

POGGIO BRACCIOLINI AND COLUCCIO SALUTATI: THE EPITAPH AND THE 1405-1406 LETTERS

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ABSTRACT: Manuscript Magliabechiano VIII.1445 of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze seems to be the only witness of an epitaph that Poggio Bracciolini wrote for Coluccio Salutati. Using this concise yet sincere homage to the late chancellor, this essay discusses Poggio's relationship both with him and the other major members of the Florentine humanist circle that started gathering around Salutati in the late fourteenth century. In doing so, it touches on such figures as – among others – Niccolò Niccoli and Leonardo Bruni. In particular, some early texts by Bruni (e.g., the *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum* and his letters to fellow humanists dating from the early fifteenth century) are seen against the backdrop of his relationship with both Poggio and Salutati.

KEYWORDS: Poggio Bracciolini, Leonardo Bruni, Niccolò Niccoli, Coluccio Salutati, Florentine humanism

Manuscript Magliabechiano VIII.1445 of the Biblioteca Nazionale di Firenze seems to be the only witness of an epitaph that Poggio Bracciolini wrote for Coluccio Salutati and that Francesco Novati published in his edition of the latter's epistles almost a century ago (Salutati, 1911: 4.484). Sometime in the seventeenth century an unidentified hand added this brief text in the blank space left by the previous scribe, who probably wrote in the mid-fifteenth century (see Fig. 1). The epitaph was transcribed after a passage from Salutati's reply to Loschi's *Invectiva in Florentinos*. More precisely, the passage in question (ff. 205r-207v) is the one between 16.4 and 32.25 in my critical edition of this work of Salutati's¹. As suggested by the *incipit* and *explicit* («Videbimus, ecce videbimus [...] originem a Romanis») this section concerns one of the topics that Salutati and his fellow citizens held most dear: the account of the Roman origins of Florence². The extraordinary political import of this subject may be

¹ See Baldassarri, 2012: 96-98, for a description of the manuscript, main related bibliography, and some remarks on the quality of the text of this work by Salutati preserved within. As I wrote on that occasion, the brevity of the passage contained in this exemplar makes it impossible to place it within the *stemma codicum* that I reconstructed. Both Loschi's invective and Salutati's reply have been published (using my critical edition and a facing English translation) in Salutati's *Political Writings* (2014). For an Italian translation of both texts see Baldassarri, 2012: 135-44 (Loschi) and 237-329 (Salutati).

² I discussed this topic in the following essays: *A Tale of Two Cities: Accounts of the Origins of Fiesole and Florence from the Anonymous "Chronica" to Leonardo Bruni* (2007); *Like Fathers like Sons: Theories on the Origins of the City in Late Medieval Florence* (2009); and *Le città possibili: arte e filologia nel dibattito sull'origine di Firenze da Giovanni Villani a Leonardo Bruni* (2011). See also the article by Cabrini, *Coluccio Salutati e gli elogi di Firenze fra Tre e Quattrocento* (2012).

the reason why the unknown seventeenth-century scribe inserted the epitaph attributed to Bracciolini in that specific part of the manuscript. Before commenting on the epitaph, I will briefly describe the only witness preserving it and then publish the text in question.

As I already noted when introducing the edition of Salutati's so-called *Responsiva*³, ms. Magl. VIII.1445 is a thick, miscellaneous paper codex (ff. II + 374 + IV), middle-sized (217 x 150 mm.), with a modern binding in paper and leather. In keeping with the title *Opuscula varia* on its spine, it gathers a number of texts, mostly concerning mythological and rhetorical matters. Assembled in Florence in the mid-fifteenth century, it was likely produced within the Donati family, as argued by Luca Boschetto in a detailed assessment of this manuscript listing all related bibliography (De Robertis, *et al.* 2008: 102-04). Written in humanistic cursive hand by several scribes (especially *A* on ff. 1r-210r and *B* on ff. 211r-256r), this exemplar belonged to the Strozzi library for some time, bearing «730» as its call number. After the death of Alessandro Strozzi in 1784, it was purchased by Pietro Leopoldo, Granduke of Tuscany, together with the rest of that library, eventually entering the Biblioteca Magliabechiana two years later. As already noted by Ullman in his edition of the *De laboribus Herculis* (of which it preserves several excerpts on ff. 162r-199v) (Salutati, 1951: 1.x), a fascicle entirely written by scribe *A* (ff. 162r-207r, originally numbered 1-46) contains sections of several Salutati texts, namely *De nobilitate legum et medicinae* (ff. 202r-203v), *De tyranno* (ff. 204r-205r) and, as said above, the Florentine chancellor's reply to Loschi (ff. 205r-207v). The following formula introduces the excerpt on the origins of Florence (titled *Coluccius contra Luscum vicentinum*): «Luscus cum adversus Florentinos scriberet eis litteris inter alia multa ita ait: Videbimus, ecce videbimus [...]»). At the end of this excerpt is the following inscription by the scribe (*A*, as pointed out above, whose signature is ϕ on f. 151v): «Coluccius autem ipse mortuus est die IIII mai MCCCCVI ut scriptum repperi manu ser Antonii ipsius filii». Right after this inscription comes the epitaph, which – as said above – a much later hand copied in the blank space at the bottom of this folio. As promised, I will now provide the full text of this short homage to Salutati by Poggio, preserving its original spelling throughout⁴:

³ I write «so-called» because the title that Salutati chose for this work is as follows: *Contra maledicum et obiurgatorem qui multa pungenter adversus inclitam civitatem Florentie scripsit*. On this important feature, see my introduction to *La vipera e il giglio*, pp. 17-70, and related p. 55n1.

