The period of Brunetto Latini's life (c. 1220-1294) was a vital one for the commune of Florence; some 150 years before, according to Giovanni Villani, "the doings of the Florentines began to multiply and extend the fame of Florence throughout the whole world," (iv, 18) and since about 1125, when her neighbour Fiesole was destroyed, the Arno city had embarked on a more or less rational policy of political aggrandisement in the Tuscan contado. By the mid 13th century Florentine merchants and bankers were actively engaged in inter-regional and international trade and finance; even a family of moderate position like the Velluti could boast that by the 1260's they had started to trade "in Bologna, Venice, Milan, Pisa, Genoa, Rome, Paris and in France and England." Florence, indeed, began to see herself as the new Rome, "full of all imaginable wealth", as the inscription on the new Palazzo del Popolo claimed. Half a century later, the sober Villani could begin his great Cronica in something of the same spirit — visiting Rome for the Jubilee of 1300, and reading the old Roman histories, he decided to write, "considering that our city of Florence, the daughter and creature of Rome, was rising, and had great things before her, whilst Rome was declining." (viii, 36)

But Villani's vision was perhaps a little too optimistic. Dino Compagni also focused his attention on Florence in 1300, and had also read "the ancient histories"; but as Villani had in Florence seen a greatness rivalling Rome's, Dino, perhaps well aware that even Rome had ultimately fallen, was afraid of "the events, fraught with danger and ill fitted to bring prosperity, which the noble city, the daughter of Rome, has for many years undergone, and especially at the time of the Jubilee of the year 1300." For Dino's whole chronicle is a close examination of the Black-White struggle in the Florentine Guelf party around 1300, and in factionalism, the detested civic division "through rivalry for office," he saw the main obstacle to the realisation of a Florence ruled by justice which was his ideal. Not that factions were new in Florence — Villani himself deplored their prevalence both before and after the traditional starting point of the Guelf-Ghibelline rivalry in 1215, (v. 38) and in 1260, when the Florentines were badly defeated by the Ghibellines at Montaperti, the Aretine poet Guittone mocked at the "new Rome" because her internal divisions had brought her low.

And Latini's lifetime, too, embraced the period when, in some sense still to be defined, the Florentines began to prepare themselves for the cultural and literary pre-eminence that was to be theirs in the following centuries. Other cities, Arezzo, Verona and Padua for example, shone more brilliantly as pre-humanistic centres in the 13th century itself, but Florence's Duecento development must also be closely watched, though it is at the moment still shrouded in relative obscurity.

In this seminal age for Florence Brunetto Latini's life seems to stand for more than just a convenient chronological tool with which to order our thoughts: the effort to tentatively begin to place him in this 13th century panorama is
worthwhile because two contemporaries and one near contemporary pay tribute to him and his influence in a touching and historically very intriguing way. In Villani's significant account Brunetto appears as a “great philosopher,” “perfect master in rhetoric,” a translator and popularizer of importance, the “secretary” of Florence, and to sum up, “the beginner and master in refining the Florentines and in teaching them how to speak well, and how to guide and rule our republic according to policy.” (viii., 10; vi, 73). Dante further whets our appetite for knowledge of Latini when he devotes much of canto xv. of the Inferno to him; Latini calls Dante there “O my son,” and Dante obviously remembered lovingly:

the dear and kind paternal image of
You, when in the world, hour by hour,
You taught me how man makes himself eternal.10

Brunetto commends to Dante his famous work Li Livres dou Tresor10 (“in which I live still”), and denounces the vile Fiesolans because their blood had corrupted the pure “holy seed” of the original Roman inhabitants of Florence. In Dante's account, then, Brunetto appears as a hater of the factions that Florentine legend attributed to the impure Fiesolan strain introduced in 1125.12 And lastly, Leonardo Bruni the great humanist chancellor of the early Quattrocento, looking back over a century to another secretary of Florence, called Brunetto “a most worthy man for those days,”13 and this slightly patronizing comment is instructive in itself. For it was humanists like Bruni who created a strict chronological concept of a “dark ages” preceding their own enlightened era, and usually they considered the rebirth of humane studies to have begun with Dante at the very earliest.14 That a man who was 45 when Dante was born could earn Bruni’s praise is surprising, and we shall try to explain this fact later.

