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Abstract *Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508) was one of the first Jewish thinkers to express republican positions, yet very little is known about his knowledge of humanistic republican conceptions. Had he read Leonardo Bruni's republican writings? Had he even heard of them? In this essay I attempt to address this philological gap by comparing Abravanel's republican commentary on 1 Samuel 8 with Bruni's* Laudatio florentinae Urbis*, especially the motif of the plea to God to authorize a political regime. This comparison is particularly useful for illuminating their respective positions on republicanism, their shared interests and conceptions, as well as their divergent attitudes to their own political and historical environment. This divergence, I argue, sheds light on the early modern Christian and Jewish receptions of ancient republicanism.*

Don Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), who lived and operated in Portugal and Castile, and after the 1492 expulsion of the Jews, found refuge in southern Italy and Venice, is acknowledged as one of the first early modern Jewish thinkers to express republican positions. This has inspired various scholars to investigate not only the literary sources of his "republicanism" but also its historical background. Their research has uncovered the medieval Jewish, Christian, and Islamic sources of Abravanel's claims, as well as some Roman sources.[1] However, we still know very little about Abravanel's knowledge of the humanistic republican conceptions developed in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy. Several letters and documents testify to his close commercial and intellectual ties in the years 1472–82 with the Tuscan-Jewish banking family Da Pisa, who were active in Florence, Pisa, Lucca, and many other Tuscan cities.[2] Since they exchanged Hebrew manuscripts and letters with Abravanel on literary matters and historical events, they could have been an excellent source of information about the literary and republican trends of fifteenth-century Florence. Unfortunately, however, we have very little information about any exchanges of this kind between them, which is why we cannot know if Abravanel had ever read, nor had ever even heard of Leonardo Bruni's republican writings.

The present article is an attempt to address the gap in our philological knowledge of Abravanel's humanistic republican sources. To this end I shall compare his

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republican commentary on 1 Samuel 8 (1483–84) with Bruni's *Laudatio florentinae urbis* ("Panegyric to the City of Florence") (1403–4).[3] My aim, however, is not to prove that Abravanel had actually read the *Laudatio*, but rather to use the textual similarities between their works to define the new historical position expressed by Abravanel's rejection of monarchy and by Bruni's republican praise of Florence. In my comparison I shall focus on the literary motif of the plea to God to authorize a political regime. This motif, which appears in both Abravanel's *Commentary* and in Bruni's *Laudatio*, is particularly useful for illuminating their respective positions on republicanism and on its historical roots.

1. The Elders' Request for a King in 1 Samuel 8 and Abravanel's Republican Response

Historical and Biblical Background

Abravanel's *Commentary on the Early Prophets* (especially on 1 Sam. 8) is one of the first republican texts written by a Jew in early modern times.[4] It was written in the years 1483–84, following Abravanel's escape from the kingdom of Portugal in 1483.[5] The Portuguese King João II wanted to arrest him and put him on trial for conspiracy along with a group of other noblemen, headed by Abravanel's patron Dom Fernando II, Duke of Bragança, who was indeed put to death in 1483. When Abravanel learned of the King's plan, he fled from Portugal to the Castilian town of Segura della Orden. There, according to his own testimony, he wrote a commentary on the Books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel (3, 91, 161, 421). He intended to address all these prophets, but completed the commentary on Kings only after his expulsion from Spain, when he reached Naples in 1492. As he wrote in the preface to the second portion of his work, the commentary was written following a twofold disaster—Abravanel's personal calamity of having to flee Portugal and the communal calamity of the expulsion of the Jews from Castile and Aragon in 1492.

> I am the man who has seen affliction (Lam. 3.1). In the pain of the exiles and expulsions that have befallen me, namely, my particular exile from the Kingdom of Portugal, I have established and begun the commentary on these four books. In the midst of the foremost of the exiles and the most intense among them, which is this bitter and hasty (Hab. 1.6) expulsion, the great and dreadful (Deut. 1.19) persecution in which they expelled us and unbounded our bond (1 Sam. 26.19) to Spain. ... I set up the gates (1 Kings 16.34) of the commentary and I completed it. (423)

As Jonathan Israel explains in *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism*, the 1492 expulsion was not an isolated event.[6] Jews were expelled from Sicily in 1493, and in 1497 in Portugal, they underwent a forced mass conversion. In 1498, the Jews were expelled from Provence following its annexation to France, which in the course of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries expelled all its Jews. In 1510 and 1541, the Jews were driven out of Naples, in 1569 out of the Papal States, and in 1597 out of the Duchy of Milan. At the same time, ghettoes were established throughout Italy, beginning with Venice in 1516. To this partial list of expulsions, one must add the

complex historical process that began with the pogroms and mass conversions of 1391 in Castile and Aragon, which eventually led to the establishment of the Inquisition in the years 1477–81.[7]

Against this historical background, Abravanel's *Commentary on the Former Prophets*, written in two stages—before and after the expulsion from Spain—shows traces of this long and traumatic period. Although expulsions and exclusions were the most visible signs of the social and political changes that affected Jews in the early modern period, they should not be considered as the only evidence of the transformations in the relationships between Jews and Christian states and societies. I suggest, moreover, that Abravanel's commentary on 1 Samuel 8 reflects the ambiguity of these early modern transformations, which entailed both the exclusion and the inclusion of the Jews.

Abravanel's republican text is a commentary on the demand for a monarch, as related in 1 Samuel 8 (202–11).The chapter begins with three verses briefly describing the physical decline of the judge and prophet Samuel, and the moral, religious, and political weakening of the regime. Samuel having grown very old, appointed his sons, Joel and Abijah, to replace him, but they "did not follow in his ways" (8.3). They became corrupt and ceased to be honest judges. Joel and Abijah's corruption shows that Samuel could not establish a morally and religiously stable dynasty. Thus the corruption of the sons of the high priest Eli—who preceded Samuel as judge—is shown to repeat itself at the end of Samuel's own rule. The question of a new political regime arises following repeated crises, and becomes, in 1 Sam. 8, a demand to replace the rule of judges with a monarchy.[8] Abravanel's long commentary on monarchy is a scholastic discussion of the verses describing the demand for a king:

> All the elders of Israel assembled and came to Samuel at Ramah. And they said to him, "you have grown old, and your sons have not followed your ways. Therefore appoint a king for us, to govern us like all other nations." Samuel was displeased that they said "give us a king to govern on us." Samuel prayed to the Lord, and the Lord replied to Samuel, "heed the demands of the people in everything they say to you, for it is not you they have rejected: it is Me they have rejected as their king." (8.4–7)[9]

The biblical narrative of the decline of Samuel's leadership and the foundation of a monarchy may be compared to the twilight days of the rule of King Afonso V of Portugal in the years 1476–81. Following his defeat in the war against the Castilian Queen Isabel, and his failure to unify Castile and Portugal through the intended marriage of his son João with Joana, daughter of Enrique IV, Afonso gradually retreated from power and transferred most of his royal responsibilities to his son. During these years, the plague swept through Portugal, with Afonso himself being one of its victims. After the death of his father in 1481, King João II launched a new strategy to reaffirm his royal power vis-à-vis the high nobility (especially directed at Abravanel's patron, the duke of Bragança). His new policy aimed to curb, and even terminate, Afonso V's former alliance with the high nobility, which, on the one hand, allowed him to defeat his rivals, but on the other, obliged him to share his power with the nobles who supported him and to award them new titles, lands and prerogatives. João II's policy led to a direct and violent confrontation with some of the most influential noble families, and eventually to accusations of conspiracy, with many of the nobles being

condemned to death. Following this dramatic shift in royal policy the king was given the Machiavellian nickname, *O principe perfeito*, the "perfect prince."[10]

