Machiavelli’s Republicanisms: Society, Discord and the Politics of Equilibrium in the *Florentine Histories*

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

The purpose of this project is to show that Niccolò Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories* (1520-24), represents a departure from earlier Machiavellian conceptions of liberty, power and authority toward an attraction to Venice, collective structures of power and constitutional mechanisms to create stability. In this later writing, which Anglo-American scholarship has largely overlooked, we see a republicanism built on different conceptual and theoretical foundations than the Roman model introduced in Machiavelli’s most famous republican treatise, the *Discourses on Livy* (1513-17). This transformation indicates Machiavelli’s rejection of the assumptions of classical republicanism and marks a crucial transition in his own analysis of power and authority.

Contrary to received wisdom, I demonstrate that in the *Histories* and other key post-1520 works, we can observe Machiavelli’s *rapprochement* to the Venetian style of “institutional virtù” and his consequent *éloignement* from the Roman model of civil discord and popular “guardianship of liberty.” In a word, while the *Florentine Histories* confirms that Machiavelli was a devoted republican thinker, it also shows that his preference for a collective form of self-government underwent some integral alterations from the earlier political works – with the late Machiavelli coming increasingly closer to the Venetian form of republicanism advocated by his intellectual contemporaries.
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Bibliography
Chapter 1
Introduction:
Society, Discord and the “Politics of Equilibrium”

1 Machiavelli and Republicanism(s)

For decades now, political philosophers and policy makers alike have wrestled to find appropriate normative and prescriptive answers to one of the most vexing problems in contemporary liberal societies: if social and political life is increasingly defined as the pursuit of individual interests, is the ideal of a community with collective objectives under threat?¹ In other words, if the problem that dominates politics and society is the satisfaction of interests, how ought one to define a sense of a common life? More important still, if social and political identity is to be understood as the expression of what is particular to any individual, group or class, then, what is most glaringly absent is some form of commonality capable of countering the potential corrosiveness and destructiveness inherent to an interest-ridden conception of life.²

This lack of a communal sense of identity suggests that, whenever private actions and desires dominate whatever is left of an extensive civil life, the members of a community’s acts ought to be seen as their constant attempt to enlarge their immunity from any form of interference, to expand their protection from any form of political obligation or constraint. The most common rejoinder to public objectives and participation thus suggests that the individual’s freedom of action, will or choice is incompatible,


² This sense of drama and anxiety, especially in relation to seventeenth and eighteenth-century political thought, is nowhere better deployed than in Hobbes’ famous chapters XVII and XXI of Leviathan. Hobbes conveys the absence of a political and communal natural character in human beings, suggesting that society itself is the by-product of the particular interests and anxieties of its individual members. It is on the basis of this considerations that Hobbes provides the quintessential definition of liberty as the absence of impediments, “Liberty, or Freedome, signifieth (properly) the absence of Opposition,” and “opposition” means nothing else but “externall Impediments of motion.” Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, ed. Richard Tuck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 117-21 and 145.
or rather constrained by, the existence of any such participatory obligations. As Hobbes puts it, in spite of having the turrets of the city of Lucca in great characters, at this day, the word LIBERTAS, the Lucchese were to be free as long as they could curb civic demands and commitments and maximize their “immunity from the service of the commonwealth.” For Hobbes, then, the libertas of the citizen of Lucca did not pertain to a sphere of membership to the republic, but to its individual members’ juridical realm of action and will of choice.

Inspired by Niccolò Machiavelli, recent scholars have attempted to retrieve a forgotten or lost form of communal life, one which empowers common citizens to publicly contest and engage in political affairs in order to defend both their individual liberty and the collective good of the community, at once. Machiavelli, they further contend, is to be seen as a, if not the, quintessential figure in the rediscovery of this civic ideal, one that dates back to ancient republican Rome – and which is, as a result, labeled “neo-Roman.” Heavily drawing on Machiavelli’s Discourses on Livy, these oft-called

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4 Hobbes, Leviathan, 149.


6 Certainly, there are some fundamental differences to be drawn between the neo-Roman republicanism associated with the works of Skinner, Pettit and Viroli, on the one hand, and the civic humanist/Atlantic republican thesis developed by Baron and Pocock, on the other. Since my project partly adheres to, and partly departs from, both the ideological and methodological appreciations of these scholars, I find it important to briefly expose their most general appreciations and differences. Skinner has famously suggested that the development of republican ideas in the context of pre-humanist Italy is the result of two distinct traditions that date back to the thirteenth century – one from the study of rhetoric in the early universities of Bologna, the other from the scholastic and legal studies imported from France. Skinner further asserts that it is the first strand – the ars dictaminis – that had a crucial impact in the development of a republican language of politics in the early Italian commune, since its language came to be appropriated by “two new literary genres: the city
“neorepublican” scholars suggest that, in spite of some discontinuities with respect to earlier Greek or Roman traditions, “Machiavelli remains content to fit his ideas into a traditional framework, a framework based on linking together the concepts of liberty, the common good and civic greatness in a largely familiar way.”

Indeed, students of this “Machiavellian republicanism” contend that if we turn our attention from individual activity in the narrow sense of enjoying one’s life and goods – a conception of liberty these authors conceived as inaugurated by Hobbes and that came to prominence among nineteenth-century liberal writers – to a more political sense of taking part in public and civil affairs, then citizens can be safely guaranteed a personal form of liberty by curtailing extreme forms of individual self-interest that are in fact detrimental to the majority of a polity’s citizens and members at large – such as, giving any individual, group or state prerogative or discretionary powers. For the “civic humanist” and “neo-

chronicles…and the advice-books…for the magistrates of the city.” On the other hand, Pocock, following the footsteps of Baron, suggests that the starting point (or rediscovery) of a republican synthesis is the consequence of the ideological struggle between the philosophical outlook of medieval scholasticism and the recovery of Aristotle as a source for the principles of social and political life. Crucially, the “moment” in Pocock’s Machiavellian Moment symbolizes, on the one hand, the experience and anxiety (and at times pessimism) represented by the liberation of the secular civic ideal from its Christian pre-modern historical temporal setting. It is the struggle of a secular language of politics coming to know itself as free from, or at least in opposition to, Christian eschatology, for which time and history had no fundamental value or meaning. Indeed, it is in the revival of an Aristotelian triad of concepts – isonomia, polis, and zoon politikon – by Renaissance Italian thinkers that the “Machiavellian moment” is inaugurated, whereby the universal and atemporal Christian worldview was challenged and displaced, establishing these values in political terms first in Florence, then in England, and finally in the American experiment. It is for this reason that Pocock observes a “Machiavellian moment” in “the eighteenth century,” which “lie that of the sixteenth, confronted civic virtue with corruption.” See Hans Baron, The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 49-160; Pocock, The Machiavellian Moment, viii-x; Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. 1, 27-45; and Marco Geuna, “Skinner, Pre-Humanist Culture and Machiavelli,” in Rethinking the Foundations of Modern Political Thought, eds. Annabel Brett, James Tully and Holly Hamilton Bleakley (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 52.

Of no less importance are their methodological differences, with Pocock advocating for a diachronic (as opposed to Skinner’s synchronic) study of historical and linguistic contexts. Briefly, the task of Pocock’s method – or what he has famously identified as “the métier d’historien” – is to situate paroles or forms of speech and writing as grounded in a specific langue to then try to uncover how utterances consequently either shaped the contours of an already existing language form and/or led to the creation of thoroughly novel languages of politics. Skinner, on the contrary, suggests that in order to grasp the intended consequences of a given text and author, one must locate them as part of the conceptual and linguistic conventions governing the author’s contemporary intellectual milieu. Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding,” 3-53; J.G.A. Pocock, “The Concept of Language and the Métier d’Histoire: Some Considerations on Practice,” in The Language of Theory in Early Modern Europe, ed. Anthony Pagden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 19-37.

7 Skinner, “Pre-Humanist Origins of Republican Ideas,” 137. Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” 300, paraphrases this suggestion as follows: “Many theorists espoused the republican cause…but the greatest among those who did so, as Professor Viroli emphasises…was undoubtedly Machiavelli in his Discorsi…” See, also, Viroli, “Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics,” 152. On the neorepublican debate concerning the communitarian vision of Arendt and Taylor, see, for instance, Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” 297-301.

Roman” Machiavelli, accordingly, the fundamental threat to liberty and the communal way of life is not merely posed by the fact of human selfishness; rather, the vexata quaestio is that, “whenever we corruptly permit or pursue such policies hostile to the common good, we begin to subvert the free institutions of our community, and hence our own personal liberty,” as well.⁹

To put it in Philip Pettit’s words, “The price of liberty is eternal vigilance,” suggesting that a virtuous citizenry is required to monitor and dispute public authorities so as to preserve freedom and to prevent corruption.¹⁰ “The vivere politico,” one of the main exponents of this interpretation adds, “requires habits of civic virtue both in magistrates and ordinary citizens.”¹¹ As Skinner famously observes, civic virtue, “denote[s] the range of capacities that each one of us as a citizen most needs to possess: the capacities that enable us willingly to serve the common good, thereby to uphold the freedom of our community, and in consequence to ensure its rise to greatness as well as our own individual liberty.”¹²

The central contention of these interpreters, in brief, is that Machiavelli’s republicanism draws on an ideal of republican liberty which can be traced back to the republican writers of antiquity, whereby the self-governing republic, its civic greatness and its members’ liberty, were seen as the result of its citizens’ willingness to cultivate an enduring form of civic virtù.