Latini, then, appears to have been very prominent in several different fields of thought and action, and at a time of both crisis and promise for Florence. Indeed he seems to anticipate some later features of Florentine thought and political behaviour — we note that Villani explicitly calls him a cominciatore or “beginner” — yet his Tresor has been called an “imposing medieval encyclopaedia”15 and he was a prominent master of what is usually taken to be a typically medieval sort of rhetoric, the ars dictamen. But a closer examination of his activities will show, I hope, how careful we must be in labelling Brunetto in any way; an elusive figure in a fast moving age, he seems to give us a concrete example of that continuity in Florentine and Italian civilization that the humanists so arrogantly denied.

II

An examination of Brunetto’s career as secretary or dittatore of Florence will help us to see him as a cominciatore in several fields. The early history of the chancery is rather obscure:16 a Podesta’s statute of 1355 decreed that “each year a good and expert notary of the College of Judges and Notaries . . . and expert in the art of writing . . .” should be chosen to write the commune’s letters, and that he and his assistant should live in the Palagio de’ Signori for the year. Latini’s job seems to have been somewhat similar 70 years or so before. But the position is seen to have become more important when the humanists, first Salutati and then Bruni, became chancellors towards the end of the Trecento. Their fame enhanced Florence’s reputation and their fine style and their oratoric ability were used as political tools and sometimes weapons. They were, as Gregorio Dati said, always “poets and men of great knowledge”, not just mere writers of elegant letters.17
Now Latini in several ways seems to fit more happily Dati’s portrait of a chancellor than the conception of him as a mere scribe. For Latini had great prestige in his day — Villani calls him “a man of great wisdom and authority” (vi, 73) — and so did many of his fellow notaries and dittatori; Mino da Collé’s reputation as a wise man was what most impressed the commune of San Miniato when he was made a teacher there in Dante’s time. And Latini commanded respect because his Latin style was that of the Capuan school founded by Frederick’s II’s secretary Piero dalle Vigne, the style called the altus stilus which Piero used as a lofty official language. It was Brunetto who introduced it into the Florentine chancery, and who probably taught it to Dante whose Latin letters show its influence. In 1289, too, Brunetto was public orator, and we know from Villani that he knew “how to speak well” and that he passed on this ability to the Florentines. (viii) His Tesoretto, too, shows him to be a not incon siderable poet. In these respects Latini can be compared with the later chancellors, although his Latin was of course not Cicero’s.

His political activities as dittatore remind one of the later chancellors too; he was many times Florentine ambassador on vital missions both before and after Montaperti, and his influence was all pervasive. Between October 21st, 1282 and July 22nd, 1292 his name appears in 35 public documents of importance as having being consulted on communal affairs, and his advice seems generally to have been taken. This summary does not exhaust the list of his activities; he had, as Ottokar has said, “a considerable and influ ential place in public life.” It is perhaps not merely a coincidence that Bruni, who in his Life of Dante and elsewhere praised the active life, could call Latini “a most worthy man for those times.”

Thus to be the secretary of a commune one was expected in practice if not in theory to be a practical man of affairs as well as a scholar and notary, and Latini, who was both, made such a combination his ideal. To him rhetoric, the ability to speak and to write, was essentially a political art — it is impossible to make an arbitrary division between the two in either his thought or his active life. For when he read and translated into Italian three of Cicero’s most famous orations, he was probably as much taken with the ideas about civic unity he found there, as with the beauty of Cicero’s prose — just as the great Roman had seen the intimate relationship between men’s ability to express themselves and good, rational civic government, so did his disciple Latini. We shall have to talk first about his rhetorical ideas for the sake of convenience, but we must never forget that in his thought and life they were wedded.

