As is well known, the German scholar Hans Baron (1900–89) played a major role in drawing attention to the lives and works of both Coluccio Salutati and Leonardo Bruni. According to Baron’s much debated thesis, the humanist movement led by these two prominent intellectuals between the end of the fourteenth and the beginning of the fifteenth centuries promoted a new kind of political ideology and propaganda that would have a profound impact both in Florence and elsewhere, lasting at least until Machiavelli’s time.

Not surprisingly, then, Laurent Baggioni’s carefully structured book begins with a detailed analysis of Baron’s civic humanism, both retracing the origin of the theory and defining the notion of humanism itself. These two topics are treated in the general introduction and first two chapters (“Entrée en matière,” “Hans Baron, l’Allemagne et Florence,” and “L’Amérique et le myth républicain”) wherein he relies on a wide variety of studies from the 1920s to the present, providing an accurate and most useful bibliographic update. Understandably, these almost eighty pages anticipate some of the main features of Salutati’s personality, thought, and works that Baggioni analyzes in greater detail for most of this book, before devoting the last chapter (“Rhétorique de l’éloge et parénésie civile dans la ‘Laudatio florentine urbis’ de Leonardo Bruni”) to a reflection on his cultural and political legacy as it emerges from the panegyric of Salutati’s best-known pupil.

Baggioni successfully offers an accurate and convincing interpretation of Salutati’s political outlook that rests on a close reading of most of his texts. Going in chronological order from Salutati’s earliest private letters to his unfinished De Laboribus Herculis, Baggioni manages to provide a coherent and detailed portrait of this author as thinker, humanist, and chancellor of the Florentine republic. In contrast to most scholars who view Salutati as a puzzling and contradictory figure torn between two different ages (a man at a crossroads, to echo the title of Ronald Witt’s groundbreaking and still most useful monograph, Hercules at the Crossroads [1983]), Baggioni relies at once on the Epistolario, the missives, and writings as different—in style, content, and genre—as De Saeculo et Religione, De Laboribus Herculis, De Tyranno, and the reply to Loschi’s Invectiva in Florentinos, to highlight those features that, in his eyes, bear witness to a remarkable consistency on Salutati’s part.

Among Salutati’s deepest convictions, Baggioni finds the indissoluble link joining ethics and politics, the need to conceive of Italy as a single political entity, and the role of the Holy Roman Empire and the Church as the two inevitable points of reference from which all ideological and spiritual discourse must begin (only to realize all too often that they, too, like most institutions, are increasingly subject to moral corruption and, consequently, unable to perform their tasks properly). It is specifically this widespread
ethical decay and loss of veritable leaders that, according to Baggioni, triggers most of Salutati’s political thinking throughout his long, eventful career as chancellor of Florence. The answer Salutati provides to the moral and social crisis of his time is the unremitting, sincere search for those natural and, as such, divinely ordained values that, in his eyes, should underlie both the active and the contemplative life of all Christians.

It is precisely this unity of intents and adherence to a solid set of values inherited from classical antiquity, the church fathers, and the Italian judicial tradition that Baggioni documents through the thirteen chapters of his informative study. In doing so, he consistently contextualizes the topics in question both from a historical and cultural perspective, thus showing how Salutati reacted not only to specific events in Italian history, but also to the crucial legacy of the so-called three crowns of Florence. Baggioni’s clear prose, rich and up-to-date bibliography, and his frequent citations from Salutati’s writings (translated into French in the body of the text while the Latin original is reported in the footnotes) make his monograph useful and coherent for the wide readership it should find.

Stefano U. Baldassarri, *International Studies Institute, Florence*