

CIVIC KNIGHTHOOD IN THE EARLY RENAISSANCE: LEONARDO BRUNI'S *DE MILITIA* (CA 1420)

JAMES HANKINS

In the comic tales of Franco Sacchetti, the trecento *novellista*, there is a story (no. 150) that shows with great vividness how Florentines of the early Renaissance viewed the knighthood of their time. A knight of the Bardi family has been chosen as a foreign judge (*podestà*) of the city of Padua. He is a tiny man, unmilitary in his habits, and an indifferent horseman. To give himself a more impressive appearance, he decides to wear a magnificent crest on his helmet, consisting of a bear rampant with drawn claws and the motto: «Non ischerzare con l'orso, se non vogli essere morso» (Don't play games with the bear if you don't want to be bitten). On his way to Padua, he passes through Ferrara, where in the main piazza by the prince's castle he is accosted by a gigantic German knight. The German, who is a bit tipsy, is incensed to see the diminutive Florentine bearing what he claims are his, the German's, own arms and he challenges the Florentine to a duel. The Florentine, however, can see no point in coming to blows and arranges a deal through his seconds. «Let's settle this with florins and put honor aside, he says. If you want me to go on my way as I came, I'll be off right now; if you mean that I shouldn't bear his crest, I swear by God's holy angels that it's mine and that I had it made in Florence by the painter Luchino and it cost me five florins; if he wants it, give me five florins and take the crest away».¹ The German, triumphant as though he'd conquered

¹ SACCHETTI 2004, 474: «Or bene, rechianla a fiorini, e l'onore stia da l'uno de' lati: se vuole che io vada a mio viaggio, come io c'entrai, io me n'andrò incontentenente; se vuole dire

a city, paid up willingly. The Bardi knight went off with his five florins to Padua, where he was able to purchase a new crest for only two florins, making a clear profit of three.²

This little piece of buffoonery gives us a good idea of what knighthood had come to mean in the minds of many Italians by the late fourteenth century. For the Florentine judge, his knighthood was an honor which gave him the opportunity to dress up in a dazzling costume. It was a piece of merchandise he had purchased; nothing more. He had no sense of shame at his lack of *bellica virtus*. Nor was he an isolated character, at least in the literary imagination. The theme of the decline of knighthood was, as a matter of fact, a common one in the literature of the period. In the *Corbaccio* of Giovanni Boccaccio the knights of the time are depicted as «poltroons spangled with pearls and draped in ermine, decked with gold spurs and swords with gilded hilts, yet with as little appreciation of true knighthood as the devil has of the cross.» The jurists were as acerbic as the novellists on the subject. Cino da Pistoia criticized «pseudo-knights who were immersed in their profits and scarcely knew how to gird on a sword».³ They enjoyed the prestige and privileges of knighthood without having any of the military responsibilities of the order.

The historical reality, so far as we can reconstruct it, seems to correspond to the literary image. In Florence we hear of four-year-old children or old men on their deathbeds being made knights. During the tumult of the Ciompi in 1378 sixty-seven men were created knights by the revolutionary workers in a single day.⁴ When the Ciompi revolt was put down and the oligarchy restored

che io non porti il cimiero suo, io giuro su le sante Dio guagnele che'egli è mio e che io lo feci fare a Firenze a Luchino dipintore e costòmi cinque fiorini; se egli vuole, mandimi fiorini cinque e tolgasi il cimiero».

² SACCHETTI 2004, 472-475.

³ BAYLEY 1961, 206.

⁴ ACCIAIUOLI 1917-1934, 25.

there was yet another orgy of knight-making: twenty-four new knights were created on 20 January 1382 at a single ceremony.⁵ Such mass creations were clearly political actions, not rewards for military virtue, as was shown many years ago by Gaetano Salvemini. The aim was to undermine or to strengthen the power of the Parte Guelfa, a conservative political society in Florence that was also a *societas militum*, to which knights automatically belonged by reason of their rank.⁶

A similar disregard for the military functions of knighthood is shown in the practice of awarding knighthood to men who were being sent on diplomatic missions; here the motive seems to have been to permit Florentine diplomats to cut a better figure abroad when representing their city. As late as 1419 we hear of a mass creation of twenty knights, the sole purpose of which was to enrich the spectacle of welcome for the solemn entry of Pope Martin V into Florence. It seems that the desire to have twenty Florentines dress up in crowns of olive leaves, green tunics sewn with pearls, gold sword, spurs and swordbelt, so as to welcome the Holy Father with greater splendor, was sufficient inducement for the Florentine government to debase the coinage of knighthood.⁷

But by 1419 things were changing; a reaction had set in. A movement was afoot in Florence to reform knighthood, and the Parte Guelfa was at the head of it. The Parte was an immensely wealthy and prestigious institution that occupied a curious semi-public, semi-private position in Florentine life. Unfriendly critics have compared its role to that of the Communist party in the old Soviet Union, but this is to overstate its influence if not its aspirations. It is certainly true that its leadership overlapped to a surprising extent with the oligarchic leadership of Florence, especially in the period 1382-1434, when that oligarchy