Against this background, the main purpose of this dissertation is to show that Niccolò Machiavelli’s Florentine Histories (1520-24), represents a departure from earlier Machiavellian conceptions of liberty, power and authority toward an attraction to Venice, collective structures of power and constitutional mechanisms to create stability.¹³ In this later writing, which Anglo-American

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⁹ Palonen, Quentin Skinner, 105. For the record, much has been said about the similarities and differences between concepts, such as “classical republicanism,” “civic humanism,” “Renaissance republicanism,” “neo-Roman republicanism” and the like. Nonetheless, in spite of their differences, all of these concepts share one integral point of commonality: the discussion of liberty as embedded in an analysis of what it means to live in a “free state.” On this theme, consider Pocock’s call to prudence in his “Virtue, Rights and Manners” piece: “I continue to find preference for the [civic humanism] term in spite of the numerous objections made to it [in reference to Baron’s thesis]; these arise from the confusion occasioned by the circumstance that there are nine-and-sixty ways of using the word humanism and a strong desire to consolidate them, with the result that whenever one scholar employs the term civic humanism, another will object that humanism wasn’t civic. Nevertheless, the affirmation of classical republicanism has something which is humanist about it; it entails the affirmation that homo is naturally a citizen and most fully himself when living in a vivere civile...” J.G.A. Pocock, “Virtue, Rights and Manners: A Model for Historians of Political Thought,” in Virtue, Commerce and History: Essays on Political Thought and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 38-9.

¹⁰ Pettit, Republicanism, 250.


¹³ The remark that Machiavelli’s history of Florence ought to be read as a work of political theory requires some clarification. To overlook the political status of the Histories is to deny the fil conducteur through which Machiavelli oftentimes communicated his political ideas – the almost instinctual necessity to interpret the world through the lens of
scholarship has largely overlooked, we see a republicanism built on different conceptual and theoretical foundations than the Roman model introduced in Machiavelli’s most famous republican treatise, the *Discourses on Livy* (1513-17). In that sense, the Machiavelli that emerges from my reading was deeply rooted in the debates of his intellectual milieu and informed by an emerging political culture concerning the status of Florentine republicanism in the early sixteenth century.

More to the point, this transformation indicates Machiavelli’s rejection of the assumptions of classical republicanism and marks a crucial transition in his own analysis of power and authority. Contrary to received wisdom, I demonstrate that in the *Histories* and other key post-1520 works, we can observe

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History. Indeed, in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses on Livy* Machiavelli rooted his political principles (such as, civil conflict as the primary locus of analysis of domestic political life) in the study of history and historical exemplars – for instance, by introducing a comparative antithesis between Rome and Venice or Sparta. Needless to say that Machiavelli’s self-identification as “storico, comico, tragico” in his famous letter to Francesco Guicciardini of October 21 1525 substantiates this suggestion. With respect to the post-1520 Machiavelli, as suggested by Felix Gilbert, while Machiavelli was not expected to do any original research for the *Histories*, he subordinates history to political inquiry, historical documentation to the political concreteness, the effects and consequences, of the described figures, events and acts. Thus, I tend to agree with Margaret Leslie, who in her seminal piece “In Defence of Anachronism” suggests, “The contemporary thinker, whether he [she] calls himself [herself] political philosopher or political scientist, must suffer if he [she] has not available to him [her] for use in grasping the political experience of his [her] own time the rich vocabulary of the past.” Whether from Leslie’s prudential “linguistic anachronism” or Machiavelli’s appeal to historical experience, should we draw too strong a distinction between history and theory, between context and thought, we would simply end up trapping ourselves in a quixotic intellectual conundrum, the attempt of doing political theory without its “instrument” – a proper battery of themes, concepts or historical exemplars. Margaret Leslie, “In Defense of Anachronism,” *Political Studies* 18 (4) (1970): 443. On the theme of the composition of the *Histories*, see Felix Gilbert, “Machiavelli’s *Istorie Fiorentine*: An Essay in Interpretation,” in *History, Choice and Commitment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 135-53.

14 As Jurdjevic rightly observes, “In *The Machiavellian Moment* Pocock refers twice to the [Discourse on Florentine Affairs] and twice to the [*Florentine Histories*]...both in passing. In volume II of *Visions*, Skinner does not mention the [Discourse] and refers only twice, also in passing, to the [Florentine Histories]. His monograph on Machiavelli also does not mention the [Discourse], and devotes only ten pages to the [Histories].” Mark Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” *English Historical Review* 122 (499): 1247 n.79. Additionally, great part of the scholarship devoted to the study of the *Histories* tends to see this work as a series of historical reflections devoid of any theoretical or philosophical import; indeed, most scholars suggest that the *Florentine Histories* provides little, if any, evidence concerning Machiavelli’s active inquiry of the political. For instance, in his *Machiavelli*, Skinner repeats, no less than four times, that the themes Skinner himself considers relevant in the *Histories* – namely, corruption, civil discord and freedom – have “already been treated extensively in the *Discourses*.” Skinner, *Machiavelli*, 83-4; also, Gisela Bock, “Civil Discord in Machiavelli’s *Istorie Fiorentine*,” in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, eds. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 197-8. Harvey C. Mansfield, who has devoted a fair amount of scholarship to the *Histories*, reads Machiavelli’s history of the Florentines as a parochial (and pessimistic) consideration of the themes and concepts introduced in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Other scholars not necessarily associated with the contextual or textual interpretations of Skinner and Mansfield have made similar claims with respect to the continuities and parochialism of the *Histories*. Harvey C. Mansfield, “Party and Sect in Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories*,” in *Nature of Political Thought*, ed. Martin Fleisher (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 209-43; Miguel Vatter, *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli’s Theory of Political Freedom* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 93-5; John P. McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 12, 46-7 and 191. I provide a comprehensive critique of this “continuity thesis” in the following chapters.

Machiavelli’s *rapprochement* to the Venetian style of “institutional virtù” and his consequent *éloignement* from the Roman model of civil discord and popular “guardianship of liberty.” In a word, while the *Florentine Histories* confirms that Machiavelli was a devoted republican thinker, it also shows that his preference for a collective form of self-government underwent some integral alterations from the earlier political works – with the late Machiavelli coming increasingly closer to the Venetian form of republicanism advocated by his intellectual contemporaries.

The reading offered in this dissertation, moreover, synthesizes and expands upon interpretations advanced by Italian Renaissance scholars, such as Bausi, Black, Butters, Guidi, Jurdjevic, Marietti, Martelli and Silvano, whose works and theses have remained largely foreign to Anglo-American political theorists. While their considerations differ widely, these students of Machiavelli agree that the Florentine’s political views changed decidedly in a conservative direction by the 1520s. Informed by a more eloquent understanding of the historical context and intellectual tradition of Machiavelli’s late works, these readings express how Machiavelli abandoned much of his earlier republican appreciations and came to embrace a more nuanced, and aristocratic, political agenda.

Silvano, Martelli and Bausi propose that the *Florentine Histories* displays Machiavelli’s abandonment of the populist republicanism of the *Discourses*. These scholars suggest that the *Histories* offers a pessimistic account of the history of the city, which results in his increasing sympathy for a monarchical, as opposed to republican, solution by the end of the second decade of the sixteenth century. For instance, drawing on Machiavelli’s main constitutional text, the *Discourse on


17 Bausi, *Machiavelli 21-4* observes that, in spite of his early admiration for Rome’s republicanism and his late sympathy for the Venetian republic, Machiavelli’s texts were always attached to the destiny of the Medici; Martelli, “Machiavelli della Repubblica al Principato,” 15-7 conceives of the post-1520 Machiavelli as part of a system of patronage that led him to support the absolutist solution for his city; and Silvano, “Florentine Republicanism in Early Sixteenth Century,” 59-67.
Silvano asserts, “the republic of the [Discourses] and the republic of the [Discourse on Florentine Affairs] are not quite the same…the republic of the [Discourse] is in Machiavelli’s own words in fact a monarchy.” Similarly, Martelli and Bausi consider the late Machiavelli a philo-Medicean writer, whose thought was permeated by a system of patronage and intellectual alliances. However, the few passages that these scholars cite in support of their monarchical thesis are ambiguous and thus susceptible to other, more robust, readings.

Contrary to Martelli, Silvano and Bausi’s thesis, other scholars consider the post-1520 works as representative of a rather aristocratic and pro-Venetian Machiavelli. Guidi asserts that Machiavelli’s post-1520 texts are representative of the Florentine’s departure from his earlier Roman conceptions of liberty and self-government, coming to embrace a “compromising solution between the various ideals of government and political forces” similar to the one promoted by Francesco Guicciardini in his 1512-16 texts. In reference to Machiavelli’s Discourse on Florentine Affairs, Butters asserts, “[it has] much in common with those advanced by Guicciardini in his nearly contemporaneous Dialogue on the Government of Florence,” in that both intellectuals “rejected the idea that the Medici should set up a principate,” and instead promoted the thesis that Florence could only have a republican government inspired by the Venetian example. As Butters concludes, “Machiavelli’s Discourse on Florentine Affairs] proposes a constitutional model even more aristocratic than the reform proposals of some of the ottimati during the popular government.” Butters, however, neglects a large portion of the late political works, pays little attention to the Histories proper and draws too strong a

claims that Machiavelli’s late constitutional ideas hover between a republican governo stretto and a Medicean monarchical solution.

