In Quattrocento Florence the interaction of the humanistic tradition and the political percepts created by the changing state system affected the nature of Cinquecento political thought and influenced the future of the Florentine republic. Baron’s Trecento - Quattrocento studies attempt to trace the evolution of this politico-cultural idea and to reveal their interplay at the most crucial point in the history of Florence. In this fermentive period of development Florence was in a position to influence the intellectual development of the Renaissance in Italy. An evolution by distinctive yet interconnected phases forms a pattern of continuity from the promise of Petrarchan humanism through Salutati’s fusion of the classical tradition with the Republic’s vita civis, to a climax in the early Quattrocento civic humanism. The early stages characterize later developments. The civic ideal itself becomes a tradition which asserts itself with compelling dignity and authority at various intervals in the Renaissance epoch. In politics the Last Republic is the most eloquent testimony to the enduring vigour of the civic spirit, while in the world of thought the same tradition is revealed in the Discorsi and in the firm unity between the apparently divergent humanistic and volgare trends.

Criticism of this vast analysis comes from a failure to realize the isolative nature of an evolution by phases, limited in duration but still preserving full relevance to and an organic part in the whole analysis of a genetic picture. Baron is more commonly accused of separating the Quattrocento from the Trecento by too great an abyss. If Bruni epitomises the change which took place in this period, it is only Bruni who feels comfortable in the narrowly cut garments of civic humanism. Even so the citizens dabbled in literary pursuits and the humanists were far from imbued with the civic spirit since they still nursed a tension between a political and literary life. Ideals of civic liberty were singularly inopportune at this time because with the Ottimati triumph in 1382 even a semblance of liberty disappeared from the Florentine political scene. 1 Another critical approach is more subtle; were cultural developments dependent upon the Quattrocento civic sentiments or was it just a question of Florence’s survival as an independent state in a despot dominated era? Surely it is an inadequate explanation to regard the crystallization of the Quattrocento intellectual climate as the result of a change in the Florentine state system? 2

The analysis of the Trecento political scene is however a more successful critical basis than the above. The political balance
which maintained republicanism in Florence was the result of a frequent change in the state system; from oligarchy to despotism and from there to popular government. This prevented each state system from attaining its full stature, since such a development would be checked by the growing preponderance of an impersonal force in the body politic. The "novi cives" reached the ranks of the "grandi e potenti cittadini" and yet they acted as a contrary influence to the oligarchical tendencies of that class. By the interaction of these forces representing different political directions Florence was able to uphold the republican tradition. The oligarchic phase of the Signoria was the least republican; the ruling circle was elevated above the communal law and its members received a shower of immunities and other advantages. The despot had to be the most democratic, initially at least, but the final version of his administration emerged as the very opposite of the propaganda action during the sham equalitarian start. The interludes of popular government in Florence represented the industrial magnates, who were most anxious to stifle the oligarchic attempts to reserve the communal power for a few domineering families. With the ultimate triumph of the Ottimati the guilds lose their autonomous significance and the novi cives are only sporadically admitted to the communal offices in the 15th Century. There is a parallel withering of the "liberty" ideal. Quattrocento civic humanism seems to be only a much cherished vision with occasional glimpses in the foreign politics as the positive limit of its appearance. Salutati's circle is the intellectual heir of the Trecento republican spirit but it is no longer a factor in internal politics.

Such are the criticisms. But many of them disappear if we follow faithfully the above outline of Baron's analysis. The change from Trecento tradition to the Quattrocento transformation of it is apparent from a sociological survey of the period. The Trecento traded St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle's via media for the extreme stoic distrust of material wealth. Dante no longer makes wealth one of the qualifications for nobility but relies on "virtus" alone. Even Petrarch embodies the union of classical stoic spirituality (the philosopher's independence of Fortune) and Christian spirituality (renouncing the world for Salvation). But in his Secretum Petrarch realizes a certain tension between an admired life of poverty and literary activity. It is a tribute to Petrarch's prophetic genius that he chose the latter and professed that riches in themselves do not debase human nature. But his circle selected only those strains of complex antiquity which suited the Franciscan ascetic ideal. In the 15th century the change is due to the abandonment of this ideal which allowed the citizen to contribute to the humanistic literature, (this in fact happened in the case of Trecento jurisprudence). The fundamental requirement was the participation of the citizen in the world of letters, but this attained too universal a scale in its appeal. It could not as yet transgress into the political sphere. The development of the commune into territorial states necessitated short term developments with a great impact if the direction of internal and external politics was to
Influences of a politico-cultural nature acted on small compass with restricted territorial significance at the beginning of the process, (as in republican Florence the civic liberty ideal persisted into the Cinquecento). The nature of this development is such that once it transformed the political climate it is no longer confined to the place of its origin in its effects. On the intellectual field the Florentine experience transformed the direction of the Renaissance in Italy and through foreign policy it influenced diplomacy and politics. In this way it was possible for the republican spirit to influence the despotic courts of the High Renaissance. With the close of the Trecento we have a transformed concept of Dante's "virtus"; the "vita civilis" of the humanists requires external causes which can only be procured by material wealth. Parallel changes occurred in the structure of Florentine society. A new middle class emerged with contrary interests to the feudal banking magnates and the new trends in humanism answered the requirements of this class. 6 This largely undocumented thesis has been reconsidered by Baron and I will deal with it in the latter part of this paper.

