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“IAM NOUUS IN TERRAS ALTO DESCENDIT OLYMPO IUPPITER”:



Patronage and propaganda in the time of Leo X (1513–1521)

By Outi Merisalo

Giovanni de' Medici (1475–1521), son of Lorenzo il Magnifico, was destined to a brilliant ecclesiastical career that eventually led him to the Holy See as pope Leo X (1513–1521). His reign, marked by wars and the emergence of protestantism, was also a period of intense artistic activity in Rome, with Raphael, Michelangelo, Sangallo as well as a plethora of humanist authors engaged in celebrating Leo's feats. This article explores Leo's patronage and propaganda, in particular through an analysis of one of the numerous poems dedicated to him by Giano Vitale Castalio of Naples (Ianus Vitalis Castalius, c. 1485–c. 1560) at the beginning of his pontificate.

Introduction

This paper will explore the papacy of the first Medici pope, Leo X (1513–1521) in the light of his patronage and propaganda, in particular through an analysis of one of the numerous poems dedicated to him by the Neapolitan scholar Ianus Vitalis Castalius (c. 1485–c. 1560) at the beginning of his pontificate.

Biography

The future pope was born Giovanni di Lorenzo de' Medici (1475–1521), son of Lorenzo il Magnifico (1449–1492), ruler of Florence, and Clarice Orsini (c. 1453–1488), daughter to Giacomo Orsini, Lord of Monterotondo and Bracciano. The marriage to a member of the powerful Orsini dynasty based in and around Rome represented an important step of social and political ascent in the Italian peninsula for the Florentine dynasty, the political position of which inside the Republic of Florence was far from secure in the 1470s.¹

¹ The research for this article was financed by the Academy of Finland and University of Jyväskylä project *Transmission of Knowledge in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance* no. 267518 (Tralmar, 2013–2017), by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, which

Giovanni, the second eldest son, received an exquisite humanist education together with his cousin Giulio (1478–1534), the illegitimate son of Giuliano di Piero.² He was taught by Politian, Urbano Dalle Fosse, Marsilio Ficino and Demetrius Chalcocondyles, among others.³ While his elder brother Piero (1472–1503) was to become lord of Florence, Giovanni was destined to an ecclesiastical career. After the failed conspiracy of the Pazzi in 1478, supported not only by rulers such as Federico di Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino and Ferdinand, King of Naples, but also by Pope Sixtus IV, Florence was at war with Lorenzo’s enemies between the summer of 1478 and March 1480.⁴ The reconciliation with the church was a priority in the following years, and Giovanni’s task was to serve his father’s political aims. He was ordained at the age of eight and received prebends all over Europe, including the abbacy of the monastery of Montecassino in 1487.⁵

The political fortunes of the Medici were radically improved by the marriage of Lorenzo’s daughter Maddalena to Franceschetto Cybo, son of Pope Innocent VIII in 1487. Giovanni, only thirteen years old, and therefore, officially too young, was secretly appointed cardinal as early as 1489, and publicly in 1492,⁶ just before the deaths of Innocent VIII and Lorenzo il Magnifico. His titular church was S. M. in Domnica on the Caelius.⁷

After this series of successes, the fortunes of the House of Medici started to lag. At the death of Lorenzo il Magnifico on 8 April 1492, the power in Florence passed to Giovanni’s brother Piero di Lorenzo, whose political inexperience did not bode well for the Medici regime.⁸ The next pope, Alexander VI Borgia (1430/2–1503), elected in August 1492, was no friend of the Medici.⁹ The Florentine revolution and the exile of the dynasty on 9 November 1494 was a great catastrophe.¹⁰

generously financed a research stay at the FU, Berlin between April and July 2016, and the Academy and University of Jyväskylä project *Late Medieval and Early Modern Libraries as Knowledge Repositories, Guardians of Tradition and Catalysts of Change* no. 307635 (Lamemoli, 2017–2022). – See, for example, Martines 2003 (2004), 168–172.

² Giuliano di Piero (1453–1478), Lorenzo il Magnifico’s brother, was to be assassinated by the Pazzi conspirators.

³ Pellegrini 2005; Gualdo Rosa 1986.