Abravanel, accused of taking part in the "conspiracy" of the Bragança family and sentenced to death, saw the king's policy as the primary reason of his fall from grace at court, and his exile to Castile. These events account for his hostile criticism of the king's rule in his introduction to the *Commentary*:

> Suddenly, however, the day of affliction, punishment, and shame arrived (Isa. 37.3)... [King Afonso V] fell ill (Exod. 21.18)... and in a few days death crept into his window (Jer. 9.20), the destruction (Ezra 7.25) in his palace. ... His son D. João [II] came to the throne, a new king who did not know [the friends of his predecessor] (Exod. 1.8), and turned his heart to hate his ministers [of D. Afonso V]. ... And he made himself a stranger (Gen. 42.7) to the friends of his ancestor... and cunningly said to them: You shall surely die because you have all conspired against me (1 Sam. 22.13), to hand me and my kingdom over to the Spanish Crown. (2)[11]

Abravanel quotes Exodus 1.8, describing the new "king over Egypt who knew not Joseph," to depict João II's shattering of the former alliance with the high nobility. Thus, it was in the new political situation brought about by the king's reaffirmation of power—the outcome of which was his own exile to Castile—that Abravanel wrote his commentary on the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. Writing on the biblical narrative of the demand for a change of regime, he surely had in mind João II's monarchic revolution, or rather, the assertion of the king's rule over the aristocracy. Although Abravanel's commentary on 1 Samuel 8 should not be reduced merely to an angry response to the king's policy, it should be seen in the historical context of the strengthening and reshaping of monarchic power in the Iberian Peninsula.

Monarchy and its Justifications

Having noted Samuel's advanced age and the corruption of his sons, Abravanel deviates from a direct interpretation of the verses and raises a more general question: "Why, concerning this request, did God become angry, and why was it evil in Samuel's eyes that Israel asked for a king, when this was a commandment from the Torah (see Deut. 17.14)? I found in our sages, and in the new and ancient sages of the Christians, five different opinions" (202–3). At this dramatic moment in the biblical narrative, when Israel are entering the political, religious, and cultural framework of monarchy, Abravanel dares to question the value and the implications of the monarchic revolution in Judaism. More than two thousand years after the establishment of the monarchy, as related in the Bible, Abravanel proposes a general study of monarchy in Jewish and Gentile history. In doing so, he is not only echoing Samuel's original rejection of kingship but also expressing his own conflict with João II and, more generally, adding a Jewish voice to the Renaissance's new and challenging attitude to kingship.[12]

He begins with a review of the various opinions of the Talmudic rabbis and of Jewish and Christian commentators on the reasons for the rejection of the monarchy by the prophet Samuel and God himself.[13] Their explanations range from idol worship, the inappropriate formulation and timing of the request, and the confusion

between the authority of the judge and the authority of the king, to the claim that the elders requested a tyrannical regime and not a constitutional monarchy (203–5). Abravanel rejects all of these, for his intention is to show that neither the Talmudic nor the medieval explanations had heeded the anti-monarchic voice in 1 Samuel 8.

Yet how was it that suddenly, at the end of the fifteenth century, Abravanel overcame the centuries' old deafness of Jewish and Christian commentators to hear this voice? His negative review seems to imply that earlier commentators had so internalized the monarchic revolution, that they could not sense the problems inherent in the transition from the rule of the judges to the rule of kings. This in turn suggests that Abravanel belongs to another era, or at least that he is interested in distinguishing himself from earlier thinkers. He concludes: "I have reviewed in this discussion [five] opinions. The wind will carry all of them off because of the incoherencies I have stressed" (205; the printed text erroneously states 'six').

A Republican Rejection of Kingship

Having exposed the monarchic bias of Jewish and Christian exegesis, Abravanel raises three related questions regarding Samuel's first rejection of kingship: (1) Is a king necessary for a political community? (2) Assuming that he is necessary, is a monarchic regime necessary for Israel as for the other nations? And (3) How should we interpret the passage in Deuteronomy 17.14 on the commandment to appoint a king? His answers comprise three levels: the general-philosophical level, disclosing his political and historical perceptions; the particular-theological level, centered on the uniqueness of the Jewish religion and the people of Israel; and his technical-hermeneutical response to the commentators' premise on the positive commandment to appoint a king.[14]

Abravanel begins by presenting a conception that he seems to attribute to Jewish and Christian commentators, according to which the relationship between the monarch and the political community resembles that of the living organism to the heart, the body's central organ.[15] It also resembles the relationship of the entire cosmos to the First Cause, according to which image, the king is necessary for the existence of the political community. Abravanel rejects this cosmology as "false," attacking it by pointing out the possibility of an alternative regime. One cannot rule out the possibility, he writes, that a number of leaders would unite, and that their joint decisions would be accepted as those of the state and become law. Nor, he continues, can one rule out the possibility of a government that rules for a limited time, after which its members would be replaced. Besides, there would be great benefit in such a time limit, as replacing leaders would create a system of supervision and correction, which is essential. The epistemological advantage of this political arrangement lies in the greater probability of one man erring than a group of people who criticize one another erring when they know their decisions will be put to the test.[16]

Abravanel's challenge to monarchy, on which his fame rests, may be juxtaposed with a passage from Bruni's *Laudatio*, which shows their shared historical background —Florence's political regime and its republican justification.

Abravanel:

> For it is not impossible that a nation should have many leaders who convene, unite, and reach a consensus; they can thus govern and administer justice. ... Then also, why cannot they have terms of office, extending for one year—or even for a shorter or longer duration? When the turn of other magistrates comes to replace them, they will investigate the abuses of trust committed by earlier [magistrates]; Those found guilty will pay for their crimes. ... Finally, why cannot their powers be limited and determined by laws or norms? Reason suggests that [in a dispute] between the one and the many, the many should be heeded. Furthermore, it is more likely that one will commit a crime... than many in concert, for when one of them strays, the others will protest. (205)[17]

Bruni:

> In many ways, care has been taken that the upholders of the law, to whom great power has been entrusted, do not come to imagine that, instead of custodianship of the citizens, a tyrannical post has been given to them. Many provisions are made so that these magistrates do not lord it over others or undermine the great freedom of the Florentines. First of all, the chief magistracy that is commonly viewed as possessing the sovereignty of the state is controlled by a system of checks and balances. Hence there are nine magistrates instead of one, and their term is for two months, not for one year. This method of governing has been devised so that the Florentine state may be well governed, since a majority will correct any errors in judgment, and the short terms of office will curb any insolence.[18]

Although the above juxtaposition does not prove that Abravanel had actually read Bruni's *Laudatio*,[19] the striking similarities between the two texts make clear, as I hope to now demonstrate, that he was well aware of a republican conception of political power and of its connections to the Florentine regime as well as to Ancient Rome.[20] For Abravanel, as for Bruni eighty years before him, the political function can better be achieved by a republican system of checks and balances, under which the limited duration of office tenures would also more effectively prevent any confusion between common and private interests.[21]

