version offered by Harth, Visconti's letter is addressed «To a very erudite man, our very learned friend Poggio». But the manuscripts do not show this clumsy repetition of erudite and learned, «eruditissimo, doctissimo». Rather, the phrase as it appears in all the manuscripts is not «amico nostro doctissimo» but «amico nostro dilectissimo», that is, our dearest friend. Surely most of us have very dear friends who are not very erudite.

It is better to suspend this list of small corrections, because it is likely to be long and tedious. However, we can say, in general, that the corrections from the earlier Harth edition number about forty. Certainly, these are simply small details. But some say that God is in the details, or the devil is in the details; surely, at any rate, philology is in the details. In short, the new critical edition we present today seems, on the whole, a step forward in the philological research on Poggio's works.

3. *Historical Background: Civic Humanism in Florence against Milan*

Before turning to look more closely at the content of Poggio's letter to Visconti, let us examine a bit of the historical background.

During the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, a fierce struggle for supremacy was taking place between the states of Milan and Florence. This was a contest of political and military power, fought in bloody battles, but it was also a contest of artistic and literary power, fought with words.

Milan endeavored to exalt itself as heir to Imperial Rome. One of its most noted apologists was the Duke's secretary, Pier Candido Decem-

³ ms. Lat. 5888 of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France and Add. ms. 26814 of the British Library.

brio. In 1436, he wrote a work *In Praise of the City of Milan*. The Duke sponsored translations of classical works that championed princely rule over republicanism, the system embodied by Florence in which the people had a say in the various branches of power.

Florence, for its part, had begun to foster scholars who were also statesmen. Florentines were proud of their intellectuals, like Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni, and they believed that their republican state fostered a meritocracy. An expression of this republicanism appeared in the first years of the 1400s, through the *Panegyric* or *Praise of the City of Florence* written by Leonardo Bruni (and proposed again in 1434). This work is often cited as an example of what came to be called civic humanism, a term coined by Hans Baron (see Baron, 1966; Baker & Maxson, 2015).

While Bruni's *Praise of the City of Florence* is not explicitly cited by Poggio in his letter to Visconti, it does read as a variation on the theme developed by Bruni. The principle difference between the two texts is the choice of literary genre. Bruni wrote a treatise, a humanist reworking of a form popular in previous centuries, known as a «laus urbis», a tribute to a city. As a treatise, Bruni's *Panegyric* proceeds systematically according to a formal and logical exposition. Poggio's work is instead a private letter and therefore proceeds with greater freedom and informality. This format of a private letter accounts for the relative brevity of Poggio's work (Komorowski, 2012; Hankins, 2017; Baldassarri, 2017).

4. Historical Background: Florence after 1434

Another important difference between Bruni's work and Poggio's letter is that the treatise by Bruni was addressed to a republican city, one that was very proud of its fair and balanced system of government. In 1427, Bruni became chancellor, an office akin to that of prime minister, and shortly thereafter the political situation changed quite drastically. In 1433, a wealthy banker, Cosimo de' Medici, had become so powerful that he was perceived as a threat to other leading families of Florence, particularly the Strozzi and the Albizzi. These rival factions had Cosimo imprisoned and then condemned to exile for ten years. But Cosimo was clever enough to use his money and support to bring about a triumphant return to Florence only a year later. In 1434 just a few months after his bloodless coup, Cosimo succeeded in eliminating his adversaries and effectively took control of Florence without officially modifying the republican structures. For the following 60 years, from 1434 until 1494, the Medici family ruled Florence, although the city still considered itself a republic (Rubinstein, 1997).

This abrupt rupture with republican liberty signaled a trauma for Chancellor Bruni, a trauma which has since been analyzed by many scholars (Field, 1998). Poggio had been raised with the same republican ideals as Bruni, but if he felt any anguish over the Medici coup, he said little about it⁴.

In his letter to Visconti, Poggio gives the impression that he is unaware of any change in Florence's situation, and indeed, his letter does not so much as mention Cosimo de' Medici. After 1434, Poggio seems to have been of two minds about Florentine politics. Although a firm believer in civil liberties, he was sympathetic to Cosimo, who presented himself as a «popolano» – one of the people, in opposition to the aristocratic elites. Cosimo had always cultivated good relationships with the artists and intellectuals of the Tuscan state, and his patronage earned him broad popularity. Under the circumstances, it is not terribly surprising that Poggio maintained a certain sympathy towards the generous banker, nine years his junior.

As Cosimo went about curtailing the freedom of his Florentines, transforming himself into an absolute ruler, if not a tyrant, Poggio remained silent about him. Thus, an historically correct reading of Poggio's letter to Visconti would have to note that the republic championed by him so ardently no longer existed. Poggio's Florence was an ideal city, not the real city of his day.

Poggio's fence-sitting did not represent a mere passing moment. When later he succeeded Leonardo Bruni as chancellor of Florence in 1453 and undertook the continuation of Bruni's *History of Florence*, he deliberately passed over in silence the entire coup by Cosimo. He records other political realities of the year 1434, but not the Medici power grab (Ianziti, 2007).

5. Historical Background: 1438, Attempt at Peace between Milan and Florence

Now let us look at the historical moment surrounding the appearance of this letter. In the summer of 1438, Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan, wanted to bring an end to the long period of wars begun by his father and continued by his brother and himself, and thus seemed ready to propose peace with Florence. With reconciliation in mind, he charged his secretary Pier Candido Decembrio with the drafting of a solemn letter in Latin.

⁴ For the Poggio's reticence (or silence) about the Medici's coup see Fubini, 2003: 180, 199-200.

However, Visconti chose to have the letter written neither to a leader of the Signoria, the ruling body of the Florentine Republic, nor to the Chancellor Leonardo Bruni, but instead to a private citizen. And not to a random humanist, but to Poggio, who had been serving as papal secretary and who was on friendly terms with Cosimo de' Medici. Poggio's nineteenth-century biographer, William Shepherd, implies that in writing directly to Poggio, Visconti may have been hoping to make a separate pact with the Medici against Venice (Shepherd, 1837: 328–29).