III

Latini had a rather typical “literary” education for his day, at a time when literary studies were perhaps temporarily on the wane, but certainly not dead. He was a notary, (hence the “ser” before his name), one trained in the very specialized skill of ars arengandi or ars notaria, and its sister ars dictaminis the art of letter writing. This last study had arisen in the late 11th and 12th centuries in response to the need for literate clerks and administrators in an age of increasing paper work and centralization. From the start it tended to forget about classical rhetorical models, and in 13th century Bologna it had become little more than a “business course” to the famous master Boncompagno della Signa — attention was focused on the learning of mechanical rules for composing certain stock types of administrative and business letters.
The *ars dictaminis* has very properly been seen to belong to “the scholastic age” of narrow specialists, but it would be over simple to dismiss it as a static tradition. For within its bounds Piero dalle Vigne developed the *altus stilus* or *stilus rhetoricus*, a mode of writing which one of his contemporaries called obscure “and in the grand manner”; not Ciceronian, it nevertheless encouraged a heightened awareness of stylistic matters, more than the earlier *dictaminis* had done. By the middle of the 13th century Bonfiglio of Arezzo was using it in the official letters of that city, and as we have seen Latini used the new style in Florentine documents of this period. Indeed Brunetto regarded Piero as a master, and in the *Rettorica* significantly praised the Sicilian secretary for making the art of speaking and writing a useful one — he praised those who “use (the art) in speaking and composing on different questions, as do the great speakers and writers, such as was master Piero delle Vigne.”

The practical political use to which the new style could be put seems to have been what earned Brunetto’s praise, and it is interesting that his most famous “pupil” used it well in the famous political letters.

But there was yet another stylistic tradition in later 13th century *dictamen*, and Latini seems also to have been part and parcel of it; whereas earlier *dictatores* had more or less ignored classical literature, certain masters in Dante’s time began to return to classical rhetorical models and particularly to Cicero. Indeed certain pre-humanists gained their early knowledge of and love for classical literature in the Aretine schools of *dictamen*, and Geri d’Arezzo is the best known example. This late 13th century figure has recently been studied in detail, and Professor Weiss concludes of him:

> With Geri indeed we have already arrived, one can say, at humanism. Not only because his knowledge of the Latin classics is rather notable for his time, but also because he knows very well how to make his reading of the ancient texts relive in his writings.

Yet Weiss’ careful study also shows that many of Geri’s letters follow the rules of *dictamen* — nevertheless, Salutati regarded him and the Paduan Mussato as Petrarch’s fore-runners, as indeed they were.

Brunetto himself does not appear to have been a pre-humanist; indeed by later humanistic standards his technical scholarship was not always good. Nevertheless, his attitude to Cicero seems rather a new one, and indicates that he belonged to the classicizing tradition among the masters of *ars dictaminis*. Indeed he seems on the verge of widening the concept of *dictamen*, “letter writing”, to something like “rhetoric” as later humanists understood it, but this is notoriously difficult ground and I cannot cross it. Certainly, anyway, Brunetto admired Cicero’s eloquence with a fervour that reminds us of Petrarch himself — the latter was to call the great Roman “the prince of the language I use” and “the great father of Roman eloquence” — and Latini wrote to a friend of Cicero as “a fountain that never dries up” — “I want you to know that Tully was the world’s greatest speaker ...” When Latini translated as rhetorical models three great Ciceronian orations to Caesar, *Pro M. Marcello*, *Pro Q. Ligario*, and *Pro Rege Deiotaro*, his Italian translation, a scholar tells us, captured most of the technical effects and all of the spirit of the original Latin; his mistakes were remarkably few, and probably often explicable in terms of the faulty manuscripts he used. Significantly he had “begun to feel the influence of a classical prose writer”, and Maggini prints as illustration the following “Ciceronian” passage from *Pro Marcello*:

> Certo i nostri successori quando udiranno e leggeranno le tue signorie e le province ch’hai vinte, il Reno, il Danubio, il Nilo e mare Oceano ch’hai passati,
The later humanists, of course, tried to imitate Cicero in Latin, as even John of Salisbury had a century or so before Latini’s time; but the latter’s profound admiration of Cicero, and particularly of the Roman’s concept of the unity of politics and rhetoric, perhaps marks an advance in understanding by comparison with John. Thus Brunetto’s attitude to classical thought and style may be very tentatively seen as something of a half-way house between the school of Chartres and the 14th century; this groping classicism seems important not only in itself but because Latini was “the beginner and the master in refining the Florentines and in teaching them how to speak well.”

Much of the significance of Brunetto’s admiration of Cicero is lost to us unless we realise how closely he identified rhetoric with “politekhe, which teaches how one ought to govern cities.” (Tresor, iii, 1.) For the De Inventione, the first part of which he translated in the Tresor, and commented on in the Rettorica, had been known for centuries as a school text and his use of this Ciceronian treatise has no particular prima facie importance.