⁴ Punctuation, instead, is mine as well as the addition of dashes to show the length of each line of this text in the manuscript.

Sepulchrum Colucii Pieri Salutati

Hic opido Stignani bonis parentibus ortus⁵ cum ab ipsa adolescentia / eloquentie et bonarum artium studiis operam dedisset / cancellarius florentinus factus est. Quod officium XL⁶ / ferme annos summa cum integritate ac laude administravit. / Doctorum virorum quasi communis parens, huius precipuo opere / grece littere primum Florentiam commigrarunt, quibus rebus om- / nium civium benevolentiam est consecutus. LXXV etatis / anno excessit e vita, summo civitatis merore. Post obitum / corona laurea donatus est iussu populi in doctrine vir- / tutumque quibus excelluit insigne. Vir fuit etatis sue / optimus ac eloquentissimus, qui sui ingenii multa re- / liquit monumenta laude et gloria digna ad memoriam / posteritatis.

Poggius

Born of good parents in the town of Stignano, having devoted himself to the study of the liberal arts since adolescence, he was made Florentine chancellor. For almost 40 years he held this post with the utmost integrity, receiving the highest praise. Almost a common father to learned men, it was mostly thanks to him that Greek letters first came to Florence. For these reasons he earned the benevolence of all fellow citizens. At the age of 75 he passed from this life, causing the greatest sorrow to the whole city. After his death he was presented with a laurel wreath by public decree as a sign of the learning and the virtues in which he excelled. The best and most eloquent man of his age, he left behind many testimonies to his own genius, worthy of praise and glory, for future generations to remember⁷.

Before commenting on these few lines I find it appropriate to illustrate – though briefly – the relationship between Poggio and his «venerated tutor», as William Shepherd wrote (1837: 6). To this purpose I will re-elaborate some reflections from my introduction to the critical edition (1994) of Leonardo Bruni's *Dialogi ad Petrum Paulum Histrum*. As is well known, the *Dialogi* are crucial to an understanding of both the main features of the Florentine humanistic movement at that time (namely, between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries) and the ties between its leading members⁸.

Not surprisingly, Petrarch proves a fundamental figure and a starting point in this case too. For one thing, most scholars credit him with reviving dialogue as a literary genre after centuries of scholastic disputa-

⁵ The word «ortus» is an interlinear addition by the scribe.

⁶ It should read XXX, for Salutati was appointed chancellor on April 19, 1375 and died on May 4, 1406.

⁷ Unless otherwise noted, all English translations in this essay are my own.

⁸ For a bibliographic update on this work of Bruni's see Cabrini, 2012. All previous studies until 1994 are listed in Bruni, 1994: 283-90.

tions. Despite bearing several medieval traits, Petrarch's *Secretum* displays that natural exchange of opinions that will become a prominent feature of humanist dialogues⁹. Precisely in the invitation to a free, sincere discussion and the plea for a new, more flexible kind of culture (free from the limitations imposed by medieval scholasticism) lies Petrarch's main teaching in Bruni's *Dialogues*. This fictional debate – as is well known – is divided into two days, with several Florentine scholars (Niccolò Niccoli, Roberto de' Rossi, Coluccio Salutati, and Bruni himself) gathering at Salutati's house first, then at Rossi's the following day. On Day One, Niccoli (whose polemical attitude was notorious) criticizes the so-called Three Crowns of Florence (Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio) for their scarce knowledge of ancient Greek and the Roman classics. In Niccoli's opinion, the three Florentine writers did not break away as much as they should have from what he considers a medieval, scholastic and therefore narrow approach to literary studies. On Day Two, instead, when the same scholars meet again to resume their conversation (with the addition of Pietro di ser Mino to their group), Niccoli reverses his opinion, praising Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio as shining stars of Florence. As Niccoli explains, what he said the day before was just a ruse to irritate Salutati. Far from being disrespectful, Niccoli acknowledges the aged Florentine chancellor as the mentor of a whole new generation of humanists, starting with those involved in this two-day gathering.

Such is, in a nutshell, the plot of Bruni's *Dialogues*, which he dedicated to his fellow humanist and Salutati's pupil Pier Paolo Vergerio from Capodistria (hence the *Histrum* in the full Latin title of this work). I will not go now into the whole debate on the composition and dating of this work that Hans Baron first raised some sixty years ago. I discussed it at length in my 1994 critical edition. I believe to have proved Baron's thesis groundless. Philological evidence shows that the two halves of this text were conceived and composed together. With regard to its date, there is sound reason to claim that it was composed in the second half of 1406, soon after Salutati's death. As for its contents, a lot could be said, of course. We are speaking, after all, of a foundational text of early Italian humanism. I'll limit myself to pointing out a few features that tie in with the topic I am discussing here, that is, the Bracciolini-Salutati relationship.

