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The Many Shades of Praise: Politics and Panegyrics in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Diplomacy

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In 1465, the Republic of Florence sent diplomats to congratulate the King of Naples on a military victory of his family over the House of Anjou. Diplomatic protocol required that the Florentines send a congratulatory mission or risk offending the powerful king. The rituals that marked the entrance of their diplomats into the King's presence required a panegyric of the King and his accomplishments. The problem was that the King's success opposed Florentine interests. The Florentines had refrained from assisting the King during his war, although a treaty had required that they do so. Disagreements about Florentine exiles had so soured relations between Naples and Florence that the King went hunting rather than formally greet the Florentine diplomats who arrived in Naples earlier in 1465. Praising the King also risked offending the Florentine allies that the King had recently defeated. Thus, the oratorical...
demands of diplomatic ceremony were diametrically opposed to the political policy of the Florentines. In fact, the Florentines often sent their diplomats into situations in which political and ceremonial demands failed to coincide. Florentine diplomats solved this frequent tension between ritual and politics through subtle variations in the form and content of their rhetoric. Through these variations, Florentine diplomatic oratory sent subtle, meaningful messages masked behind their stated words.

Historians have published much important scholarship on the intellectual, political, and religious insights that humanist oratory offers about Renaissance Italy. Several insightful studies have investigated the content of humanist orations for their ideas as well as potential for broader cultural and political questions. However, much less has been published regarding the social and political demands placed on individual orators in individual contexts and the means by which orators satisfied those demands. Diplomacy offers a unique topic for this type of study because strong evidence of the two primary demands on diplomatic oratory survives in the historical record. Diplomatic documents provide historians with direct information about the political demands placed on a diplomat's speech. The study of ritual, meanwhile, provides convincing, albeit more indirect, knowledge of the ceremonial demands.

Diplomatic commissions and rituals suggest that diplomats were tightly restricted in what they could say in their opening orations. Commissions dictated the politics underlying a mission, the opinions that the diplomats were
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to express, and when they were to express these opinions. The political alliances and enmities between Florence and other Italian powers helped determine the reception of a diplomat, but these factors were outside of the diplomat’s control. The demands of diplomatic rituals of entrance further restricted the form and content of opening orations. Although diplomatic orations to minor powers and even powerful republics required basic restatements in the vernacular of a diplomat’s commission, missions to kings, popes, and Emperors often required opening epideictic orations as a preface to all subsequent political discussions.5 Within the diplomatic ceremonies of entrance, these opening orations served as a gift to a ruler in the form of eloquent laudations. The ruler reciprocated a successful oratorical gift by offering a short and laudatory response to the diplomats and admitting them into the city as representatives of a foreign power.6 By the 1420s, rulers expected these opening orations to be in Latin.7 This expectation for delivery in this language further restricted the oratorical options of a diplomat. In these opening panegyrics, shaping an initial oration too much to address the political particulars

5 Giannozzo Manetti delivered two orations to republics in 1448, one to Siena and one to Venice, that survive. See Wittschier, Giannozzo Manetti, pp. 91–106 and published at pp. 155–175. The surviving versions of the orations are in Latin, but both orations were undoubtedly delivered in the vernacular. Vespasiano da Bisticci claims that the oration in Venice was delivered in Italian. da Bisticci, Le Vite Vol. 2, p. 565. The Sienese oration was most likely in Italian because of the range of Latinity among Manetti’s audience. The fact that Manetti makes three separate references to common sayings in his oration, but gives them in Latin in the surviving version, also suggests that the original speech was in Italian. Wittschier, Giannozzo Manetti, p. 160 and p. 164. The successful response to Manetti’s orations suggests that his style and content were not atypical for republican audiences. See Wittschier, Giannozzo Manetti, p. 92; Nadia Lerz, Il Diario di Griso di Giovanni, in: Archivio Storico Italiano 117, no. 2 (1959), p. 258; Vespasiano da Bisticci, Renaissance Princes, Popes, and Prelates, trans. by William George and Emily Waters, New York 1963, p. 382; da Bisticci, Le Vite Vol. 2, pp. 565–66. The short instructions for and the lack of surviving examples of diplomatic orations given before minor Italian powers suggests that such missions featured a basic restatement of the diplomat’s commission. Compare the short instructions for the opening oration for orators to Faenza in 1447 (ASF Sig.Leg. 12, fol. 4r) with those of diplomats to the Pope in the same year (ASF Sig.Leg. 11, fol. 185v–186r).


7 Maxson, Costumed Words, pp. 34–81.
of a mission would have been counterproductive, since some rulers addressed were not fluent in spoken Latin.⁸

These restrictions left Florentine diplomats with few options to meet both the ceremonial and political expectations for their oratory. Focusing on praise would meet ceremonial demands, but would ignore political realities. Focusing on politics would address political realities, but would fall short of the Latin panegyric that diplomatic ceremony required. Incorporating both demands into a single oration risked offering neither enough praise nor advancing political negotiations, to say nothing of the challenge of incorporating two oftentimes-conflicting demands into the same speech. Thus, diplomats could focus on politics or praise, but lacked the flexibility to give equal treatment to both.