After proving the possibility of setting up a government of "many leaders" (in contradistinction to the claim that a king is a political necessity), Abravanel turns to the empirical field, comparing monarchic regimes with republican regimes. He presents the former in a strong negative light: "Just see the evils and abominations, each of them [the kings] does whatever is right in his own eyes" (206). Yet apart from the monarchic states he lived under, he was also acquainted with the republics in Italy through his commercial contacts.[22] "Today we have seen many lands under the leadership of judges and governors chosen for three months at a time, and God the king is with them" (206). Here Abravanel stresses the word "judges," as opposed to the request for a king that ended the rule of the biblical judges,[23] and the political and historical success of the Italian republics as proof of their superiority, on which he writes enthusiastically:

> To this day, the Kingdom [Heb. *Malkhut* or state] of Venice is "the lady among nations and the princess among states," and the Kingdom of Florence is a splendor among the nations. Genoa... Lucca, Siena and Bologna, and other kingdoms, have no king, but are rather ruled by governors elected for fixed terms. ... They are

> honest regimes without deviousness. A man will not raise hand or foot in crime, and they conquer lands not their own through wisdom, understanding and knowledge, all of which shows that the presence of a king is not necessary and binding on the people. On the contrary, he is most harmful and a great danger to his people and his servants. (206)

By placing the republican theory he defended a few lines earlier in its political and historical context, Abravanel clearly allied himself with the humanistic republicanism that had developed in several Italian cities. He also demonstrates his awareness of their economic state when he comments on the biblical expression "after the manner of the Zidonians, quiet and secure" (Judg. 18.7): "And my opinion is that the Zidonians were merchants who were always ruled by a good government without kings, like today, the Venetians, the Florentines and the Genovese are doing" (147).

In the years 1470–88, Yochanan Alemanno (ca. 1434–ca.1504), a protégé of the Da Pisa family with whom Abravanel had strong personal ties, wrote a eulogy on the city of Florence, praising its republican regime.[24] Could Abravanel have learnt from the Da Pisas about Florentine republicanism? We have no way of knowing. But both Abravanel and Alemanno produced highly idealized versions of it, especially under the rule of the Medicis.[25]

Abravanel was also aware of another aspect of Bruni's republican justification of the Florentine regime: its representation as a revival of the Roman republican model. "Have you heard of the great power, Rome... that ruled the entire world... while being governed by many excellent consuls, serving temporary terms. After it was ruled by an Emperor, it lost its freedom [and declined]" (206). Here, again, the juxtaposition with Bruni's *Laudatio* is revealing:

> Accordingly, this very noble Roman colony was established at the very moment when the dominion of the Roman people flourished greatly, and when very powerful kings and warlike nations were being conquered by the skill of Roman arms and by virtue. ... Moreover, the Caesars, the Antonines, the Tiberiuses, the Neros—those plagues and destroyers of the Roman Republic—had not yet deprived the people of their liberty. (151)[26]

We have seen from Abravanel's refutation of monarchism that he was aware of the republican conception of power, of its "actual and present" realization in several Italians cities, and of its link to the ancient Roman model. This conceptual and historical awareness of the differences between the two regimes is essential for understanding his concluding statement on monarchic rule:

> It becomes clear that a king is not necessary within the people, neither for amending the political society... nor for its unity, nor for its continuity, nor for its absolute power. And so, I would think that in the beginning, kings were not made by the people's choice but rather in accordance with the principle "might is right." (206)

In this striking claim, we see Abravanel's political sensitivity to the violence involved in the regime change narrated in 1 Samuel 8 and its historical implications. This becomes even clearer in his theological discussion of kingship.

A Theocratic Rejection of Kingship

Abravanel begins by recapitulating the three reasons outlined by the rabbis for Israel needing a king: (1) To save the people from their enemies in times of war; (2) To determine norms and laws (which do not appear in the Torah) that are necessary for preserving public order; and (3) To punish, occasionally not according to the Torah, but as the situation requires. Abravanel rejects these reasons: "And so it becomes clear that all three matters are attributed to God, blessed be he, in order to use them for his people, Israel, for he is their king and there is no other" (207). For Abravanel, the rabbinical conception of the king's role assumes that God's covenant with Israel, expressed in divine providence and the laws, is not sufficient, and that there has to be a supplementary and corrective agent, the king. However, this supplementary agent seriously undermines the regime based on the covenant, according to which the roles of deliverer and lawmaker are attributed to God only. A sharp distinction is made between the source of military success and law, and the person chosen to fill the military or legal role.[27] In his review of Jewish and Christian commentators on 1 Samuel 8, Abravanel devotes much attention to Pablo de Santa Maria's *Additio* to Nicholas of Lyra's commentary on the passage, which attests that he had also read Nicholas of Lyra's commentary. Indeed, his affirmation of God's direct rule over Israel is very similar to Lyra's insistence on God as *rex immediatus illius populi*.[28] Thus for Lyra, as for Abravanel, God's direct kingship made the demand for a human king *contra ordinationem Domini*.

To this theological reason Abravanel adds a historical one: "As we have seen from experience, they were rebels against the light in Israel, and turned their backs on it as shown in the matter of Jeroboam son of Nebat and his successors, who led Israel astray so they were exiled from their land" (1 Kings 11–15; 2 Chron. 10–13) (207). Behind the motif of the king who corrupts his people's morals and religion, Abravanel hints that the monarchic revolution in Jewish history created a hybrid regime and a political-theological contradiction between the rule of the Torah (or the covenant) and the monarchy. This contradiction led to the progressive decadence of Israel and Judah, to exile, and eventually to the political situation in the Middle Ages whereby the Jews were legally defined as *servi camerae*, "slaves or servants of the king's treasure"—a regime of exile and expulsion in which the citizenship of the Jews depended on a utilitarian and temporary contract with the ruler.[29] If we read this passage on the role of kings in the historical and divine process that led Israel to exile together with the former passage on the role of the emperors in the decadence of Rome, we may perceive both Abravanel's critical appreciation of the "monarchic revolution" and his desire to revive political regimes that preceded this revolution—the republic and the judges.[30]

His criticism of monarchic rule discloses a literary affinity between the republican regime and the theocratic regime of the covenant, which he identified with the rule of the judges preceding the monarchic revolution. This affinity is based on the analogy between the covenant between Israel and God and the republican regime, in that both leave the place of the lawmaker and the ruler vacant. In the case of the former, this is because no man can become lawmaker or ruler save by violence (which had proved itself disastrous in the course of Jewish history). With the latter, there is a sharp distinction between political authority and power per se, and the private individual

who cannot appropriate them save by means of violence (which had also been disastrous in the course of Roman and Italian history).[31] In other words, it is understood in both forms that political power is transcendent. If one follows this analogy through, one could argue that Abravanel perceived the demand for a monarch as the opacification of divine and political power, which eventually led to exile. His rejection of the authorization of monarchy was thus a new standpoint, which was developed in response to historical change.