18 Ibid, 60.
20 Heavily drawing on Martelli, “Machiavelli dalla Repubblica al Principato,” 15-31, Bausi considers the Histories as faulty of historical inaccuracies and “composed in a rush,” then suggesting that five out of eight introductory sections refer to the “good and wise ‘reformer’” in an allegedly monarchical tone. Bausi, Machiavelli, 256, 262 and 304-5. My translation. Silvano’s study is in large part dedicated to the Discourse on Florentine Affairs, hence overlooking not only the Histories but Machiavelli’s three other post-1520 political works. Silvano, “Early Sixteenth-Century Florentine Republicanism,” 59-67; also, by the same author, Vivere Civile e Governo Misto, 95-108.
23 Butters, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 73-4. Butters also suggests that the anti-Medicean connotations of the Histories ought to be read in tandem with Machiavelli’s criticism of the Medici regime of mid-to-late fifteenth century as present in the Discourse on Florentine Affairs. Machiavelli was thus promoting a republican government that would give its due role to those powerful aristocratic families that had been neglected by the Medici first and by Soderini’s republic later. Ibid, 75; and Mateucci, “Machiavelli Politologo,” 245-6.
connection between Machiavelli’s late intellectual shift and the patronage of Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi and Jacopo Salviati. In a word, Butters, like Bausi and Martelli, considers Machiavelli’s late political conservatism as a consequence of the Florentine political context and Machiavelli’s interest in returning to active political life under Medici patronage.

More recently, Black, and most especially, Jurdjevic have accurately observed that, unlike his earlier political works, the Histories are the result of Machiavelli’s increasing interest in the history of Florence and the city’s history of constitutional “failure” – themes that had already been developed by Najemy. Even more importantly, both Black and Jurdjevic have noticed that Machiavelli’s late works underscore a novel conception of the populace: by the post-1520 texts Machiavelli is as critical of the acts and desires of the people as he is of those of the elites. Partly adhering to, and partly departing from, Najemy, these scholars suggest that the late Machiavelli embraced a pro-Venetian form of republicanism, though Black and Jurdjevic part ways with respect to the rationale behind Machiavelli’s endorsement of Venice’s system of institutional control and stability. While Black observes that the shift in Machiavelli’s thought results in the Florentine’s adoption of the aristocratic political thought of early sixteenth-century Florence, especially as advocated by his friend Francesco Guicciardini, Jurdjevic considers Machiavelli’s late republicanism as shaped by his “belief” in the republican ethos of his “great and wretched” city.

26 Black, Machiavelli, 242-62; Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 71.
27 John Najemy has famously demonstrated that the late works display an increasing interest in Florentine history and in the impact of institutions to the detriment of Roman History and the role of the extraordinary political individual. Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici: The Lessons of Florentine History,” Renaissance Quarterly 35(4) (1982): 554-73; Black, Machiavelli, 227-8; Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1253-4; and by the same author, A Great and Wretched City, 103-31. With regard to Machiavelli’s negative conception of the people, Bonadeo introduced a similar thesis in his works from the early 1970s: “Machiavelli condemned the role and the purpose of the people in Florentine class conflicts because it seemed to follow the behavior patter of the ‘grandi,’” but he still assigned to it an important political role by envisaging the creation of a condition which would suppress both the need for conflicts and the people’s opponents.” Alfredo Bonadeo, “The Role of the People in the Works and Times of Machiavelli,” Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance 32:2 (1970): 369.
28 Contrary to this Venetian thesis, Najemy suggests that Machiavelli’s popular republicanism is shaped by the idea of a revival of the guild corporatist system of thirteenth and fourteenth-century Florence. I discuss Najemy’s position in chapter III of the present project.
29 Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 213 asserts, “despite the wretchedness of his city’s history…[Machiavelli] never lost hope in the promise of better things. In particular, he remained stubbornly optimistic that the Florentines could set aside their differences and create and enduring and free republic.” On the Machiavelli-Guicciardini relationship, see Black, Machiavelli, 263-72; also, by the same author, “Review of Jurdjevic’s A Great and Wretched City,” 497. Also, Gaia Pieraccioni, “Note su Machiavelli Storico II-Machiavelli Lettore delle Storie Fiorentine di Guicciardini,” Archivio Storico Italiano CXLI (1989): 61-80, suggests that the Machiavelli-Guicciardini relationship began at a much earlier date than their famous epistolary exchange of the 1520s. Pieraccioni observes that family ties, acquaintances (especially from the Alamanni and Salviati families) and their shared disapproval of the post-1512 Medici regime bring these two authors closer.
Focusing on the “strategic connections” between the *Florentine Histories* and the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs*, Jurdjevic posits that, while the *Histories* demonstrates “in detail why any revival of earlier magistracies and institutions will inevitably cause discord, instability, and vulnerability for those in power,” the *Discourse* of 1520-1 displays Machiavelli’s “activist republican agenda,” whereby the Florentine conveys his Medici readership how to “build their regime on entirely new institutions, magistracies, and councils.” Contrary to what he refers to as the “utopian” and “bleak” interpretations of Gilbert and Sasso, Jurdjevic offers a synthetic interpretation that situates the late Machiavelli as part of what Jurdjevic himself labels the Florentine’s “hybrid republicanism.”

In that regard, Jurdjevic questions the neorepublican theses of scholars affiliated with a Cambridge approach to texts – especially Skinner, Viroli and Bock, but also Pocock and even Baron – and considers that the late Machiavelli’s view of authority and citizenship was much more attuned to an ideal of positive liberty, or the collective self-expression of the city as a whole, than hitherto thought. For Jurdjevic, the post-1520 Machiavelli’s view of liberty and power comes to full light as a result of Machiavelli’s novel conception of the people – “In [Machiavelli’s] later republicanism, the people have become irreducibly political” – as well as in his “omission of any reference to economic prosperity,” a theme that characterizes Machiavelli’s view of the people in the earlier texts. Lastly, as a result of the previous point, Jurdjevic rightly considers the *Histories* and the *Discourse* as drawing on different sociological categories than the earlier political works: “By 1520, [Machiavelli] has introduced a third category of analysis: the middle ranks” thus acknowledging “a broader range of social groupings…than he had in *Il Principe* and the *Discorsi*.”

Much of the argument offered in this project is in line with Jurdjevic’s interpretation of Machiavelli. However, despite our agreeing on the fundamental changes in Machiavelli’s later political thought, there are some integral aspects relative to Jurdjevic’s approach that require qualifications: first and

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31 As he suggests in the last sentence of his earlier piece, “Machiavelli fused an argument for the radical and innovative restructuring of Florentine government with an Aristotelian politics of common ends and purposes, we would be better served by using a term that does not imply a single affiliation – hence, Machiavelli’s ‘hybrid republicanism.’” Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1257; and *A Great and Wretched City*, 75-6.

32 Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1253-4; and *A Great and Wretched City*, 75, 78, 104-5, 118-9, 130-1 and 213.

33 Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1255-6; and *A Great and Wretched City*, 77.
foremost, Jurdjevic’s analysis heavily relies on two texts – what he calls the “textual interconnection” between the *Histories* and the *Discourse* of 1520, hence overlooking three critical works by the late Machiavelli – the incomplete *Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio*, the *Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Government of Florence* and, most crucially, the *Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca.*

In view of Jurdjevic’s interest in an inter-textual analysis of Machiavelli’s late political theorizing it is regrettable that he does not incorporate these three texts into his investigation.

Secondly, and as a consequence of the previous point, Jurdjevic’s claim concerning the late Machiavelli’s “radical,” “more engaged, [and] activist” republicanism is contradicted by the *Summary*, the *Memorandum* and the *Draft of a Law*. Indeed, not only do these three texts display a restructuring of the government of Florence along the lines of the institutions of the Florentine republic of 1494-1512, but they also unequivocally demonstrate, as Guidi and Butters have persuasively showed, the resemblance between Machiavelli’s constitutional ideas and those of his early sixteenth-century Florentine aristocratic counterparts.

Third, the connection between the late Machiavelli and the Florentine intellectual milieu of early sixteenth century is further substantiated by another shortcoming of Jurdjevic’s inquiry – his suggestion that the late Machiavelli is silent on issues of economic prosperity and material security. Both the *Summary* and the *Draft of a Law* are explicit about economic themes, such as the office of public debt (the *Monte Comune*), fiscal regulation, taxation and the commercial interest of powerful families. Not only do these themes contradict but also challenge one of Judjevic’s main claims – that “Machiavelli [had] no interest in considering questions of finance and taxation – so long as the people are engaged in the state their satisfaction can be relied upon.”