At least four orations survive from Florentine diplomats that prioritized political matters over praise. This category includes two orations that Gian-nozzo Manetti delivered to the Republics of Siena and Venice, venues for which deliberative rather than epideictic rhetoric was the norm. The political focus of Manetti’s oration to King Alfonso of Aragon in 1451 and Nello Martini’s deliberative oration to Pope Martin V in 1425 are more surprising.⁹ Both the pope and the King would have expected a Latin panegyric to complete the ceremonies for the entrance of a diplomat into a host space. Yet, as shown below, each of these orations sticks closely to the content of their respective commissions. A closer examination of each of these orations reveals that Manetti and Martini did not ignore the ceremonial demands to praise a ruler, but rather they molded the form and content of their oratory to the particular situation in which they spoke. In these situations, the molding of rhetoric held

⁸ Paolo Giovio recorded an anecdote in which Charles V whispered to a companion during one such occasion that «Ah, my tutor Adrian was right when he told me I should be chastened for my childish idleness in learning Latin.» Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, trans. by S.G.C. Middlemore, London 1990, p. 364; Buonaccorso Pitti told an anecdote in his diary about a diplomatic crisis between Florence and the King of France. On this occasion, the French king was receiving bad second-hand information from his advisors because he himself could not follow the Latin words of the Florentines. The Florentine diplomats averted the crisis after one of them had the good sense to restate the Florentines’ case in French. Gene A. Brucker, ed., Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence, the Diaries of Buonaccorso Pitti and Gregorio Dati, trans. Julia Martines, New York 1967, pp. 57–58.
⁹ On Manetti’s oration in 1451, see the discussion below. Martini’s oration is published in Cesare Guasti, Commissioni di Rinaldo degli Albizzi per il Comune di Firenze dal MCCCCIX al MCCCCXXXIII. Vol. 3, Florence 1867–1873, pp. 534–40.
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significance beyond the stylistic preference of an orator or developments in Renaissance Humanism. In diplomacy, changes in rhetorical style could also hold political meaning.

The remaining diplomatic orations that survive prioritized praise over politics. At least twenty examples survive from Florentine diplomats during the fifteenth century. Most, in fact, amount to little more than general praise with minor variants of the same content, style, structure, and classical topics. For example, the oration that the Florentine patrician Filippo Magalotti delivered in 1408 focused on praise rather than politics. One of Magalotti’s fellow diplomats on the mission even commented that the oration dealt exclusively with non-substantive matters. Four diplomatic orations along the same lines survive from the pen of Leonardo Bruni, one of which he delivered himself as a Florentine diplomat. Numerous other panegyrics survive from the pens of Giannozzo Manetti, the Archbishop Filippo de’Medici, the Archbishop and future saint Antonio Pierozzi, Batolomeo Scala, and others. The conclu-


11 Ibid., 292–93.

12 All four orations are published in Leonardo Bruni, Opere letterarie e politiche di Leonardo Bruni, ed. by Paolo Viti, Torino 1996, pp. 803–11 and pp. 825–47. Bruni was a diplomat in 1426 and delivered his own oration in this context. He wrote orations for diplomats on missions to the Emperor in 1432, 1438, and the King of Naples in 1442. Scholars have traditionally assumed that Bruni delivered the oration himself to the Emperor Sigismund in 1432 or 1433. However, there is no evidence to support this assumption. Sigismund was forced to send diplomats to Florence from Siena because the Florentines had denied him entry into the city. da Bisticci, Renaissance Princes, p. 451. Therefore, a Florentine diplomat must have delivered Bruni’s oration outside of Florence. The Florentine Signoria sent five ambassadors to the Holy Roman Emperor between 1432 and 1433. The earliest mission featured Biagio Guasconi. ASF Sig.Leg. 9, fol. 44r. A second mission in 1432 featured Francesco Tornabuoni and Bruni’s friend Palla di Nofri Strozzi, although these diplomats were recalled before completing their mission. See Matteo Palmieri, Annales, ed. by Giosue Carducci and Vittorio Fiorini, (Raccolta degli Storici italiani dal Cinquecento al Milletcento, 26, part 1), Città di Castello 1906, p. 137. The third mission featured Zenobi Guasconi and Rinaldo degli Albizzi. ASF Sig.Leg. 8, fol. 55v.

sions of these orations typically highlight their focus on praise. These conclusions usually contain a phrase that declares the diplomats have more substantive materials to discuss in future meetings with the ruler, implying that the speech just concluded dealt only with ceremonial concerns. Yet, the appearances of these diplomatic orations are deceiving. Each diplomatic oration fit into a ritual that possessed both ceremonial demands as well as a restrictive political context. As with the more political diplomatic orations, the rhetorical choices of Florentine diplomats in these speeches held meaning beyond hollow well-wishing and stylistic preference.

Orations that focused on politics could mask subtle ceremonial implications. For example, in 1425, Nello Martini, together with Rinaldo degli Albizzi and Agnolo Pandolfini, was charged with stopping hostile actions of papal subordinates in the papal states against the Florentines as well as warming relations between Florence and Pope Martin V. Martini’s instructions had used a smooth narrative framework to present him with the different topics that he was to address in his oration. The commission began by stating that the Florentines had always been devoted to the pope; however, some of the pope’s representatives in the papal lands had forgotten this devotion and acted against the Florentines (without, of course, the pope’s knowledge). The commission then told the story of the wrongs inflicted upon the innocent.