First, the *Dialogues* reveal how at that time Bruni was still far from holding a strong, precise opinion on the issues raised by Petrarch's writings. Niccoli's famous palinode – generic as it is in its praise of Petrarch

⁹ See the following studies: Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue. Classical Tradition and Humanist Innovation* (1980:16-23); Quillen, *A Tradition Invented: Petrarch, Augustine, and the Language of Humanism* (1992: esp. 202ff.); Fubini, *All'uscita dalla scolastica medievale: Salutati, Bruni e i "Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum"* (1992: esp. 1066). This last essay has also appeared in Fubini, 2001: 75-100.

– attests to this. Only some thirty years later, when writing the *Lives of Dante and Petrarch*, did Bruni reach a clear assessment of Petrarch's role in the rebirth of the *studia humanitatis*. More importantly for us, the very topics discussed in the letters that Italian humanists exchanged at the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries show how crucial a precise assessment of Petrarch was for them.

It is not surprising, therefore, that a heated epistolary debate on Petrarch's merits flared up in those very years between Salutati and Poggio. Salutati's two letters to Poggio – drafted between the end of 1405 and March 1406 – shed light on the subjects being discussed at that time within the humanist circle¹⁰. Here is a brief summary of these documents. Epistle XIV.19 opens with Salutati chiding Poggio (who had recently started his career as papal secretary) for showing little prudence in criticizing an unspecified influential figure. In doing so, he uses the same paternalist tone with which he had recently addressed Bruni in another letter: «Haec pro tanto velim fuisse praefatus, quoniam, ut video, nimis hoc maledicendi et invehendi caractere delectaris»¹¹. In both cases the aged chancellor criticizes his former pupils for their rash behavior, warning them lest the ones they attack strike back and foil their promising careers. Salutati thus invites them both to be more respectful of Christian doctrine and not to embrace a misleading, hedonistic lifestyle.

This said, Salutati touches on literature, hinting at a previous letter that Poggio had sent him from Rome¹². In this «longa epistula» (now lost) Poggio contested Salutati's famous comparison of Petrarch with Cicero and Virgil¹³. As is well known, Salutati considered Petrarch superior

¹⁰ See Salutati, 1911: eps. XIV.19 and XIV.22 together with related notes by Novati on pp. 4.127ff. and 4.159ff. For a first hint at the dispute between Salutati and Poggio, see ep. XIV.14, pp. 4.104-05. Modern scholars have given it considerable attention. See Baron, 1955: 159; Baron, 1966: 241 and 254ff.; Seigel, 1968: 86-98; Gravelle, 1981: 195-97; Witt, 1983: 266-71 and 403-05; Fubini, 1990: 27-31 and 229-337; and, above all, Kajanto, 1987: 7-15. See Kajanto's essay for further bibliography.

¹¹ Salutati, 1911: ep. XIV.17, written to Bruni on November 6, 1405. The breach was healed soon, as one can see from the chancellor's letter dated «January 9, 1406» (XIV.21, pp. 4.147-58). However, this episode embarrassed Bruni considerably and for a long time too, as shown by his decision not to include in his epistolary collection a letter to Salutati regarding this argument between them. Written in Viterbo on February 13, 1406 this document was eventually rediscovered and published by Claudio Griggio. See Griggio, 1986: 27-50 (the letter is published on pp. 47-48).

¹² «[...] longa quidem epistola sextodecimo Kal. Septembris, credo, anni praeteriti ex Urbe, scribens de quadam mea epistula» (Salutati, 1911: ep. XIV.19, p. 4.130).

¹³ Salutati, 1911: IV.20, pp. 2.338 and 2.342. R. P. Oliver (1939) believes that Salutati's opinion of Petrarch developed through three distinct phases: first, uncritical praise; second, a more nuanced position; and, finally, that which he articulated in his quarrel with Poggio. In the latter circumstance, Oliver holds, Salutati was afraid that Poggio would eventually regard intellectual research and Christian doctrine as not only different but even mutually exclusive.

to both classical authors for his excellence in writing verse no less than prose. Poggio, as his former teacher informs us, had contested this opinion, believing Petrarch – like all modern men of letters – to be inferior to any great classical author. As one would expect, Salutati’s defense of Petrarch grows into a defense of modern (that is, Christian) culture as a whole against the pagan classics. Remigio Sabbadini (who erroneously dated Bruni’s *Dialogues* to 1401) cited this work as the first example of the quarrel between ancients and moderns, which Salutati and Poggio would take up four years later in their correspondence (Sabbadini, 1922: 49n1). We shall soon return to similarities (and even coincidences) between Bruni’s *Dialogues* on one hand and the Poggio–Salutati exchange on the other. First, though, it is important to note that the Florentine chancellor warns the young papal secretary not to be seduced by an excessive admiration for pagan antiquity, to the point of neglecting praiseworthy moderns. The last two centuries, he writes, have produced geniuses deserving to be put on par with the ancients. Besides, there is noticeable continuity between the latter and «our Petrarch», as Salutati explains:

Et, ut secundum membrum ingrediar, dic, precor, cum tot libros, tot epistolas, tot metra, tot prosas Petrarca noster composuerit atque reliquerit, in quo reprehensibiliter vetustati contradixit vel in his quae scripsit erravit? (Salutati, 1911: ep. XIV.19, p. 4.133).