⁴ Walter 2009.

⁵ Pellegrini 2005.

⁶ Pellegrini 2005.

⁷ Bencini 2003, 285.

⁸ See e.g. Merisalo 1999.

⁹ Pellegrini 2005.

¹⁰ Merisalo 1999.

A solid network of friends and partisans based even in Florence, was, however, keeping the Medici afloat.¹¹ From the beginning of the pontificate of Alexander VI, Giovanni preferred to stay away from Rome. In 1499–1500 his voluntary exile culminated in a colourful European trip, which took him and his faithful cousin Giulio as far as Flanders and included getting arrested in France, to be ransomed by Piero di Lorenzo.¹² After his return to Rome, Giovanni finally settled down in a rented palace in the field of Mars, on the site of the Baths of Nero (restored by Alexander Severus and also known as the Baths of Alexander),¹³ which he finally acquired in 1505. Incorporated into adjacent buildings, it became part of Palazzo Madama.¹⁴ There he put to use his increasing financial, political and cultural resources to reconstruct and further enhance the position of the House of Medici. In the city palace, with his assets developing favourably throughout the first decade of the new century, he set up a splendid Renaissance court modelled on that of his father. Part of Lorenzo il Magnifico’s library was exhibited in Giovanni’s palace.¹⁵ He also managed to assemble the opponents of the Republican regime of Florence.¹⁶

In 1503, a new season started when Giovanni’s good friend cardinal della Rovere was elected pope Julius II (r. 1503–1513). Giovanni also became the head of the House of Medici upon the death of his brother Piero in the same year. His political ascent culminated in important responsibilities towards the end of Julius’ pontificate. In 1511, he was appointed legate for Bologna and the Romagna and consequently led the pontifical army in the war against Louis XII, King of France. In the bloody battle of Ravenna (11 April 1512) Giovanni was taken prisoner, only to be liberated near Milan on 6 June while being transferred to France.¹⁷ Giovanni obtained from Julius II and his allies the support for the Medici re-taking Florence, which, thanks to Spanish troops, took place on 31 August 1512. The Medici officially returned to the city on 1 September. Giovanni entered Florence a fortnight later, setting up a

¹¹ Merisalo 1999, VIII–XV; cf., in the text of the document, artists claiming compensation from the Republic for works of art commissioned by the Medici and allegedly never paid for, and the works later appearing in the Medici collections.

¹² Pellegrini 2005.

¹³ Nielsen 2021.

¹⁴ Bencini 2003, 285–286. Alfonsina Orsini, Piero’s widow, acquired the future Palazzo Madama in 1509, Bencini 2003, 286. Leo X sold his own palace to Alfonsina in 1519, who bequeathed it back to the pope in her testament, Bencini 2003, 286 n. 15. The name *Palazzo Madama* refers to Margaret of Parma (1522–1586), widow of Alessandro de’ Medici, Duke of Florence (r. 1532–1537) subsequently wife of Ottavio Farnese (1524–1586), Duke of Parma, grandson of future Paul III. The palace currently houses the Senate of the Republic.

¹⁵ Bencini 2003, 286.

¹⁶ Pellegrini 2005; Bencini 2003, 285–286.

¹⁷ Pellegrini 2005.

regime based on reconciliation¹⁸ and at least apparent respect for the Republican past, while continuing the policy of his father.¹⁹ On 6 and 7 February 1513, two pageants, designed by Andrea del Sarto and Pontormo in Florence, celebrated the return of the golden age of Lorenzo il Magnifico, the mythical Roman past, notably that of the learned king Numa Pompilius, and the ages of man.²⁰ Even at this stage the connection between Florence and Rome; that is, of a scope well beyond the Republic, was part of Giovanni’s self-representation.