Négociations Diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane. Documents, Recueillis par Giuseppe Canestrini, Paris 1859, pp. 117–24; 1464: B.U. Padova, M.S. 537, fol. 28r–32r; Bartolomeo Scala in 1465: Scala, Humanistic, pp. 242–45; 1484: Scala, Humanistic, pp. 224–31; Donato Acciaiuoli in 1471: BNCF Magl. XXXII 39, fol. 77v–80r; Alamanno Rinuccini in 1477: Alamanno Rinuccini, Lettere ed Orazioni, ed. by Vito R. Giustiniani, Florence 1953, pp. 68–72; Gentile Becchi in 1493: Desjardins and Canestrini, Documents, pp. 205–14; Angelo Poliziano in 1496: Florence Alden Gragg, ed., Latin Writings of the Italian Humanists, New York 1927, pp. 199–201. This list does not include orations from the fourteenth century, orations delivered in Florence, or orations written but not delivered in a ritualized setting. For more details on these orations, see Maxson, Costumed Words. A final oration delivered in a diplomatic setting, but from an occasion other than a ritual of entrance survives by Palla di Palla Strozzi from 1428. See ASF Carte Strozziane III 191, fol. 40r. The same oration is also found at ASF Carte Strozziane III 119, fol. 75r.

14 See, for example, the end of the oration to Alfonso of Aragon in 1442: «Moreover, there are other more specific things, most serene prince, that we have to relate to your serenity, which things we will relate elsewhere, when the time and place will be given to us.» Bruni, Opere, p. 846. Ceterum, serenissime princeps, alia quedam particularia habemus tue serenitati scorsum referre, quae alias cum tempus locusque dabitur referemus.

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Florentines by the Duke of Milan. Throughout the narrative, the Florentines are presented as lovers and seekers of peace who wish only to «conserve their liberty» (libertá nostra conservare) against the treacherous and bellicose Duke. The Signoria instructed Martini explicitly to stay on topic and avoid «old things» (cose antiche) that would «bore» (dare tedio) his listeners. A later letter from the Dieci di Balà reinforced their demands by providing the exact historical references that Martini was to use in his opening oration.

Martini broke apart the information in his commission, identified four major points in it, and proceeded to present them in a plain list format. He began with his argument that the Florentines had always been devoted to the pope, citing the examples from the recent past that the Dieci had provided to him. Next, he turned to the actions committed against Florence by rulers in the pope’s lands, taking his examples from his commission. Third, he made the case that Florence was justified in going to war with Milan, again taking his information from his commission. Lastly, Martini argued against the contention that the Florentines had not been active seekers of peace, again using his commission. In addition to making bullet points out of the story structure in his commission, Martini avoided classical citations and classical

17 Ibid., p. 331.
18 Ibid., p. 329.
19 Ibid., p. 336.
21 Ibid., p. 329 and pp. 336–37. The examples in the commission were Rettore della Marca, Giovanni da Camerino, Ardicione da Carrara, Govenatore di Bologna, followed by the opposite has been done for the Duke of Milan, etc. The oration has Governatore della Marca, Piero di Navarrino, Ardicione, followed by the opposite has been done for the Duke of Milan.
22 Ibid., pp. 329–31 and pp. 537–38. Among other examples, the commission justified war with a statement about how, after the death of Giangaleazzo Visconi, the Florentines restrained from pushing their advantage. The oration contains the same justification.
23 Ibid., p. 331 and pp. 539–40. The oration adds some minor details regarding the Florentine attempts to maintain peace, probably drawn from the first hand experiences of Rinaldo degli Albizzi and Nello Martini. One area with added information was the peace talks in Ferrara, in which Rinaldo degli Albizzi was a participant. Ibid., pp. 7–11. The oration (but not the commission) also referred to the rejection of an audience for Bartolomeo Val-
word phrasings. In fact, the only Latin that appears in the oration is a quotation that echoes the legal language found in Florentine laws. Martini’s avoidance of the narrative framework provided to him in his commission left his oration to be little more than a blunt list of items, arguments, and proof. Martini made repeated statements expressing his worry about the length of his oration. This concern for succinctness combined with plain language and a clear presentation of evidence drove Martini’s legal case rather than the desire for classical eloquence directed at praising the pope.

Martini and his audience were both well aware that he had subjugated praise to political matters. Martini’s exordium, by far the most rhetorical part of his oration, makes this point explicitly. Martini stated that usually a lengthy oration of praise precedes an exposition of the diplomat’s commission. Regrettably, Martini stated, the length and importance of his material would not allow him to perform this action. Moreover, the quality of the audience requires a Latin oration. Both Martini’s commissioners and custom, however, have forced him to speak in the vernacular. Martini betrayed his concern about his choice to follow this tradition by offering numerous explanations for his stylistic choices. His statements hint that a different tradition, that of panegyrics, was common and an increasingly expected aspect of highly important missions such as his. Martini’s statements implied that he would not engage it.

Martini’s choice of style in his oration may have been a deliberate reflection on the icy relations between Florence and the papacy. The famous insult to Martin V in Florence in 1420, in which the people of the city sang a mocking song about the pope, reflected the deepest disagreements between the pope and Florence concerning the lands of the Romagna. The root of the problem lay in the Florentine support of petty lords in this area of the papal state, such as the Malatesta, Montefeltro, Manfredi, and especially Braccio or, on which mission Nello Martini was present. ASF Sig.Leg. 7, fol. 29v: See also P. Bigazzi, Vita di Bartolommeo Valori (il vecchio), in: Archivio Storico Italiano 4 (1843), pp. 272–73.