This problem in Jurdjevic’s interpretation is further qualified by another claim – that the late Machiavelli polemically engaged with various competing arguments for constitutional reform proposed by what Jurdjevic labels “the Medicean ruling group.” Jurdjevic fails to adequately define these “Medicean” groups and their projects, and he also fails to appreciate the strong resemblance...
between the late Machiavelli’s tripartite social classification and those present in texts by Lodovico Alamanni, Alessandro de’ Pazzi, Francesco and Niccolò Guicciardini, among others. It is only by the last few pages of the book that Jurdjevic engages with the political and ideological Florentine context of the 1520s, and he does so to consider Machiavelli’s “skepticism” and the extent to which Machiavelli “was hardly alone” in criticizing the Medici and their attempt to fuse the family’s Roman power base with their de facto presence in Florence. Jurdjevic refers to the post-1520 Florentine political context – in reference to the “fundamentally unresolved” question of constitutional reform, but considers the works of the Florentine aristocratic intellectuals, Francesco and Niccolò Guicciardini, only in passing.

In view of Machiavelli’s political “skepticism” one may also question Jurdjevic’s reference to the “Aristotelian” character of the political thought of the late Machiavelli. If Machiavelli’s project is driven by an Aristotelian ideal of “common ends and purposes” as suggested by Jurdjevic, it is quite unclear how the Jurdjevic squares this thesis with Machiavelli’s consistent critique of the ancient conception of moral and political rationality in a context of isonomia – as well as his recurrent condemnation of the Aristotelian idea of the common good as the sublimation of partial and material interests.

Drawing on the integral contributions of these Italian Renaissance scholars – integral particularly for having acknowledged the conceptual and theoretical changes in the Machiavelli of the 1520 – my project sheds light on three distinct, but nonetheless interrelated, subjects. First, it shows that the “late” Machiavelli of the 1520s introduces a novel account of the “politics of equilibrium” and the mixed government as the most robust solution to secure the vivere libero in the context of actual Renaissance polities. In that regard, I demonstrate that Machiavelli acknowledges a broader range of social

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38 To this shortcoming should be added that nowhere in his works does Jurdjevic properly define (socially, political and/or culturally) the composition of the “third class,” or “middle class,” as he calls it. See Guidi, “Machiavelli e i Progetti di Riforme Costituzionali a Firenze nel 1522,” 489-90; and, by the same author, “La Teoria delle ‘Tre Ambizioni,’” 242-4.

39 Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 209.

40 Ibid, 208.

41 In sum, Jurdjevic fails to properly assess the extent to which Machiavelli’s late republicanism is to be seen as “Aristotelian”: if the purposes invoked in his later works suggest a more “positive” form of freedom, then, is Machiavelli to be seen as promoting the flourishing of capacities that serve to realize our most distinctively natural human purposes? Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1257.

42 Briefly, I refer to “politics of equilibrium” or equal ends as social and political behavior that is determined – or rather shaped by – structural and institutional features of a system of government. While it is certainly not my intention to engage with the institutionalist approaches to policy-making, I do find that the work by Avner Grief and David Laitin substantiates some of the more practical implications of my study of the late Machiavelli. In their game-theoretic study of late-Medieval and early-modern Venice and Genoa, they suggest, “If an institution reinforces itself, more individuals in more situations would find it best to adhere to the behavior associated with it. When self-reinforcing, exogenous changes in the underlying
groupings within the *polis* than he had in the *Discourses* and *The Prince*, and introduces important qualifications regarding the nobility and distinctiveness of the different groups’ agency and objectives. Indeed, Machiavelli’s social and political vocabulary by the time of the *Florentine Histories* substantiates the thesis that the late works are ideologically closer to aristocratic Florentine political culture and Venetian constitutionalism, whereby it was customary to refer to the city according to a tripartite social makeup or *tre ambizioni.*

Additionally, contrary to his earlier books – in which the people are characterized by their desire to live under the law, “to live secure[ly]” or simply by their wish not to be “oppressed” or “dominated” – in the *Histories* both the elites and the people become objects of Machiavelli’s condemnation: the former now appear as the “promoters of slavery,” the latter as “promoters of license,” with both groups unwilling to be subject to “either laws or to men.” Most crucially, Machiavelli’s later sense of power and political agency led to a corresponding expansion in his sense of composition of the state. In *The Prince* and the *Discourses* he recurrently observes that every state, whether princely or republican, consists of two parts, the great and the people. By the 1520s we can observe a re-conceptualization of his prior distinction between the two parts or “humors” present in the city, with the late Machiavelli both multiplying the divisions and eroding the differences in a redrawn social terrain. I thus show that Machiavelli’s reference to these social categories in the *Histories* therefore pertains to their incorporation in a Venetian system of “institutional virtù,” since the structure of power, not the agency of its participants, compels individuals to undertake political action in support of the common good.

Secondly, the post-1520 Machiavelli no longer views discord as an ideal of civil life, meant to resolve the ubiquitous problems of modern polities; rather, he condemns the social conflicts of the past, offering documentation of the evils to be avoided when reorganizing the city. As a result, the Machiavelli of the *Histories* disregards his previous republican considerations of ancient Rome and,

situation that otherwise would have led an institution to change would fail to have this effect.” In other words, what these authors suggest is that it is not necessary for individual participants to become virtuous citizens (so at least in a conscious manner) in order for their acts to become beneficial for the community as a whole. Avner Grief and David Laitin, “A Theory of Endogenous Institutional Change,” *American Political Science Review* 24 (2004): 634.


45 I use the term “institutional virtù” in a loosely “Pocockian” fashion and always in reference to the typically Venetian system of balanced and interlocking councils: magistrates or forms of power were rendered interdependent by virtue of their sharing authority and by which they ensured that no private interest could become sufficiently powerful to dominate the political decision-making process as a whole. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 283-5.
instead, promotes a system of government built upon different foundations. Machiavelli thereby goes beyond the conceptualization of liberty that has made of the Florentine the father of “neo-Romanism” or “neo-Aristotelianism.” Contrary to his *Discourses*, in which martial valor, “greatness” and civic responsibility are highlighted as the objectives of the community, the Machiavelli of the post-1520 works underscores the more pragmatic goal of transcending political fragility and securing order and stability. What emerges from this mutation in Machiavelli’s vocabulary of society and discord is a form of “republican realism” that transcends the normative or “romantic” conceptualization of ancient Rome in the *Discourses*, and thus elaborates a republican program based on a systematic analysis of political processes and their relation to social forces. In a word, the late Machiavelli is much more interested in immunizing the community from the threat of tyranny, or the monopolization of power, by any one group than in the revival of a Roman or Greek conception of liberty and equality of civic values. The novelty of Machiavelli’s late republicanism thus resides in the integral role played by institutional mechanisms whereby individual desires are not converted into the well conducted virtue of the citizen but rather turned into an “emulation” of virtue – or the attempt to accommodate and satisfy the variegated desires present in a multifaceted constituent social body.

Finally, I suggest that the late Machiavelli’s analysis of power and authority as a broad social phenomenon resulted in an increasing concern with institutional mechanisms of vigilance in a context much more modern than ancient, more “Florentine” than “Roman” in character. Machiavelli’s later sense of republicanism gains substantive clarity by demonstrating the connections between the *Histories* and his various post-1520 constitutional works, in which the principal argument is to develop an original institutional configuration capable of defying factional manipulation and encouraging self-governance and autonomy. Read in tandem, these late historical and political works suggest that the post-1520 Machiavelli embraces a more Venetian style of balanced and interdependent councils meant to guarantee that no private interest could become sufficiently powerful to dominate the political arena.

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47 In line with the work of Black and Jurdjevic, I follow the thesis developed by Najemy, who observes, “From the *Prince* (1513) to the *Florentine Histories* (1520-24) Machiavelli’s writings *post res perditas* reveal a progressively deepening interest in the history of his city. With the exception of the *Art of War*, in each successive major work the number of references to events or problems of Florentine history increases.” Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 555.

48 On the history and transmission of ideas of mixed constitutionalism (especially Venetian) and modes of thought in sixteenth century Italy, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 83-113. James Blythe suggests that “the eventual dominance
Machiavelli’s later sense of power and authority can also be illuminated if we pay close attention to the social and economic vocabulary the Florentine introduces: in spite of references to the nominal equality of citizens, he abandons the language of the virtuous individual and rather emphasizes the coexistence of self-interest and the common good – especially with regard to the powerful and the wealthy. In this sense, I propose that Machiavelli can be seen to have evolved from the *Discourses*: while in the earlier works he rejects commerce as antithetical to civic virtue – as Machiavelli famously observes “well-ordered republics have to keep the public rich and their citizens poor” – in his post-1520 works Machiavelli acknowledges that the communal good was considered to be the result of the coordination of honor and private objectives. In that sense, the republicanism that Machiavelli embraces in this late works challenges the civic republican conception of the individual citizen, whereby the existence of a virtuous *vita activa* – shaped by either Roman or neo-Aristotelian conceptions of the good life – determines the soundness of a given political system. Thus, Machiavelli’s “later sense of republicanism” proves to be a corrective to the commerce-civic virtù antithesis, so strongly advocated by Baron and Pocock, among others.49

By drawing on the works of Bausi, Black, Guidi and Jurdjevic as a point of intellectual departure, my interpretation is thus an attempt to discuss a largely unexplored aspect buried within the model presented by neorepublican interpreters of Machiavelli – or what scholars associated with a contextual analysis of texts have referred to as “the intellectual development” of an author.50 Indeed, my