These political feats enhanced Giovanni’s prestige, no doubt contributing to his election, as the candidate of the young cardinals, to the Holy See after the death of Julius II (20 February) on 11 March 1513. He took the name Leo X, no doubt in reference to Leo I the Great (*r.* 440–461), who had championed the primacy of the Roman see, fought different Christian sects and saved Italy from Attila in 452.²¹ Leo presented himself as the bringer of peace in marked opposition to his predecessor, who had engaged the Church in a series of European wars.²² On 11 April 1513, only one year after his capture by the French at Ravenna, this was lavishly and dramatically expressed in the sumptuous procession on horse through Rome marking his *possesso*, or appropriation, of the *Urbs*. The multiple decorations, including triumphal arches, marked the presence of the Medici through the arms and symbols of the dynasty in general and of Leo in particular (e.g. lions).²³

The union between Rome and Medicean (Laurentian) Florence, on the one hand, and the continuum between Antiquity and Leo’s pontificate, on the other, were lavishly celebrated even later in the year. On 12 and 13 September 1513, the union between the two cities was marked through the sumptuous ceremonies on the occasion of the conferment of Roman citizenship upon Giuliano di Lorenzo, Leo’s brother, and Lorenzo di Piero, his nephew. The venue was a wooden theatre constructed on the Capitoline Hill, centre of the Roman municipal government, between the Palazzo dei Conservatori and the Palazzo Senatorio, marking Leo’s wish for reconciliation with the Roman

¹⁸ Giovanni seems to have adopted the *impresa* of bulls bearing a yoke, already used by his great-grandfather Cosimo il Vecchio on his return from exile in 1436, with the *motto suave*, in this period, to underline his clemency and spirit of reconciliation, Bencini 2003, 288–290.

¹⁹ Pellegrini 2005.

²⁰ Bencini 2003, 287.

²¹ Cf. Pellegrini 2005. For Leo I, see Schäfer 2021.

²² Pellegrini 2005.

²³ Bencini 2003, 287. For the lavish *possesso* celebrations of Alexander VI, see Gwynne 2015, 256; on Leo’s *possesso*, Gwynne 2015, 263.

nobility through the (at least apparent) restitution of municipal autonomy.²⁴ As a monument to this reconciliation, the city of Rome (SPQR) was to commission a statue of the pope by Domenico Aimo (?1460/1470–1539) in 1514.²⁵ The ceremonies and decorations of September 1513 emphasised the continuity between the Ancient past of Rome and the felicitous present under Leo.²⁶

Leo, who had always exercised patronage of arts, quite in line with his father, could now set up a court rarely equalled in artistic splendour, with such figures as Raphael (Raffaello Sanzio, 1483–1520, in Rome since 1508), his pupil, Giulio Romano (Giulio Pippi, 1492/1499–1546), Andrea Sansovino (1467–1529) and Michelangelo (1475–1564). Together with numerous authors, most of them scholars well versed in Greek and Roman culture,²⁷ they celebrated Leo and his policies, expressing and elaborating on the ideas presented above.

Of Leo’s architectural projects the most important was doubtlessly his titular church, S.M. in Domnica, which was lavishly restored in the last years of his cardinalate and first years of his pontificate (see below).²⁸ In the field of Mars, where he had established his headquarters as cardinal in a palace contiguous to what was to become Palazzo Madama (see above), a kind of

²⁴ Bencini 2003, 287–288. Almost 80 years before, the Roman nobility had forced pope Eugene IV out of the city, and the relations had often been critical throughout the fifteenth century.

²⁵ For Aimo, see Anonimo 1960. The statue was probably finished between 1518 and 1521, Bacchi 2021, and placed in the Palazzo dei Conservatori in June 1521. The statue was moved several times and brought away from the Palazzo in 1799 during the French revolution, see Shearman *et al.* 2003, 762; Quattrocchi 2016, 333–359. It is rather well hidden in the church of S.M. in Aracoeli since 1876, Quattrocchi 2016. The very classicising inscription in Augustan capitals on the plinth reads as follows: “Optimo. principi. Leoni. X // Med(ici) Ioan(ni) Pontif(ici) Max(im)o // ob. restitutam. instauratamq(ue) // urbem. aucta. sacra. bonas // artes. adscitos. patres// sublatum. vectigal. datumq(ue) // congiarium. // S.P.Q.R. p(osuerunt)” [(To the best prince, Leo X, Giovanni de’ Medici, the pope, due to his restoring and repairing the city of Rome, promoting religion and culture, electing senators, abolishing the *vectigal* tax and distributing monetary gifts to the people, the city of Rome erected (this monument)].