24 The Latin quotation in Martini’s speech is dirette o indirette, vel ullo quasto colore. Guasti, Commissioni Vol. 2, p. 538. Martini’s language paralleled a diplomatic law from 1430, which read … non possit vel debeat, directe vel indirecte … Giuseppe Vedrovato, Note sul Diritto diplomatico della Repubblica fiorentina, Florence 1946, p. 50.


26 Ibid., p. 534.

Fortebacci. Such support made assertions of papal power over these lands difficult. During the peace negotiations that followed Martini’s oration, the Visconti highlighted the Florentine support of these petty rulers by suggesting a clause that would cut the ties between Florence and them, a clause that the Florentines rejected. Moreover, the pope favored the Visconti in the wars between Florence and Milan. During peace negotiations with the pope, the Florentine ambassador Rinaldo degli Albizzi declared, »in secret, the Pope agrees with the Duke about everything« (… in segreto il Papa s’intende col Duca per omnia). On June 22, 1426, the Duke of Milan wrote to his Roman ambassadors to express his glee that the pope had conceded Città di Castello to him. As the papal historian Peter Partner wrote, Città di Castello »… commands the passes into Tuscany, and whoever holds the city threatens – and thus may alienate – Florence.« Città di Castello did not actually pass into Milanese hands. However, this letter provides further evidence for Martin V’s pro-Milanese sentiments. This context suggests that Martini’s repeated comments in his speech that he would not offer the pope a Latin panegyric masked a second layer of meaning regarding the cold relationship between Martin V and Florence. By rejecting to fulfill the ceremonial demands of his mission, Martini made an implied statement about the relationship between Florence and the pope.

At the other end of the spectrum from Martini’s seemingly all political oration, orations that focused on praise made veiled political statements. For example, the orators to King Alfonso of Naples in 1442 ostensibly delivered an oration void of political specifics. In that year, Alfonso of Aragon finally defeated René of Anjou to gain possession of the Kingdom of Naples. Such an impressive conquest of one of the major states of Italy necessitated a congratulatory embassy from Florence as well as other Italian powers. A ruler as powerful as Alfonso expected diplomats with a great deal of social prestige and eloquent words as proof of the Florentines’ joy over Alfonso’s accomplishments.

### Notes
31 Partner, Papal State, p. 73.
32 Ibid., pp. 81–82.
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The orator on this occasion, Giuliano Davanzati, was charged with offering these words. He began by admitting that his speech would lack learned displays. He stated that an oration before a different prince would require »exempla of illustrious men of ancient times for our speech« (… sermonibus nostris antiquorum illustrium virorum exempla conquirenda).  

Alfonso did not need such comparisons because he himself possesses the greatest praiseworthy traits. The orator claimed, »for that reason, why would someone bring forth old examples, when new ones are so abundant« (… quamobrem quid vetera quis conquirat, cum superabundet novis)? The oration followed the recommendations of Cicero for panegyrics by praising external things and internal things, although it broke off from Cicero by declining to praise any of Alfonso’s physical attributes.  

After the brief statements of general praise, the orator declared that the Florentines »rejoice and exult« (gaudeant et exultent) at the king's conquest of Naples. The orator offered two reasons for the Florentines' joy. First, the Florentines were overjoyed because of the »singular devotion« (singularis devotio) that they possess towards »your regal highness« (regiam sublimitatem tuam).  

Second, they declared that they are confident that the Kingdom of Naples under the able rule of Alfonso would enjoy peace and that this peace would spread to all neighboring areas.  

This bland and short panegyric in classical Latin seems to suggest that it and by extension, most other diplomatic orations were works of empty rhetoric, detached from the political situations into which they fit. Under this interpretation, the oration in 1442 and others like it served an important, but solely ritualistic purpose. Towards this end, the Florentines placed an enormous amount of care into the construction of this oration and selection of the diplomats that delivered it. The Florentine government elected Bernardo Giugni and Giuliano Davanzati as their diplomats, both men of reputation.

33 Bruni, Opere, p. 844.
34 Ibid.
35 For the recommendations for a panegyric, see Pseudo-Cicero, Rhetorica ad Herennium, 3:10 and Cicero, De inventione, 2:177.
36 Bruni, Opere, p. 846.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
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learning, and frequent Florentine diplomats.39 Vespasiano da Bisticci claimed that Alfonso was flattered to receive Bernardo Giugni, because he knew «how much Bernardo was beloved in Florence.»40 The interests of Giuliano Davanzati in classical learning made him an excellent choice to deliver the opening oration before the victorious king. The most eloquent man in Florence, Leonardo Bruni, wrote the words that Davanzati delivered. It is not clear whether Bruni took it upon himself, was ordered by the Florentine government, or asked by Giuliano Davanzati to write this oration; nevertheless, the manuscript tradition indicates that Bruni wrote the oration that Davanzati delivered in late November or early December, 1442.41 Whether or not the king knew that Bruni had written Davanzati’s oration is also unclear. However, the combination of diplomats with great social prestige as well as the words of the city’s most eloquent citizen ensured the success of the ritual aspect of the mission.