Visconti's letter, quite astutely, does not speak of political actualities. Instead it begins by addressing a stereotype, a «blason populaire», which held that the Florentines were blind, or short-sighted. This was a well-known saying about the Florentines, one that Boccaccio and others traced to an anecdote in which the Florentines were duped by people from Pisa. Dante also referenced this in his *Inferno*, saying of Florentines that an age-old rumor called them blind (*Inf.* 15.67; Schizzerotto, 2015: 211–214, 220–223, 290, 333, 464). The Visconti Duke writes that he does not want to believe that Florentines are blind, and in fact, that he admires the Florentine people. He asks Poggio what he thinks of this stereotype, and he offers the Florentine humanist his esteem and friendship. Visconti thereby makes an indirect overture for peace between the two city states.

For the record, this attempt at peace was not successful. War between Milan and Florence resumed shortly thereafter, culminating in the famous victory of Florence in the Battle of Anghiari, 29 June 1440.

6. Poggio's Response

In response, Poggio's letter thanks the Duke for his offer of friendship and expresses satisfaction that the Duke does not give credence to the stereotype. He praises Visconti's greatness, but uses the platform to launch an elaborate encomium of the city of Florence and specifically of her republican liberty.

The whole letter is filled with passionate descriptions of freedom, which he portrays as «solida et vera» (solid and real), and «cara et dulcis» (dear and sweet) (§ 26–28). In addition to the republican ideal of liberty, Poggio emphasizes a beneficial effect of having a state ruled by the majority: peace. He makes a simple but strong argument that republics rarely harass anyone with war (§ 20–22).

A third *leitmotiv*, after liberty and peace, is the «studia humanitatis», or humanistic studies. Poggio allows that there are many illustrious and magnificent cities that are known for their learning and culture, but Florence is, in Poggio's opinion, the «magnum Italiae splendorem»,

the great splendor of Italy. His praise of learning is not merely self-congratulatory; he attributes the intellectual achievements of the Florentine humanists to the virtues of a free republic (§ 38). In fact, he goes so far as to ask who would be foolish enough to seek to harm these liberties and risk being despised by everyone (§ 32-33).

This passionate celebration of the splendor of Florence has a limit: it is generic. Poggio does not name names here. He calls attention to achievements in Latin and Greek studies (§ 34), but does not mention any scholars or any of the classical texts they discovered or taught. He alludes to the greatness of Florence but does not give one example of its many masterpieces: Brunelleschi's famous dome which had just been completed, or Ghiberti's beautiful baptistery doors, or the statues of Donatello. Nor does Poggio cite the leading intellectual of his age, his friend Leonardo Bruni, who had much to say about liberty, nor does he mention any of the other humanists of his era such as Niccolò Niccoli, Flavio Biondo, or Leon Battista Alberti.

Perhaps in choosing to remain generic in his praise, Poggio was avoiding taking sides for or against Cosimo de' Medici and his faction. And in adhering to the format of a private letter, his reticence makes stylistic sense. His plea for respect and peace between nations refers back to earlier texts and anticipates the liberation movements of later centuries (Hankins, 1996; Ricciardelli, 2015).

7. The Dissemination of the Manuscripts as a Channel of Propaganda for the City of Florence

As a philologist, I would like to conclude by returning to the eighteen manuscripts. Each of these manuscripts has its own story and cultural significance (how do they differ?). But observe also their current geographical distribution: Florence, Rome, Naples, Venice, Vicenza; and then Basel, Vienna, Prague, Munich, Berlin, Lüneburg and Dresden. Finally, we can truly say that this letter from 15 September 1438 has done much to spread the legend of Florence in Italy, in Europe, and today, also in America⁵.

⁵ I will provide the detailed reconstruction of the textual tradition of the letters, along with the description of each manuscript and the discussion of textual variants, in a forthcoming contribution.

LETTERS

Manuscripts: Collections of Poggio's Letters (I, viii 5 e 6): Florence, Bibl. Riccardiana, ms.S 759 (ff. 158v-162v), 804 (ff. 115r-120r); Vatican City, Bibl. Vaticana, ms. Ottob. lat. 2251 (ff. 91v-95v) – Dresden, Sächsische Landes-, Staats- und Universitätsbibl., ms. C. 110. ab, ff. 151v-156v; Lüneburg, Ratsbücherei, ms. Misc. D. 2° 15 (ff. 75v-78v); Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibl., Clm 5344 (ff. 80r-83r); Paris, Bibl. Nat. de France, ms. Lat. 8576 (ff. 142r-146r); Prague, Národní knihovna České republiky, ms. I.C.3 (ff. 80r-83v) – *Miscellaneous:* Florence, Bibl. Med. Laurenziana, ms. Pl. 90 supp. 36 (ff. 13r-15v); Naples, Bibl. Naz., ms. V.F.18 (ff. 176r-179v); Venice, Bibl. Marciana, ms.S Lat. xi, 59 (=4152; ff. 50r-62v), Lat. xi, 66 (=3967; ff. 17r-24v), Lat. xi, 80 (=3057; f. 375r); Vicenza, Bibl. Bertoliana, ms. 108 (ff. 34r-38v); Vatican City, Bibl. Vaticana, ms. Reg. lat. 1555 (ff. 204r-208r); Basel, Univ. Bibl., ms. A.II.37 (ff. 141v-146r); Berlin, Staatsbibl., ms. Lat. Qu. 782 (ff. 88v-92r); Vienna, Schottenkloster, ms. 214 (ff. 99r-102v).

I

Eruditissimo viro amico nostro dilectissimo Poggio civi Florentino secretario apostolico dux Mediolani.

Ex quorundam nostrorum relatione fidelium intelleximus, eruditissime vir, amice noster dilectissime, saepenumero te quaestum extitisse, Florentinos cives a nonnullis impudenti quadam et satis proterva appellatione caecos dici, eamque probatissimis et optimis viris falso inscripti nominis infamiam a nullo melius quam a dignitate nostra posse deleri. ² De qua laudabili profecto assertione et voluntate tua non mediocrem voluptatem laetitiamque suscepimus, cum nihil a te nisi sincera et recta ratione, nisi prudenti maturoque consilio credamus iudicari. ³ Et profecto ea digna sapientia et virtute tua extimatio videtur esse, quae non minus dignitati nostrae, pro mutua inter nos benivolentia, quam civium illorum claritati videatur consulere.