His commentary testifies to the fact that he had lived through historical and cultural developments that partly undermined the foundations of feudal monarchy during the Renaissance, and which granted him a sort of external gaze on kingship, along with an interest in the revival of pre-medieval models. Indeed, Abravanel wrote his text when the Iberian monarchies were undergoing profound transformations. His opposition to the new policy of João II in the years 1481–83 and his subsequent need to escape from Portugal were the outcome of internal changes in the kingdom. Similar changes also occurred in the Castilian and Aragonese monarchies, creating at least partly the conditions for the expulsion of the Jews a few years later.[32] Abravanel, so to speak, inscribed his own perception of the changes and challenges experienced by the monarchical regimes around him in his commentary on the biblical text on the foundation of monarchy. In his commentary, monarchy became an object of philosophical, historical and theological criticism. He did not see it as a necessity but as a historical period that was preceded by earlier and better forms of non-monarchical government and was followed by their successful revival in fifteenth-century Italy.

2. The Plea of Leonardo Bruni

In the following pages, I would like to compare Abravanel's negative interpretation of the biblical demand for a king with Bruni's new demand or plea at the beginning of his famous *Laudatio* of 1403–4 in praise of the city of Florence. Although I have already demonstrated Abravanel's knowledge of republican conceptions and of the historical realities related to Bruni's *Laudatio*, the connection I propose here between the two texts is not grounded in textual evidence, but in the literary motif shared by the two texts: the appeal to God to authorize a certain political regime.

Before God and the City

Bruni opens the *Laudatio florentinae urbis* with the following sentence:

> Would that God immortal give me eloquence worthy of the city of Florence, about which I am to speak, or at least to my zeal and desire on her behalf; for either one degree or the other would, I think, abundantly demonstrate the city's magnificence and splendor. (135)[33]

Bruni here beseeches God to grant him the eloquence sufficient to tell, to voice, and to extol the qualities of Florence. Immediately he qualifies his plea by insinuating that the qualities of Florence (in analogy to those of God) are beyond all powers of speech. He asks thus for a seemingly more modest gift: the eloquence adequate for his own

desire and admiration as a citizen for the city. In his plea Bruni discloses a "new" transcendence, that of the city, of the state. This transcendence is confronted with the transcendence of God, who is immortal, as a city may not be.

Without overstating the significance of the Christian God in the *Laudatio*, it is important to note that he appears several times in the discourse, especially at the beginning and at the end (175),[34] where there is a prayer to God, to "the Most Holy Mother," and to "John the Baptist," calling upon them "to defend this most beautiful and distinguished city from every adversity and from every evil."[35] None of these references, however, seems to go beyond the literary conventions of speech. And yet the articulation of these conventions, side by side with the ancient literary sources and the political and social attitudes expressed in the *Laudatio*, is not in itself conventional and warrants closer attention in view of the plea to God which opens the text. One must remember that after writing the *Laudatio*, Bruni took up the position of apostolic secretary at the service of Pope Innocent VII, remaining in the papal court from 1405 to 1415.[36] His commitment to the unity of the Church and the solution he proposed to the papal schism is also well-known.[37]

Florence's "magnificence and splendor," which Bruni is all too eager to eulogize, are partly the outcome of the long process of state building and independence from imperial power. In the beginning of the second book of his *History of the Florentine People* (1419), Bruni described the liberation of the city from imperial control following the death of Imperator Frederick II in 1250:

> After the death of Frederick, whose shocking crimes we have already described, the Florentine people, having long been consumed with hatred for the arrogance and ferocity of those who have seized the commonwealth, roused itself to take the reins of government, to defend liberty, and to direct the city affairs in accordance with the popular will. ... It is wonderful to relate how great the strength of the People grew from these beginnings. The people was now itself a lord and a font of honor, and men who only a short while before had been frankly servile towards princes and their supporters, now, having tasted the sweetness of liberty, bent all their strength on raising themselves up and acquiring an honorable standing in their own community. Thus the people grew strong in prudence and industry at home, in courage and arms abroad.[38]

For Bruni, Florence's magnificence and power are the result of its liberation, and to a certain extent, the effect of its return to its original independence under the Roman Republic. He sees its liberation after Frederick's death as a revival of its republican past, as expressed in the excerpt already quoted from the *Laudatio* in the first part of this essay (151).[39] Recent scholarship has rightly insisted that far from being a faithful description of the Florentine regime, the *Laudatio* is a new ideological formulation, based on the classical concept of virtue and the Roman expansion during the Republican period. This new conception was partly connected to the "oligarchic" transformation of the Florentine Republic in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[40]

But to return to Bruni's text: a few sentences after the opening of the *Laudatio*, he presents his comparison between the City and God:

> Indeed, this city is of such admirable excellence that no one can match his eloquence with it. But we have seen several good and important men who have spoken concerning God himself, whose glory and magnificence the speech of the most eloquent man cannot capture, even in the smallest degree. Nor does this vast superiority keep them from trying to speak, insofar as they are able, about such an immense magnitude.[41]

The divine transcendence, to which he compares the "admirable excellence" of the city, puts the speaker in the paradoxical situation where eloquence reaches its farthest limit. Indeed, language is forever drawing boundaries in the attempt to say something, and thus always falling short of God's transcendence, for he is not "a thing." This contradiction, however, enhances the speaker's desire to speak of God, and turns the impossibility of adequate speech into a challenge to confront the impossible. Yet the truly novel element here is Bruni's turn from God to the city.[42] Through these two endeavors, of "speaking of God" and "speaking of Florence," he presents his *Laudatio* as a shift from a rhetoric that maximizes itself in the impossible challenge "to tell of God" to a new eloquence that constitutes itself and reaches its peak in the challenge of "expressing the city." It may be said that Bruni appeals to God himself for this new eloquence, but his plea could also be understood as a separation not from God, but from a certain type of speech that seeks to surmount its limits in the attempt to speak of God.

Bruni's relative lack of interest in theological and religious matters can be seen in his letter to Giovanni of Lucca, on the study of Hebrew (1442):

> Whatever was good in that [Hebrew] literature has already been translated into Latin, and by no light-weights, but by the most authoritative and learned scholars. I do not see what more you need, unless perhaps you disagree with these translators and are intending to summon them to an investigation and judgment. If you should do that, believe me, you would be foolish.[43]

His refusal to study the Hebrew texts after the translation and the scholarly work done by the Church Fathers stands in direct contrast to his intensive study of Greek and his translations of Greek philosophy:

> Don't throw up at me the study of Greek letters and the labor I have expended upon them. For if the Greek language had had translators like Jerome, this would have relieved me, and others, of much labor. But those who translated the books of Aristotle transformed them into something barbarian rather than Latin. ... Finally, what is there in common between the erudition of the Greeks and the crudity of the Jews? Greek is the language of philosophy, and for the sake of other disciplines, too, is worth learning. Together with Latin, it offers the complete range of all branches of literature. ... With Hebrew there can be no such inducement. Among the Hebrews, no philosophers, no poets, no orators are to be found.[44]

Hebrew, for him, is useless, in that unlike Greek and Latin, it cannot be subjected to a process of revival that would contribute to the development of the city and the discourses it requires (philosophy, science, rhetoric, ethics, and poetry). This sharp distinction between Hebrew and Greek—between the undertaking of translation and assimilation by the Church Fathers and the labor of translation and assimilation of

Greek literature that still needs to be done by the humanists—confirms Bruni's shift to a new rhetoric of the city.