And, to address the second topic, tell me, I beg you, since our Petrarch has composed and left us so many books, so many epistles, so many verses, so many prose texts, why should he be criticized for going against ancient customs or what did he do wrong in his writings?

From now on in this letter Salutati’s evaluation of Petrarch becomes more generic, focusing as it does on the relationship between scholarship, wisdom, and rhetoric. As he writes: «Duo sunt quibus eruditio patet: sapientia, videlicet, et eloquentia» («Knowledge shines forth in two ways: that is, through wisdom and eloquence», 1911: 4.134). Inevitably, he adds, any Christian is superior to all pagans in doctrine. Yet, the same is true of rhetoric. In this respect, too, the Church Fathers cannot but surpass all Greeks and Latins, for their language reveals the truth. Furthermore, one should not insist too much on Petrarch’s style being inferior to Livy and Sallust’s. It would be just as wrong to extol classical Latin at the expense of Petrarch’s. Language changes with time, so much so that the only true criterion by which to judge it is comparison with common use. Because of all this, Salutati cannot but reiterate his opinion of Petrarch vis-à-vis Cicero and Virgil:

Superant ambo de facundiae dignitate Petrarham; superantur illi a Francisco nostro non simpliciter, sed Cicero versu, Maro vero, ne con-

tendas, obsecro, solutae dictionis ornatu. Sed eruditione peritiaque veritatis modernus hic noster non duobus illis solum, sed plane cunctis Gentilibus antecellit (1911: 4.144).

On the one hand, they both surpass Petrarch for the quality of their eloquence. On the other, they are surpassed by our Francis not as a whole but, more precisely, Cicero with regard to verse, and Virgil (please, do not deny this) with regard to prose. With regard to learning and precise knowledge of truth, however, this modern author of ours is clearly superior not only to these two but to all pagans.

The letter then ends in a humorous tone. As Salutati writes, Poggio had been helped by an unnamed friend to draft his criticism of Petrarch. Although he doesn't say his name, Salutati seems to know full well who this friend and great lover of antiquity is. Various indicators, in my opinion, reveal that this was none other than Niccolò Niccoli. For instance, the following formula by Salutati most likely alludes to Niccoli's notorious reluctance to set pen to paper: «[...] facque quod eum sua, si fieri potest, scriptione vel tua saltem agnoscam». («[...] and please see to it, if at all possible, that I may come to know him from one of his writings or from one of yours», 1911: 4.145).

The second epistle (XIV.22, which Salutati sent Poggio in March 1406) is a sequel to the previous one. Salutati says that he has received several letters from him. Those letters, he adds, are certainly worthy of praise for their style but not so for their contents. Once again Salutati warns Poggio to follow Christian doctrine more carefully and be cautious in sharing news about the papal curia with Niccoli (1911: 4.160). As in epistle XIV.19, after an introductory invitation to a more moderate behavior Salutati moves on to discuss literary topics. Once again, Petrarch's comparison with the classics holds central prominence. More importantly, in this case Salutati must rebut a palinode similar to Niccoli's in the *Dialogues*. His words make it clear that Poggio had sent him an exaggerated retraction of his criticism of Petrarch: «Tu vero praetendis in Petrarchae laudem quod multis possit hystoricis antiquis, poetis, oratoribus et philosophis comparari; quod quam ridiculum sit, tu vides» («To praise Petrarch you even dare say that he may be deemed on par with many ancient historians, poets, orators, and philosophers. You can see for yourself how ridiculous this is», 1911: 4.162).

Salutati suggests to Poggio that he take a more thoughtful stance on this matter. To this end, he puts forth the same thesis – although in shorter format – that he expounded in epistle XIV.19. Finally, Salutati invites Poggio to debate in a more peaceful and restrained fashion, without going to extremes, before concluding with kind words for his former pupils who are now away from Florence (1911: 4.167).

It is clear, I believe, how closely the topics discussed in these two letters from Salutati to Poggio resemble those in the *Dialogues*. What is more, a comparison between those letters and this early work of Bruni's highlights the link joining them¹⁴. Several passages from Salutati's epistles to Poggio share telling similarities with the *Dialogues*, starting with Niccoli's praise of Petrarch on Day Two. Ending the account of his meeting with the Paduan circle of Petrarch scholars, Niccoli says:

Haec cum illi ostendissent, a me contendebant ut, si quem haberem ex omni antiquitate, qui tantis laudibus respondere posset, in medium afferrem; quod si facere nequirem, nec haberem quemquam qui in omni genere aequae profecerit, ut non dubitarem civem meum omnibus doctissimis viris, qui in hunc diem fuissent, anteferre. Nescio quid vobis videatur: ego nunc ferme omnia loca attigi quibus illi causam suam confirmabant. Quae quoniam optima ratione concludi mihi videbantur, illis assensi mihi que ita esse persuasi (Bruni, 1994: par. 84, p. 271).