⁴ Quid enim laudabilius, quid honestius, quam eam nos potissimum impendere operam, ex qua optimorum omnium et imprimis amicorum nostrorum fama revirescat? ⁵ Quid etiam iniquius, quam eos falsis inquinare rumoribus, quorum fides, pietas, integritas, omni denique in re prudentia spectata est? ⁶ Tuam igitur erga illam florentissimam civitatem singularesque concives tuos caritatem, nec minus extimationem dignitatis nostrae commendamus, laudamus, admiramur; et ita nos animatos in futurum pollicemur, ut quotidie magis hoc animo nostro gaudeas.

⁷ Ceterum, ut ad rem ipsam accedamus, non inmerito nobiscum soles indignari tantam apud ullos vanitatis valuisse opinionem, ut Florentinos

cives, non nostra solum, sed cunctorum ferme sententia doctissimos, caecos ausint appellare, quamquam id ex invidia quadam magis quam ulla aut ratione aut veritate putemus contigisse, ut clarissimis viris tantopere nonnulli conentur illudere.⁸ Quis enim adeo omnium rerum ignarus queat reperiri, qui cum urbis illius pulchritudinem, ornatum intueatur, cum civium moderationem prudentiamque intelligat, eos caecos arbitretur, a quibus singula tanta ratione ac diligentia regi soleant, ac non potius se ipsum non oculis modo, sed ingenio captum sentiat?⁹ Nos enim, qui nulla affectione, nulla invidia aut malivolentia ad iudicandum adducimur, tantum abest, ut eos caecos arbitremur, ut omnium prudentissimos ac oculatissimos potius esse fateamur.

¹⁰ Nam ut paulo altius sermonem repetamus, quaenam urbs memoria nostra quibit reperiri, quae prosperis in rebus aequitatem ac moderationem, in adversis fortitudinem Florentino populo parem visa sit praestitisse?¹¹ Non enim privatim dumtaxat huic vel illi civitati beneficia contulit, sed universae simul Italiae tranquillitatem ac pacem impendere conatus est.¹² Cuius rei cum multa ac praeclara extent monumenta, illud vel imprimis admiratione videtur esse dignum,¹³ quippe cum maxima et gravissima bella cum maioribus nostris gessisset hic populus, adeo adversus omnium vires indefessum pugilem pro libertate sua praestitit, ut cunctorum bellorum semper idem finis illi fuerit, tuta Italiae pax et secura tranquillitas, nec umquam cum sociorum suorum iniuria imperium studuerit parare.¹⁴ Qua in re tanta ab illo humanitas pietasque erga nos pupillum adhuc, et statum nostrum malivolorum quorundam suggestionem ruentem, ostensa et observata est, ut divini illius beneficii memoriam nulla ex animo nostro exceptura sit oblivio.¹⁵ At vero proximo bello, quod a nobis pro gloria et dignitate solum cum Florentino populo gestum est, quanta ab illo diligentia, auctoritate, consilio, providentia conatibus nostris occursum fuerit, eventus docuit, ut haec unica urbs quasi iure quodam gentium libertatem vendicasse, nec ulla aut inimicitia, aut malivolentia, sed pro gloria nobiscum putetur contendisse.

¹⁶ Nempe si uniuscuiusque officium est patriam tueri et libertatem propriam defendere, quis Florentinos cives accuset aut odio dignos censeat, qui ita se ad reipublicae tutelam contulerunt, ita in hostes fuerunt animati, ut nihil impie, nihil avare, nihil contumeliose credantur egisse?¹⁷ Sed totis Italiae suorumque fortunis pensitatis, odia semper cum armis posuere; nec secus priscae ac Romanae probitatis vestigia imitata, a qua originem duxisse referuntur, illius claritatem videantur aemulasse.¹⁸ Haec nobis profecto non caeci ac hebetis, sed vigilantissimi prudentissimique consilii videntur esse signa, siquidem optimarum rerum notio- nem non vulgi opinione, sed consilio, prudentia, auctoritate metimur.

¹⁹ Illa vero non minori laude putamus celebranda, quae domi et in pace vestra in republica magno in honore semper fuere.²⁰ Semper enim in illa consilii gravitas fuit, integritas, continentia, minima alieni

ambitio, sui diligens custodia, amicorum caritas, profugium omnium bonorum, tum artium liberalium studia, talis denique moderatio, ut nihil potius quam Italiae pacem dare, afflictos tueri, superbos cohibere et fidem omni auro utililitatique anteferre, sanctissimus senatus vester putetur cogitasse.

²¹ Quid de religionis cura et templorum ornatibus referam? ²² In quibus adeo urbs vestra creditur excellere, ut cum nonnullae Italiae urbes una aut alia in re praeclarae habeantur, hac sola maxime non inferiores tantum, sed barbarae quodammodo censeantur esse.

²³ Haec autem cum omnibus nota sint, ad eximiam civitatis vestrae laudem non putamus reticenda, quamquam multa a nobis brevitatis causa consulto omissa sint. ²⁴ Sed haec ipsa recensere visum est, ut omnibus plane notum fiat, non caecos, sed oculatissimos, ut praediximus, huiusmodi fore cives, a quibus non praesentia solum, sed praeterita ac futura considerari solent, et qui ex omnibus, quae ad tranquillitatem ac pacem praecipue conducant, noverint eligere.

²⁵ Tales igitur nos viros non amabimus, non amplectemur, non in deliciis sumus habituri, non supra omnium ingenia videre confitebimur? ²⁶ Nos quidem illos, ut dignum est, omni cura, diligentia, amore prosequemur, quantoque maior ob gloriam contentio belli nobis cum illis fuit, tanto benivolentiae caritas astrictior et fides indissolubilior semper erit, ut nihil tam magnum aut arduum excogitari queat, quod ab eorum fraternitate et benivolentia nos amplius possit avertere, cum antiquior apud nos virtutis honos sit, quam imperii aut divitiarum ulla cupiditas.

²⁷ Quamobrem, eruditissime vir, nihil est quod huiusmodi rumores magnifacias, aut quippiam insipientum voces ad laudem aut vituperationem existimes conferre. ²⁸ Ea demum vera laus est, quae a laudato viro proficisci solet. ²⁹ Unica clementiae et virtutis operatio laudem promeretur, verba autem, si nihil amplius quam bonorum calumniam prae se ferant, contemnenda ac nullius momenti habenda sunt.