Yet, even as Davanzati declared the devotion and goodwill of the Florentines towards King Alfonso, the recent hostilities between the two powers were not far in the background. The Florentines had initially proclaimed their neutrality in the war between Alfonso and René. Eventually, they backed René.42 Moreover, Alfonso’s victory directly opposed Florentine interests. From the mid 1430s, King Alfonso had allied himself with the Visconti in

40 da Bisticci, Renaissance Princes, pp. 326–327.
41 Emilio Santini, Leonardo Bruni Aretino e i suoi »Historiarum florentini populi libri XII,« Pisa 1910, p. 167; cf. Bianca, Le Orazioni, p. 227. My date of this oration disagrees with Bianca and is based on the following evidence. On November 17, the Signoria elected Bernardo Giugni to go to King Alfonso. A week after that, Giuliano Davanzati was elected to join him. See ASF Car.Cor. 51, fol. 38r and 40r. As this was the only mission by Davanzati to the King of Naples during this time and the manuscript tradition links this oration with Giuliano Davanzati, it must have been for this mission that Bruni wrote this speech. These findings concur with the argument of James Hankins, who has pointed out that one surviving manuscript of the speech carries the date of December 1, 1442. See James Hankins, The Chronology of Leonardo Bruni’s Later Works (1437–1443), in: Studi medievali e umanistici 6 (forthcoming), pp. 29–30. I have accessed this article at http://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/2961721 (accessed November 24, 2009). The online version states a planned publication date of 2007; however, the article has to my knowledge yet to appear in print. My thanks to James Hankins for his permission to cite this unpublished article.
Milan, a frequent antagonist in Florentine wars. Alfonso was an enemy of Pope Eugenius IV, even as the Florentines housed Eugenius within the walls of their city. To make matters worse, René fled north after his defeat at Alfonso’s hands and took refuge within Florence. Pope Eugenius greeted René in Florence with a bull that granted him legal right to Naples. René remained in Florence for three months, until he finally departed for Provence in October.

The Florentines attempted to appease both Alfonso and René in July, August, September, and October. Since an official congratulatory mission to King Alfonso while René was in the city would have affronted the Angevin king, on July 14, the Florentine Signoria sent a letter downplaying René’s presence in the city. On the sixteenth, they sent a short letter congratulating Alfonso. On the twentieth, the Florentine Signoria sent Giovannozzo Pitti to King Alfonso. Pitti’s commission has been lost; however, it seems likely that he was sent as a stopgap diplomat until they could send a more elaborate congratulatory mission after René was safely back in France. Such temporary congratulatory missions were not unprecedented in Florence, as they had sent a similar mission to Pope Martin V directly after his election as pope. However, putting off official congratulations in order to house and appease the king’s enemies undoubtedly did not escape Alfonso’s notice. In mid-November, the Florentine Signoria finally elected its congratulatory mission, featuring Giugni and Davanzati, to King Alfonso. These diplomats arrived before

43 Ryder, Alfonso, pp. 207–08.
44 Ibid., p. 255.
46 BNCF Pac. 148, fol. 186v.
47 Ibid., fol. 187r.
48 ASF Car.Cor. 51, fol. 38r.
49 Florence initially sent Jacopo Riete, a Dominican Friar, to the Council of Constance to congratulate Martin V on his election as pope. The city did not send an official congratulatory mission until September of the same year. See ASF Sig.Leg. 6, fol. 78r.
50 ASF Car.Cor 51, fol. 40r. James Hankins has discovered new archival documentation that further suggests the reluctance of the Florentines to congratulate Alfonso. Hankins points out that the Signoria fined all members of the Otto di Guardia in November of 1442. The Signoria stated that they would not lift the fine until Bernardo Giugni, a member of the Otto, left Florence for Naples. On November 26, the Signoria threatened both Davanzati and Giugni with the death penalty if they did not set out for Naples on December 1. Hankins, Chronology, p. 30.
the hostile king with words that directly contradicted the previous decade of Florentine and Aragonese relations.

Davanzati’s oration negotiated this complicated political context through subtle word choices, oratorical style, and omissions in content, all of which scaled back the praise that he offered the king. Bruni’s oration to Alfonso claimed that the Florentines offered their congratulations to the king with all their heart and soul. He then attributed the Florentine joy at the king’s conquest to the city’s devotion to the king and their hope for peace. In addition to trope phrases, these lines may have implied that the Florentines accepted the king’s victory against their ally without reservation. The ritual cemented the sincerity, feigned or not, of the words. Davanzati also claimed that he did not need to cite ancient examples when praising such an illustrious figure. This section of the oration amounted to a diluted version of the praise Bruni had written for a diplomat to the Emperor Sigismund in 1432. This previous oration by Bruni had amounted to another brief panegyric to a man whom the Florentines had risked insulting by not sending a diplomat to him at the appropriate time. Yet, the oration in 1442 was even shorter and vaguer than this previous speech. Particularly, the two orations diverged in their use of specific examples to praise the ruler in question. The oration to Alfonso in 1442 lacked any specific examples to back up its generic lines of praise. By contrast, the oration in 1432 contained an entire paragraph of praise of specific actions performed by the Emperor.