When they had shown me this they urged me, if I had any one from all antiquity who could prove a match for such praises, to bring him forward; but if I could not do so, and had no one equally proficient in every genre, I should not hesitate to set my fellow citizen before all the most learned men up to this day. I do not know how it seems to you, but I have now touched upon just about all the points they used to establish Petrarch's cause. Since their arguments struck me as excellent, I agreed with them and persuaded myself that such was the case (Griffiths, *et al.* 1987: 82).

This passage re-elaborates the famous opinion that Salutati repeatedly expressed in his two letters to Poggio, which he summed up in the following rhetorical question: «Quem enim habemus alium, quem iure possimus [antiquis] eruditus anteponeere vel aequare?» («For who else may we consider higher or equal to the learned ancients?») 1911: ep. XIV.22, p. 4.161). In the *Dialogues* (85.2–5) Bruni has Niccoli defiantly ask: «[...] nec audebimus illum suis meritis ornare, praesertim cum hic vir studia humanitatis, quae iam extincta erant, repararit et nobis, quemadmodum discere possemus, viam aperuerit?» (1994: 271–72) («Shall we not venture to honor him for his merits, especially when this man restored humanistic studies, which had been extinguished, and opened the way for us to be able to learn?», Griffiths, *et al.* 1987: 82–83).

Remarkably similar praise of Petrarch can be found (first) in a famous letter from Boccaccio to Jacopo Pizzinga and (later) in the aforementioned epistle XIV.22 that Salutati sent to Poggio. In the latter text we read as follows: «[...] qui [*Petrarch*] primus suo labore, industria, vigilantia

¹⁴ As I already noted in my critical edition; see Bruni, 1994: 50–53.

haec studia paene ad internicionem facta nobis in lucem erexerit et aliis sequi volentibus viam patefecerit¹⁵» («[...] who [Petrarch] with his toil, efforts, and care first brought back to light for us these studies, which were almost extinct, and paved the way for others willing to follow»).

Also, in Bruni's *Dialogues* (85.7-8) Niccoli replies to criticism of Petrarch's *Africa* asking: «Quis est iste tam gravis censor, qui non probet?»¹⁶. This formula echoes a passage from Salutati's epistle XIV.19 to Poggio. Inviting his former pupil not to be too harsh a critic of both Petrarch and modern times in general, Salutati writes: «Pura sit non temporum, sed scientiae concertatio. Haec ad examen et trutinam redigamus. Quod si feceris, crede mihi, non eris aetatis tuae tam iniquus et improbus extimator» («A clear assessment should be made not of the times but of knowledge instead. Let us evaluate and ponder this. If you do this, believe me, you will not be such a biased and harsh critic of your own time», 1911: ep. XIV.19, p. 4.132).

More importantly, in his conclusion of Petrarch's praise in the *Dialogues* (86.7-11) Niccoli subscribes to that famous opinion by Salutati in his two letters to Poggio. Here is what Niccoli says on Day Two of Bruni's work:

Nam quod aiunt, unum Vergilii carmen atque unam Ciceronis epistolam omnibus operibus Petrarchae se antepone, ego saepe ita converto, ut dicam me orationem Petrarchae omnibus Vergilii epistolis, et carmina eiusdem vatis omnibus Ciceronis carminibus longissime anteferre (1994: 272).

What they say about preferring one poem of Virgil's and one epistle of Cicero's to all the works of Petrarch, I often turn around this way: I say that I far prefer an oration of Petrarch's to all the epistles of Virgil, and the poems of Petrarch to all the poems of Cicero (Griffiths, *et al.* 1987: 83).

Another letter by Salutati dating from the same period – that is, penned between the end of 1405 and the beginning of 1406 – is echoed in the *Dialogues*. At the end of Day One (51.1-4) Salutati invites Niccoli to be more lenient towards his fellow citizens, adding as a general rule that no one can ever be praised by everyone:

Hic Colucius subridens, ut solet: «Quam vellem», inquit, «Nicolae, ut tu civibus tuis amior esses, etsi non me fugit numquam aliquem tanto consensu omnium probatum fuisse, quin adversarium invenerit» (Bruni, 1994: 258).

¹⁵ Salutati, 1911: ep. XIV.22, p. 4.161. For his letter to Jacopo Pizzinga see Boccaccio, 1928: 195. Baron, 1966: 261-69, compares this letter with the passage cited above from Salutati, ep. XIV.22.

¹⁶ Bruni, 1994: 272. In *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, this passage reads as follows: «Who is so severe a critic as not to approve it?» (Griffiths, *et al.* 1987: 83).

Smiling in his usual way, Coluccio replied: «How I should wish, Niccolò, that you were kinder to your fellow citizens; although I realize there was never any one so universally approved that he did not find an opponent» (Griffiths, *et al.* 1987: 75).