³⁰ Nos autem omni cura diligentiaque praestabimus, ut tuam istam de nobis extimationem quam gratissimam nostrae dignitati fuisse intelligas; nec minus, concivium tuorum amicitiam ac fraternitatem amplectentes, totis viribus agemus, ut eorum benefacta in lucem prodeant. ³¹ Ad quorum quidem non laudem solum, sed utilitatem ac protectionem status rerumque suarum, personam, opes, facultates, denique (quo nihil antiquius nobis est) inconcussam fidem pollicemur et omnia ipsis grata offerimus laeto corde, dispositi quaecumque facere, ex quibus honos decusque succedat florentissimae urbi vestrae, cuius solidam ac felicem exoptamus libertatem.

³² Vale, amice noster dilectissime.

³³ Ex Castro nostro Portae Iovis v. Kalendas Augusti Mccccxxxvij^o.
Candidus

II

Illustrissimo principi domino Philippo Mariae Anglo duci Mediolani

Nisi vererer adulatoris nomen, a quo semper abhorruī, praeclarissime ac praestantissime princeps, laudarem pluribus verbis egregiam profecto, qua mecum uteris in scribendo, humanitatem. ² Quid enim humanius, quid benignius fieri aut excogitari potuit, quam tantum ac talem principem, saeculi nostri praecipuum lumen ac decus, in quo prisca illa virtus ac probitas Italorum relucet, ultro scribere ad virum pusillum, ignotum sibi, nullis praesertim litteris provocatum? ³ Et quidem tanto magis haec tua humanitas atque animi aequitas extollenda est, quanto eam excellentiori in dignitate collocatam videmus. ⁴ Sunt qui humiliori in loco constituti, etiam compellati litteris scriptores contemnunt ac rescribere inferioribus dedignantur. ⁵ At vero tua praestans virtus et excellens quaedam animi magnitudo verbis solum meis admonita tantum mihi tribuere dignata est, ut ipsis litteris me collaudare, patriam laudibus extollere et suam erga illius statum et commoda egregiam mentis affectionem scriptis notam esse voluerit, omnibus ad ostendendum, si quis secus sentire videretur, quam sincerus sit erga nos animus tuus, quam promptus ac firmus ad mutuam benivolentiam atque amicitiam conservandam. ⁶ Quod eo mihi fuit iocundius legere, quo plus fidei, roboris atque auctoritatis scripta quam verba solent hominibus afferre.

⁷ Gratum extitit mihi laudari abs te, principe omni laude ornatissimo, cuius iudicium apud omnes magnum pondus habet; ⁸ sed illud multo mihi gratius atque acceptius fuit, animus videlicet, quem ad meam rempublicam ostendisti. ⁹ Nam cum exquisitis verbis Florentinam urbem adeo graviter copioseque laudaris, ut nihil fere amplius ab homine amicissimo dici potuisset, maximum erga eam videris benivolentiae testimonium praeferre. ¹⁰ Adde quod non solum laudes nostras prosequeris elegantissime, sed etiam tuum in nos amorem profiteris, tuerisque nos veluti propria in causa ab eorum vulgo, qui caecos appellant Florentinos. ¹¹ Hoc mihi maximam praestat ac praecipuam voluptatem, quandoquidem has litteras existimo ad me missas tamquam certissimum pignus amoris erga nos tui. ¹² Non enim ad adulandum (quid enim minus egregium principem decet, aut quae in vitio adulationis inesset utilitas?) a te referri ista iudico, sed ad demonstrandum quis sit tuus animus in populum Florentinum. ¹³ Neque enim tam ornate, tam copiose solemus laudare atque extollere verbis eos, a quorum utilitate et commodis mens nostra est alienior. ¹⁴ Itaque ea vere et ex animo a te scripta esse confido, et quod litteris polliceris, ipso opere comprobaturum.

¹⁵ Fuit olim inter maiores tuos et Florentinos cives plurima de gloria et dignitate contentio, quos inter non odio aut crudelitate certatum extitit, sed de praestantia et laude dimicatum. ¹⁶ Factum est id palam post

obitum excellentissimi atque omni laude dignissimi principis patris tui: cum ruente ad bellum et se ipsam, saevo Marte, conficiente Lombardia, Florentini, semota bellorum cura, paci et otio consuluerunt.¹⁷ Et cum ad delendum imperium praeclari tui generis et sanguinis saepius invitarentur, tamen, quia nullis odiis, sed pro libertate tantum sua cum patre tuo concertaverant, securi rerum suarum quievere ab armis, satis sibi esse factum arbitrantur, si procul a belli suspitione libertate sua potirentur.¹⁸ In te autem nedum odium ullum non ostenderunt, sed etiam antiquos discordiarum frutices non opinione, sed pace et foedere excidere voluerunt.¹⁹ Bello quidem, quo Ianuenses subegisti, tu ipse scis nulla conditione impelli potuisse Florentinos, ut tuis adversariis opem ferrent, quamvis multi ad impediendam tuam victoriam hortarentur, plures vero id esse utile iudicarent, tanta erat nobis servandi foederis et pacis potitundae cupido.²⁰ Itaque ipsis, ut aiunt, manibus comprehendere potes, nihil aliud respicere, nihil aliud quaerere nostras cogitationes, quam pacis ac libertatis tutelam.

²¹ Est enim ferme rerum omnium publicarum raro quemquam bello lacessere; provocatae ut plurimum et vi coactae, ad arma descendunt.²² Nam cum respublica multorum arbitrio gubernetur, multitudo autem quietem appetat et tranquillitatem, impulsiva et necessitate potius quam voluntate bella suscipit et aut pro ulciscendis hostibus aut iniuria propulsanda.

²³ Sed accidit fatalis quidam motus temporum, ut arbitror, et maioris cuiusdam principis culpa, qui per nostras calamitates suam potentiam augeri cupiebat, quo non de tuis aut nostris opibus, sed de fide et dignitate certabatur.²⁴ Et cum uterque pacem optaret, tamen eius, quem dixi, opera, bellum pro pace formidantis, concordiam ab utroque appetitam diutius impediunt.²⁵ Secuti sunt deinceps varii dissensionum fluctus inter nos, quibus tamen omnibus satis aperte perspicere licuit nullo tui odio aut malivolentia pugnasse tecum dudum Florentinos, sed tutandae solum causa libertatis, cuius possessionem omni ope defendendam semper viri doctissimi ac sapientissimi censuerunt.²⁶ Quod si quibus cara ac dulcis esse libertas debet, Florentino certe populo decet esse gratissimam, apud quos, obloquantur malivoli atque invidi quantum libet, est solida veraque libertas.