The more strictly intellectual climate experienced a similar transformation. Cicero's paradox deceived thinkers of both centuries; the early Trecento gloried the contemplative philosopher in him, while the Quattrocento flushed with pride in beholding Cicero the civic humanist. But Cicero used his "vita solitaria" to further the republican ideal. The medieval tradition could not be reconciled with this concept and so Cicero's "otium" was detached of its political significance. Salutati however placed civic liberty above individualism. Bruni's Cicero Novus marks the emergence of the new ideal; the union of politics (activity) and literature (creation) in the same personality. The solution to Cicero's paradox is that in spite of his political obligations he created Latin philosophy and despite his literary pursuits he achieved more in politics than those who had no literary aspirations. The Scipionic "otium" is to develop even more the urgency of political action. The humanistic ideal made Dante its De Oratore. 7

To translate the intellectual change into a political climate one has to trace the measure of success attained by that ideal in political action. The ideal becomes a reality on the stimulus of an external threat to the existence of the Republic. The final transformation of the Trecento classicism to the Quattrocento civic humanism came about as the reaction of the Florentine city state against the expansion of the Viscontean monarchy. In this way Baron is able to tie the Geistesgeschichte background to concrete political terms. The seeds of this development are present from the earliest times. Petrarch's enthusiasm for the classics made him hail the Roman Republic; example was made available to the Quattrocento. But later in his life Petrarch feels compelled to recant by Dante's semi divine authority; he flirted with the civic ideal but Cicero's
fate shocked him. 8 "Petrarch in the initial phase of this process was neither Medieval nor Renaissance but rather a Moses, first to see the promised land but not granted to enter it". 9 The clearest expression of this tradition can be found in the Salutati of the next generation. The same external pressure which made him write the Invectiva inspired citizens like Rinuccini and Dato. But there is a fundamental difference in attitude, the humanist finds it difficult to turn against the Petrarchian tradition as the citizen could. Salutati underwent the same phases of change as his admired predecessor, but with the 1402 crisis he came nearer to the finished Bruni version of civic humanism. Salutati was the first to realize the importance of the Roman civic tradition in the everyday life of the citizen. We can see the difference in the structure of Bruni's Dialogi, where Salutati's position was vindicated in Dialogue II after Niccoli's attack in Dialogue I. 10 Bruni exhibits the same petrarchan naivete manifesting itself in a fervent praise of the Republic but in Dialogue I he identifies himself with Niccoli in an attack on the Triumvirate of Florentine poetry. Niccoli is a pure antiquarian and he remains one while Bruni is able to rectify his own position in Dialogue II. The 1402 events are crucial for the transformation in the attitudes of the Bruni circle. After a reassessment of civic attitudes Dante becomes the Ideal Citizen. The early Volgare criticism of the latinized humanists was mistaken and the road was open for the later union of the Volgare and humanist traditions. 11 Here I think Baron equates civic humanism with the Bruni circle by making Cino's criticisms inapplicable to Bruni and hence to civic humanism. But it is possible that Bruni characterized the Florentine Humanist circle around the 1400's. Recalling Baron's picture of the Trecento attitude to wealth and its transformation by a wide circle of humanists we can see that the latter turned citizens and not vice versa. Rinuccini's efforts show the first signs of the Humanist-Volgare union which became a reality with Poliziano.