A New Mobilization of Knowledge

Bruni's new orientation toward the city rings out in all its force in following sentence of the proem of the *Laudatio*:

> Therefore, I too shall seem to have done enough if, marshaling all competence, expertise, and skill that I have eventually acquired after so much study, I devote my all to praising this city even though I clearly understand that my ability is such that it can in no way be compared with the enormous splendor of Florence. (135–36)[45]

In his resolution to praise the city and the state, Bruni draws on all his accumulated knowledge and his very existence. This declaration of intention is directly linked to the first part of the *Laudatio*, where Bruni provides a general description of Florence's architectural beauty and of its impact on the viewer:

> Almighty God, what a wealth of buildings, what distinguished architecture there is in Florence! Indeed, how the great genius of the builders is reflected in these buildings and what a pleasure there is for those who live in them. (139)[46]

And he continues:

> As soon as they have seen the city and have inspected with their own eyes its great mass of architecture and the grandeur of its buildings, its splendor and magnificence... instantly everyone's mind and thoughts change so that they are no longer amazed by the greatest and most important exploits accomplished by the Florentine. Rather, everyone comes immediately to believe that Florence is indeed worthy of attaining dominion and rule over the entire world. (143)[47]

Bruni's admiration and mobilization for Florence seem to reflect its impact on his personal life. Indeed, after the death of his father and mother in 1386 and 1388 respectively, Bruni, then in his early twenties, left his native town of Arezzo to study in Florence, where he was "adopted" by the chancellor and humanist Coluccio Salutati.[48] The strong impact of the city on the newcomer and his successful integration into its cultural and political elites, certainly contributed to his desire to "devote [his] all to the praise of the city."

But Bruni's commitment stemmed not only from his perceptions and experiences but also from texts. His *Laudatio* was based on a Greek text—Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* (ca.155 CE), which he had learnt to read and translate under the guidance of his Byzantine tutor Chrysoloras in the years 1397–1400.[49] Bruni's text is in many ways an imitation of Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* in Ciceronian Latin. This new mobilization of Greek and Latin literature can be seen as the invention of a new form of knowledge, the knowledge of the city, and as the revival of a lost knowledge that could only be restored through study, translation, and imitation.[50] His statement about his devoting years of study to "the praise of the city" echoes other statements, notably at the end of the *Laudatio*, where he insists on the direct dependence of scholarship and language on its urban environment:

> All who wish to speak well and correctly follow the example of the Florentine manner of speech, for this city possesses men who are so expert in the common vernacular language that others seem like children compared to them. The study of literature—and I don't mean simply mercantile and vile writings but that which is especially worthy of free men—which always flourishes among every great people, grows in this city with full vigor. (174)[51]

Bruni saw his mobilization of scholarship as contributing to the cultural development of Florence, for in a way he was giving back to the city the knowledge he had acquired there. Florence's cultural life, along with its architectural beauty and other moral and political virtues, created and fed, among humanists like Bruni, the desire to participate and foster its "growth" by praising it or narrating its history.

Bruni and Aristides' "Panathenaic Oration"

Whereas Bruni's neo-Ciceronian imitation of Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* may have enabled him to celebrate the architecture, the political virtues and cultural life of Florence, there is a marked difference in the opening lines of the two speeches:

> The Greeks and, I think, also most of the barbarians, have an old custom, to pay back, as far as they can, every debt of gratitude to their foster fathers. But it seems to me, at least, that it is not easy to find persons whom anyone, (who could somehow be apparently classified as a Greek) would regard as foster parents before you, O men of Athens. For right at the start, in his initial consideration, one would find that you were both named for and providers of this customary and general means of fostering. … let none of you condemn the whole attempt [to praise Athens in a speech] for rashness and simplicity if we undertook a contest so obviously great. ... Indeed, even if this too is blameworthy, we at least have not been remiss in bold undertakings in respect to the gods.[52]

Whereas the *Panathenaic Oration* opens with the expression νομος εστι τοις Ελλησιν παλαιος stressing that its justification is rooted in an "old custom," the opening words of the *Laudatio—Vellem michi a deo immortali datum esset…*—refer to the relationship between God and humans as the primary source of authority. Even if the "audacity" of praising the city or the gods is present in the *Panathenaic Oration*, it is not confronted, as in the *Laudatio*, with the transcendence of the Christian God, but with the audacity of praising Athens after the long tradition of panegyrics. The juxtaposition of the opening lines of the two speeches suggests that Bruni's text is informed by the biblical tension between God and political power, which tension we earlier encountered in Abravanel's *Commentary*. Thus Bruni cannot simply imitate Aristides' *Oration* without first seeking permission of the Christian God.[53]

If we return to Bruni's decision to wholly devote himself to the task of praising the virtues of Florence, we may say that its attractions were such that he felt called upon to invent and rediscover a rhetoric of the city-state. The city calls. Florence calls. Bruni, like other humanists, had gone to study in Florence and later on held administrative positions in the city. Abravanel was also attracted by political power throughout his life. He was an important figure in the courts of Portugal and of Castile, and after the expulsion, in Naples and Venice, too. But this attraction to the city was not only

an attraction to power, for it may also be understood as what had awakened Bruni's desire for a new discourse on history and political realities. On this point it is worth recalling that Bruni adapted one of the central motifs of the opening of the *Panathenaic Oration*:

> However, as to the purpose of the performance of my obligation and in regard to the fostering of which I intended to speak, that which is truly pure and particularly proper to man; the fostering of studies and oratory, [μαθημασι, λογοις] to whom are these so foreign that he does not know that all of them owe their origin [αρχην] to you, [Athens]? Therefore, it is reasonable to present here a speech on this subject, and to the honor of the city, in a fitting way... this alone can be called a genuine means of expressing thanks for your kindness. For the expression of thanks for oratory, delivered by means of oratory, not only is right in itself but also first of all confirms the name given to this kind of speech. For it is alone the "use of fair speech" [ευλογος].[54]

Because Athens is the "origin" (*arche*) of human studies, the best way to express one's gratitude to it is to produce a eulogy that celebrates it as the "foster father" of all discourses.[55] Bruni adopts this cycle of the *polis*, the *logos*, and the eulogy in declaring his devotion to the city, yet he includes the Christian God as the alternative origin of speech and knowledge. It would seem that his desire to praise Florence is conveyed in the opening of the *Laudatio* through his shifting from the relationship between the Creator and his creatures to his search for a new mode of speech centered on the city. This partial return to the ancient cycle of the *polis* and the *logos* is clearly expressed in his introduction to the *Dialogi ad Petrum Histrum*, written at the same period:

> There is a wise old saying that to be happy, one must first of all have an illustrious and renowned native land. In this respect I am unhappy, Pietro, because my land has been overthrown and reduced almost to nothing by repeated blows of fortune; but I do enjoy the solace of living in this city, which seems by far to surpass and excel all others. It is eminent for its numerous inhabitants, its splendid buildings and its great undertakings; and in addition, some seeds of the liberal arts and of all human culture, which once seemed completely dead, remained here and grow day by day and very soon, I believe, will bring forth no inconsiderable light.[56]