²⁷ Non enim unus aut alter imperat, non optimatum aut nobilium fasces regnat, sed populus aequo iure ascitus ad munera civitatis, quo fit ut summi, infimi, nobiles, ignobiles, divites, egeni communi studio conspirent in causam libertatis proque ea conservanda nullos effugiant sumptus, nullos labores, nulla discrimina reformident.²⁸ Nihil denique tam durum atque arduum videatur, quod non subeundum ducant, ut gaudeant accepta a patribus libertatis hereditate.²⁹ Omnibus, qui modo eius nomen tueri possunt, idem impetus est, idem ardor, ut salutem patriae defendant.³⁰ Cuius incolumitatem optare, dignitatem tueri, commoda

appetere, pericula amovere et divino et humano iure homines coguntur; huius propugnatores omnium sermone celebrantur, oppugnatores vero omnium gentium memoria damnavit.

³¹ Atqui certus sum te olim nobiscum non ad libertatem delendam, sed pro tuendo honore et dignitate, ut scribis, contendisse. ³² Nam si quis ea esset immanitate, ut laudem sibi quaereret ex nostra oppressione, viam verae laudis ignoraret, et vivus odio mortalium omnium et mortuus execratione dignissimus. ³³ Quis enim non omnium saeculorum oblivioni damnandus esset, qui gentis Etruscae decus, magnum Italiae splendorem, hanc virtutum aemulam libertatem appeteret extinguere? ³⁴ Laudatur bello ac pace virtus Etruriae atque amplitudo omnibus tum Graecis litteris, tum Latinis; emanavit enim eius nomen et gloria ob res magnifice gestas etiam ad exteras nationes. ³⁵ Sed ab eorum gestis et virtute nequaquam Florentini ulla ex parte degeneravere, quin potius partam a suis maioribus nobilitatem et laudem prae ceteris auxerunt.

³⁶ Sunt in Italia plurimae praeclarae urbes atque magnificae, sed nulla videtur nobis neque acumine ingenii, neque doctrina, neque sapientiae studiis, neque civium prudentia, neque moribus, neque ullo virtutis genere praeferenda. ³⁷ Nam si qui virtutem vel humanitatis studiis, vel omnium disciplinarum doctrina, vel agendorum prudentia, vel fide, vel pietate in Italia coluerunt, praecipuum inter eos locum, pace ceterorum dixerim, sibi vendicant Florentini. ³⁸ Haec omnia accepta referimus a sola libertate, cuius diutina possessio ingenia nostra ad virtutis cultum erexit atque excitavit.

³⁹ Quanta igitur laetitia, quanta consolatione, quanta mentis alacritate me affectum tuis litteris putas, cum ipsis oculis cernere videar singularem, quam ad statum nostrae patriae geris, affectionem? ⁴⁰ cum te Florentinos omni diligentia et amore, ut dignum est, prosecuturum scribas, cum pro nostra utilitate et status protectione opes, facultates, personam insuper pollicearis, cum sit nihil futurum, ut verbis utar tuis, quod tuum animum a nostra fraternitate et benivolentia possit avertere, quae talia sunt, ut vota mea tuis verbis exuperari quodammodo videantur? ⁴¹ Adeo igitur consolor verbis istis, tantam tuae oblationes mihi fiduciam praebent, ut procul dubio sperem nos tua opera in diuturna, quod solum cupimus, pace quieturos.

⁴² Etenim simultas ad benivolentiam, dissensio ad concordiam, discordia ad unitatem, bellum ad pacem conversa mihi persuadent nihil iam posse emergere, quod immutare queat tuam sanctissimam voluntatem.

⁴³ Qua in re dabitur a nobis diligentia et sollicitudo, ut tibi et reliquis innotescat nostrum servandae pacis desiderium. ⁴⁴ Hanc quidem bello semper priorem duximus, dummodo procul ab insidiis esse videretur.

⁴⁵ Loquor haec apud te liberius, invitatus tua in scribendo humanitate atque eo in his versor libentius, quo eloquentius a te laudari video Florentinos ob defensam ab eis hactenus libertatem. ⁴⁶ At vero certe ex-

istimo sancte et omni cum fide ac pietate te, quae scribis, effecturum perinde, atque a te dicuntur.

⁴⁷ Etenim si boni principis atque omni laude cumulati, qualem te esse volumus, esse sapientes putant beneficentia et placabilitate honorem et gloriam querere, si malle diligi quam timeri, si potentiam a Deo concessam ad hominum salutem, non ad pernitiem vertere, si odia ad caritatem, hostes ad amicitiam flectere, quemadmodum tu ipse paulo ante praeclaro exemplo docuisti, si quietem et otium tumultui anteferre, certus sum equidem te principem, omnium qui vivant sapientissimum, exquisita ope atque opere enixurum, ut pax diuturna inter nos vigeat; ut nulla tuorum culpa novarum discordiarum aut belli suspicionum causa exoriat; ut aliquando a diutinis bellis, quibus iam diutius quam aequum erat Italia conquassata est, conquiescamus; ut otio et tranquillitate quae semper appetere professus es, per opus tuae prudentiae potiamur; ut, iactis amicitiae inter nos fundamentis, molem supraedifices immobilem atque inconcussam. ⁴⁸ Nos quippe oblitterata omni superiorum memoria bellorum, deposita priorum temporum sollicitudine, praeteritarum rerum oblivione sumpta, curam, mentem, consilia, animum defleximus ad fruendam pacem, nihil aliud quaerentes, nihil aliud appetentes, nisi quod bonorum civium esse debet, ut in libertate nostra cum otio et dignitate vivamus. ⁴⁹ Eandem mentem cum tibi quoque inesse asseveres, compotes voti nos tua reddet prudentia, ut pace mutua communibus incrementis reviviscant Italorum vires et ad priorem gloriam revertantur.