But Latini does not seem to have regarded the De Inventione or the three orations which he translated as specifically rhetorical texts; he was just as interested in the picture they give of a united civic life, and of the use of the arts of communication in such a world. We have seen that he admired delle Vigne because the great dictatore had used his rhetoric in the active life; indeed a few late Duecento masters of dictamen were thinking more and more realistically of the peculiar political setup of Italy — Mino da Colle’s collection of model letters, his Artes dictaminis, is rather interesting because it is specifically designed to cater for the social classes and new socio-political situations of a busy, confused Italian trading city, unlike his older contemporary Guido Fava’s Dictamina and Epistolae. Obviously, masters of letter writing and rhetoric were as much teachers of affairs as schoolmasters, and Brunetto stands directly in this “realistic” stream.

We are therefore not really surprised when Latini says in his Tresor: “For if gold is superior to all sorts of metal, similarly is the science of good speaking and of governing men more noble than any art in the world.” (i, 1.) For the orientation of his mind was profoundly political, and his Tresor and Rettorica are largely source books in what we may perhaps call political science, social ethics and the political arts. In the former he translates large slabs of Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics, Cicero’s De Inventione and several medieval tracts, with his own enlightening introductory comments.

And like his contemporary Mino, when he thought politically he thought, as it were, instinctively of the polis-like Italian city state. If the Tresor is about the political arts, then it is specifically about those necessary in a city like Florence. In the Tresor he says that the last part of his book “teaches men to speak according to the doctrine of rhetoric, and how the lord ought to govern his subjects, according to the customs of the Italians.” (i, 1.) While there are other sorts of states, he explicitly says that “des communes” are the best. (Tre. iii, 44.) And though there are communes in France, he prefers the Italian sort because there “the citizenry, the bourgeoisie and the community of the towns elect their podesta and their lord”, (Tre. iii, 73.), whereas in France the King or a prince appoints the ruler and he neglects the people’s interests. It is in such a democratic polis that the social arts of good speaking
and of composition are vital, and Brunetto, explicitly following Cicero here, believes that “the loftiest science of governing a city” is rhetoric. (Tre. iii, 1.; For it is the ability to think and to speak rationally that separates men from animals (Tre. iii, 1.), and it is speech that allows men to take part in a community. Rhetoric is indeed “a science which teaches us very plainly and perfectly to speak of public and of private matters.” (Tre. iii, 2.—“dire es choses communes et es privees.”) Only when men can communicate freely and well will they learn to rule and be ruled “according to reason and according to justice.” (Tre. i, 4.)

Thus to Brunetto, following Cicero, a city is “an assembly of men living in one spot and living under one law.” (Tre. iii, 73.) To be a citizen, to be fully and actively a political man, was not sinful, and Latini, in an age when nationalism (or perhaps rather campanilismo) was very typical of the Florentine political outlook, shared its basic assumption. In the Tesoretto appears most clearly his deep patriotism — an important Guelf before Guelfism became a partisan slogan, he heard of the defeat of the “chomune sagio” at Montaperti with real distress,

Thinking of the great honours
And the powerful riches,
That Florence alone has
In almost all the world. (cap. iii, 70-3; cf. ii, 1-5.)

A natural corollary of this civic patriotism was an utter detestation of political faction; in the Tresor Brunetto deplores the man who “follows his will” (ii, 49.) For he believed that citizens should love one another and think always of the “common benefit of the town and of all men.” (Tre. iii, 74.) How divided the Florentines were in fact we have already seen, and indeed Brunetto sadly records that “war and hatred have multiplied among the Italians . . . and amongst the world.” (Tre. iii, 75.) — but in his poem he more emotionally contemplates Florentine discord. He does not want to see his beloved city dominated by any one man, he says, or “divided” — he longs to see everybody pulling together for;

pace, e di ben fare,
Che gia non puo scampare
Terra rott di parte.40

These last ideas, formulated between 1260 and 1266 when Latini was in bitter exile in France after the Ghibelline victory at home, represents a very early statement, if not the first, of the anti-faction position in Florentine thought.50 This moderate viewpoint was to become a very vital theme as Florentine politics became increasingly turbulent.

Brunetto, then, sees man as a political and social animal; his political ideas are closely linked with the practice of contemporary Italians communes, but received a further stimulus from the writings of Cicero and of Aristotle, who had evolved their theories in two societies in some ways strikingly similar to Brunetto’s. That the communal age in Italy was similar to some periods of antiquity has indeed long been recognized, and need not really surprise us, for the Italians tended to model themselves consciously on their Roman ancestors in particular.51 Perhaps Brunetto can be seen as playing an important role in resurrecting “antiquity” as a living and meaningful concept in Florentine thought and action.