⁵ SALVEMINI 1972, 113.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, 189 (no. 77).

was at the height of its power. Officially, the Parte's role was to guard against constitutional innovations. Less officially, it aimed to safeguard the position of old Florentine families and to minimize the influence of *gente nuova*, new men, in society and politics. It was also the institution charged with overseeing all activities relating to communal knighthood, i.e., the *dignità cavalleresche* conferred by the Comune of Florence on selected citizens. On feast days it organized the part of civic processions that featured knights. Every year on 28 July, the feast of St Victor, it organized a horse race at S. Felice in Piazza; on 9 October, on the feast of St Dionysius, it sponsored a joust in the Piazza Santa Croce. The latter two occasions celebrated Guelf victories over the Ghibelline city of Pisa. In addition, for citizens newly knighted by the commune, the Parte held lavish ceremonies in its own palace and attached buildings in Via delle Terme near Orsanmichele.⁸

By 1413, there were signs that the Parte was taking active steps to reform knighthood and to renew its own tarnished image. In typical fashion, the Parte saw its task as one of excluding the «Ghibellines and peasants», i.e. *gente nuova*, who had infiltrated its ranks. The dignity of knighthood was to be ennobled by taking it out of the hands of the unworthy. The movement of reform culminated in March of 1420, in the revision of the statutes of the Parte Guelfa. The new statutes were designed to ensure control over Parte affairs by the old Guelf families and to keep out *gente nuova*; they were also intended to prevent the indiscriminate creation of communal knights that had disfigured the institution in the past.⁹ The statutes were revised by a commission of six Parte members, among whom was a man who had recently inherited a leading role in the Florentine oligarchy, Rinaldo di Maso degli Albizzi. The commission was aided

⁸ BRUCKER 1962; BRUCKER 1977; ZERVAS 1988; BROWN 1992, especially 104-108 on the attempted revival of the Parte in their period 1423-1434.

⁹ Florence, Archivio di Stato, Capitani della Parte Guelfa rosso, vol. 3, f. 2r.

in its work of drafting the new statutes by a former apostolic secretary to four popes, Leonardo Bruni of Arezzo, who had recently begun a new career in Florence as its official historian. The original codex containing the revised statutes survives; it was written, significantly, in the new *littera antiqua* of the humanists with an early humanistic vine-stem initial; the hand is identifiable as that of the humanist scribe Antonio di Mario, who copied a number of Bruni's works for Florentine patrons, including the dedication copy of Bruni's translation of the pseudo Aristotelian *Economics*, made for Cosimo de' Medici in the very same year, 1420.¹⁰

The connection of Bruni and Albizzi is an interesting one, since in December of 1421, less than two years after the revision of the Parte Guelfa's statutes, Bruni dedicated to Albizzi a little treatise entitled *De militia* – a title which is best translated as *On Knighthood*. The coincidence of dates and persons as well as the topic of the treatise already suggest that Bruni's work should be seen as part of the Parte Guelfa's programme to reform communal knighthood, as this article will argue. What makes the work of more than antiquarian interest, however, is the surprising way Bruni realized this project of reforming knighthood. Bruni's aim in the *De militia* was nothing less than to co-opt the most glamorous of medieval ideals, the ideal of chivalry, and to re-interpret it in terms of Graeco-Roman authorities on military service. In other words, he aimed to make the reform of knighthood into an aspect of the revival of antiquity – that great Renaissance movement which in those years was just beginning to sweep through Florence and other Italian cities.

It needs to be said that this interpretation of the *De militia* is by no means the orthodox one at present. The most detailed study of the text, by C. C. Bayley

¹⁰ On Bruni's role, see DE ANGELIS 1990. On Antonio di Mario's copies of Bruni's works, see DE LA MARE 1985, 1, 483.

published in 1961, sees the work as «a link in a long chain of controversy, extending from the thirteenth to the sixteenth century, excited by the progressive displacement in Italy of citizen militias by mercenary troops.» Bayley, in other words, saw the text primarily as a critique of the condottiere system. Bayley's interpretation came under criticism already in the 1960s in reviews by Paul Oskar Kristeller, Sergio Bertelli and Hermann Goldbrunner. Kristeller pointed out that the word *militia* should be translated as «knighthood», not «militia» in the sense of volunteer citizen soldiery; as a result, he claimed, the whole concept behind the book was flawed.¹¹ Bertelli, too, said the book was «nato su di un equivoco» and made the suggestion that Bruni's treatise should be connected with the reform of the Parte Guelfa in 1420 rather than with the reform of the condottiere system.¹² Goldbrunner repeated these criticisms and raised a number of more technical questions regarding Bayley's critical edition of Bruni's text.¹³

Not all of these criticisms are entirely fair. Bayley certainly knew that *militia* could mean «knighthood» and he was aware of the connections between the *De militia* and the 1420 statutes. Indeed, he realized that the *De militia* was somehow related to contemporary criticisms of «carpet knights». The treatise, he admitted in passing, «lodged a discreet but unmistakable protest against the current decline of civic knighthood.»¹⁴ Nevertheless, Bayley's attempt to read the text primarily as a critique of the condottiere system inevitably skewed his interpretation and led to several false emphases in addition to the errors of fact and method pointed out by his critics.