⁵⁰ Quamvis autem minime necessarium videatur hortari tuam excellentiam ad eum vitae cursum, ad quem te video tua sponte adeo incensum, ut hortatore non egeas; tamen caritate patriae ac pacis cupiditate motus te hortor, rogo et per eam fidem, quam mihi tua verba praestant, obsecro atque obtestor, ut pacis animum sumens, eam civitatem, quae tecum olim omnem inimicum animum deposuit, quae tibi aliquando favit, quacum tibi sanctissimum foedus quondam fuit, quae numquam voluntario tecum pugnavit, ornatam, auctam atque amplificatam tua indulgentia velis; ut eos, qui fidem patriae servant, speres tuis quoque rebus futuros esse fideles; utque illos, qui nihil tuorum appetunt, quin potius, libertate salva, praeclarum te atque amplissimum cupiunt, concupita pace, desiderata quiete, exoptato otio frui gaudeas. ⁵¹ Quae cum egeris, acturum vero confido, eam, quam praeclaris principibus propositam scimus, famam et gloriam adipisceris, firmam quidem et nullis saeculis defuturam. ⁵² Ego (tu modo voluntatem meam confirma) tuorum operum et laudis praeconem quendam me futurum esse profiteor. ⁵³ Et quamvis parum ingenio valeam, minus vero eloquentia, tamen doctioribus atque eloquentioribus scribendi occasionem praestabo.

⁵⁴ Vale, princeps inclite, et me in tuorum numerum ascribe.

⁵⁵ In Terra Nova, die xv. Septembris.

I

To a most erudite man, our dearest friend Poggio, Florentine citizen and apostolic secretary, from the Duke of Milan

From the report of certain of our confidants we have understood that, O most erudite man, our dearest friend, many times a complaint has been put to you, that Florentine citizens are named by some, with an impudent and rather brazen designation, blind; and you assert that the infamy of this label falsely attributed to the most esteemed and excellent men can be expunged by no one better than by our authority.² From this assertion and wish of yours, laudable to be sure, we have received no little pleasure and delight, since we believe that nothing is resolved by you without sincere and honest reasoning, without prudent and mature deliberation.³ And surely your evaluation seems to be worthy of wisdom and virtue, which would seem to take into account our authority on behalf of the reciprocal benevolence between us, as much as the renown of those citizens.

⁴ For what is more praiseworthy, what more honest, than to apply ourselves above all to this undertaking from which the reputation of all the best people and especially of our friends may regain its vigor? ⁵ Besides, what is more wicked than to sully with false rumors the faith, the piety, the integrity and lastly, the prudence of those who in every matter are under the eyes of all? ⁶ Therefore, we commend, praise and admire your love toward that most flourishing city and its singular citizens, and your esteem of our worthiness as well, and so we promise to be inspired ourselves in the future, so that each day to a greater extent you may rejoice in our spirit.

⁷ Furthermore, to approach the issue itself, you are indignant with us not without reason that such an opinion of foolishness has prevailed with some, that they dare to call the citizens of Florence blind, who instead are nearly all considered most learned, not only in our estimation but in that of all others, although we think it has happened – that some people try hard to ridicule illustrious men – due to a certain envy rather than to any reason or truth. ⁸ For who could be found so ignorant of all matters, who – looking at the beauty and the trappings of that city, understanding the moderation and the prudence of the citizens, could deem them blind, citizens from whom individual matters are usually governed with such reasonableness and diligence, and not perceive himself as arrested not only in sight but also in judgment? ⁹ For we, who are not led to make judgements by any envy or malice, are so far from the case that we think them blind, that instead we acknowledge them to be the most prudent and sharp-sighted of all.

¹⁰ In order to raise our discourse to a somewhat higher level, what city could be found in our memory that shows itself to have given proof of excellence equal to that given by the Florentine people as to fairness and moderation in times of prosperity, and strength in times of adversity? ¹¹ Indeed this people has not only conferred benefits to this or that city, but has likewise attempted to bestow peace and tranquility on all of Italy. ¹² Although many and very clear reminders of this attempt stand out, one especially seems to be worthy of marvel: ¹³ namely, when this populace was waging the gravest and greatest wars with our ancestors, it brought to bear the forces of all against an indefatigable opponent for the sake of its own liberty, while the goal of all wars was always the same: the safe peace and untroubled tranquility of Italy, nor did it ever strive to obtain supremacy with the exploitation of its allies. ¹⁴ In this matter, on the part of that people, such humanity and piety was observed toward us, who were still children, and toward our state, which went into ruin due to the actions of some men bent on wrongdoing, to the point that no forgetfulness can cancel from our mind the memory of that divine favor. ¹⁵ But yet in the following war, which was conducted against the Florentine people only for our glory and honor, the deeds demonstrated with what diligence, authority, planning, and providence the clash against our operations was conducted on the part of that people, so much so that one could maintain that this city alone as though by right avenged the liberty of the nations and that it took on the battle with us not out of any enmity or malevolence, but for glory.

¹⁶ Of course, if it is the duty of each person to protect his homeland and defend his liberty, who could accuse Florentine citizens, or deem them worthy of hate: those who looked out so for the safety of the republic, who were so passionate against the enemy, that they are believed to have done nothing unjustly, nothing covetously, nothing insolently? ¹⁷ But having weighed all the conditions of Italy and of its peoples, they always laid down their hostilities with their arms; not otherwise were the footprints of ancient Roman virtue imitated: they may be seen to have emulated the renown of that virtue from which they are reported to have taken their origin. ¹⁸ These things certainly seem to us to be signs of an intelligence that is not blind and blunted but most vigilant and most prudent, if indeed we measure the notion of best things not by the opinion of the masses but by intelligence, prudence, authority.

¹⁹ However, we think that those things which were always held in great honor in your republic, in internal politics and in peace, are to be celebrated with no less praise. ²⁰ For in that republic there was always the gravity of deliberation, integrity, restraint, the least desire for others' possessions, diligent safe-guarding of its own possessions, love of friends, a refuge of all good things, moreover studies of the liberal arts, and lastly, such moderation that your most sacred senate is thought to

have meditated nothing other than giving peace to Italy, protecting the afflicted, subduing the haughty, and giving preference to loyalty over all gold or advantage.

²¹ And what might I say concerning the care of religion and of temple ornaments? ²² In these matters your city is believed to excel to such an extent, that although some cities of Italy are held to be outstanding in one or the other, these others are thought to be not only utterly inferior to this unique city, but in a certain way, barbaric.

²³ Moreover, though these things are known to all, we think that for the distinguished praise of your city they are not to be left unsaid, nevertheless, many things have been deliberately omitted for the sake of brevity. ²⁴ But these things indicated it seemed right to enumerate, so that it would be known clearly to all that these sorts of citizens are not blind, but extremely far-sighted, as we said above, those who generally consider not only present events but also past and future and who will understand how to choose from among all these, those that lead chiefly to peace and tranquility.