If we briefly enquire in more detail into his mixed Aristotelian-Ciceronian ideas about the state, we will see that in a modest sense Brunetto was indeed at the spearhead of a new movement in political and social thought. Of Cicero,
he translates in the Tresor and Rettorica the first part of the De Inventione, and more significantly we see from the Tresor that he knew much, though indirectly, of the De Officinis, “the most nearly complete and humane discussion of moral problems to be found in the libraries of the Latin West” before Aristotle’s Ethics became important in the 13th century. Latini’s main knowledge of the De Officinis was gained through the Moralium Dogma philosophorum of the 12th century humanistic school of Chartres, and Giovanni di Viterbo’s 13th century De Regimine Civitatum, and the authors of both works significantly had begun the long process of understanding Cicero’s thought to be that of a busy civic man rather than a monk or wise sage as earlier medieval writers had tended to do. Quite possibly, too, the orations he translated gave him food for thought; Pro Marcello in particular contains an eloquent plea by Cicero to Caesar that civic unity be restored, and that the “arts of civil life” be encouraged, and the rich significance of such a passage would not have been lost on faction-ridden Florence’s elder statesman. Brunetto’s Ciceronianism shows him indeed to have been “in direct line . . . with the traditions of Italian civic culture.”

We are on safer grounds in assessing the novelty of Brunetto’s political attitudes when we glance briefly at his debt to Aristotle; for at least some of Cicero’s works had been known and cited for centuries, and this fact makes it hard to pinpoint changes of attitude to his thought. But Aristotle’s Ethics, much of which Brunetto translated in the Tresor, was still a somewhat revolutionary book in the 1260’s when Latini used it, and approved of its author’s stress on the natural foundations of the state and of man’s new dignity within it. Parts of the Ethics had been known since the 12th century as the Ethica Vetus, and by the early years of the next century additional chapters, comprising the Ethica Nova, were familiar to some scholars; nor had its study been banned at Paris in the early 13th century. But a good translation from the original Greek of the entire text was not made until the early 1240’s, (by the great Robert Grosseteste), and St. Thomas’s influential commentary was not completed until about 1270. That Brunetto in the 1260’s should translate some of it, and adopt its general ideas so wholeheartedly, is of real interest then. For the “Aristotelian flood”, as a recent scholar has called it, was to have a tremendous effect on European politico-ethical thinking — with its naturalistic principles and its emphasis on man’s life and hope of attaining happiness in this world, it was basically opposed to what can be called the “Christocentric View”, which stressed that political authority was of sinful origin, and that at the most government had a negative role, that is, to control man’s rampant sinfulness on earth. While this latter conception cannot be called the only early medieval political viewpoint, it was an undoubtedly strong tradition.

The great Hildebrand’s letter to the Archbishop of Metz in 1081 is sometimes taken as representative of this view:

(Christ) despised a secular kingdom, which makes the sons of this world swell with pride, and came of His own will to the priesthood of the cross. Who does not know that kings and leaders are sprung from men who were ignorant of God, who by pride, robbery, perfidy, murders — in a word, by almost every crime at the prompting of the devil, who is the prince of this world — have striven with blind cupidity and intolerable presumption to dominate over their equals, . . . over mankind? (Only if man follow Christ shall he) pass from this servile and transitory kingdom, to a true kingdom of liberty and eternity.

How different from Gregory’s “servile and transitory kingdom” is Brunetto’s classically inspired picture of an Italian commune! Indeed several writers have recently stressed the dynamic element in Aristotle’s political ideas, par-
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particularly as synthesised by St. Thomas and Marsilius of Padua.64 A new view of man and the world was inherent in their writings, and it seems hard to resist the conclusion that Brunetto, the scholarly secretary of Florence, had grasped fully and related to his own experience these Aristotelian ideas, and that his work in popularising them in particular must have been vital.65 Did he really belong to a movement some Italian scholars have called “communal pre-humanism” (“preumanesimo comunale”)?66 If he did, the possible connection of such an early tradition with Dr. Baron’s supposedly almost unique “civic humanism” can hardly be ignored.