¹¹ KRISTELLER 1963.

¹² BERTELLI 1964.

¹³ GOLDBRUNNER 1966. Similar criticisms of Bayley are found in HALE 1964 and RUBINSTEIN 1963.

¹⁴ BAYLEY 1961, 208.

Bayley's rather perverse view of Bruni's text – which after all never mentions condottieri or mercenaries – may be traced to the influence of Hans Baron's famous book, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, first published in 1955.¹⁵ This book, extremely popular in America and Italy during the 1960s, tended to read Bruni's writings as promoting republicanism and popular government. Impressed by Baron's conception of civic humanism, Bayley was predisposed to read Bruni's *De militia* as a work that advocated replacing the mercenary system with citizen soldiers. But since Baron's interpretation of Bruni in recent years has been brought into question on other grounds, it is worth while reopening the question of the *De militia* meaning and purpose.¹⁶ The task is all the more necessary as the interpretation of Baron and Bayley has been endorsed by two leading Bruni scholars of the present day, Paolo Viti and Lucia Gualdo Rosa.¹⁷ Moreover, the alternative interpretation of the *De militia*, as an attempt to reform communal knighthood in accordance with ancient models, has never been worked out in detail, beyond the passing suggestion in Bertelli's review. As this article aims to show, a careful reading of this text can help us understand more clearly what the Renaissance of classical antiquity meant in a concrete social and political context: Florence in the 1420s.

The *De militia* treats four main topics: (1) the origin and true nature of knighthood; (2) the question whether modern Italian knighthood conforms in its general pattern with ancient ideas about military service; (3) the question of how a knight should dress, and (4) the issue of what the duties of the knight should be during peacetime. The radical nature of Bruni's approach becomes clear immediately in his treatment of the first topic. Bruni ignores the usual

¹⁵ BARON, 1955, 1966.

¹⁶ See now HANKINS 2000, with references to the earlier literature.

¹⁷ GUALDO ROSA 1990 ; Viti in BRUNI 1996b, 651-53. By contrast, Bayley's interpretation is rejected by BOENINGER 1995, 204-209, whose reading is closer to the one advanced here. For the historical phenomenon of civic knighthood in general see GASPARRI 1992.

view of his contemporaries that knighthood was a transalpine invention of recent centuries. Instead, he raises the question to a higher level of abstraction altogether by inquiring what the essence is of communal knighthood – that is, of military service to the state considered as a necessary social and political function. The question for him is as much a philosophical as an historical one. He begins from the Aristotelian proposition that man is a political animal. Since the *miles* is a man, it follows that an inquiry into the nature of the *miles* is fundamentally an inquiry into the nature of the state. «Civitas enim totius vite cunctorumque humanorum munerum princeps est et perfectrix.» (The city-state is the initiator and perfecter of our whole life and all human tasks), he writes.¹⁸ Following Macrobius' *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* and Polybius' *Histories* (a text of which Bruni had published a paraphrase only the year before), he avers that there are two ways of investigating the nature of the state: the philosophical and the historical.¹⁹ The philosophical way exists in the mind, as an analytical model, while the historical way is based on the analysis of actual states. Both shed light on the origin of military service.

Bruni's philosophical guide to the essence of the *miles* is Book 2 of Aristotle's *Politics*. This was a natural choice. Bruni had just finished translating the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1418) and the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics* (1420) and would soon embark on a translation of the *Politics* that would eventually be

¹⁸ For the text of the *De militia* with an Italian translation, see BRUNI 1996b, 649-701 (quoted passage on 656); for an English translation, see BRUNI 1987, 127-145 (quoted passage on 128).

¹⁹ MACROBIUS, *Comm. in Somnium Scipionis*, cap. 1. The comparison of philosophical and historical republics is most fully worked out in Book 6 of Polybius's *Histories*, the surviving fragments of which did not become known in Florence until the end of the fifteenth century, but the theme is implicit throughout the first five books (paraphrased by Bruni in his *De primo bello punico* of 1419/22), for example at 1.1-3.

published in 1436.²⁰ He considered himself an Aristotelian, or as he put it, a follower of Aristotle in matter, of Cicero in manner.»²¹ Despite his allegiance to the moral philosophy of Aristotle, however, Bruni uses Aristotle more as an historical source than as a philosophical authority. Aristotle himself had said little about the function of the *miles* in the state, but he reported the view of Phileas of Carthage, Hippodamus, and Plato that the protective function of the miles was «necessary and natural» to the state; that *milites* or *custodes* should therefore be permanently constituted as one of the three orders or classes in the state with appropriate responsibilities and privileges. Bruni takes this to be the «philosophical» view of the *miles'* role in the state. Bruni seems also to have consulted Plato's *Republic* itself, or the Latin translation by Uberto Decembrio, since he quotes a passage in *Republic* 2 (not found in Aristotle) where Socrates describes the ideal character of the guardian caste as one combining ferocity against enemies with gentleness toward fellow-citizens.²²