Bruni’s oration to Alfonso of Aragon also was more reserved in its praise than the two other orations that Bruni wrote and/or delivered to rulers. In particular, Bruni’s oration in 1442 lacked the layered metaphors that charac-

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51 The evidence suggests that Biagio Guasconi delivered Bruni’s oration in 1432 in order to placate the Emperor’s hostile sentiments towards the Florentines. The oration does not mention the Emperor’s coronation by the pope, suggesting that this event (in 1433) had not yet occurred. Moreover, Biagio Guasconi dabbled in humanist learning and was a friend of Matteo Strozzi, which may have placed him in contact with Bruni. Christian Bec, Cultura e Società e Firenze nell’Età della Rinascenza, Rome 1981, pp. 132–44. Elements of the oration and Guasconi’s commission overlap, such as the stress in both texts on the Florentines as devoted sons of the Emperor and their hopes for his rule. ASF Sig.Leg. 9, fol. 44r. Biagio Guasconi faced the task of explaining a potential insult that the Florentines had given to the Emperor by not sending an elaborate diplomatic entourage earlier. In fact, his commission ordered that Guasconi make an excuse for the fact that the Florentines had not sent such an embassy, although the imperial office required one. Cf. the discussion in Maxson, Costumed Words, pp. 101–06.

52 Bruni, Opere, p. 830.
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terized his orations in 1426 and 1438. In 1426, Bruni ostensibly lauded the pope for his efforts to rebuild Rome and to reform the Church. Yet, Bruni’s oration had another layer. Bruni symbolized the problems of the Church in the years prior to the papacy of Martin V by referring to the dangerous valleys and mountains outside of Rome. Within the city, Bruni’s praise focused on the pope’s rebuilding efforts. In particular, he praised the pope’s rebuilding of the Lateran, the traditional home of the popes, and the city’s bridges. Not coincidently, the Latin word for bridge, pons is similar to the Latin name for the pope, pontifex.53 Through such allusions, Bruni turned Martin V into a refounder of the papacy in addition to his ostensible role as rebuilder of Rome. In 1438, an oration by Bruni praised the new Holy Roman Emperor in terms reminiscent of the three magi approaching the newborn Christ. The oration began with words from Matthew, »We have seen His star in the east and we have come to adore Him.«54 The oration continues with eschatological passages from Vergil and inferences to Messianic passages in the Book of Isaiah.55 These references further the metaphor of the Emperor as the second coming of Christ. By contrast to these earlier orations, the 1442 oration contains no multi-layered metaphors. By avoiding them, the oration was able to scale back its praise to the victorious King Alfonso.

53 Ibid., pp. 808–10. For a more in-depth analysis of this oration, see Maxson, Costumed Words, pp. 96–99.
54 Bruni, Opere, p. 836. Vidimus stellam eius in Oriente et venimus adorare eum. For a more in-depth analysis of this oration, see Maxson, Costumed Words, pp. 107–09.
55 Bruni, Opere, pp. 836–39. Referring to Vergil, Bruni wrote »Lest you think that all these things were now newly invented by me, hear what Virgil, most learned of the poets, says: Behold the star of Dionysian Caesar appears | a star by which the grain fields and also crops would rejoice | the grape would ripen on sunny hills.« Que quidem omnium, ne nunc noviter a me reperta putes, audi quid dicat Virgilius poetarum doctissimus: ecce Dyonei processit Cesaris astrum | astrum quo segetes gauderent frugibus quoque | duceret apricis in collibus uva colorum. Bruni, Opere, p. 836. The reference to Vergil derives from Vergil, Ecologues, 9.47–49. Bruni argued that this quotation showed Vergil’s wish that the Emperor would bring »tranquility and peace« (tranquillitatem et pacem). The Emperor was thus like the description of God in Isaiah 9:5–7, the »Prince of Peace.« Bruni praised the Emperor’s virtues: »trust« (fides), »moderation« (moderatio), »strength« (fortitudo), »clemency« (clementia), »incorruptible justice« (incorrupta iustitia), »admirable wisdom« (admirabilis sapientia) and »the highest intelligence« (altitudo consilii). These virtues echo Isaiah 11:1–5, where the Messiah is foreseen to have sapientia, consilium, fortitudo, iustitia, and fides. For the Latin Vulgate Bible, see B. Fischer, I. Gribomont, H.F.D. Sparks, W. Thiele, Robert Weber, H.I. Frede, and Roger Gryson, eds. Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem, Stuttgart 1994.
Politics and Panegyrics in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Diplomacy

Finally, Bruni’s oration for Davanzati to deliver to Alfonso in 1442 contained less praise than a letter from the Florentine patrician Palla di Palla Strozzi to the same ruler.66 Unlike the generic and vague praise in Bruni’s oration, Palla offered more detail and specific examples, including several references to the conquest of Naples itself. Palla unequivocally claimed that Alfonso had demonstrated his »strength« (fortitudine) through his conquest of lands far from his home country without allies and, in fact, against many foes.67 Alfonso and his army had been throughout the Kingdom of Naples but had never looted or destroyed anything. In fact, they had left no trace of their presence. Alfonso has treated the city of Naples in the same way. Both times that he has conquered the city, he has left its churches, women, and maidens be. His treatment of rebels in Naples and his other lands demonstrates his mercy.68 By contrast, Bruni’s treatment of the king’s conquest of Naples in his oration was much vaguer. He congratulated the king on his victory and conquest of Naples. He then claimed that the Florentines were pleased about the conquest because of unspecified »benefits« (beneficia) received from the king.69 He also claimed that the Florentines hoped that peace would come to the Kingdom and Italy because of Alfonso’s »most praiseworthy rule« (laudabilissimam gubernationem).70