To discuss Brunetto’s influence is a very difficult task, not only for the very real reason that any talk about one man’s ideological influence on another is likely to be misleading, but because in this rather obscure case research by a scholar would be necessary. We can, however, very briefly make several general points that seem to arise from our earlier discussions.

To talk of Brunetto is to think of the Dante whom he calls “O figliuol mio”, (Inf. xv, 31.), but to decide precisely what the nature of their relationship was is another matter. Umberto Cosmo thought that Latini was actually Dante’s “professor”67 but Florence was not to have a studium until 1321, and it is hard to see how such a busy man as Brunetto undoubtedly was could have spared the time to teach in any formal way — Bonfiglio had been both master and secretary of Arezzo it is true, but that town was smaller than Florence. Nevertheless their personal ties were close; clearly the poet remembered his “dear and kind paternal image” and it was, we note, “hour by hour” that Latini taught him “come l’uom s’eterna” — “how man makes himself eternal.” Evidently, then, Brunetto gave some time to teaching Dante; after all, he must have known the young poet very well to so confidently predict that:

If thou follow thy star, thou
canst not fail of glorious haven, if I discovered
rightly in the fair life. (Inf. xv, 55-57.)

What it was that Brunetto taught Dante, how he showed him “how man makes himself eternal”, is a thorny problem, and Dantologists have rushed into the thicket with their usual energy and ingenuity. Renucci and Davis68 are important here and to choose between their expert theories is difficult — but rather neglected has been the fact that Brunetto’s modest Tesoretto is in several ways not unlike the Divinia Commedia. It was, indeed, the first “poema didattico-allegorico” in the Italian language and concerns Brunetto’s journey “through the kingdoms of nature” and his meetings with “allegorical personages who instruct him . . . in science and in morals.”69 Dante may well have regarded Virgil as:

my master and my author, thou alone
art he from whom I took the good style that
hath done me honour. (Inf. i, 85-87.),

but to the humble Tesoretto he was probably indebted as a vernacular preced-ent for the Commedia written by a man very conscious of literary style and content.

And it was Brunetto of course who taught Dante the Latin altus stilus which ennobled the political letters; when the poet thundered eloquently at the Florentines for opposing Henry VII:
But you have been lured, all too apt pupils in crime, by the monstrous maw of your greed into every trespass against the laws of God and man...

Indeed, to take up another point, it is likely that Brunetto introduced Dante to two great classics then unknown in Florence — Cicero’s *De amicitia* and Boethius’ *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. The latter was to fulfill a vital function in Dante’s intellectual development; when he was left utterly hopeless by Beatrice’s death, it was Boethius, he tells us in the *Convivio*, who awoke him to the delights of philosophy, which from then on he eagerly sought. We should not overemphasize Brunetto’s literary knowledge however; he does not seem to have known Virgil (*Inf.* xv, 46.) and it is Virgil who dominates the *Commedia* as a moral and stylistic guide.

Dante’s political ideas, too, certainly owe a lot to Brunetto’s teaching and knowledge. Leonardo Bruni notably stresses that Latini encouraged Dante to devote himself “not only to literature but to other liberal studies, omitting nothing that pertains to the making of an excellent man,” and Boccaccio says that Dante heard “filosofia” from Brunetto. And Dante the philosopher was primarily Dante the Aristotelian; Aristotle was “the Master of those who know” (*Inf.* iv, 131), and man was “naturally a social animal.” The *De Monarchia* is an Aristotelian inspired work with a clear concept of man’s two beautitudes, his two separate but not incompatible aims, to live a full life on earth and to be eternally saved. No agreement exists about Dante’s brand of Aristotelianism but his general debt to the Greek philosopher is indisputable, and it seems certain that it was Brunetto who at least introduced Dante to the *Ethics*, though Remigio Girolami probably furthered his philosophic education.

Dobelli has shown that the poet knew the *Tresor* very thoroughly. Nor must we ever forget that Latini’s deep hatred of political factions seems to have been one of his most important legacies to the young Dante, who looked back lovingly to a Florence “nor yet by faction dyed vermilion” (*Paradiso*, xvi, 154), and whose political ideal was a new Roman empire united and at peace, “not cramped within the limits of Italy, nor even within the triangular outline of Europe.” For in the *Inferno* Brunetto says that had he lived longer he “would have cheered (Dante) in the work”, and as he then goes on to explicitly condemn the divisions amongst the Florentines wrought by the infusion of:

> that ungrateful, malignant people, who of old came down from Fiesole, and still savours of the mountain and the rock, (which) will make itself an enemy to thee for thy good deeds,

it is at least possible that Latini is by Dante’s “work” referring to his self-appointed task of preaching peace and political unity under the empire. Dante’s became a rather more catholic political vision, but one with its roots in the teaching of the great Guelf secretary.