²⁶ Bencini 2003, 288.

²⁷ As Giovio 1551, 96, put it: “Nemo enim vel civis, vel peregrinus, qui paulo nobilioris artis fama(m) teneret, nemo vel malesanus poëta, nemo alicuius optimarum literaru(m) partis non ignarus vnquam fuit, qui benignitatem humanissimi principis non senserit” (There was no Roman citizen nor foreigner reputed to possess a somewhat noble skill, not even a bad poet, nobody somehow versed in some type of good literature who would not have enjoyed the benevolence of the kindest of princes) Also see Gwynne 2015, 263. For the considerable amount of texts generated by Leo’s election and early pontificate, cf. Muecke 2014, 315.

²⁸ Bencini 2003, 288.

Medici enclave was planned but not completed.²⁹ For brother Giuliano, Andrea Sansovino designed a palace, in 1558 purchased by the Lantes, at St Eustace in Piazza de’ Caprettari.³⁰

Leo’s reign turned out to be as turbulent as those of his predecessors. The Holy See was engaged in continuous wars waged to ensure the Medicean domination of the Italian peninsula. While there was a rapprochement with Francis I, King of France, with whom The Concordat of Bologna was agreed upon in 1515; by 1517 the papacy was facing a paramount theological and political conflict with the rise of Lutheranism. In 1520 Leo, with the bull *Exsurge Domine*, responding to the 95 theses presented by Luther in 1517, and the subsequent excommunication through the bull *Decet Romanum pontificem* (January 1521), refused cooperation with Protestants and, consequently, initiated the division of the Western church.

The year 1517 also saw a conspiracy of cardinals against Leo, who was seen to show excessive favour to cousin Giulio. Leo managed to squash the conspiracy and appoint a new college of cardinals with friends and allies of the Medici. After another six years of rule, he was buried in the Dominican basilica of S. M. sopra Minerva. His funeral monument was designed by Antonio da Sangallo the Younger.³¹

Giano Vitale Castalio (c. 1485–c. 1560), *Leonem. X. P(ontificem) M(aximum) Lateranen(sem) episcopatum ingredientem laetabundus admiratur* (filled with joy (the author) admires Pope Leo X taking possession of the the throne of Bishop of Lateran)³²

Giano Vitale Castalio (Ianus Vitalis Castalius) of Palermo studied both in Naples and in Rome. His extensive Latin production in verse comprises, for

²⁹ Cardinal Giovanni purchased a palace for his brother Giuliano di Lorenzo, sold in 1509 to Alfonsina Orsini. Alfonsina acquired contiguous houses, which were fused with Giovanni’s palace, to form the future Palazzo Lante dei Caprettari, Randolfi 2010, 4. Alfonsina left even this palace to Leo X in her testament, Randolfi 2010, 5.

³⁰Randolfi 2020, 4; Colombini *et al.* 2016, 422.

³¹ Smith 1999, 110–127.

³² Vitale Castalio 1513, printed in Rome by Giacomo Mazzocchi with a dedication to Pierio Valeriano, dated 10 April 1513, and short epigrammes about Giano by Giovambattista Ruberti, Mariangelo Accursio and Francesco Aquila, among others. Giano quite obviously mixed with members of the celebrated Roman sodalities around Angelo Colocci and the Luxemburg merchant and patron Johann Goritz (Johannes Corycius). Accursio wrote a dialogue between an Oscan and a Volscan on Latin style for the September 1513 celebrations of the conferral of Roman citizenship on Giuliano and Lorenzo di Piero (see above) entitled *Osci et Volsci dialogus ludis Romanis actus* (Accursio [1513]), which was brought to Johannes Reuchlin by his protector, the humanist Hermann, Count of Neuenahr, who was to become Chancellor of the University of Cologne in 1524. Reuchlin asked Philip Melanchthon to publish it, Accursio [1514/1515], Campana 1960; Kuropka 2002, 147 and n. 60. This and subsequent translations are by the author of the present article.

example, a famous epigram on the ruins of Rome,³³ which demonstrably influenced, among others, Du Bellay in his *Antiquitez*.³⁴