50 Geuna, “Skinner, Pre-Humanist Rhetorical Culture and Machiavelli,” 56; see, also, Iain Hampsher-Monk, “The History of Political Thought and the Political Thought of History,” in *The History of Political Thought in National Context*, eds. Iain Hampsher-Monk and Dario Castiglione (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 165-6. As Quentin Skinner has advised in his most famous methodological text, scholars should concentrate on texts, as opposed to authors, as their main unit of interpretive analysis. This functions as a methodological precaution to what Skinner has labeled “myth of coherence,” or the interpreter’s effort to resolve antinomies and contradictions present in different texts by the same author by forcefully imposing a unitary scheme or coherent corpus. Nonetheless, other Cambridge-affiliated and contextual authors have suggested that Skinner himself fails to abide by his own methodological assumptions, especially when it comes to understanding the ideological and cultural underpinnings of various works by a single author, such as Machiavelli. Strikingly, Skinner does promote a “marked change of direction” in his *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, in which he observes, “Hobbes’s analysis of liberty in *Leviathan* represents not a revision but a repudiation of what he had earlier argued, and that this development reflects a substantial change in the character of his moral thought.” Skinner, *Hobbes and Republican Liberty*, xiv-xv. On the “myth of coherence,” see Quentin Skinner, “Meaning and Understanding
reconstruction of the post-1520 Machiavelli advances the claim that, should students of Machiavelli’s republicanism be interested in detecting the intentionality of the author, they should then take the conceptual and intellectual antinomies in his historical and political corpus seriously. My work thus suggests that Machiavelli scholars should re-examine their usual interpretive habits; if we broaden our intellectual scope of analysis, if we read and embrace the Florentine Histories as a work of political theory in its own right, we would then recognize the existence of two distinct republicanism at the heart of Machiavelli’s political theorizing.

The remainder of this chapter examines three integral axioms relative to Machiavelli’s Roman republicanism as present in the Discourses on Livy, the text that largely dominates the interpretations of Machiavelli’s ideal of civil life. First, it surveys Machiavelli’s conception of collective self-governing as resulting from a binary opposition between the few and the many, and his appeal to the language of “guardianship of liberty” in the context of ancient Rome. Then, it considers Machiavelli’s preference for a tumultuous ideal of civil life as exemplified by Rome at the time of the creation of the tribunes of the plebs, and his stern critique of the ideal of unity, order and stability, so strongly supported by his Florentine humanist counterparts. In that regard, it also introduces Machiavelli’s pessimistic undertones concerning Venice’s foreign and martial affairs as well as his considerations regarding the aristocratic constitutional status of the Venetian republic as present in his early letters and political works.

Chapter II presents significant aspects of Machiavelli’s thinking on society and civil discord in the context of the Florentine Histories. I argue that the Machiavelli of the Histories abandons the binary political analysis emphasized in The Prince and the Discourses, in which the people stand in opposition to the nobles. The Histories engages in an analysis of major conflicts that, Machiavelli claims, shaped the history of Florence insofar as the social basis of warring parties defied any definitively binary conceptualization of city factions. Most crucially, I suggest that Machiavelli’s history of the Florentines offers a sustained revision of his earlier interpretation of the nature of the people: the Florentine Histories proposes a critique of the positive characteristics of popular interests and agency evident in both The Prince and the Discourses on Livy, replacing it with a much more

complicated, and recurrently tripartite, distinction among groupings referred to as the “ancient nobility,” “popular nobles,” and “the plebs.”

Overall, this chapter demonstrates that the post-1520 Machiavelli can hardly be understood as singing the old tune of civic virtue, whether in its Ciceronian or Aristotelian form. Much to the contrary, interest takes precedence over, or rather overtakes, any provision for a common vision of life, or the transformation of the multitude into a constitutive whole or polis. Put bluntly, Machiavelli’s Histories displays the Florentines, and the consequent disposition of the city’s institutions and authorities, as a random collection of unassociated individuals equally struggling for power. While an egalitarian ethos is certainly the main condition for the founding and maintenance of a republican system of governance, Machiavelli suggests that – as a result of the unequivocally similar ambition of all parties – equality is much more a problem than it is a solution for the modern political context.

Chapter III looks at Machiavelli’s criticism of the history of Florentine constitutional reform through the lens of the Histories. I suggest that Machiavelli’s narrative focuses on the particularities and nuances of the various Florentine regimes – from the Ordinances of Justice of the primo popolo of mid-thirteenth century to the Council of Seventy introduced during the first Medici regime – examining the weaknesses of the various constitutional structures as the main reason behind the city’s history of factionalism and violence. Specifically, I observe that Machiavelli recurrently deprecates the typically Florentine rapid rotation of offices, the city’s reliance on the so-called squittini system of electoral politics, its constant appeal to consultative bodies of private citizens, and the recurrent use of dictatorial powers for reform – known as balìa.

What arises from this discussion is Machiavelli’s critique of the Florentine institutional procedures whereby functions are unevenly distributed and irregular in nature, which serves only to give undue weight to factional interests – and consequently shapes his search for a constitutional world of order and “equilibrium” of ends. In a word, Machiavelli’s increased awareness of power as a broad social phenomenon suggests that private interests had to be offered a clear set of political alternatives – what I call a system of “institutional virtù” – in order to be liberated from the “corrupting” forces of tyranny. Contrary to Jurdjevic’s suggestions, I thus observe that the Histories shows that Machiavelli was moving not in an “activist” or “radical” but in a conservative direction by the 1520s.

In view of these suggestions, Chapter IV introduces the post-1520 Machiavelli’s considerations concerning the status, power and organization of the Venetian republic. More to the point, I examine
Machiavelli’s puzzling suggestion in chapters 28-29 of the first book of the *Histories*, where the Florentine considers that, in view of its “order and power [ordini e potenza],” Venice ought to be celebrated as a well-ordered polity. The following section considers Machiavelli’s newly-found sympathy for the Venetian constitution and compares it to his own considerations of the republic of Genoa as present in *Histories* VIII.29. The last section of chapter IV introduces one of Machiavelli’s most overlooked political works, the *Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca* of July-September 1520 as a “hermeneutic key” to the Florentine’s post-1520 analysis of political life. Overall, this chapter confirms the prevalence of a republican mode of governance as his most preferred regime, but it also substantiates the claim that the Machiavelli of the post-1520s is ideologically closer to a Venetian form of republicanism than previously thought.

Chapter V provides an interpretation of Machiavelli’s three post-1520 constitutional blueprints, the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs after the Death of the Young Lorenzo de’ Medici* of 1520-1, the incomplete *Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici* of early 1522 and the *Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Constitution of Florence* of 1522. I challenge the neorepublican and populist interpretations of the *Discourse* and suggest that, if read in tandem with the *Histories*, these constitutional works unequivocally display what I referred to as Machiavelli’s “later sense of republicanism.” To shed light on this thesis, I compare Machiavelli’s constitutional blueprints with the works of contemporary Florentine intellectuals, such as Goro Gheri, Francesco and Niccolò Guicciardini, Alessandro de’ Pazzi and Lodovico Alamanni, among others. As a result, my comparative analysis demonstrates that Machiavelli’s post-1520 republicanism is informed and structured by the early-sixteenth century Florentine aristocratic sympathy for the Venetian constitution.

The conclusion to this project provides a summary of the main findings and situates the thesis introduced in the previous five chapters in the larger debate concerning Machiavelli’s impact on the development and transmission of republican ideas in the early modern and modern intellectual context on both sides of the Atlantic. Specifically, I question the “virtue versus corruption” civic humanist thesis espoused by Baron and, most prominently by, Pocock – that Machiavelli consistently deprecated commerce as antithetical to, or as utterly dangerous for, a civil way of life. By drawing on a series of overlooked texts and arguments, my project thus sheds integral light on the quarrel between the neorepublican and Atlantic-republican theses – associated with the works of Skinner and Pocock –
and the liberal-republican interpretations – as espoused by, among others, Rahe, Sullivan and Pincus – a debate that has markedly influenced contemporary liberal and republican theories.

In view of the reading proposed in this dissertation – that the post-1520 Machiavelli adapted his republican ideas to a modern and increasingly commercial context – I argue that Machiavelli’s “later sense of republicanism” strongly resonates with the alleged “anomalous” character of John Adams’ political thought – especially as present in his *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States of America* of 1778.\(^{51}\) I close this project by suggesting that the Florentine’s “later sense of republicanism” is much more attuned to the “commercial” and “aristocratic” republicanism of John Adams than hitherto thought. Adams – an avid reader of Machiavelli and of the *Florentine Histories* in particular – suggests that the *Histories* is to be seen as Machiavelli’s most brilliant articulation of the complex interrelationship between private interests and the structures of power and authority of the state. Thus, I indicate that the late Machiavelli proves to be a compelling intellectual influence because he had developed a comprehensive rationale for republican reform which gave coherence and precision to John Adams’ own convictions concerning the preservation of liberty and order in a world shaped by private interests.\(^{52}\)

## 2 Society, Discord and Venice in Machiavelli’s Early Works

Before turning our attention to the post-1520 works of Machiavelli, it is imperative to return to the *post res perditas* early political writings, texts in which the Florentine deploys most forcefully the categories, principles and theoretical underpinnings that will allow us to understand the later transformation of his republican theorizing. The primary purpose of this section is to provide an exposition of a series of integral themes and concepts relative to Machiavelli’s republicanism, especially as introduced and developed in the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*.\(^{53}\) This

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52 On the theme the influence of Machiavelli’s republicanism on the political thought of John Adams – via the political thought of English republicans such as Marchamont Nedham and James Harrington, see Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 317, 395 and 519-26. I treat Adams’ *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States* and its reference to the *Florentine Histories* in chapters II and VI.

introductory discussion functions as a point of reference for the examination that is to follow relative to Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories* and his texts on constitutional reform.