Having moved from Arezzo to Florence, Bruni was granted the opportunity to take part in the Florentine flowering of the ancient "seeds of the liberal arts." For it is in this city that the cyclic relationship between the state, the human, the artefactual, the natural and speech recurs, manifesting itself in the city's physical, architectural, political and cultural features. This cycle appears immediately after the introductory part of the *Laudatio*:

> As we may see several sons with so great a resemblance to their father that they show it obviously in their faces, so the Florentines are in such harmony with this very noble and outstanding city that it seems they could never have lived anywhere else. Nor could the city, skillfully created, have had any other kind of inhabitants. (136)[57]

The city creates its citizens and inhabitants, but is itself at the same time ever created by them. The parent-son relationship is central to the whole argument of the *Laudatio*: the Florentines are the "descendants of the Roman people" and "by their hereditary

right" and through their imitation of their founders are promised "the dominion over the entire world and the possession of their parental legacy" (150).[58] This parental metaphor is borrowed from the *Panathenaic Oration*, especially from its opening passages where Aristides insists on the autochthony of the Athenian people:

> For the nature of our country will appear to agree with the nature of its people. The land is not now, nor was it ever, a proper home for other people. ... For whoever has dwelled in this country, shows at every possible opportunity manifest and marvelous signs of his own goodness.[59]

The perfect adaption of the Athenians to their land is then further developed into a mythical and maternal relationship where Athens is "for the human race, the mother and common nurse" (τω των ανθροπων ɣενει μητερ και τροφος κοινη). "Like spring-water," writes Aristides, "the race [of the Athenians] arose from the bosom of the earth, taking its beginning from itself (αυτο εξ αυτου λαβον την αρχην)."[60] Bruni, in contrast, does not adopt the myth of autochthony, Florence being a colony founded at a later stage of Roman history, but he strongly wishes to see it accomplish its Roman heredity and destiny. Thus Bruni's dedication of his scholarship to the praise of Florence appears to be not only an effect of the immanent development of the city but also the rediscovery of the common origin and deployment of the city, the discourse, and the speaker.[61]

A New "Scene" of Authorization

In the first sentence of the *Laudatio*, Bruni appeals to God to grant him a new language to praise the city: "Would that God immortal give me eloquence worthy of the city of Florence, about which I am to speak, or, at least to my zeal and desire on her behalf; for either one degree or the other would, I think, abundantly demonstrate the city's magnificence and splendor." He wants to give voice to the historical reality of the city of Florence, which came into being through a long and ongoing process. Thus, with the new and ever renewing city of Florence shall be created a new language, a new memory, and a new mission: to tell of the city, that is, to give a rhetorical shape to the political cycle we are part of.

Bruni's search for a new language to describe a new reality reflects a historical and cultural change that we may now understand somewhat better. His reorientation towards the city is articulated as the permission man asks for, and takes, from God, as the elders did in 1 Samuel 8. This rhetorical permission opens up a space between two ways of understanding Being: either through the relationship between God and man, or through the relationship between the city and man.[62] In this in-between space, an earlier understanding of the *civitas* and the *polis* returns as Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* in Bruni's *Laudatio*. This, I believe, is how Bruni's translation should be understood, for it is neither a return nor a revival in the literal sense, but rather a new way of speaking both before the city and before God. And it is in this in-between space—which would eventually become the modern public space—that the Roman Republic and Athenian democracy return. This, however, is a return "in translation" with a new purpose: to express the city of today, or of tomorrow, and to serve its interests.

Conclusion

The comparative study of Abravanel's and Bruni's use of the literary motif of the plea to God for a change of regime discloses a number of shared "republican" affinities. Abravanel's rejection of the "monarchical revolution," based on the identification of ancient and contemporary non-monarchical regimes, allowed him to reframe the monarchic period either as a problematic regime in the biblical past or as epitomizing the negative aspects of present political regimes. In my attempt to assess his possible borrowing of Bruni's literary elaboration of Roman and Florentine republicanism, I hope to have contributed to our understanding of his perspective on the monarchy and its negative role in Jewish history and exile.

However, if "republicanism" in Abravanel's commentary on 1 Samuel 8 is used to reject the demand of the elders for authorizing a new monarchical regime, the opening sentences of the *Laudatio* seem to do exactly the opposite. In his speech Bruni constructs a new "scene" for the divine authorization of Florence, appealing to God to "recognize" the city's return to a "republican" regime, and to grant him the eloquence to justify it. Thus Abravanel and Bruni seem to use republicanism with different ends in mind. For the former, it is a way of critically appraising the "new monarchic" regime under which he and his fellow Jews were living. For the latter, it is a justification of the Florentine socio-political reality. Abravanel seems to be interested in returning to a former stage of the Portuguese monarchy, where the balance between the king and the nobility fostered the ascension of the Abravanel family. In his commentary on 1 Samuel 8, he develops a positive conception of the period of the Judges as representing the right balance between theological and political interests. Bruni seems far less nostalgic for the earlier stages of the Florentine Republic and much more inclined to justify and serve the more recent "oligarchic" political changes.

Without overstating the religious aspects of the *Laudatio*, its comparison with Abravanel's commentary on 1 Samuel 8 shows that Bruni found rhetorical means to distinguish but also to articulate the Christian God and his own search for a new rhetoric of the city. While my comparison between the two thinkers discloses a number of shared motifs, interests and conceptions, it also reveals the sharp divergence in their attitude to their particular political environment. This divergence is, I believe, an important factor in our understanding not only of the Christian and the Jewish reception of ancient republicanism but in its impact on the relations of Christians and Jews in the early modern period.

Notes

1. For an almost complete bibliography, see Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abravanel's Stance toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001), 287–312; Jolene S. Kellner, "Academic Studies on and New Editions of Works by Isaac Abravanel: 2000–2008," *Jewish History* 23 (2009): 313–17.
2. For the letters, documents, and interpretation of Abravanel's relationship with the Da Pisas and Italy, see Cedric Cohen Skalli, *Isaac Abravanel: Letters* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).
3. Hans Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*: *Studies in Humanistic and Political Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 232–63. For the historical, philological,

and intellectual context of the *Laudatio,* see Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955); Eugenio Garin, *La cultura filosofica del Rinascimento italiano. Richerche e documenti* (Bologna: Tascili Bompiani, 2001), 3–37; James Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson, eds., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni: Selected Texts* (Binghamton, NY: SUNY Press, 1987); Ronald G. Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients: The Origins of Humanism from Lovato to Bruni* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2003), 392–442.