Here we shall examine a poem in 104 hexameter verses, with the rubric “Ianus Vitalis Castalius Leonem. X. P(ontificem) M(aximum) Lateranen(sem) episcopatum ingredientem laetabundus admiratur”. The poem is preceded by a letter to Pierio Valeriano (Giovanni Pietro Dalle Fosse, 1477–1558),³⁵ where the author describes his enthusiastic reaction to the election of Leo X:

Me quoq(ue) cultissime Pieri sanctissimi Leonis .X. Pont(ificis)
Opt(imi) Max(imi) Electio una cu(m) omniu(m) / (et) deorum / (et)
hominum laetitia maximo gaudio medullitus affecit.

Most cultivated Pierio, the election of most pious Leo X, the greatest and best pope, thoroughly fills even me with the greatest joy, on top of all gods and men rejoicing.

The sheer happiness made him try his youthful hand at a poem, which is, as he himself admits, a far cry from the poems of the circle of Pierio Valeriano: “Ne uero expectes a me arte(m) ulla(m) quam a u(est)ri generis grege in primis expeti no(n) sum nescius” (You should not expect from me any skill that I know your type of crowd is primarily expecting). The common joy shared by all has confused Giano: “Tanto enim / (et) tam co(m)muni omniu(m) gaudio co(n)fusus / nullum ordinem seruare potui” (As I was confused by such and so common joy felt by all, I could not keep any order). The prestige of the recipient, Pierio Valeriano, however, is a recommendation for the work, and Giano hopes to progress under his guidance: “certe q(uod) tanto uiro sint accepta censerī poterunt. Proinde spero te duce me ad maiora progressurum” (certainly, since (my verses) are approved of by such a man, they will be appreciated. That is why I hope to proceed to greater things with you as my guide).³⁶

The poem starts by announcing the arrival of a new Jupiter on earth (v. 1–2): “Iam nouus in terras alto descendit Olympo // Iuppiter” (Now a new

³³ Vitale Castalio 1552/1553.

³⁴ See Smith 1999, 116–117.

³⁵ Giovanni Pietro Dalle Fosse Bolzanio de Belluno, nephew of Urbano Dalle Fosse Bolzanio (1442–1524), Giovanni di Lorenzo’s Greek professor, 1484–1489. Of his literary output, the following should be quoted: Dalle Fosse 1509; Dalle Fosse 1549, already circulating in 1524, dedicated to Ippolito de’ Medici; Dalle Fosse 1550, dedicated to Catherine de’ Medici, and Dalle Fosse 1556, dedicated to Cosimo de’ Medici, Duke of Florence; see Lettere 1986.

³⁶ Vitale Castalio 1513, [2].

Jupiter descends from Mt Olympus to the earth).³⁷ In line with the appropriation of classical Roman terminology for the emperors, the epithet *divus* is used, for example, for Leo’s predecessor Julius II Della Rovere in the inscription on the wall of the Macerata Palazzo della Prefettura finished in 1513.³⁸ Leo’s divine character is underlined by several authors, such as Riccardo Bartolini, according to whom “Coniecere oculos, numen venerantur, adorant, / Pontificem creant” (they cast their eyes, they revere the godhead, they adore, elect him Pope),³⁹ and the anonymous poets of *Carmina apposita Pasquillo An(no) M.D.XV*.⁴⁰ Giano Vitale Castalio himself returns to Leo’s non-terrestrial origins later in the poem. He was not born of mortal parents; indeed the Medici had descended from Mt Olympus: vv. 41–43 “Non hunc terra tulit / non hunc genuere parentes // Mortali de gente sati / Descendit olympo // Tale genus” (He was not produced by the earth, he was not born of parents sown by a mortal race Such a dynasty descended from Mt Olympus).