As part of his «philosophical» consideration of the function of the *miles* in the state, Bruni investigates the etymology of the word *miles*. The results are not impressive. Bruni approves the derivation of *miles* from *malum arcendum*: the *miles* is one who wards off evil from the state – an embarrassingly close parallel to the infamous *lucus a non lucendo*. Here one may be reminded of Voltaire's witticism that etymology is a science where the vowels count for nothing and the consonants for very little. But the digression shows that, in Bruni's mind, as in those of other humanists, there was a natural parallelism between grammatical and historical methods. Just as the meaning of a word was established by its derivation and current usage, so establishing the meaning of an insti-

²⁰ See HANKINS 2007-2008, 22-35, which shows that Bruni had begun work on the *Politics* version already in the mid-1420s.

²¹ *Ep.* IX, 4, in BRUNI 1741, vol. 2, 147-49.

²² See *Republic* 2, 375c, and HANKINS 2003-2004, 1, 51-90, at 84.

tution had to take into account its original function as well as contemporary practice. This is precisely Bruni's approach in discovering the meaning of knighthood.

Bruni next turns to the historical part of his study of military origins. Here he relies chiefly on Livy and Cicero. In the best-constituted historical societies military service is treated very differently from the way it is treated in philosophers' republics. For Bruni (as for Macrobius), Rome is of course the best of all states that have actually existed. It is morally inferior to the philosopher's republic in that it makes concessions to human weakness, but it has the advantage of being possible.²³ According to Bruni, military service in the state founded by Romulus was a *temporary* condition, rigidly divided from civilian life by a religious oath. Soldiers did not form a caste apart, but were citizens performing military duties on a temporary basis. The military oath, as Bruni learned from the *De officiis* (1.11.36), prevented the civilian from acting as a soldier and vice versa. In what was presumably a further concession to human weakness, Romulus also allowed for class distinctions among his *milites*. The Roman military consisted of both *pedites* and *equites*. The latter rank was accorded to citizens of outstanding wealth, ancestry or accomplishment. In time they formed the equestrian order, and were considered noble. From thence they might rise further to consular or senatorial rank. This did not mean that the *pedites*, however, were downgraded to servile status as in the society of Gaul; Romulus did not permit the plebs to be stripped of its right and dignity. But he did give special honor and dignity to equestrian soldiers. And he allowed for a certain mobility between ranks, a principle that Bruni, as a *novus homo*, heartily approves.

²³ Bruni's view mirrors Cicero's own view: see ATKINS 2013, chapter 2.

As can be seen, what Bruni is doing here is reinterpreting the meaning of communal knighthood, using the classical concept of the *polis*: a natural association of men under common laws, organized for the purpose of realizing the good life. The military function of the state, whether temporary or permanent, is a necessary one, and derives its value from its organic role in preserving other members of the state. We are now worlds away from the medieval concept of chivalry. Here are no divided loyalties to lord, lady and church; here is no supranational code of conduct, no crusaders fighting the paynim in foreign lands, no roving adventurers seeking to prove their prowess or find the Holy Grail, no jousts or tournaments or feats of arms. We would also seem to be at some distance even from the communal knights of late medieval Florence – those middle-aged merchants in fancy dress. So it comes as a surprise to hear Bruni assert, in the next section of his work, that it is possible to identify modern Italian knighthood with military service in ancient times. By this Bruni does not mean that the ancient soldier or *eques* and the modern gentleman-cavaliere resemble each other in their way of life. Rather the resemblance between ancient and modern knighthood is a formal one, seen mainly at the level of constitutional theory. According to Bruni, modern communal knighthood draws elements from both ancient philosophical theory and actual ancient practice. From Rome it adopts the practice of allowing mobility between the orders and the practice of requiring a military oath before a soldier could engage in warfare. From the philosophers it borrows the idea of a *permanent* caste of men dedicated to the military life. Bruni's analysis also reveals, implicitly, how inferior the French equestrian order is to both ancient and modern Italian forms of military service. French knighthood is a closed caste which, together with the priesthood, monopolizes all honor in the kingdom; by doing so it reduces the common people to servile status. «At non sic Romulus», writes Bruni, «sed

plebem sua iura libertatemque habere voluit» (Not so Romulus; he wanted the common people to have their rights and freedom).²⁴ As elsewhere in his writings, Bruni aims to bolster Italian pride in native institutions by assimilating them to ancient Roman ones, while contrasting them favorably with the ways of transalpine barbarians.²⁵