One could go on forever — we have not, for example, touched on the interesting questions raised by the fact that Dante places his beloved master in Hell, although as Renaudet suggests, perhaps he does so because Latini wrote his masterpiece, the *Tresor*, in French rather than his own vernacular. Still, perhaps we have begun to see why Dante revered the great secretary.

Latini’s own ideas and his translation seem to have had a wide influence. Villani was not speaking imprecisely when he called the *Tresor* a “good and useful book”; apart from the fact that the original French version was widely copied and known in various forms, a very popular Italian translation, the *Tesoro*, was quickly made by Bono Giamboni and was
very well known, particularly in Tuscany. Many manuscripts of it are extant. There remain, also, two Italian verse re-modellings of the Tesoro, and Catalan, Castilian and Latin translations. One famous example of the direct use of the Tesoro is in the well known 14th century Florentine chronicle the Anonimo Fiorentino. The Tesoretto was also popular.

Stylistically Latini's influence can also be seen. His Italian was that "dolze lingua e piana" (Tesoretto, ii, 42) to become important with Dante and Boccaccio, and his prose is regarded by Italian scholars as having been a model for later writers in the Italian vernacular's formative period.

As a translator he was also a great cominciatore. The important task of disseminating classical culture to ordinary literate citizens was begun in earnest in the 14th century — Dante's Convivio is a good example — and as translators Brunetto and Bono Giamboni, both of whom worked in the last half of the 13th century, stand as real pioneers. If the citizens of the Italian states became conscious of their classical heritage, and aware of its relevance to their own lives, this was surely due to a large extent to vernacular popularizers like Latini. The man who "commented upon the rhetoric of Tully" and compiled the Tresor was worthily called "the beginner and master in refining the Florentines and in teaching them how to speak well," for with Latini starts that Florentine awareness of literary culture that was to bloom, albeit in a much more splendid and scholarly way, a century later.

But this was but part of his work, for it was he who also taught the Florentines "how to guide and rule our republic according to policy"; if one translates the last word as "polity" as one may, and remembers our earlier discussion of Latini's ideas on politics, we begin to get a clearer idea of his revolutionary activities as a popularizer in this sphere. In his lifetime factions became prominent in Florence and his answer to their terror he drew from Aristotle and Cicero, and from his own wide experience of affairs; he called for unity and for patriotism, for freedom and for man's chance to "refine" himself, and as the disruption of Florentine political life became worse after his death, a few citizens took up his cry. A whole line of such non-faction men has been discerned, and several of them were undoubtedly directly influenced by Latini. The chronicler Dino Compagni seems to have been in contact with him, and his Cronica shows on every page his hatred of civic strife. Villani too deplored the factions, and we know very well that the secretary's thought had made a profound impact on him. We know too that Guido Cavalcanti, Dante's dear friend, suffered much because of his moderation in politics, and his intimacy with Brunetto is well known. And when we remember how widely read Brunetto's work was, we can feel confident that it must have been an important factor in the growth of the moderate view which became important from about 1300 onwards. Villani's testimony about Latini's influence begins to take on real meaning.

VI

It seems important in conclusion to briefly refer to two contemporary scholarly accounts of Renaissance civilization in order to see where Brunetto Latini stands if our account of his position in Florentine history has any worth. Dr. Hans Baron has isolated one vital stream of Italian humanism, "civic humanism", which, he believes, was rather suddenly created in Florence around 1400 when a great political crisis brought about the transplantation of Petrarch's somewhat limited Ciceronianism "into civic surroundings;"
then too the great Bruni’s “discovery of Aristotelian ethics” further aided the development of this civic humanism, which as “civic Aristotelianism” became the dominant 15th century intellectual current. Baron admits the existence of a nascent civic humanism in Padua, Vicenza, Verona and Milan in Dante’s time, but Florence, he says, had to await the great Salutati and Bruni. If one looks at Latini, both in his active life and in his works, one cannot help but wonder whether this supposed revolutionary change in Florence’s “cultural atmosphere” was at all as revolutionary as Baron supposes. As we have seen, after all, Latini knew and admired Aristotle’s civic ethics, understood Cicero fairly realistically, fulfilled a political role not unlike that of the later civic humanist, and valued liberty and unity in the state as much as they. Nor was he an entirely isolated figure; the Dominican preacher Remigio Girolami was not a humanist in any literary sense, but around 1300 he was teaching a fully fledged civic Aristotelianism. Further more, the Arezzo humanist Geri, who spent much of his adult life in Florence in Dante’s time, passionately attacked the factions of his day, and in at least one of his polished Latin letters shows a real appreciation of the active temperament of many of the great Roman writers.