Leo’s military successes are referred to: vv. 2–3 “sancto laetatur Martia uultu // Roma triumphaleis⁴¹ iterum ductura Quadrigas” (Martial Rome, which is again about to drive a triumphal span of four horses, rejoices at (his) holy face), but more importantly, there is a new hope for peace: vv. 4–5 “Sed tamen armorum cędat [sic] furor: impia cędant // Praelia Mauortis” (But let the rage of arms give way, let the impious battles of Mars give way).⁴² Indeed, the Golden Age (vv. 5–6 “Saecula Cumeis praecognita uocibus aurea // Saecula”, the golden ages foreseen by the sayings from Cumae) prophesied by the Cumaean Sibyl⁴³ will return. (Southern) Italian poets (vv. 6–7 “Poetę Ausonii”, Ausonian poets)⁴⁴ have never sung more forcefully. Now, however, Rome (vv. 8–9 “Romula [...] Pompa”, Romulus’ procession) will be

³⁷ Cf. Virgil, *Ecl.* 4, 7: “Iam nova progenies caelo demittitur alto” (Now a new breed is sent down from high heaven); for further Virgilian elements, see below.

³⁸ In regular Augustan-type capitals: “Pontificatu Diui Iulii Aug(usti)” (during the pontificate of Divine Julius Augustus), Pallocchini 2016.

³⁹ Riccardo Bartolini of Perugia (c. 1475–1529), *Idyllium*, transcribed from Florence, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Magl. VII.III, f. 9v in Gwynne 2015, 263.

⁴⁰ Anonymi 1513.

⁴¹ Note the archaic spelling, typical of antiquarian tendencies of the time; see also l. 5 *Mauortis*, 7 *queis*. The diphthongs have normally been rendered by a nexus (l. 2 *laetatur*, l. 5 *praelia*, 6 *Saecula*, etc.), sometimes left out (l. 6 *Cumeis*); there are also some cases of hypercorrect use of *e caudata* (l. 4 *ędat*).

⁴² Hopes for peace also feature prominently e.g. in Pierio Valeriano’s poem *Ad Leonem. X. De Naui Esculapij in insula Tyberina paulo ante exerta, q(uam) ipse Card(inalis) olim, a Nauicula, Pont(ifex) Max(imus) efficeretur* (To Leo X of the ship of Aesculapius excavated on the Tiber island shortly before he, once Cardinal of the Navicella, was made Pope), Valeriano 1550, 63v; for an analysis of this poem, see Muecke 2014.

⁴³ Cf. Virgil, *Ecl.* 4, 4 “Ultima Cumei venit iam carminis aetas” (The last era of the Cuman prophecy has now arrived).

⁴⁴ The Greeks called Southern Italy *Ausonia* (cf. Dion. Hal. 1, 35, 3), Pappalardo 2006.

resuscitated by the Etruscans (vv. 8–9 “patribus [...] Thuscis”, Etruscan fathers). Here we have a key element in Leonine propaganda, the Etruscan, that is, Tuscan, identity of the new pope. The takeover of the Medici will regenerate all of the city of Rome (v. 10 “Vnde urbem / proceresq(ue) auxit / gentemq(ue) togatam”,⁴⁵ whence he brought prosperity to Rome, the leading men and the senators). The beneficial reconciliation of the Etruscans (Leo) and Rome is a conceit virtually omnipresent in different types of Leonine propaganda, but one of the most forceful representations may be found in the frescoes, largely by Polidoro da Caravaggio (c. 1499–1543), of the *salone* of the Vigna Turini (now Villa Lante al Gianicolo), designed by Giulio Romano and built between 1518 and 1534 for one of Leo’s most loyal Tuscan retainers, the *datarius* Baldassarre Turini (1486–1543). The frescoes (since 1837 to be seen in Palazzo Zuccari) feature four moments in the history of the Janiculum: the meeting of the eponymous god Janus and the foreigner Saturn on the Janiculum⁴⁶ the flight of Cloelia from Lars Porsenna’s camp on the Janicule, the generous liberation of Cloelia and her friends by Porsenna, and the discovery of the tomb of Numa Pompilius. While the arrival of Saturn in Rome is of course connected to the Golden Age, the Cloelia episodes are concerned with the reconciliation of the Etruscans (noble Lars Porsenna) with the Romans (equally admirable and fair in returning the young women to their captor).⁴⁷