The mostly private nature of Palla’s letter to King Alfonso allowed him to be more profuse in his praise regarding the king’s accomplishments. Palla had been a prominent member of the Florentine state before the triumph of the Medici in Florence in 1434. Palla di Palla served on several diplomatic missions, including important charges to the Count of Savoy and to greet Pope Eugenius IV upon his entrance into Florentine territory in 1434.71 He was a member of the Priors, Twelve Good Men, and Sixteen Standard Bearers between 1426 and 1432.72 Unlike his more famous cousin Palla di Nofri

56 Palla di Palla Strozzi was also known as Palla Novello. He is frequently confused in the historiography with his cousin, Palla di Nofri Strozzi.
57 ASF Carte Strozziene III 125, fol. 146r.
58 Ibid.
59 Bruni, Opere, pp. 846–47.
60 Ibid.
62 For Palla’s office-holding career in Florence, see the online Tratte at Brown University: Florentine Renaissance Resources, Online Tratte of Office Holders, 1282–1532, Machine
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Strozzi, Palla di Palla Strozzi maintained Florentine residence after the first consolidation of Medici power in Florence in 1434.63 However, his diplomatic as well as domestic political profile seems to have dropped precipitously after that date. Palla had strong personal connections to King Alfonso, with several letters surviving from him to the king in an unpublished manuscript.64 He was knighted by the king in 1423.65 The Strozzi family were prominent bankers in Naples and would become particularly prominent at court in the 1450s and 1460s.66 Although public and private were always hopelessly intertwined during the fifteenth century, it seems likely that Palla’s dismal political position after 1434 and strong personal relationship with the king made his letter more a reflection of himself and his family than the Florentine ruling regime. Palla’s flexibility in a personal letter contrasted sharply with the limited options of the Florentine diplomats who approached a hostile king.

The Florentine ruling regime may have added a final element to their efforts to tone down their official congratulations of King Alfonso. On October 17, 1442, just one month before Davanzati and Giugni arrived in Naples, Leonardo Bruni sent King Alfonso a portion of ›History of the Italian War‘, a work drawn from Procopius focusing on the wars of Justinian against the Goths in Italy. In his letter to Alfonso, Bruni wrote that he was sending a copy of his ›History‘, in which it is shown that Belisarius had conquered Naples in the same way as Alfonso had. Bruni stated that he would have sent the history six months before when he had completed it, but he had feared offending somebody, an obvious reference to René of Anjou who had asylum in Florence at that time.67 Unlike Palla di Palla Strozzi, Leonardo Bruni was too prominent within the Florentine government to separate public from private.
actions. Bruni had been the Florentine chancellor by this point for over fifteen years. He had served in recent memory on the Dieci di Balìa, the most exclusive government body in Florence. He had written and ceremonially presented the official history of Florence. Alfonso of Aragon had received countless letters from Florence that Bruni had written. Thus, Bruni’s position may imply a deeper motive for his letter to the king.

Bruni’s words in the letter suggest that it was a reflection of the Florentine regime in addition to a letter from a Florentine citizen to a ruler interested in humanist learning. Concerning his delay in sending the book to Alfonso, Bruni wrote »but a certain consideration delayed me, because I feared that I would offend some people if I would demonstrate the way and hidden approach by which to seize the city.« Bruni was afraid that Alfonso could use his book as an instruction manual for defeating the Florentine ally René. Such an action would certainly have angered the Angevin King, but it also would have run counter to Florentine foreign interests. These interests were opposed to Alfonso at that time. By waiting until after the siege, such hints were a moot point. The content of the work and Bruni’s dedication to the king became, instead, an act of flattery by comparing Alfonso to his classical predecessors. In doing so, Bruni performed the same comparative action between a modern and an historical example that is so common in fifteenth-century diplomatic oratory. In this example, Bruni drew parallels between Alfonso’s actions and classical figures, this time Belisarius and Totila. As such, Bruni’s letter and gift may have been an additional element that the Florentine regime used to congratulate Alfonso of Aragon on his conquest. Foreign rulers watched the quality of diplomats and words that states sent one another. Thus, the ambiguity of the public and private worlds of politics and literature may have enabled