In his last letter to Bruni (dated 9 January 1406) Salutati made peace with him after a dispute that had briefly threatened their friendship in November 1405. As if apologizing for the harsh tone he had used with him on previous occasions, the old chancellor wrote as follows:

Semper enim mecum tuum admirabar ingenium et quam perspicaciter cuncta ponderares et animadverteres tacitus commendabam. Noli curare si vel ego vel alius aliquando contra quae dixeris arguamus sententiamusque semperque cum scribis tibi fore persuadeas contradictorem (1911: ep. XIV.21, p. 4.156).

I have always admired your intellect and praised to myself how keenly you pondered and reflected on any subject. Take no concern if either I or anyone else may argue and speak against what you have said. And rest assured that whenever you write you will find an opponent.

In addition to the ones mentioned above, there are other passages from Salutati's writings that Bruni borrowed in his *Dialogues*. A case in point is the praise of Dante in Salutati's *De fato* (III.12) to rebut Cecco d'Ascoli's criticism, which Bruni re-elaborated on Day Two (par. 71) (Bruni, 1994: 266; Salutati, 1985: 195–206, esp. 195–96). Another telling example is Niccoli's antischolastic tirade on Day One, modeled as it is after the famous opening of the *De laboribus Herculis* (Salutati, 1951: 1.3). Moreover, when Salutati celebrates Florence for its beauty at the beginning of the second dialogue (Bruni, 1994: par. 54–55, pp. 259–60) one cannot fail to notice how similar that panegyric is to what the chancellor himself wrote in his point-by-point reply to Loschi (par. 115) (Baldassarri, 2012: 198 [Latin] and 293–94 [Italian translation]). Nor is this the only passage evoking Salutati's lengthy invective in Bruni's *Dialogues*. For instance, when on Day One (par. 41) Niccoli defiantly asks the old chancellor «Quos tu mihi Dantes commemoras? Quos Petrarchas? Quos Boccattios?» (Bruni, 1994: 253) his provocative question not only echoes a famous contrast between Mucius and Crassus in Cicero's *De oratore* (I.23.105) but turns on its head Salutati's proud statement in his reply to the Visconti secretary. There (par. 116) the Florentine chancellor had summed up his city's cultural primacy in the following rhetorical question: «Ubi Dantes? Ubi Petrarchas? Ubi Boccaccius?»¹⁷.

¹⁷ Baldassarri, 2012: 199 (Latin text) and 294 (Italian translation). In his English version Rolf Bagemihl renders this passage as follows: «Where will you find another Dante, another Petrarch, another Boccaccio?» (Salutati, 2014: 311).

As I pointed out in my critical edition of this text, Salutati's epistles XIV.19 and 22 to Poggio are useful in dating the *Dialogues*. More precisely, it is reasonable to consider those two letters the *terminus post quem* for the work that Bruni dedicated to Vergerio. What matters most for the subject at hand is Poggio's striking absence from it. Bruni wanted this at once fictional and exemplary debate to serve as a manifesto of Florentine humanism. Adding Poggio (one of Salutati's closest pupils) to the characters should have been both easy and obvious. Inserting a passing reference to him in the course of the two-day debate would have been just as natural and even less complicated. And yet, Bruni avoided all this.

It is not easy to determine why he did so. Several hypotheses could be raised to explain his decision. It may be argued, for instance, that Bruni composed the *Dialogues* soon after Salutati's death. At that time the dispute that the old chancellor had with Poggio shortly before dying, as attested by his letters discussed above, must have still been fresh (and probably embarrassing) in his pupil's memory. Also, Poggio's remorse must have been considerable on hearing that a father figure to him like Salutati had passed away soon after their dispute over such important cultural and, above all, moral and psychological matters. In all likelihood, that contributed to the tone pervading the most extensive and passionate praise of Salutati ever penned by Poggio. I am referring to the moving letter that he sent Niccoli right after receiving news of their teacher's passing.

Only seven manuscripts preserve in its entirety this letter that Poggio wrote in Rome on 15 May 1406 (that is, eleven days after Salutati's death)¹⁸. Such a limited number of witnesses for a text of this nature may be regarded as further evidence of an issue that its author never managed to solve during his lifetime, thus deciding to remove it from his collection of private letters. I do not want to attempt a psychoanalytical reading, especially knowing the philological issues that make the edition of Poggio's private correspondence (above all from his early life) such a difficult task. I thus prefer to focus on the texts at hand. In doing so, I will begin by noting several similarities – sometimes even coincidences – between Poggio's letter to Niccoli in memory of Salutati and the epitaph he wrote for him. In both texts, for instance, Salutati is called «father» as a token of admiration and affection. Such an epithet is far from unusual in documents like these. As Novati pointed out in a note to his edition of the epitaph, the formula «*Doctorum virorum quasi comunis parens*» («Almost a common father to learned men») is «*Espressione prediletta da Poggio a designar il Nostro*» (Salutati, 1911: 4(2).484n1). We find it in a slightly different form halfway through Poggio's letter to Niccoli, where

¹⁸ For the complete text of this epistle and a list of the manuscripts that preserve it, see Bracciolini, 1984: 219–21.

one reads: «[...] pater communis erat omnium et amator bonorum» («[...] a common father to all and a lover of good men», Bracciolini, 1984: 220, line 24). Also, in the very opening phrase Poggio wrote:

Gravem ac tristem nuntium accepi, mi Nicolae, et qui maximum mihi vulnus infixit, mortem scilicet *patris Colucii*, eloquentissimi omnium et sapientissimi viri, quem ego multis lacrimis prosecutus sum magna cordis acerbitate (1984: 219, lines 1-5, italics mine).