The first section of the poem is closed by a refrain highlighted by a paragraph sign: v. 11 “Roma tuu(m) meritis decimu(m) venerare triumphis” (Rome, revere your tenth (Leo) with deserved triumphs).⁴⁸ The poem then describes in very much detail the beneficial effects of Leo’s reign. Not only will wars, pillaging and disasters disappear confronted with his clemency (v. 17 “mansueti hac fronte Leonis”, with the brow of this clement Leo). Indeed, diseases will be cured by Leo with medicine, not bitter as aloe,⁴⁹ but sweeter than ambrosia and nectar: “Datq(ue) salutiferos passim medicina liquores / Non Aloe tristis / non succis improba amaris: / Dulcior Ambrosia sed enim est ac nectare dulci” (the medicine spreads salutiferous fluids, (it is) not disagreeable aloe, not spoilt by bitter juices, but it is indeed sweeter than ambrosia and sweet nectar, vv. 22–24).

⁴⁵ Cf. Virgil, *Aen.* 1, 282 “gentemque togatam” (people wearing the toga).

⁴⁶ Described by Macrobius, *Sat.* 1, 7, 19–22; cf. Graf 2006.

⁴⁷ For Turini, see (with bibliography) Merisalo 2016. For the frescoes, see in particular Gnann 1997, 140–157.

⁴⁸ Repeated at irregular distances: v. 25, 40, 47, 56, 64, 69, 76, 82 and 89.

⁴⁹ The medical use of aloe is described by e.g. Pliny the Elder (*NH* 27, 14–20), cf. Hünemörder 2006.

The author here evokes another central concept of Leonine propaganda, the pun on the pope’s family name. The conceit of the Medici as doctors of the ills of the world goes back at least to Cosimo il Vecchio.⁵⁰ It also featured in the decorations for Leo’s *possesso* on 11 April 1513.⁵¹

Altogether the world will be a far better place thanks to Leo: no more deceitful intrigues and evil but pure simplicity: “Te regnante cadent fraudes / neq(ue) non mala mentis // Gaudia. simplicitas imprimis pura uigebit” (Under your reign frauds will fail and the mind’s evil pleasures, above all, pure simplicity will prevail, vv. 45–46).

The poem culminates in a final prayer to God, summarising the essential themes treated above. Leo, whom God has sent to earth from Olympus, should be allowed to help the diseased mortals with his medicine:

Longos esse dies decimo / multosq(ue) per annos
Da decimo prodesse aegris mortalibus: atq(ue)
(Quod cupit humanum genus) instaurare medela<m>/
Quam tulit /e/ summo per te demissus Olympo.

Let the days be long for the tenth one, and for many years make it possible for the tenth one to help sick mortals and (which the human race desires) establish the cure that he brought from the top of Mount Olympus sent down by you.⁵²

Conclusion

Giovanni, younger son of Lorenzo il Magnifico, was taught by such Humanist luminaries as Politian, Ficino, Chalcocondyles and Dalle Fosse. While his elder brother Piero was destined to inherit his father’s position as sole ruler of Florence, Giovanni made a precocious career in the Church, thus furthering the political ambitions of Lorenzo il Magnifico. After initial successes, the Medici suffered a number of devastating setbacks, ranging from their exile from Florence in 1494 to precarious existence under Alexander VI, no friend of the dynasty. From the beginning of the reign of Julius II Della Rovere and death of Piero (1503), cardinal Giovanni, now head of the House of Medici, reconstructed the fortune and the position of the dynasty, rising to the top of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, his career being crowned by his election to pope in 1513. In accordance with family traditions, cardinal Giovanni, himself an artistically talented individual, engaged in important patronage as soon as his means would permit it, and surrounded himself with the foremost artists, such

⁵⁰ Muecke 2014, 320 n. 29

⁵¹ Muecke 2014, 320.

⁵² Vv. 101–104.

as Raphael, musicians and writers of the day. The works of art thus created transmitted a set of themes glorifying Leo’s past and present: divine bringer of peace and happiness, the Etruscan resuscitating Ancient Rome, the healer of the ills of the world, among others. Drawing on the latest knowledge of Ancient sources, the painters, sculptors and writers exemplify the ways that the past was put to use to promote present concerns.

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