Of no less importance, in drawing attention to Machiavelli’s early political works, I also wish to reconstruct some of the dominant approaches of contemporary Machiavellian scholarship, thus showing the diverging conceptions of what has come to be labeled “Machiavelli’s republicanism.” In doing so, as will become evident in the next five chapters of the project, I wish to draw out an important commonality underlining these otherwise highly divergent interpretive accounts: they all offer static accounts of Machiavelli’s political theorizing – and in doing so they neglect the possibility of a “dynamic” understanding of the Florentine’s political imagination.

In order to make explicit the general assumptions underlying my dissertation project, I will thus consider three specific themes or principles: a) Machiavelli’s binary sociological approach as it comes to light in both the *Discourses* and *The Prince*; b) his almost stubborn interest in the *civile discordie* as well as his understanding of the people’s desires and interests in the aforementioned early political texts; and c) most polemically of all, his considerations on the status of the quintessential example of the republican politics of equilibrium, peace and stability – the modern mercantile republic of Venice.

### 2.1 Society and Civil Discord in the Early Political Works (1513-17)

From the very early sections of the first book of the *Discourses* (1513-17), Machiavelli shows himself interested in an almost axiomatic characterization of society and political agency, one which largely departs from the positive view of the unity and nature of the *polis* as present in humanist discourses of the Italian Renaissance.54 Certainly, Machiavelli, like his contemporaries, looked at the history of the ancients as a guide to present and future political action. However, his interpretation of the classical antiquity and his recommendations for political activity differs from those of Florentine humanists in that he does not rely on the history of the ancients to legitimate an existing order of things.55

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55 See, for instance, Moulakis, “Civic Humanism, Realist Constitutionalism,” 202-6 concerning the ideological disconnect between what the author considers as the ethical commitments of Florentine civic humanists and the Florentine authors of the first decades of the sixteenth century. From a different interpretive standpoint, Najemy, “Baron’s Machiavelli and Renaissance Republicanism,” 125-7 underscores the ideological commitments that bounded civic humanists to the ruling
As the “Dedicationary Letter” of the Discourses indicates, whereas humanists dedicate their meditations to an empowered elite or vera nobilitas, Machiavelli’s dedicatees are distinctively powerless – Machiavelli has chosen to dedicate his work to “those who for their infinite good parts deserve to be [princes and rulers].” 56 Contrary to this suggestion, in his “Panegyric to the City of Florence,” Leonardo Bruni portrays the Florentine “civic discipline” as analogous to the Roman hierarchy and constitution. “Here are [in Florence] outstanding officials, outstanding magistrates, an outstanding judiciary, and outstanding social classes. These parts are so distinguished so as to serve the supreme power of Florence, just as the Roman tribunes used to serve the emperor.” 57 In dedicating his commentary on the first ten books of Livy to two young friends from the Orti Oricellari, Zanobi Buondelmonti and Cosimo Rucellai, Machiavelli departs from the “common practices” of those who devote their works to “princes,” and praise them when should condemn them instead. 58

More to the point, Machiavelli observes that selfishness, the relentless pursuit of individual interests and deception, is a systematic human trait that ought to be considered by any statesman. 59 Indeed, oligarchy of the early fifteenth century in an attempt to turn the city’s oligarchic power’s protracted war against Milan into an ethical struggle between liberty and tyranny – a theme that connected Florence to Republican Rome – and, conversely, Milan to the Rome of the emperors – in the collective imagination of the city-state. Also, by the same author, A History of Florence: 1200-1575 (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 188-219. For a different interpretation, especially with respect to Northern European civic humanism, see Brendan Bradshaw, “Transalpine Humanism,” in The Cambridge History of Political Thought 1450-1700, eds. J.H. Burns and Mark Goldie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 95-131. Bradshaw suggests that, while Northern humanists – like their Italian counterparts – relied on an ideal political order located in the world and texts of the ancients, they did so to contrast “the wisdom of the political values enshrined in the classical heritage and the folly of contemporary [political] practice.” In any case, Bradshaw also suggests that the emergence of this humanist “transalpine” aspiration was imported from the Italian context and consequently transformed to the adequacies of the Northern political and cultural milieu. In brief, while humanist discourse – and its appeal to classical antiquity – led Florentine authors to connect their city to the greatness of republican Rome, it led Northern European humanists to criticize their present state of affairs – consequently “urging advance from an imperfect present toward an ideal inspired by classical antiquity.” 56 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 3.


58 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 3. Of course, this may also allude to the fact that Machiavelli himself had dedicated his Prince, first to Giuliano and then to Lorenzo de’ Medici – the de facto rulers of Florence, and consequently may be hinting at some form of self-reproach – all of which may thus suggest that the Discourses could be read as Machiavelli’s invitation to revisit the points he had made in The Prince. 59 Indeed, the chapter on “What Accidents Made the Tribunes of the Plebs be Created in Rome, Which Made the Republic More Perfect,” begins with an overly pessimistic assertion concerning the nature of human acts. “As all those who demonstrate who reason on a civil way of life, and as every history is full of examples, it is necessary to whoever disposes a republic and orders laws in it to presuppose that all men are bad, and that they always have to use the malignity of their
Machiavelli mentions in the following lines, it is as a consequence of human selfishness that “necessity [necessità],” and its relationship to human agency as procurer of good things [acquistare], turns out to be one of the quintessential lessons to be learnt by statesmen.\(^{60}\) Political founding is thus to be conceived, not simply as the result of human struggles against adversity and the changing nature of things, but also as a consequence of the capacity to acknowledge, and even embrace, the selfish quality of human beings.

On the basis of this recurring operating assumption Machiavelli goes on to introduce the most crucial principles of the *Discourses*. While most Florentine humanist intellectuals, most notably Francesco Guicciardini, deprecate Rome’s history of domestic turmoil, Machiavelli comments that chronic mistrust and anxiety among the Romans – or what would be defined as the inevitable egotism of man – enabled the city to survive, flourish and, even more, expand.\(^{61}\) Indeed, one of the features that most astonished Machiavelli’s contemporaries was his defense of the quarrels between two contrasting groups, the few and the many, the patricians and the plebs, whose sense of identity and behavior underpins a large part of the arguments developed in the early sections of book I of the *Discourses* – and in *The Prince*, as well.\(^{62}\) As Machiavelli’s friend, Francesco Guicciardini, observes in his late critique of the *Discourses*, “praising [civil] discord is like praising a sick man’s illness…”\(^{63}\) In this regard, the “path as yet untrodden by anyone” that Machiavelli suggests to have undertaken in the Preface to the first book is in large part shaped by his revolutionary analysis of the social basis of spirit whenever they have a free opportunity for it.” And this is not relative to a republican order only, since in chapter 15 of *The Prince* Machiavelli comments that “human conditions do not permit” princes to behave according to traditional principles of ethics. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 15; and Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 62. For Italian renditions of *The Prince*, I have relied on the *Edizione Nazionale* of Mario Martelli – Niccolò Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. Mario Martelli (Rome: Salerno, 2006).

\(^{60}\) “Such a thing is testimony of what I said above, that men never work any good unless through necessity, but where choice abounds and one can make use of license, at once everything is full of confusion and disorder.” Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 15. On the theme of “necessity” in Machiavelli’s works, see John F. Trinkler, “Praise and Advice: Rhetorical Approaches in More’s *Utopia* and Machiavelli’s *The Prince,*” *Sixteenth Century Journal* 19(1988): 199-200; and Mikael Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 94-6


\(^{62}\) Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 16.

politics – both domestic and foreign – as well as the integral character of conflict, social classification and class interests.⁶⁴

The first series of sections of the *Discourses* recurrently display a binary antagonism – or rather a “conflict [disunione]” – between the senatorial nobles and the plebs: already in I.3 Machiavelli claims that while the Roman nobles’ sense of entitlement and domination was restrained under the rule of the Tarquin kings, the advent of the republic led them to “spit out [their] poison against the plebs,” a behavior that only came to a rest after the creation of the “tribunes” of the plebs.⁶⁵ In the following section (I.4), Machiavelli takes a full blow against prevailing “opinion” and defends the “tumultuous” domestic character of republican Rome. Machiavelli adds, “I say [io dico]” those who deprecate the Roman conflicts, “do not consider that in every republic are two diverse humors, that of the people and that of the great, and that all laws that are made in favor of freedom arise from their disunion, as can easily be seen to have occurred in Rome.”⁶⁶ His republic is consistently depicted as emanating from the energy and conflict of the members of two roughly defined classes or social sectors as understood in the Roman context, the few and the many.