I received woeful and sad news, dear Nicholas, which caused me the greatest sorrow, that is, the death of *father Coluccio*, the most eloquent and wise man of all. I reacted to this news with many tears and great pain in my heart.

Two more times in this same letter Poggio laments the loss of a father figure like Salutati:

Amisimus enim patrem, quem posthac non facile reperiemus. [...] Illud nunc scribam, *me tali amisso patre* magno esse confectum vulnere; quod quidem fortassis esset levius paululum, si eum semel postquam Romam veni, viventem aspicere potuissem.

We lost a father, who will be far from easy for us to find again. [...] I do confess now in writing that the loss of such a father has dealt a great blow to me; it might have been a little lighter had I had the chance of seeing him alive one more time after I came to Rome (1984: 219, lines 12-13 and 32-35, italics mine).

These last words may reveal some guilt on Poggio's part. Yet, as I said above, I prefer to limit myself to a comparison between these two documents. Speaking of which, since discrepancies are no less important than similarities, the main difference regarding the contents of the aforementioned letter and the epitaph (that is, Salutati's merits) is the deceased chancellor's instrumental role in the return of ancient Greek to the Latin world. This reason for praise only appears in the epitaph, where one reads as follows: «Huius precipuo opere grece littere primum Florentiam commigrarunt» («It was mostly thanks to him that Greek letters first came to Florence»). It should be noted that Salutati's praiseworthy efforts to hire Manuel Chrysoloras as teacher of Greek for the University of Florence¹⁹ are not mentioned in any other epitaph edited either by

¹⁹ See the excellent essay by S. Gentile and D. Speranzi, *Coluccio Salutati e Manuele Crisolora* (2010) and the rich bibliography reported therein.

Novati or any other scholar²⁰. Poggio is the only one who gives Salutati credit for this pioneering initiative in an epitaph. Actually, he praises his former teacher for the rediscovery of ancient Greek culture even more than Bruni did when he celebrated Salutati in a well-known letter to his sons dated 15 October 1407:

Quod graecas didici litteras, Colucii est opus; quod latinas non leviter inspexerim, Colucii est opus; quod poetas, quod oratores, quod scriptores ceteros legerim, didicerim, cognorim, Colucii est opus.

My learning Greek literature is thanks to Coluccio; my studying Latin literature not just superficially is thanks to Coluccio; my reading, learning, and coming to know poets, orators, and other writers is thanks to Coluccio²¹.

The seminal importance of Chrysoloras' university courses in Greek language and literature would be widely acknowledged by a host of humanists throughout the fifteenth century, to the point of becoming a cliché²². In the first decade of the Quattrocento, however, it was still far from common. Most likely, Poggio composed his epitaph right after Salutati's death, when the Florentine government expressed the intention of building a sepulcher for the renowned chancellor in Santa Maria del Fiore²³. If so, Poggio was among the first to celebrate Salutati for reviving Greek culture in the Latin world after centuries of oblivion.

I wish to conclude by pointing out that even this last feature of Poggio's praise of Salutati raises something of an issue. Unlike other pupils of the venerable Florentine chancellor, Poggio did not learn Greek from Chrysoloras. This often put him in a less favorable position when compared with colleagues and friends who – like Jacopo Angeli and Bruni – had managed to learn the language so quickly from the Byzantine

²⁰ See De Robertis, *et al.* 2008: 93–113 (section titled *La memoria*), entries 19–29 by S.U. Baldassarri, G. Barbero, L. Boschetto, A. Decaria, G. Tanturli, and S. Zamponi. See also in the same work, pp. 55–62, entries 1–5 by L. Amato and M. Marchiaro in the section titled *Le biografie*; and the essay by C. M. Monti, *Salutati visto da nord: la prospettiva dei cancellieri e maestri viscontei* (2010).

²¹ Bruni, 1741, which I quote from the anastatic reprint with an introduction by J. Hankins vol. 1, p. 45 (ep. II.11).

²² On the image of this Byzantine scholar that humanists developed in the course of the fifteenth century see Maisano and Rollo (2002), in particular the essay by V. Fera, *La leggenda di Crisolora*, pp. 11–18.

²³ See entry 23 by Boschetto, in De Robertis, *et al.* 2008: 101–102. I agree with Boschetto when he writes that most epitaphs made for this sepulcher to be built in honor of Salutati date from the summer and autumn of 1406 (that is, soon after his death). As already pointed out, Salutati died on 4 May 1406. Eventually, the plan that Florentine authorities would pay for the tomb fell through.

teacher. As is well known, both Angeli and Bruni soon started translating ancient Greek texts at Salutati's request. Out of embarrassment and to keep up with an increasing number of humanist competitors, Poggio forced himself to make up for this deficiency many years later. In these unremitting efforts one may notice, once again, the influence of Salutati's example. Salutati reiterated his insatiable desire to learn and engage in disputation with scholars of any age in many of his works²⁴. If one wanted to pinpoint the greatest teaching that Poggio received from Salutati, I believe it would be this one. Even more than the development of humanistic script²⁵ or the erudition of his impressive literary opus – culminating in the history of Florence when he, too, served as chancellor of that city²⁶ – the main lesson that Poggio learned from Salutati was his teacher's passion for knowledge.