²⁵ Therefore will we not love such men, will we not embrace them, will we not hold them in delight, will we not confess that we consider them above the talents of all? ²⁶ Certainly we, as is fitting, will treat those men with every care, diligence and love; and as strong as the competition of war was among us in the past, so much tighter will the bond of benevolence be in the future, and the more indissoluble the trust, so that one cannot imagine anything so great or so problematic, that it could turn us away from good will and fraternity with them, since the honor of virtue is more well-established in us than any desire for power or wealth.

²⁷ For which reason, O most erudite man, there is no reason that you should attach importance to these sorts of rumor, or that you should consider granting the voices of the foolish any praise or blame. ²⁸ This lastly is true praise: that which comes forth from a praiseworthy man. ²⁹ Only an act of mercy and virtue deserves praise, but words that display nothing more than false accusations of good people are to be condemned and held of no account.

³⁰ We will also carry through with every care and diligence, so that you will understand how very pleasing this esteem of yours for our authority has been, and also while embracing the friendship and fraternity of your fellow citizens, we will act with all our might so that their good deeds will come to light. ³¹ Indeed not only in praise for them but also for the usefulness and protection of their state and their things, we pledge our person, our wealth, our resources and lastly (as nothing is more well-established in us) our unshaken trust, and we offer all these welcome things with a glad heart, disposed to do whatever might advance the honor and glory of your most flourishing city, whose firm and happy liberty we yearn for.

³² Farewell, dearest friend of ours.

³³ From our Castle of Porta Giovia, 28 July 1438. Candido.

II

To the Most Illustrious Lord Prince Filippo Maria Anglo Visconti,
Duke of Milan

If, most distinguished and most outstanding prince, I did not fear the label of sycophant, which I have always abhorred, surely I would praise with many words the extraordinary civility which you put into practice by writing to me. ² For what could be held or contrived to be more civilized, what more obliging than for such a great prince – exceptional light and honor of our age, in whom that ancient Italian virtue and probity shine forth – to write of his own accord to a small man, unknown to him, especially when unsolicited by letters from him? ³ And indeed this civility of yours, together with your equanimity of spirit, is to be extolled all the more, given that we see it placed in quite a distinguished authority. ⁴ There are those situated more humbly, even those solicited by letters, who show contempt for writers and disdain to write back to inferiors. ⁵ But yet, your outstanding virtue and a certain excellent greatness of spirit prompted by only my words has deigned to bestow so much on me, that by these very letters you want to commend me, to extol my homeland with praises and to make known in writing your singular disposition of mind toward that state and its interests, in order to reveal to all, should anyone appear to perceive otherwise, how sincere your feeling is toward us, how staunch and eager you are to preserve mutual goodwill and friendship. ⁶ And for me this was all the more agreeable to read, in that the written word usually conveys more confidence, strength, and authority than do spoken words.

⁷ It proved pleasing to me to be praised by you, prince most endowed with every merit, whose judgment has great weight in the eyes of all; ⁸ but what was much more pleasing to me and more welcome was the spirit which you openly showed to my republic. ⁹ For when you praised the Florentine city so deeply and eloquently with exquisite words, so that almost nothing further could be said by even the most devoted person, you seem to display the greatest testimony of benevolence toward it. ¹⁰ One should add that not only do you describe our praises in detail most elegantly but you also profess your love for us and, as though it were your own cause, you defend us from the multitude of those who call Florentines blind. ¹¹ This evinces a great and exceptional satisfaction in me, since I consider this letter sent to me as your most certain pledge of love toward us. ¹² Indeed I believe that these words are proposed by

you not for the purpose of adulation (for what befits an eminent prince less, or what advantage could there be in the vice of adulation?), but for the purpose of demonstrating your opinion of the Florentine people.¹³ For we do not usually praise and extol with words so ornately, so lavishly, those whom we perceive as averse to our own advantage and profit.¹⁴ Therefore I am confident these things were truly written by you and from the heart, and that what you promise in the letter will be made good by actual deeds.

¹⁵ There were once many contests of the greatest glory and dignity between your ancestors and the citizens of Florence, vied for between them not with hate and cruelty, but striven for out of superiority and excellence.¹⁶ This was clearly shown after the death of the prince your father, most excellent and most deserving of every praise: when Lombardy was rushing to war and destroying itself with violent fighting, the Florentines, having set aside the penchant for wars, chose peace and tranquility.¹⁷ And although they were invited rather often to destroy the power of your distinguished house and family, nevertheless, since they had fought with your father not from hate, but only for their own liberty, once assured of this, they laid down arms, reckoning that enough had been done if they could attain their own liberty far from the fear of war.¹⁸ Against you as well, they demonstrated no hate, rather, they wished to eradicate the ancient stems of discord not with conjectures but with peace treaties.¹⁹ And indeed, from the war in which you subjugated the people of Genoa, you yourself know that under no condition could the Florentines be compelled to bring aid to your adversaries, even though they were urged by many to impede your victory, and the majority believed this could be useful, so strong was the desire in us for observing the treaties and attaining peace.²⁰ Therefore, you can understand by your own hands, as they say, that our deliberations do not look for anything else, they do not seek anything else than the guarding of peace and liberty.²¹ For it is characteristic of almost all republics that they rarely harass anyone with war; that for the most part they resort to arms only after having been provoked and compelled by force.²² For since a republic is governed by the judgment of many, and the majority seek peace and tranquillity, it is clear that the republic undertakes war driven by necessity rather than inclination and also in order to punish their enemies or to redress an offense.

²³ But there occurred a certain circumstance of the times, as I see it, and the fault of a greater prince who wished his own power to be augmented by means of our misfortunes, for which reason fighting took place, not with regard to your wealth or ours but to trust and dignity.²⁴ And although both sides wished for peace, nonetheless, the actions of that prince whom I mentioned, who dreaded war for peace, for a long while obstructed the harmony sought by both sides.²⁵ After that there followed various waves of dissent among us, yet for everyone it was pos-

sible to observe fairly openly that the Florentines had fought with you previously not out of any hate or malevolence toward you, but only in order to protect their freedom, the possession of which the wisest and most learned men deem should be defended with every resource.²⁶ Because if liberty should be sweet and dear to anyone, certainly it is fitting that it is extremely agreeable to the Florentine people, among whom – let the malevolent and envious object as much as they wish – there is real and lasting liberty.