In keeping with this aim, Bruni's analysis thus far has not breathed a word of criticism of Italian communal knighthood. Bruni accepts, indeed celebrates, the idea of a permanent order of men, singled out for their ancestry, wealth and accomplishments, who follow a more honorable style of life devoted primarily to military affairs. It is, in short, the kind of life led by the dedicatee of the *De militia*, Rinaldo degli Albizzi, whose public activity was devoted to diplomacy and military commissions.²⁶ This observation alone, it may be said, disproves the thesis that the *De militia* advocates the revival of the old Florentine civic militia, since militias by definition imply temporary military service by citizen-soldiers who follow different occupations in peacetime. It might be argued, to the contrary, that Bruni was unwilling to criticize communal knighthood openly because he could not afford to offend men such as Rinaldo, or his banker and close friend Palla Strozzi, or Michele di Vanni Castellani, the future father-in-law of his son – all of whom held the dignity of communal knights. To be sure, it seems likely that Rinaldo's own knighthood was given him for ceremonial reasons, as it was conferred within ten days of his being appointed ambassador to Pope Martin V.²⁷ But while it is true that Bruni

²⁴ BRUNI 1996b, 672; BRUNI 1987, 134.

²⁵ BOENINGER, 205, identifies as the likeliest target of Bruni's work the *Liber gentilis militiae* of Gentile d'Adeguardo de' Mainardi (after 1396), a tractate which places Italian knighthood in the chivalric tradition of medieval French Knighthood.

²⁶ Extensively documented in GUASTI 1867-1873.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, 294-95.

was never inclined, in this or other matters, to articulate sweeping criticism of the existing order, it cannot really be denied that his conception of knighthood was that of a permanent order of men dedicated to a life of honorable pursuits. It is quite impossible to make sense of the last section of the *De militia*, dealing with the peacetime occupations of the knight, on the assumption that Brunni favored instituting a militia of temporary soldiers, raised from the peasant population of the Florentine territory, of the kind later advocated by Machiavelli. Such a theory would also contradict the ideal of military service enunciated in a parallel text, the *Oration on the Funeral of Nanni Strozzi*, which I shall discuss below.

In the first two sections of the *De militia*, then, Brunni is not so much a reformer of communal knighthood – someone who sought to change the institution fundamentally – as he was its panegyrist and champion. Brunni's aim is to refurbish communal knighthood; to ennoble it; to change the way people saw it by looking at it from the point of view of classical antiquity. Seen from the perspective of ancient history and philosophy, Italian civic knighthood could be viewed as a legitimate descendent of a classical socio-political institution which embodied, or could embody, classical virtues. In repackaging knighthood this way, Brunni was acting (as usual) as a political conservative, a faithful servant of the oligarchy. To put it in anachronistic modern terms, the Parte Guelfa and knighthood had an «image problem», and Brunni's treatise aimed to help remedy that. It is, indeed, a fundamental misunderstanding of Quattrocento humanism to think of it in any way as interested in serious institutional or political reform. What Brunni and other early humanists wanted was not outward reform, reform of laws or institutions; they wanted interior reform, reform of the inward man. They wanted virtue. «Men, not walls, make e city»,

as the humanists delighted to quote. What made a city great was not its constitution, but the virtues of its citizens.²⁸

It is to the task of building knightly virtue that Bruni turns in the last two sections of the *De militia*, and it is here one can sense his true reforming fervor. His first goal is to discredit the vulgar view of many of his contemporaries that the essence of knighthood was dressing up in magnificent clothes. This view Bruni dispatches swiftly, citing various classical authorities to indicate that the dress of *equites* in Roman times was very simple: they distinguished themselves from the plebs only by the gold ring they wore. Even the olive crown was a later innovation, though Bruni considers it permissible to wear it, since it nevertheless has a good ancient pedigree.

In the last section of the *De militia*, on the peacetime functions of the knight, Bruni has to pick his way carefully. Having had the benefit of a legal education, he was no doubt aware of the legal maxim in the Justinianic Code that prohibited citizens from simultaneously exercising military and civic functions.²⁹ Moreover, he is dealing with a living dignity, a number of whose holders were engaged in precisely the sort of activities Bruni believes are inappropriate for knights. Rejecting Justinian, Bruni argues that in the case of a permanent knightly caste, one has to allow the knight to have more than one *persona*: he can, while a knight, act as a judge or diplomat or senator or guardian or simply as a *vir bonus*. Though he is always a *miles*, he does not always act *qua miles*. But the fact that multiple activities are permitted to the person of knightly status does not mean that it is fitting for knights to exercise any and all activities.³⁰ It is most fitting for a knight to exercise functions wherein he makes use of his special virtue of fortitude. In peacetime this means protecting widows

²⁸ See HANKINS 1996.

²⁹ BAYLEY 1961, 212.

³⁰ The point is possibly derived from ARISTOTLE, *Politics* 7.9, 1328b.

and orphans against wicked men. But it is, in Bruni's view – and here he recognizes that he is being controversial – absolutely wrong for a knight to engage in mercenary occupations, to «strive for profit». The good knight should already have sufficient wealth so that he can dedicate himself completely to public service. It is acceptable to be raised to the rank of knight *because* of one's wealth, but once one becomes a *miles*, the striving for «sordid profit» should cease.