Dr. P. O. Kristeller’s belief that Renaissance humanism originated in the medieval studies of *ars dictaminis* and *ars arengandi*, and that “Moreover, as chancellors and as teachers, the humanists, far from representing a new class, were the professional heirs and successors of the medieval rhetoricians the so-called *dictatores*, who also made their careers in exactly these two same professions.” seems to receive some corroboration from the example Latini’s career and ideas provide. Indeed, a potential weakness of Kristeller’s theory was his inability to show his readers a good example of this transition he sees, (apart from the not wholly suitable case of Piero delle Vigne), but Latini seems to fit more perfectly into Kristeller’s very exciting general picture of Italian Renaissance culture and society.

The 13th century too had its “many-sided men”; to look back at Brunetto Latini, Villani’s “man of great wisdom and authority”, is to begin to see how the later Florentine achievement in civic life and in culture had its roots firmly in late *Ducento* civilisation, which itself had been nurtured by earlier generations.

**NOTES—**
10. For these editions see respectively: F. Schevill, *History of Florence*, New York, 1936, pp. 31-48 places Latini briefly but well...
15. The basic book here, D. Marzi, La Cancelliera della repubblica fiorentina, 1910, is not available, and the Idea of Order appeared in the same edition. I have followed some comments in F. P. Luisa, "Riforma della Cancelliera Fiorentina nel 1417".
24. Ibid., p. 94.
25. Contini, Poeti, p. 169 has more details.
36. Haskins, Studies, p. 184; Wieruszowski's papers are relevant here.
37. The Rettorica was edited by Maggini in 1905, but is not available here — this passage is in his article "Orazione," p. 196. A small part of the Rettorica is in E. M. Haskins' Studies in Medical Jurisprudence, Oxford, 1955.
42. The fact that he valued the orations at all is significant — cf. Sabadini, Le Scoperte, p. 10, 18.
43. Maggini, "Orazione", pp. 196-8; 199-9; an English trans. is in Watts, Cicero, p. 447.
45. Sabadini, Le Scoperte, p. 10.
47. E. Faral's review of Carmody in Roman's lxxi, 1960, p. 128-8 calls him "un uomo e pensatore principale del governo... etc.
51. The Rettorica was edited by Maggini in 1915, but is not available here — this passage is in his article "Orazione," p. 196. A small part of the Rettorica is in E. M. Haskins' Studies in Medical Jurisprudence, Oxford, 1955.
56. Ibid., p. 146.
59. The lines may be very roughly translated, "peace and doing good, because already no one can save — (this) Land torn into parts."
60. For details see Villani, vii, 78.
61. Toynbee, Dante Dictionary, p. 94.
65. Faral, Romania, p. 126-8; but Latini does not seem to have known the Politics as Faral does.
68. P. Renucci, Dante, p. 43.
69. Maggini, Enciclopedia Italiana, p. 596.
71. Ibid., p. 104.
77. A. Dobelli, "Il 'Tesoro' nelle opere di Dante", Giornale Dantesco, iv, 1897, pp. 310-349. (At Sydney Uni.).
80. Charmody, Tesoro, Introd. lviii.
81. Bertoni, Il Duccento, pp. 325-9, p. 368 on both points.
82. Tresor, Introd. p. xxi, on both points.
84. B. Mischerini, "Il panorama dell'Italiano Trecentesco", La Rassegna della Letteratura Italiana, 55, 1954, pp. 4-5.
86. I. del Lungo, Dino Compagni e la sua Cronica, Florence, 1879, i. p. 28.
87. Ibid. i. p. 1111; Renucci, Dante, p. 31.
91. M. Becker, "Remigio Girolami."