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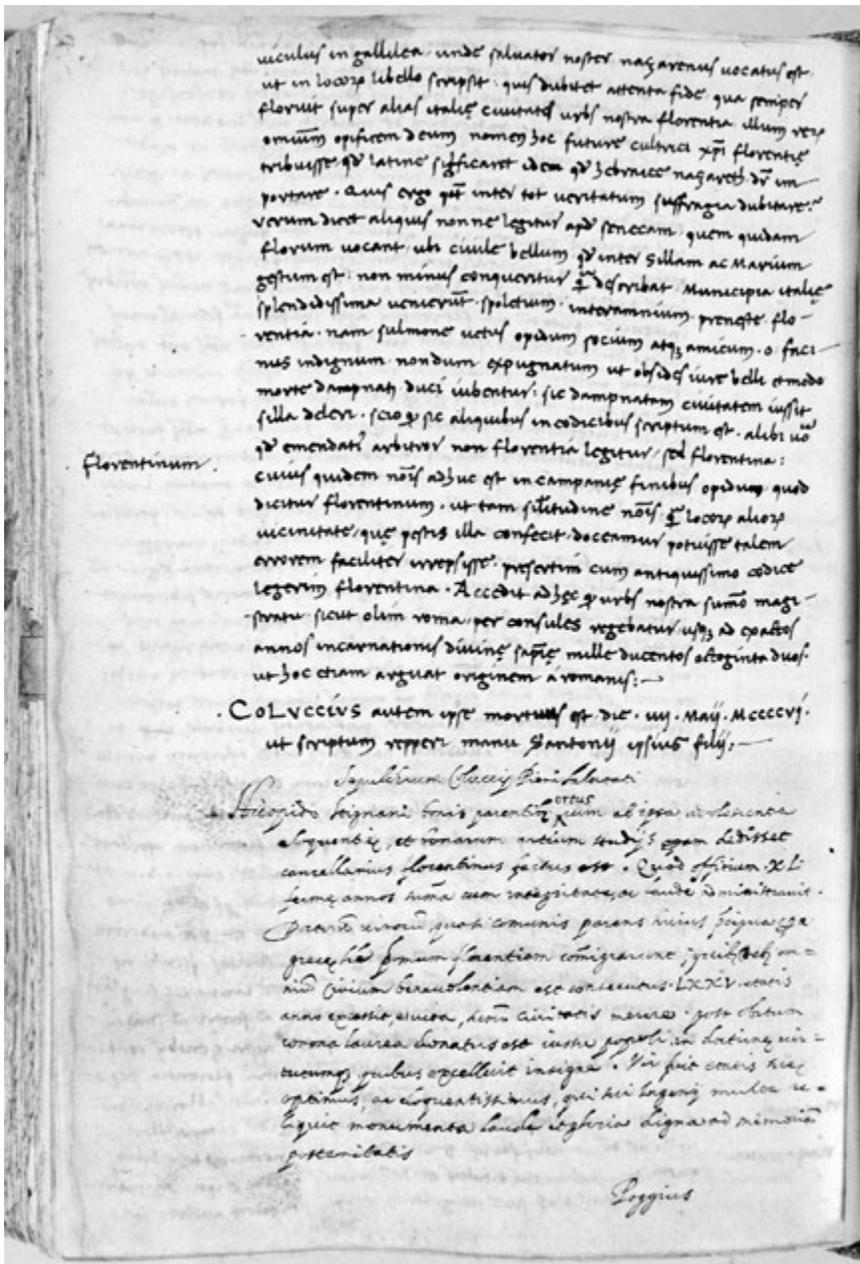
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²⁴ As one can see, for instance, in Salutati's last work (that is, his reply to Loschi, par. 182-83) and in the related letter he sent Pietro Turchi (par. 4) in Baldassarri, 2012: 227 (invective, Latin text), 328-29 (Italian translation), 234 (letter, Latin text), and 370 (Italian translation).

²⁵ On this important and much-debated topic see De Robertis, *et al.* 2008, especially the section titled *Libri e copisti di Coluccio Salutati: un consuntivo* by T. De Robertis and S. Zamponi. To the extensive bibliography reported therein one should add M. Ciccuto, *Poggio "conoscitore" fra codici antichi illustrati* (2007); T. De Robertis, *Salutati tra scrittura gotica e "littera antiqua"* (2010); S. Zamponi, *Iacopo Angeli copista per Salutati* (2008); and R. Ricci, *Umanesimo letterario, riforma grafica: Poggio Bracciolini editore, filologo e copista* (2016).

²⁶ On this last phase of Poggio's life see the section in Cardini and Viti, 2003: 99-124.

Figure 1 – Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, ms. Magl.VIII 1445, f. 207v.



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