Domestic conflict and competition between two hostile desires, not internal peace and stability, yielded benefits to all citizens – “a perfect republic [una repubblica perfetta],” as he calls it at I.2 – with the Senate representing the desire of the nobles and the Tribunes of the plebs representing and protecting the people’s “ambition [ambizione].”⁶⁷ At I.5 Machiavelli provides a more detailed rationale as to what these desires or appetites entail: “if one considers the end of the nobles and of the ignobles, one will see the great desire to dominate in the former, and in the latter only desire not to be dominated; and in consequence, a greater will to live free, being less able to hope to usurp it than are the great.”⁶⁸ Machiavelli thus displays a sociological division between the Roman nobles, driven by a

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⁶⁴ Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 5.
⁶⁵ Ibid, 15.
⁶⁶ “Io dico che dannono i tumulti fra i Nobili e la Plebe, mi pare che biasimino quelle cose che furono prima causa de tenere Roma libera…E’ non considerino come e’ sono in ogni repubblica due umori diversi, quello del popolo, e quello de’ grandi; e come tutte le leggi che si fanno in favore della libertà nascano dalla disunion loro, come facilmente si può vedere essere seguito in Roma…” Ibid, 16–7. Compare to Guicciardini: “it cannot be denied that [tumults] were harmful …So it was not the discord between the Plebeians and the Senate that made Rome free and powerful…” Guicciardini, “Considerations,” 394.
⁶⁸ “se si considerà il fine de’ nobili e degli ignobili, si vedrà in quelli desiderio grande di dominare, ed in questi solo desiderio di non essere dominati, e, per conseguente, maggiore volontà di vivere liberi, potendo meno sperare di usurparla che non posino i grandi…” Ibid, 18.
desire for domination, honor and the recognition of their superiority, and the people or plebs, primarily concerned with the security and liberty.\textsuperscript{69}

Chapter 9 of \textit{The Prince} presents a similar principle of binary antagonism between the people and the great as well as a lengthy analysis of their behavioral and psychological traits. Machiavelli observes that he who ordains a civil principality with the help of the people, as opposed to the great, enjoys greater advantages from the beginning.\textsuperscript{70} Since the basic interest of the people is to avoid being commanded and dominated by the great, “and the great desire to command and oppress the people,” then, he who comes to the principality “can satisfy the people…for the end of the people is more decent [\textit{onesto}] than that of the great.”\textsuperscript{71} Protection from oppression and domination turns out to be beneficial to the people but also worthwhile to the political status and security of the prince.\textsuperscript{72} Hence, Machiavelli adds, the traditional belief “whoever founds on the people founds on mud,” does not apply to the positive relationship between the people’s goals and circumstances and the political aspirations of the prince.\textsuperscript{73}

To return to the \textit{Discourses}, Machiavelli qualifies such structural antinomy by suggesting that, since “the people [\textit{i popolari}]” strive for some basic goals – here defined as the desire not to be politically and economically dominated – they are a crucial factor for the stability and security of the state. At first Machiavelli considers that expansionary republics such as Rome ought to pursue freedom by means of popular support while in republics like Sparta and Venice, whose main aim is self-preservation without expansion, freedom is better preserved by pursuing the desires of the nobles.\textsuperscript{74} Nonetheless, he modifies this set of alternatives by suggesting that the desires of the great – or rather

\textsuperscript{69} Nonetheless, this distinction is at times challenged by Machiavelli himself, for instance, by suggesting that the great or nobles are motivated by a base desire for acquisition, citing their value for property over honors, while referring to the plebs’ sensitivity to glory as a class, especially in relation to martial affairs. On these themes, see Ibid, 19, 63-4, 76, 80 and 91.

\textsuperscript{70} Machiavelli, \textit{The Prince}, 39.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Machiavelli refrains from referring to the quintessential character of popular agency here – the “guard of freedom;” instead, he conceives of popular attitudes toward a ruler as shaped by passion and desires, such as love, fear, hatred, goodwill, etc. Ibid, 26-33.

\textsuperscript{73} As he tells us in the same chapter, the prince can secure his position from the vexations of popular revolt – for “a prince can never secure himself against a hostile people, for they are too many…” – and in doing so from the desires of the great – since the people are “obligated to their benefactor,” or he who guarantees their freedom from the oppression of the great. Ibid, 39-41 and, also, 64, 67, 72, 83-4 concerning the behavior of the prince relative to the freedom and desires of the people.

\textsuperscript{74} “If one goes back to their reasons, there is something to say on every side; but if one examines their end, one takes the side of the nobles because the freedom of Sparta and Venice had a longer life than that of Rome.” Machiavelli, \textit{Discourses on Livy}, 18.
those who wish not to lose what they already own [quelli que temono di non perdere l’acquistato] – are more “hurtful [nocivi]” than those of the people.75

As a result, Machiavelli claims that the working of popular forces, their will and aspirations – so at least in the context of Rome – are more attuned to a “free way of life [vivere libero].”76 In a republic like Rome, then, what Machiavelli refers to as the “guard of freedom [guardia della libertà]” should be entrusted to the people, since they “have less appetite for usurping it,” and “are less able to hope to usurp it than the great.”77 Since the desire of the people is mediated by their necessity of the state – whether republican or monarchical – to defend themselves from the great, the very means by which they pursue their interests satisfies, or at least promotes, expansion and liberty – via their representation in the Tribunes, the system of public accusations and their enlisting in the military.78

In the world of The Prince and the Discourses the people is conceived of as an essential aspect in the ordering of a polity, though in its composition, character and behavior, it is loosely identified – and it is usually introduced in opposition to the role and desires of the few.79 A textual appreciation of Machiavelli’s terminology already substantiates this formulation. In Prince 9 Machiavelli makes reference to the “people” or popolo roughly twenty times, introducing it imprecisely to both the Roman context of the Gracchi and to the 1378-81 Florentine government of the lesser guilds under Giorgio Scali. “For that is true when a private citizen lays his foundations upon them, and allows himself to think that the people [popolo] will liberate him if he is oppressed by enemies or by the magistrates (in

75 “…so as to return to discoursing on which men in a republic are more hurtful, those who desire to acquire or those who fear to lose what they have acquired…they are more often caused by him who possesses…” Ibid, 18-9
76 Ibid, 17-9.
77 “…essendo i popolari a guardia d’una libertà, è ragionevole ne abbiamo più cura; e non la potendo occupare loro, non permettino che altri la occupi.” Ibid, 18. Guicciardini criticizes Machiavelli’s idea of a “guard of liberty” for two main reasons: first, “it is one thing to say who should have the governing power…It is another to say, when everybody participates in the government, who should be invested with a particular authority or concern for the defense of freedom, whether Plebeian officials or nobles ones.” Then, Guicciardini suggests that, if anything, “[T]he guarding of freedom against those who seek to oppress the republic belongs to everybody, always avoiding as much as possible the distinction between Nobles and Plebs.” Guicciardini, “Considerations,” 397-8.
78 Certainly, Machiavelli devotes an extended discussion to the problem of republican institutions and popular political agency even though their inclusion was the result of popular tumults and the conflict between the classes of Rome. Specifically, Machiavelli highlights the office of the tribunes, the mechanism of public accusations open to all citizens and the use of protest politics by the plebs – for instance, in their refusal of military service. Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 17-9, 23-8 and 67-8. Guicciardini charges Machiavelli’s endorsement of the Roman system of accusations in that it creates “discontentment among the most powerful.” Furthermore, Guicciardini considers the Florentine judicial system of Quarantia, established during the rule of Soderini and modelled after Venice’s system of forty judges or quarantia, which “convened on an ad hoc basis to hear cases of alleged serious crimes against the government, ones not under the purview of Otto di guardia e di balià.” Guicciardini, “Considerations,” 397-8.
79 On the theme of the meaning and composition of the “people” in the works and times of Machiavelli, see Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 23-5 and 78-81; and Bonadeo, “The Role of the People.” 353-6.
In this case one can often be deceived, like the Gracchi in Rome and Messer Giorgio Scali in Florence.**

Although the “people” in this instance is qualified by the distinctive contexts of ancient Rome under the Gracchi and the Florentine regime of Giorgio Scali, Machiavelli applies the term _popolo_ vaguely and in reference to the basic aspirations of freedom and security.

In the following lines Machiavelli equates the “people” with the “generality of the population” or _universale_ as he does in _Discourses_ I.16, wherein he deploys both of these terms interchangeably – and always in opposition to “aristocrats” or _ottimati_ (literally, ‘optimates’).

But when a prince who founds on the people [ _popolo_ ] knows how to command and is a man full of heart, does not get frightened in adversity, does not fail to make other preparations, and with his spirit and his orders keeps the generality of the people [ _l’universale_ ] inspired, he will never find deceived by them and he will see he has laid his foundations well.