Bruni underlines his point in the dramatic closing of the treatise. The *De militia* ends with a stirring speech, modelled on Plato's *Crito* (a text Bruni retranslated within a year or two of writing the *De militia*),³¹ in which a personified Patria addresses the aspiring knight. The knight, she declares, should be a man who seeks honor and glory rather than riches. His superior rank should imply a higher form of life, a more ample virtue, that that of merchants and tradesmen. It would be intolerable that one man should hold rank over another when he is indistinguishable in his way of life from others of lesser rank. Rank has responsibilities as well as privileges.

Thus Bruni's classicizing reinterpretation of communal knighthood accords perfectly with, and in effect provides ideological justification for, the reform of the Parte Guelfa in 1413 and 1420. Like the Parte reformers, Bruni envisages a form of knighthood restricted to those wealthy enough to engage in military and political activity without having to dirty themselves with actual money-making. Tradesmen and «peasants» need not apply. It is typical of fifteenth-century humanism that virtue is closely linked, indeed made conditional upon, the possession of wealth. Wealth is the essential precondition for knightly status, and military virtue is effectively restricted to those of knightly status. In connecting virtue and class in this way, Bruni followed Isocrates, Ci-

³¹ See HANKINS 1990, 1, 51-53, 73-74; 2, 379-387.

cero and the other ancient writers whose educational theory reflected their aristocratic or optimate sympathies.

Further confirmation for this reading of Bruni's treatise can be found in another text which, suprisingly, is never been cited by students of the *De militia*: the *Oration on the Funeral of Nanni Strozzi* (1428). As is well known, the speech was written only a few years after the *De militia* and was modelled on Pericles' «Funeral Oration» in Book 1 of Thucydides.³² Nanni Strozzi was a Ferrarese knight of Florentine extraction, a cousin of the great oligarch Palla Strozzi, who was killed at the battle of Ottolengo at the crisis of the Second Milanese War. The first part of Bruni's speech praises Florence and her free institutions as a topic in the praise of Nanni, and it is this part of the speech which has received the most attention from modern scholars. In the second part of the speech, however, praising Nanni himself, there is a long passage in which Nanni is presented as the *beau ideal* of Bruni's classicizing form of knighthood.³³ There are many explicit parallels with and echoes of the *De militia*. We are told that Nanni, in order to devote himself to the military life, gave up careers in commerce and farming. Unlike many others, Nanni knew that what made a knight was not golden swordbelts and spurs, but an honorable mode of life and brave deeds. He eschewed sartorial display and luxury and lived his life according to a «recta ... et simplex et ingenua vivendi ratio» (an upright, simple and noble plan of life). When he was knighted, it was as though he had received a sacrament; the military life, it is implied, is a special way of life like that of the priesthood. Indeed, Bruni – like St. Bernard, but with a wholly different intention – compares the profession of arms with the monastic profession: Nanni was consecrated to «haec perpetua militiae religio» (this perpetual vow

³² For a full analysis of the speech, see HANKINS 2000, 159-167, and the commentary of Susanne Daub in BRUNI 1996a.

³³ *Ibid.*, 291-295, with Daub's commentary on 337-342.

of knighthood), «quasi intra claustra quaedam huius propositi continere» (as though he was enclosing himself within the cloisters, as it were, of this great purpose). But the service to which Nanni was dedicated was not that of God, but of the *patria*:

He held the welfare of his country so dear that he was judged to have been born for this one thing above all. His whole life showed this, which he conducted in such a way that everything he did seemed to have reference to his country ... Thus he inarguably preferred the affairs of war to the arts of peace ... His youthful battles, his study of military encounters, like his athletic exercises, were undertaken to achieve, through acts of courage, fame, glory, distinction and the enlargement of his reputation. But he believed his courage should be placed most of all at the service of his country, and he did so abundantly throughout his entire life.³⁴

This passage surely demonstrates beyond question that Bruni's conception of *militia* has nothing to do with citizen-levies, *scelte*, or the militia companies (*gonfalon*) of the *popolo*, either those Florence possessed in the thirteenth century or those such as Machiavelli attempted to organize in the sixteenth. Rather he was inventing a new image for communal knighthood and the Parte Guelfa – the heart of the Florentine oligarchy – one that helped to justify its position of leadership in domestic and foreign affairs.