²⁷ In fact, neither one nor another rules, neither the arrogance of the patricians nor of the aristocrats, but rather the people, admitted by just right to the duties of the state, for which it comes about that the highest, the lowest, the noble, the ignoble, the rich, the destitute, unite with common enthusiasm for the cause of liberty, and for conserving it they eschew no expense, shrink from no pains, no hazards.²⁸ In short, nothing could seem so hard and difficult that they do not consider it possible to endure, so that they may enjoy the liberty inherited from their forefathers.²⁹ In all those who are able now to safeguard its name, there is the same impetus, the same ardor, for defending the prosperity of the homeland.³⁰ Men are driven both by divine and human law to desire its protection, to uphold its dignity, to seek its advantages, to avoid its dangers; those who defend liberty, are celebrated in the discourses of all, while those who oppose it are condemned in the memory of all peoples.

³¹ And yet I am certain that in the past you have contended with us not for the purpose of abolishing freedom, but, as you write, to uphold honor and dignity.³² For if anyone were of such savagery that he would seek glory for himself from our oppression, he would appear to ignore the path of true glory and while living would be utterly worthy of the hate of all mortals, and once dead, of their execration.³³ For what sort of person would not be condemned to oblivion by all generations, what sort of person would seek to extinguish the grandeur of the Tuscans, the great splendor of Italy, this liberty, aspiration of virtues?³⁴ The excellence of Tuscany is praised in war and in peace and its importance in all culture, both Greek and Latin letters; in fact its name and fame have become known even to foreign nations.³⁵ But the Florentines have by no means degenerated in any way with respect to their deeds and virtue, rather they have increased above others the nobility and glory generated by their ancestors.

³⁶ In Italy there are a great many illustrious and magnificent cities, but none seems to us preferable as to sharpness of intelligence, or learning, or the pursuit of culture, or for the good sense of the citizens, or of their habits, or of any sort of virtue.³⁷ For if some in Italy have cultivated virtue either by the study of humanities or by the teaching of all disciplines, or by the wisdom of action, or by faith or piety, the preeminent position among them – I say this with deference to the others – Floren-

tines claim for themselves.³⁸ All these favorable qualities we draw from liberty alone, whose long-lasting possession has elevated and stimulated our minds to the cultivation of virtue.

³⁹ Therefore, imagine with how much joy, how much comfort, how much cheerfulness I have been affected by your letter, when I seem to see with my own eyes the singular affection that you bear for the state of our homeland?⁴⁰ Since you write that you will pursue Florentines with all diligence and love, as is fitting; since for our benefit and for the protection of the state you promise your wealth, your resources, and in addition, your person; since there will be nothing in the future, to use your words, that might turn aside your feelings from fraternity and benevolence toward us, all this to such an extent that in some way my wishes seem to be surpassed by your words.⁴¹ Therefore I am so comforted by these words, your offerings bestow such confidence in me that without a doubt I hope that, thanks to your efforts, we will remain calm in a lasting peace, which is our only desire.

⁴² In fact these transformations: rivalry to benevolence, dissension to concord, divisiveness to unity, war to peace, persuade me that nothing can now arise which would be able to alter your sacrosanct will.⁴³ In this matter diligence and solicitude will be imparted by us so that our desire for conserving peace may be known to you and to others.

⁴⁵ I say these things to you rather freely, invited by your humanity in writing to me, and I linger on these matters all the more freely, the more I see the Florentines praised more eloquently by you on account of the liberty defended by them thus far.⁴⁶ But truly I think that you will surely accomplish justly and with all good faith and piety the things you write and that are said by you.

⁴⁷ And if indeed wise men think it suits a good prince and one deserving of every praise, which we wish you to be, to seek honor and glory with kindness and tolerance, if it is suitable for him to prefer to be loved rather than feared, to turn the power conceded by God to the salvation of men and not to destruction, if to bend hatred to love, enemies to friendship, as you taught me a little while ago with a noble example, to prefer calm and tranquility to tumults; I for my part am certain that a prince like you, who is the wisest of all those who live, will strive with exceptional might and effort, so that lasting peace may reign among us, so that no cause of new discord or suspicion of war might arise through the fault of your people; so that finally we may settle down from the long-lasting wars, with which Italy has been violently shaken for a longer time than was right; so that through the efforts of your good judgment we may enjoy calm and tranquility which you have always professed to desire; so that, with the foundations of friendship established between us, you construct on these a firm and stable edifice.⁴⁸ Certainly with every memory of the wars of our predecessors forgotten, having set aside our

preoccupations of times gone by, having begun the oblivion of matters gone by, we have turned our attention, our mind, our plans, and our spirit to enjoying peace, while seeking nothing else, while desiring nothing else, except what is proper for good citizens, so that we may live our liberty with calm and dignity.⁴⁹ And since you affirm that you are of the same frame of mind, your good judgment will restore us to sharing in this pledge, so that in mutual peace, with advantages in common, the might of Italians may be revived and returned to previous glory.

⁵⁰ However, although it does not seem at all necessary to exhort your excellency to that course of life for which I see you roused of your own free will, to the extent that you do not lack someone to exhort you; still, moved by love for my homeland and by the desire for peace, I exhort you, I beg you by that faith which your words offer me, I beseech and I implore you, taking up a spirit of peace, you wish that, with your indulgence, that city be made more adorned, greater and more magnificent, that city which has set aside that spirit which formerly was hostile to you, which was at one time favorable toward you, which was linked formerly to you by a most sacrosanct pact, which has never fought against you of its own volition; that you place again your hopes on the fact that, in the future, those who maintain faith in their homeland will be faithful to your causes; and that it please you that they enjoy the wished for peace, the desired calm, and the yearned for tranquillity, those who seek nothing of yours, and who, once their liberty is safe, desire nothing other than that you be illustrious and most distinguished.⁵¹ When you have done those things which I am confident you will truly do, you will obtain that which we know to be the objective of illustrious princes: fame and glory which is solid and never lacking through the centuries.⁵² I (you only confirm my conviction) declare I will be a sort of herald of your deeds and praises.⁵³ And although my talent is worth little, and my eloquence even less, nonetheless I will offer to persons more learned and eloquent an occasion for writing.

⁵⁴ Farewell, glorious Prince, and reckon me among your followers.

⁵⁵ Terranuova, 15 September.

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