

In the Middle Ages the image of Cicero had become that of a reclusive, contemplative monk, writing about rhetoric in the quiet of his study. In fourteenth-century Italy, however, recently recovered texts revealed a far different portrait of Cicero as a scholar-citizen. A cultural debate ensued not only over which portrait was correct but, more importantly for contemporary Italians, which Cicero was to be praised and imitated. From the middle of the 14th century down to 1415 the debate had no decisive conclusion. In that year, however, Leonardo Bruni, himself a living scholar-citizen, wrote, with guidance from Plutarch, a lengthy, detailed biography of Cicero, his *Novus Cicero*. This “new” biography successfully portrayed Cicero as a scholar-citizen and supplanted the medieval monkish Cicero. Thus Bruni resolved the debate concerning Cicero's image, but how Bruni, in fact, settled this scholarly dispute has not been sufficiently explained. I will show how, by (1) addressing the earlier arguments of the debate, (2) drawing on his own experience as a scholar-citizen, and (3) borrowing especially from Plutarch's biography of Cicero, Bruni ended the debate once and for all.

Bruni's *Novus Cicero* has been almost unknown to scholars. When Zielinski wrote his still essential *Cicero im Wandel der Jahrhunderte* (1st ed. 1897), he spoke generally of Bruni's interest in Cicero but left the *Novus Cicero* in a footnote. Hans Baron, whose work on Bruni and the Renaissance spans most of the century since the 1920s, set great value on the *Novus Cicero* in his influential thesis about Bruni and the birth of civic humanism, but he spent only a bit over a page specifically examining the *Novus Cicero*. More recently Edmund Fryde (1980) and Gary Ianziti (2000) have looked more closely at the text of the *Novus Cicero*, but Fryde focused too much on arguing how the text illustrates Bruni's historiographical techniques and Ianziti how it reveals Bruni as a forerunner of modern political biography. We still lack a thorough analysis of how Bruni dealt with the competing traditions about Cicero and how he incorporated his own understanding of Cicero to create his biography.

I argue that Bruni's *Novus Cicero* must be viewed as the culmination of an odyssey, illustrated by a set of documents that fueled the debate over Cicero's image; these texts include the 14th-century biographical epitome in the Troyes manuscript of Cicero, the sketch of Cicero in Boccaccio's *De casibus virorum illustrium* (c. 1358), Petrarch's two letters to Cicero (1345), Coluccio Salutati's reaction to Cicero's *Ad familiares* (1392), Pier Paolo Vergerio's fictive response from Cicero to Petrarch (1394), and the first Latin translation of Plutarch's *Cicero* by Iacopo Angeli di Scarperia (1401). I will show how, amidst this background, Bruni read Plutarch's *Cicero*, both in Angeli's Latin and in Greek, and compared Plutarch's moral and civic perspective with his own experience as an active scholar-citizen in Florence. Bruni was able, thereby, both to understand Cicero's life and to describe it in a way that had been forgotten in the traditions and texts of the West for nearly a millennium. The result was his *Novus Cicero*, which presented to the Renaissance the ideal model of the scholar-citizen.