It is surely no coincidence that at the same time Bruni was trying to invent a new, more classical image for communal knighthood, the Parte Guelfa, the custodian of communal knighthood, was endorsing in its artistic patronage the most radical form of artistic classicism available in early Quattrocento Florence – namely, the classicism of Donatello and Filippo Brunelleschi. As Diane Finiello Zervas states in her study of the artistic patronage of the Parte, «these

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 294-295: «Patrie vero salutem usque adeo caram habuit, ut huic uni se rei maxime natum arbitraretur. Ostendit vero id tota vita, que sic ab eo transacta est, ut cuncta retulisse ad patriam videatur [...] Itaque res bellice pacis artibus sine controversa preferuntur [...] Prelia ergo uivente totaque illa certaminum meditatio ceu athletarum preparamenta fuere ad famam, ad gloriam, ad amplitudinem claritatemque nominis per fortitudinis opera comparandam. Fortitudinem vero patrie maxime se debere putabat eique per omnem vitam accumulatissime prestitit».

men [the Parte's leaders] ... opted with surprising unanimity and within the space of only a few years, for the explicitly *all'antica* stile offered by Donatello and Brunelleschi and to a lesser extent by Ghiberti». ³⁵ The great projects sponsored by the Parte Guelfa – Donatello's tabernacle and bronze statue of St. Louis for the Parte's niche on the exterior wall of Orsanmichele, and Brunelleschi's rebuilding of the palazzo of the Parte Guelfa – are remarkable visual correlates to the ideological work of reconceptualizing knighthood and the Parte Guelfa being undertaken by Bruni.

A still more striking visual parallel is Donatello's famous statue of St. George, a work in stone created to adorn the niche of Orsanmichele assigned to the Guild of Armorers [*Plate*]. Here we have what is certainly an idealized image of a knight, sculpted only a few years before Bruni's *De militia*. Obviously it is not meant to invoke the standard image of the communal knight of the period – merchants in fancy dress, covered with pearls and gold. But neither is it meant to be an evocation of a medieval chivalric ideal. The point may not be evident, since the statue and imitations of it have, since the fifteenth century, become familiar icons of medieval knighthood, found frequently in Gothic settings. So it may be difficult to see at first sight how radically classical the image really is. Recent students of the work, however, such as Zervas and Greenhalgh, have emphasized the antique sources for a number of motifs and decorative details in the statue, such as Roman military stelai, portrait-sculptures (especially portraits of the young Augustus), Roman coins and gems; some features of the military costume may be borrowed from the decoration of the arch of Constantine. Greenhalgh has indeed argued that the drill-holes around the head of the statue were not meant to hold a helmet, as had earlier been thought by Janson and others, but rather an olive wreath – a striking sug-

³⁵ ZERVAS 1988, 94.

gestion in view of Bruni's view in the *De militia* that the olive was one of the few appropriate ornaments a knight might wear.³⁶

But in the end, the most impressive thing about Donatello's St. George is his countenance and bearing. Contemporary sources praise the face and physical attitude of the St. George for its effectiveness in communicating *prontezza* and *vivacità*; they marvel at Donatello's ability to combine beauty and martial valor. Modern critics describe «the focussing of the entire design of the statue upon a specific psychological state» as «a truly revolutionary achievement» in the art of sculpture.³⁷ But we, looking at the statue through lenses provided by Leonardo Bruni, considering that countenance, assured and noble, determined without aggression, strong yet gentle, might be tempted to see an image combining the austerity and martial spirit of the Roman military with the virtue and beauty of soul of Plato's guardians.

JAMES HANKINS
HISTORY DEPARTMENT
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

³⁶ GREENHALGH 1982, 49-63, esp. 51-54.

³⁷ JANSON, 29.



Donatello, St. George, Orsanmichele, Florence. Photo by James Hankins

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACCIAIUOLI 1917-1934 = ACCIAIUOLI, ALAMANNO, *Cronaca*, in Gino Scaramella, ed., *Il tumulto dei Ciompi: cronache e memorie*, 13-34, with the «aggiunte anonime» on 35-41. Bologna, Zanichelli 1917-1934 (*Rerum Italicarum scriptores*, 18.3).
- ATKINS 2013 = ATKINS, JED W., *Cicero on Politics and the Limits of Reason: The Republic and Laws*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2013.
- BARON 1955, 1966 = BARON, HANS, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance: Civic Humanism and Republican Liberty in an Age of Classicism and Tyranny*. 2 vols., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1955. Revised edition in one volume, Princeton, Princeton University Press 1966.
- BAYLEY 1961 = BAYLEY, CHARLES C., *War and Society in Renaissance Florence: The «De militia» of Leonardo Bruni*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press 1961.
- BERTELLI 1964 = BERTELLI, SERGIO, review of BAYLEY 1961 in *Rivista storica italiana*, 76.3 (1964), 834-36.
- BOENINGER 1995 = BOENINGER, LORENZ, *Die Ritterwürde in Mittelitalien zwischen Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag 1995.
- BROWN 1992 = BROWN, ALISON, «The Guelf Party in Fifteenth Century Florence», in ALISON BROWN, *The Medici in Florence. The Language and Exercise of Power*, Firenze-Perth, Leo S. Olschki--University of W. Australia Press 1992 (*Italian Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 3), 103-150.
- BRUCKER 1962 = BRUCKER, GENE A., *Florentine Politics and Society, 1343-1378*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1962.
- BRUCKER 1977 = BRUCKER, GENE A., *The Civic World of Early Renaissance Florence*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1977.
- BRUNI 1741 = BRUNI, LEONARDO, *Epistularum libri IX*, Lorenzo Mehus (ed.), 2 vols., Florence, ex typographia B. Paperinii 1741. Anastatic reprint, Rome, Edizioni di Storia e letteratura 2007, with an introduction by James Hankins. (Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, Rari, 4).
- BRUNI 1987 = BRUNI, LEONARDO, *The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni*, Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins and David Thompson (eds. and trs.), Binghamton, Center for Medieval & Early Renaissance Studies 1987 (*Renaissance Society of America, Renaissance Text Series*, 10).
- BRUNI 1996a = BRUNI, LEONARDO, *Leonardo Brunis Rede auf Nanni Strozzi: Einleitung, Edition, und Kommentar*, Susanne Daub (ed.), Stuttgart and Leipzig, B.G. Teubner 1996 (*Beiträge zur Altertumskunde*, 84).