68 On Bruni’s biography, see Gordon Griffiths, James Hankins, and David Thompson, eds., The Humanism of Leonardo Bruni, Binghamton 1987, pp. 21–41.
70 Bruni, Epistolarium, p. 165. Sed retardavit me respectus quidam, quod veritus sum, ne aliquos offenderem, si viam, et occultum adytum quodammodo monstrarem ad urbem capiendam.
71 Ibid.
the Florentine regime to offer congratulations to Alfonso without officially doing so while René was still close enough to the city to be a diplomatic factor. Between the extremes of Bruni’s oration delivered by Davanzati to Alfonso and Nello Martini’s speech to the pope, Giannozzo Manetti’s words to Alfonso of Aragon in 1451 seamlessly combined political and ritual necessities to offer a panegyric as well as an opening argument for the subsequent political negotiations. In that year, the Florentine ruling magistracy sent Manetti to Naples to discuss the relations and alliances of the major Italian powers (minus the papacy) and merchant issues. Explicitly, Manetti’s instructions told him to present his letters of credence with «those words that seem (best) to your prudence» (con quelle parole che parranno alla tua prudentia). He was to acknowledge that the Florentines’ former ambassador to the king had told them of his majesty’s devotion to their Republic and his desire for peace. Manetti’s instructions were explicit regarding his central duties: «The effect of your commission is that with all zeal and diligence, with deeds and with words, you will ensure that the peace is preserved, as much as you are able.» In addition to these explicit instructions, Manetti was expected to fulfill the rituals that began important diplomatic exchanges before foreign princes. The fulfillment of these rituals required an epideictic oration in praise of the host ruler.

Manetti combined these two tasks in his opening oration by offering a panegyric that shaped praise of peace into praise of King Alfonso. Manetti stated that the presence of so great a king demanded an oratorical style like Manetti’s predecessors had used, that is, a panegyric. However, Alfonso’s affection towards Manetti in addition to the king’s «special and almost incredible attention in listening to even orators speaking at length» have demonstrated that Manetti did not need to wait to begin the political material in his commission. Manetti declared, «Therefore, so that we might be briefer, we

72 ASF Sig.Leg. 13, fol. 4v.
73 ASF Sig.Leg. 13, fol. 4v. Loeffecto della tua commissione sue che con ogni studio et diligensia tingegni con facti et con parole quanto te possibile che la pace si conservi.
74 Sandeo, De regibus, p. 177. Si nunc primum, serenissime ac gloriosissime princeps, penes maiestatem tuam legationis munere fungeremur, profecto in hoc orationis nostrae principio trita illa et consuetud exordiorum forma, iuxta celebrata et pervulgata artis oratoriae praecipua, plane et aperte ateremur. I have silently updated the punctuation in this edition of Manetti’s speech to conform to modern standards. I have also silently changed each «&« to «et«.
75 Ibid. Sed quotiens legatos et oratores ad te missos et destinatos fasisse animadvertimus, totiens singularem quondam tuam erga nos benivolentiam acquisivisse ac comparasse intel-
have arranged auspiciously to begin, to make a start, and to declare this our oration without any opening words, since such words are unnecessary to seize your benevolence and attention.« He continued that »in accordance with the faithful and accurate duty of our commission, we most briefly exhort your majesty to the continuous and perpetual preservation of the peace, begun a short while ago with us. The most important aspect of our commission seems to contain and consist in this alone, more than anything else.«76 Manetti’s exordium turned the fact that he will start discussing the political particulars in his opening oration into an aspect of praise of the King’s learning. Implicitly, a different ruler would have required the usual panegyric and postponement of political matters. By contrast, Alfonso is so exceptional that to do anything but begin the political negotiations would be superfluous. Thus, Manetti framed his willingness to begin negotiating political matters and his subsequent treatment of these issues into an implicit reflection of the King’s praiseworthy qualities. Subsequently, Manetti’s partition declared that his oration would have three sections, all focused on his political particulars. The first will praise peace. The second will examine the benefits for people seeking peace. The third will urge the king to turn his armies to the peoples of the east. The remaining parts of Manetti’s oration continued to combine political and ritualistic demands. He delivered the oration in Latin, the language of cultural gifts.77 As he proceeded through the sections outlined in his partition, Manetti cited the authorities of the »Latins and Greeks and also the Jews« (Latinorum et Graecorum atque Hebraorum), including Vergil, Homer, Livy, Herodotus, Demosthenes, Cicero, Seneca, Aristotle, many and various books in both the Old and New Testaments, and Augustine.78 By citing such authors, Manetti offered implicit praise of Alfonso’s learning by expecting him to understand and appreciate his references. He also offered more explicit praise
of Alfonso, »not all, not most, not many« (non omnia, non pleraque, non multa) of the praiseworthy possibilities, but »a select few« (pauca quaedam).\(^7^9\) All of these aspects combine to create a king that shows God’s favor. Because of this favor, Manetti argued, Alfonso must use his talents towards the good of the church. This argument, based on praise of Alfonso, led Manetti to urge the King to set out against the Turk rather than using his army against Christians.\(^8^0\)

Language, style, content, the identity of the speaker, and the blurred boundaries between the public and private all contributed to meet the political and ritualistic demands of each diplomatic oration delivered during the fifteenth century. In a period so closely defined by intensely monitored and rigid ritualized actions, even the subtest deviation from the script carried unspoken significance. In such contexts, the form and content of an orator’s words carried implications beyond the expression of vague and meaningless rhetoric. In general, the function of humanist oratory in a diplomatic setting was to offer a cultural gift to a ruler. Within this framework, orators balanced the oftentimes-conflicting demands of ritual and politics to create oratorical works tailored to particular circumstances. Through these works, diplomats were able to present subtle misgivings masked under panegyrics offering blatant falsehoods. To balance the conflicting demands of ritual and politics, diplomats offered many shades of praise.

\(^7^9\) Ibid., p. 183.

\(^8^0\) Ibid., p. 184.