4. Don Isaac Abravanel, *Commentary on the Former Prophets* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1965); hereafter page references to the *Commenatry* are cited in the text. For the translations from Hebrew of 1 Samuel 8, I relied (with a few changes) on Menachem Lorberbaum's English translation in *The Jewish Political Tradition, Volume 1: Authority*, ed. Michael Walzer, Menachem Lorberbaum, Noam J. Zohar, and Yair Lorberbaum (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 150–54. Translations of other portions of the *Commentary* are from Elias Lipiner, *Two Portuguese Exiles in Castile: Dom David Negro and Dom Isaac Abravanel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 55–60, or are my own. On Isaac Abravanel's reception of ancient and Renaissance republicanism and the early modern Jewish reception of republicanism, see Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," in *Isaac Abravanel: Six Lectures*, ed. J. B. Trend and H. Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 95–129; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Kings and Laws in Late Medieval Jewish Thought: Nissim of Gerona vs. Isaac Abrabanel," in *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction between Judaism and Other Cultures*, ed. Leo Landman (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1990), 67–90; Avraham Melamed, *Ahotan haketana shel hahochmot* (Hebrew) (Raanana, Israel: Open University Press, 2011), 242–81, and *Wisdom's Little Sister: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Boston, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 272–304; and Walzer et al., *The Jewish Political Tradition*, 1.108–65.
5. On this episode in Isaac Abravanel's life, see Lipiner, *Two Portuguese Exiles in Castile*.
6. Jonathan Irvine Israel, *European Jewry in the Age of Mercantilism: 1550*–1750 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 5–34.
7. Haim Beinart, *The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain* (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002).
8. 1 Samuel 8 has, of course, to be contrasted with Gideon's rejection of monarchy in Judges 6–8.
9. Walzer et al., *The Jewish Political Tradition*, 1.121.
10. For Afonso V and João II, see Saul Antonio Gomes, *D. Afonso V* (Rio de Mouro, Portugal: Circulo de Leitores, 2006); Luis Adão da Fonseca, *D. João II* (Rio de Mouro, Portugal: Circulo de Leitores, 2005).
11. Lipiner, *Two Portuguese Exiles*, 56–57.
12. To get a sense of the different modern critical responses to Abravanel's commentary on 1 Sam. 8, see Ytzhaq Baer, "Don Yitzhaq Abarbanel ve-yehaso el beayot ha-historiyah ve-hamedina" (Hebrew), *Tarbiz* 8 (1937): 241–59; Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching;" Ravitzky, "Kings and Laws in Late Medieval Jewish Thought;" Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher* (London: Cornell University Press, 1988); Abraham Melamed, *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2003).
13. On the literary and historical background of Abravanel's attitude to the rabbis and scholars of the past, see Lawee, *Isaac Abravanel's Stance toward Tradition*.
14. For a study of this third claim, see Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," 119–24; Melamed, *Ahotan haketana shel hahochmot*, 263–67.
15. See Abraham Melamed, "The Organic Theory of the State in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought," in *Wisdom's Little Sister*, 140–74.
16. It is worth contrasting these arguments with Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers: De regimine principum, Ptolomy of Lucca with portions attributed to Thomas Aquina*s, trans.

James M. Blythe (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 60–103, 215–88.

17. Walzer et al., *The Jewish Political Tradition*, 1.150–51.
18. Leonardo Bruni, *Panegyric to the City of Florence*, trans. Benjamin G. Kohl, in *The Earthly Republic: Italian Humanists on Government and Society*, ed. Benjamin G. Kohl and Ronald G. Witt, with Elizabeth B. Welles (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1978), 169; hereafter page references to the *Laudatio* are cited in the text. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 259.
19. On the circulation of Bruni's *Laudatio* during the fifteenth century, see James Hankins, "Rhetoric, History and Ideology: The Civic Panegyrics of Leonardo Bruni," in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 143–78.
20. For the medieval context of Bruni's republicanism, see James M. Blythe, "'Civic Humanism' and Medieval Political Thought," in Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 30–74.
21. The *Commentary on the Former Prophets* often elaborates on the difference between the particular, the general, and the divine. See, for example, 15–16, 93–96, 106–8, 123–14, 146–48, 162–66, 220–21. Contrast also with Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of the Peace*, ed. and trans. Annabel Brett (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005), *First Discourse*, 3–136.
22. On this aspect of Abravanel's life, see Cedric Cohen Skalli, *Isaac Abravanel: Letters*.
23. In his introduction to the book of Judges, he elaborates on the difference between the rule of the judge and of the king, stressing the former's limitations compared with the latter's extra-judicial role (*Commentary*, 93–95).
24. For example, Alemanno writes: "This people [of Florence] dwelling in the reigning city, are all sons of kings, because there are no guards, governors or rulers over it. Rather they all—or almost all—are great and honored ministers, judges, guards and governors, each on his own day, every month and every year, according to the custom of the laws of government. According to this they all are like kings and deputies, magnanimous and wise, because each one raises his son in just ways and kingly stratagems, so that they will know the law and government of the state when their time comes to officiate over the public and rule them. Therefore, the people of the state are more perfect and more kingly than the people of another city where one king rules" (Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister*, 287).
25. On the "idealized," "rhetorical," or "ideological" presentation of the Florentine regime, see John N. Najemy, "Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics," in Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 74–104.
26. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 245. For another textual confrontation, see Ravitzky, "Kings and Laws in Late Medieval Jewish Thought."
27. On the Christian sources of this conception, see Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," 111–29.
28. "Te eligit Dominus Deus tuus ut sis ei populus peculiaris ideo voluit esse rex immediatus illius populi, propter quod legem dedit ei in monte sinai per se ipsum, id est per angelum in persona illius loquantem, et non per hominem mediatorem: propter quod voluit homines gubernatores illius populi ab ipso immediate institui, tanquem eius vicarii essent, non reges, vel Domini, ut patet in Moyse, et Iosue, et de iudicibus sequentibus, de quibus dicitur in libro Iudicum. Suscitavit eis Dominus talem, vel talem iudicem, propter quod filii Israel fecerunt contra ordinationem Domini, petendo super se regem hominum mortalem" (*Glosa ordinaria* I Regum VIII de Lyra, f. 71).
29. For an introduction to this question, see Salo Wittmayer Baron, *The Jewish Community: Its History and Structure to the American Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1942), 208–82.
30. Ravitzky has rightly taken issue with Abravanel's twofold criticism of biblical kingship and Roman emperors with a famous passage in Thomas Aquinas' *De regimine principum*, bk. 1, chap. 5: "Experience therefore seems to show that a single city governed by rulers who hold office for one year only can sometimes accomplish more than a king can even if he has three or four cities, and that small services exacted by kings bear more heavily than

great burdens imposed [on itself] by a community of citizens. This principle was exemplified during the emergence of the Roman commonwealth; for the common people were enlisted into the army and paid wages for military service, and when the common treasury was not sufficient to pay the wages, private wealth was put to public use to such an extent that not even the senators retained anything made of gold for themselves apart from one gold ring and one seal each, which were the insignia of their rank. Presently, however, the Romans became exhausted by the continual quarrels which eventually grew into civil wars, and the liberty which they had so striven to attain was then snatched from their hands by those civil wars, and they began to be under the power of the emperors: who at first would not allow themselves to be called kings, because the name of king was odious to the Romans. Some of these emperors faithfully pursued the common good, as kings should, and the Roman commonwealth was increased and preserved by their efforts. Most of them, however, were tyrants to their subjects and weak and ineffective in the face of their enemies, and these brought the Roman commonwealth to naught. A similar process occurred in the case of the people of the Hebrews. At first, while they were ruled by judges they were plundered on all sides by their enemies, for each man did only what was good in his own eyes. Then, at their own request, kings were divinely given to them; but because of the wickedness of the kings they fell away from the worship of the one God and finally were led away into captivity." *Saint Thomas Aquinas' Political Writings*, ed. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15–16. See also Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers*, 70–72.