Were later politico-cultural ideas and their dissemination in Renaissance Italy directly caused by the 1402 and later recurring crises? But if this is true how do we account for the later political developments? How can we regard il Magnifico's circle as imbued with the libertine spirit? And how indeed could the libertine ideal reach similar results in a princely milieu to which ideology it was least sympathetic? (In this form civic humanism must be limited.) In the above form civic humanism is not comprehensive enough to meet all these objections. But in a limited form it emerges as a definite influence on the later connection between the civic and the literary traditions. Through it run the two conflicting strains of the early humanism, the active and the contemplative ideals. Under political pressure these meet in civic humanism. There is no complete separation under the Medici rule but under the surface of "tyranny" there is a closer union, not between the idea of liberty on the Roman pattern and literature, but between the Volgare and the Humanistic traditions. The appearance of each phase in every individual case need not be universal,
so Bruni was able to serve Rome in between his residence at Florence and Salutati to compose De Tyranno. On the other hand the contemplative strain continues from Petrarch to Ficino but the latter would have taught the active wisdom of life in his academy. The two ideals run parallel to each other yet they are interdependent and appear often in the same people. 12

Baron correct the above difficulty in his latest publications. Relying on an analysis of the Trecento political scene he extends the notion of civic humanism to cover sociological grounds and at the same time he is able to claim a much wider significance for the survival of the republican spirit in to the 15th and 16th centuries. To criticize Baron's Quattrocento analysis on the basis of the Trecento socio-political landscape is a dangerous procedure. It seems to me that one cannot attach too great an importance to the differences between the immigration habits of the 14th and 15th centuries. After all only the wealthiest were admitted and this number did not change from the one century to the next. There is a definite contradiction between the roles of the "novi cives" and the "maggiori" - earlier it was claimed that the newcomers counteract the oligarchical tendencies of the leading Ottimati families but later it is noticed that the latter act to preserve the Republic an alliance with the former. The discrepancy cannot be explained by this analysis. In times of crisis not the impersonal parts of the republic are strengthened as the critic claims but the totalitarian tendencies, the Ottimati ascended to power in this way, but the fact that they did take the responsibility for the republic instead of importing a foreign despot as their Trecento counter parts did suggest a different picture. We can find no convincing reasons for the decline of the republic in this critical assessment. On the contrary the republican sentiment was strong enough in the Quattrocento to exert influence in practical politics. Baron abandons the earlier distinction between the feudal magnates and the industrially vigorous middle class the fusion of which with the maggiori guarded the civic spirit. There was an interaction of the two types of activity and a purely class-enmity interpretation robs the Trecento developments of their significance. Trecento republicanism can be explained by the changing state systems, but did their influence stop after 1382? Oligarchy was more elastic than the dichotomy "despotism and popular government were more liberal than the oligarchic regime" would allow. Impersonal forces worked more freely than in a despotic milieu since the novi cives continue to climb into the ranks of citizenry. The "membra minora" of the artimaggiori and the more affluent of the arti minori formed a "cittadini di mezzano stato" strong enough to resist attempts to exclude them from the state offices. The catasto persisted throughout the 15th century. The codification of the laws returned to the republican way after the laxity of the 1370 period. Why did the oligarchs preserve the republican spirit when in the Trecento they were most opposed to it? The impact of external threat is not sufficient to explain this. The representative nature of Florentine society necessitated the change in a time of crisis. Social
affluence and mobility were the imminent cause which led to a transformation of the Ottimati political outlook. 13

Sociological reconsiderations alter the earlier Baron analysis. By this considerable extension of the argument we are able to trace the 16th century influences of the civic sentiment. The most striking example of this is the revival of republicanism in early 16th century Florence. Machiavelli’s participation in the Oricellari circle resulted in the Discorsi which is a more mature reflection of his political thought. He added to the Prince a new vision. In the turbulence of this vision the freedom of a political society requires the greatest importance. The 15th century civic tradition finds clearest expression here: the winning of political power is not the only concern but the socio-constitutional fabric and the extent to which it allows the development of civic energies is more important. No longer can we regard the transition from the city state to the principate as from the simple to the complex. Quattrocento civilization depended on both, and it cannot be decided which was the more productive as yet. 14

In Florence the republican spirit received new impetus feeding on the 15th century civic humanism which in alliance with the constitutional thought of the time resulted in the last Florentine Republic.

Footnotes -
4. M. Becker, 'The Republican City State in Florence: an inquiry into its origins'. Speculum XXXVI.
8. Petrarch: Vita solitaria; and Secretum, the youthful attitude is apparent in Africa.
12. H. Baron, Ibid., Vol. I, p. 310
14. H. Baron, "Machiavelli: the Republican Citizen and the Author of the 'Prince'". E.H.R. LXXVI.