BRUNI 1996b = BRUNI, LEONARDO, *Opere letterarie e politiche*, Paolo Viti (ed.), Turin, UTET 1996.

DE ANGELIS 1990 = DE ANGELIS, LAURA, «La revisione degli statuti della Parte Guelfa del 1420», in *Leonardo Bruni cancelliere della Repubblica di Firenze, Convegno di studi (Firenze, 17-19 ottobre 1987)*, Florence, Olschki 1990, 131-156.

DE LA MARE 1985 = DE LA MARE, ALBINIA C., «New Research on Humanistic Scribes in Florence», in ANNAROSA GARZELLI, *Miniatura fiorentina del Rinascimento: 1440-1525. Un primo censimento*, 2 vols. Florence, La nuova Italia 1985.

GASPARRI 1992 = GASPARRI, STEFANO, *I milites cittadini. Studi sulla cavalleria in Italia*, Rome, Istituto storico italiano per il Medioevo 1992 (Nuovi studi storici 19).

GOLDBRUNNER 1966 = GOLDBRUNNER, HERMANN, «Leonardo Brunis *De militia*. Bemerkungen zur handschriftlichen Überlieferung», *Quellen und Forschungen aus italienischen Archiven und Bibliotheken*, 46 (1966), 478-487.

GREENHALGH 1982 = GREENHALGH, MICHAEL, *Donatello and His Sources*, London, Duckworth 1982.

GUALDO ROSA 1990 = GUALDO ROSA, LUCIA, «L'elogio delle lettere e delle armi nell'opera di Leonardo Bruni», in *Sapere e potere: Il caso bolognese a confronto, Bologna 13-15 aprile 1989, I: Forme e oggetti della disputa delle arti*, L. AVELLINI (ed.), Bologna, Istituto per la storia di Bologna 1990, 103-113.

GUASTI 1867-1873 = GUASTI, CESARE, *Le Commissioni di Rinaldo degli Albizzi per il comune di Firenze dal MCCCXCIX al MCCCXXXIII*, Florence, Cellini 1867-1873 (Regia Deputazione di studi di Storia Patria, Documenti di storia italiana, vols. 1-3).

HALE 1964 = HALE, JOHN R., review of BAYLEY 1961 in *English Historical Review*, 79 (1964), 405-407.

HANKINS 1990 = HANKINS, JAMES, *Plato in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. Leiden and London, Brill 1990 (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, 17).

HANKINS 1996 = HANKINS, JAMES «Humanism and the Origins of Modern Political Thought», in *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*, Jill Kraye (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1996, 118-41.

HANKINS 2000 = HANKINS, JAMES, «Rhetoric, History and Ideology: The Civic Panegyrics of Leonardo Bruni», in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, James Hankins (ed.), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2000 (Ideas in Context, 57), 143-178.

HANKINS 2003-2004 = HANKINS, JAMES, *Humanism and Platonism in the Italian Renaissance*, 2 vols. Rome, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura 2003.

HANKINS 2007-2008 = HANKINS, JAMES, «The Dates of Leonardo Bruni's Later Works», *Studi medievali e umanistici*, 5-6 (2007-2008), 11-50.

JANSON 1963 = JANSON, HORST W.. *The Sculpture of Donatello*. Princeton, Princeton University Press 1963.

KRISTELLER 1963 = KRISTELLER, PAUL OSKAR, review of BAYLEY 1961 in *Canadian Historical Review*, 44 (1963), 66-70.

RUBINSTEIN 1963 = RUBINSTEIN, NICOLAI, review of BAYLEY 1961 in *History*, 48 (1963), 211-14.

SACCHETTI 2004 = SACCHETTI, FRANCO, *Il trecentonovelle*, Davide PUCCINI (ed.), Turin, UTET 2004.

SALVEMINI 1972 = SALVEMINI, GAETANO, *La dignità cavalleresca nel Comune di Firenze e altri scritti*, Ernesto Sestan (ed.). Milan, Feltrinelli 1972.

ZERVAS 1988 = ZERVAS, DIANE FINIELLO, *The Parte Guelfa, Brunelleschi and Donatello*. Locust Valley (Pa.), Augustin 1988 (I Tatti Monographs, 8).