31. On Abravanel's rejection of the Aristotelian distinction between legal monarchy and tyranny, see Ravitzky, "Kings and Laws in Late Medieval Jewish Thought." For Abravanel, it is a distinction between regimes (republic vs monarchy), not between types of monarchy.
32. On the internal changes in the Portuguese and Castilian kingdoms and their impact on Abravanel and the Jews, see Yitzhaq Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spainvol. II: From the Fourteenth Century to the Expulsion* (Philadelphia, PA; The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1966); Maria J. Pimento Ferro-Tavares, *Os Judeos em Portugal no Século XV* (Lisbon: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 1984).
33. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 232–33.
34. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 263.
35. See also Kohl et al., *The Earthly Republic*, 139, 149, 168; Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 236, 244, 258.
36. For a general description of these years, see Griffiths et al., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 25–35.
37. See, for example, Bruni's letters on the need to end the schism and the procedures required: Griffiths et al., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 322–32.
38. Leonardo Bruni, *History of the Florentine People, Volume I, Books 1–IV*, ed. and trans. James Hankins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 109–11.
39. For a critical interpretation of Florence's *libertas* as independence, see Najemy, "Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics," 97–98. For the medieval context of Bruni's republicanism, see Blythe, "'Civic Humanism' and Medieval Political Thought."
40. See, for example, Najemy, "Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics;" Hankins, "Rhetoric, History and Ideology: The Civic Panegyrics of Leonardo Bruni;" Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, 419–31.
41. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 232–33.
42. On the urban background of Bruni's humanism and of Italian humanism in general, see Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*.
43. See Griffiths et al., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 334. "Litterae enim illae quicquid habuerunt boni jampridem in latinos translatum est, nec leves quidem auctores, sed gravissimi, ac doctissimi transtulerunt. Hic tu quid jam amplius requiras, non equidem intelligo. Nisi forte illis ipsis interpretibus diffidis, ac eos in disquisionem, & judicium vocare contendis, quod si feceris, crede michi, ineptus sis" (Lorenzo Mehus, ed., *Leonardi Bruni Arretini Epistolarum libri VIII* [Florence, 1741], 2.160–61).

44. Griffiths et al., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 335. "Neque vero michi objeceris Graecarum litterarum studia, & operam illis impensam. Si enim tales interpretes, qualis Hieronymus fuit, Graeca lingua habuisset, labore me, & ceteros liberasset. Sed qui libros Aristotelis transtulerant, barbaros magis, quam latinos illos effecerant. Deinde quid simile habet Graecorum eruditio cum Judaeorum ruditate? Graeca enim lingua philosophiae, ceterarumque disciplinarum gratia addiscitur... Apud Hebraeos autem nullum tale invitamentum esse potest. Nulli enim illis philosophi, nulli poetae, nulli oratores reperiuntur" (Mehus, *Leonardi Bruni Arretini Epistolarum libri VIII*, 2.163).
45. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 233.
46. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 236.
47. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 238–39.
48. In a letter to the Pope in 1405, Salutati describes these years: "It was our regular habit to study together, and, since he was the judge of all my compositions, and I in turn of his, we stimulated one another, as iron is whetted against iron. It would be hard to say which of us profited the more from this pleasant and honorable companionship, but both of us came out of it more learned, so that I have to say that we were to one another in turn both pupil and master" (Griffiths et al., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 47).
49. Griffiths et al., *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 23–25, 100–116, 197–234.
50. The concept and history of the Roman Republic was well known to medieval political thinkers, yet in the *Laudatio* and other works Bruni deliberately concealed it. See Blythe, "'Civic Humanism' and Medieval Political Thought." For Bruni's adaptation of central themes of Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* to Ciceronian Latin, see Antonio Santosuosso, "Leonardo Bruni Revisited: A Reassessment of Hans Baron's Thesis on the Influence of The Classics in the *Laudatio florentinae urbis*," in *Aspects of Late Medieval Government and Society: Essay Presented to J. R. Lander*, ed. J. R. Rowe (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 25–51; Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients*, 404–31.
51. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 263.
52. Aristides, *'Panathenaic Oration' and 'In Defence of Oratory,'* trans. C. A. Behr (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 7–9.
53. Santosuosso indicates correctly that Bruni's adaptation of Aristides' *Panathenaic Oration* completely overlooked the section in the *Oration* dealing with the honors conferred by the gods on the city of Athens, but he did not mention that Bruni's text opens with a plea to God. See Santosuosso, "Leonardo Bruni Revisited," 37, 40.
54. Aristides, *Panathenaic Oration*, 9.
55. For Aristotle's and Cicero's affirmation of the common birth and development of *logos* or rhetoric and the city, see Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Stephen Everson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1252b28–1253a37; Cicero, *De invention*; *De optimo genere oratorum*; *Topica*, trans. Harry M. Hubbel (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1949), 2.2–3. See also Cary J. Nederman, "Rhetoric, Reason, and Republic: Republicanisms—Ancient, Medieval, and Modern," in Hankins, *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 247–69.
56. Griffiths et al.,*The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, 63. *Prosatori latini del Quattrocento*, ed. Eugenio Garin (Milan: Ricardo Ricciardi, 1952), 44.
57. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 233.
58. Baron, *From Petrarch to Leonardo Bruni*, 244. On this aspect, see Hankins, "Rhetoric, History and Ideology."
59. Aristides, *Panathenaic Oration*, 8.
60. Aristides, *Panathenaic Oration*, 28–29.
61. Najemy argued convincingly that Bruni's insistence on a parental or paternal conception of the Florentine Republic as the son of the Roman Republic was both the result of the oligarchic transformation of the Florentine regime and also of the anxieties of the elites in light of a development of the state that would not be an imitation of the virtues of the Roman founders. See Najemy, "Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics," but also Witt, *In the Footsteps of the Ancients,* 404–31, and Hankins, "Rhetoric, History and Ideology."
62. In this essay I could not discuss Heidegger's *Letter on Humanism* (1946), where he responds to Beaufret's question on humanism: "You ask, 'Comment redonner un sens au mot

'Humanisme?' How can some sense be restored to the word 'humanism'?" Your question not only presupposes a desire to retain the word 'humanism' but also contains an admission that this word has lost its meaning. It has lost it through the insight that the essence of humanism is metaphysical, which now means that metaphysics not only does not pose the question concerning the truth of being but also obstructs the question, insofar as metaphysics persists in the oblivion of being. But the same thinking that has led us to this insight into the questionable essence of humanism has likewise compelled us to think the essence of the human being more primordially." Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings from Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 224. Nevertheless, a more nuanced approach to the humanistic literature is needed, one that would stress the "history and destiny of Being" in its new humanistic features (partially attempted in my discussion of Bruni and Abravanel), and that would recognize that humanistic understandings of Being (city, nature, rhetoric etc.) cannot simply be reduced to an obstruction of Being or to the "tyranny over Being." Would Heidegger's ontological distinction between *Sein* and *Seinde* have been possible without humanists like Bruni who developed new rhetorical possibilities out of ancient sources while deepening their understanding of how these differed from early Christian and medieval sources? The Heideggerian distinction of Being from ontic entities is already present in Bruni's confrontation of the transcendence of God with that of the city.