For the one who has the few as enemies secures himself easily and without many scandals, but he who has the collectivity [ _l’universale_ ] as enemy never secures himself…so the greatest remedy he has is to seek to make the people [ _il popolo_ ] friendly to himself.**

Additionally, at I.32 of the _Discourses_ Machiavelli refers to _popolo, universale_ and _plebe_ vaguely and indistinctly, such that they are always opposed to “patrician” or _patrizi_ in the context of ancient polities and to “great” or _grandilottimati_ in the modern Italian milieu. “The Romans did succeed happily in being liberal to the people [ _al popolo_ ],” then adding, “The collectivity [ _l’universale_ ] will judge…” and “that the people [ _quel popolo_ ] had seen that the laws had been made for its benefit, such as the one on appealing to the plebs [ _alla plebe_ ].**

When he compares the ancient situation to the more modern ones in _The Prince_ and the _Discourses_, Machiavelli associates _plebe_ (recurrently applied to the context of the ancients) to _popolo_ or _universale_ and always in opposition to concepts such as _patrizi/grandilnobilità_ and _gentiluominilottimati_.** In I.6 of the _Discourses_, Machiavelli refers to the members of ancient Venetian families as “gentlemen [ _gentiluomini_ ]” while those who “later come to inhabit [Venice]” are labeled “the populace [ _popolani_ ].”** In the following lines, Machiavelli comments that in Sparta, “Since the plebs [ _la plebe_ ] neither had nor feared rule, the rivalry that it could have had with the nobility [ _la nobilità_ ] was taken

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80 Machiavelli, _The Prince_, 38-41.
81 Ibid, 41; and Machiavelli, _Discourses on Livy_, 41 and 45-6.
82 Ibid, 70.
84 Machiavelli, _Discourses on Livy_, 20.
away, as well as the cause of tumults…”85 Discussing the outcome of the Agrarian Laws of Rome at the time of the Gracchi, Machiavelli observes, “it was not enough for the plebs [la plebe] to secure itself against the nobles [i nobili] by the creation of the tribunes,” later adding, “In the scandal and disorder the plebs [la plebe] came first and gave reputation to Marius…As the nobility [la nobilità] had no remedy against such a plague, it turned to favoring Sulla…”86

Referring to “present and ancient things” and how “in all cities and in all peoples there are the same desires and the same humors, as there always have been,” I.39 considers the acts of the Florentines against the invasion of the French King, Charles VIII, in 1494: “because this war was administered by a magistracy of ten citizens…the collectivity [l’universale] began to bear spite against them, as the cause both of the war and of its expenses…”87 Lastly, chapter 19 of The Prince mentions “the hatred of the generality of the people [l’universale] against the great [i grandi],” and how the Parlement of Paris allowed King Louis IX to “esteem the great [i grandi] but not to make himself hated by the people [il popolo].”88 In brief, what we find in the context of The Prince and the Discourses is a vocabulary that suggests a clear-cut distinction between two roughly defined social groupings with their distinctive forms of identity, character and agency.89

In spite of their interpretive disagreements, Machiavelli scholars consistently agree on the importance of the themes of society, civil discord and the so-called popular “guard of liberty” in the Discourses on Livy. For instance, Skinner comments that “[Machiavelli’s] argument starts out from the axiom that

85 Ibid, 21. Machiavelli also mentions, “the plebeians [i plebei] were less ambitious because the ranks of the city were spread among few citizens…nor did the nobles [gli nobili], by treating them badly, every give them the desire to hold rank.” At I.32 Machiavelli alternately refers to plebe, popolo and l’universale in reference to ancient Rome and the disposition of its laws after the fall of the Tarquin kings. Ibid, 70-1.
86 Ibid, 78-80 and 244-5.
87 In the next lines, Machiavelli compares the acts of the Florentine people and those of the Romans: “the people [il popolo]…thought [war] arose from the ambition of the nobles [i nobili], who, since they were unable to punish the plebs [la plebe]…wished to lead it outside Rome under the consuls so as to crush it where it did not have any aid. Ibid, 84.
88 Machiavelli, The Prince, 75.
89 As Rebhorn suggests, “Machiavelli uses such terms loosely, employing populari and populo interchangeably with words designating the excluded lowest segment of the Florentine citizenry, the plebe or the vulgo.” Wayne Rebhorn, Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli’s Confidence Men (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 90-1. The only exception to this terminology is found in chapters 6 and 55 of the first book of the Discourses, in which Machiavelli refers to the unique context of the Venetian republic, where he opposes the term “gentlemen [gentiluomini]” to “the people [popolani]” then referring to the Venetian salaried class as “plebs [plebe],” Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 111-3; also, Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 23-7; Bonadeo, “Role of the People,” 351-77; Anna Maria Cabrini, Per una Valutazione delle Istorie Fiorentine: Note sulle Fonti del Secondo Libro (Florence: La Nuova Casa Editrice, 1985), 370; and Marietti, L’Eccezione Fiorentina, 110-1.
in every republic there are two opposed factions, that of the people and that of the rich” and that Machiavelli’s solution was “to engineer a tensely-balanced equilibrium between these opposed social forces.”90 In any case, while Skinner and Viroli suggest that Machiavelli embraces the dual social antagonism of ancient Rome, they also mention that he endorses an ideal of freedom as non-domination, understood as the absence of subjection from arbitrary power in both public and private forms.91 Indeed, by accepting the principle of freedom as non-domination, Machiavelli favors the civic republican belief that the vivere civile – or the rule of laws, institutions and the existence of common interests – ought to be seen as the art of establishing and maintaining what they referred to as a vivere libero.92

More importantly, these students of Machiavelli’s republicanism observe that, whereas the Florentine does indeed repudiate the long-standing Ciceronian vision of concordia ordinum, he still “endorses the traditional belief in the importance of the common good.”93 This ideal is put forward, for instance, by Skinner, who suggests that Machiavelli distinguishes himself from his classical republican counterparts simply by promoting a “reformulation” of the classical image of the res publica.94 Indeed, Skinner adds, the conflicts between the nobles and the people play an “instrumental” role in promoting “the capacity to achieve civic greatness with the enjoyment of ‘a free way of life.’”95 Thus, Skinner, much like Viroli, Pettit and Pocock, claims that Machiavelli’s praise for the “tumultuous” domestic life of republican Rome is circumscribed to the exercise of political agency, understood as vigilance

91 Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” 302 considers Machiavelli as fully endorsing a republican ideal of freedom as non-domination by suggesting that, for Machiavelli, “to be free…is simply to be unconstrained from pursuing whatever goals we may happen to set ourselves.” See, also, Viroli, “Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics,” 144-5.
92 It is in part as a result of this thesis that neorepublican scholars (most prominently Skinner and his fellow travelers) consider The Prince and the Discourses as driven by two distinct political and linguistic premises – the vivere libero and the vivere sicuro. Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 316; Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. I, 156; by the same author, Machiavelli, 52-3; “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” in Machiavelli and Republicanism, eds. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 302-3); on the distinction between a vivere sicuro and a vivere civile, see Viroli, “Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics,” 158-68.
93 Skinner, “Pre-humanist Origins of Republican Ideas,” 137. As Skinner explains elsewhere, “the crucial difference between Machiavelli and his contemporaries lies in the nature of the methods they took to be appropriate for attainment of those ends [of politics].” In a word, while his humanist predecessors assumed that the common good can only be secured under principles of morality and justice – understood as the attainment of the universal purposes of a civil life – Skinner’s Machiavelli suggests that justice and the common good may be at times (if not all the time) incompatible with one another. Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, Vol. I, 134.
94 Ibid, 113-5. Also, “The squabbles and conflicts that a Roman-like constitution is likely to produce should be considered inevitable inconveniences if the city is to remain free and able, if need be, to expand.” Viroli, “Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics,” 158.
and guardianship against “corruption,” or the corrosive effects of foreign and domestic arbitrary power and domination.\textsuperscript{96}

In that sense, whereas the neorepublican Machiavelli suggests that the \textit{vivere civile} may not be compatible with civic concord, he does conceive of civic participation as the means by which the common good and freedom from servitude may actually be attained and observed. “A self-governing republic,” Skinner observes, “can only be kept in being…if its citizens cultivate that crucial quality which Cicero had described as \textit{virtus}, which Italian theorists later rendered as \textit{virtù}, and which the English republicans translated as civic virtue or public-spiritedness.”\textsuperscript{97} To guarantee the maintenance of a free way of life, then, citizens ought to embrace the structures of political life and, in doing so, transform their individual passions and interests into “habits of civic virtue.”\textsuperscript{98} In a word, “For Machiavelli, like his republican teachers, politics is not just to do with the formal structure of the constitution; a primary aim of politics is to shape, to educate the passions of the citizens.”\textsuperscript{99}

As a result, in spite of their attentiveness to Rome’s imperial entanglements, scholars associated with a neorepublican interpretation of Machiavelli stress a concern with the domestic aspirations and objectives of a republican mode of life.\textsuperscript{100} This suggestion is most prominently endorsed by Skinner, who considers Machiavelli’s republicanism as attuned to “the long-standing view that the highest ends to which any city can aspire are those of civic glory and greatness.”\textsuperscript{101} Having connected liberty with the pursuit of civic greatness in the public realm, the neorepublican Machiavelli thus completes his argument by considering that genuine liberty, or freedom from servitude, can only be attained and promoted under republican institutions. Machiavelli’s suggestion that the people are better “guards of

\textsuperscript{96} “To meet this ineradicable threat [of corruption], Machiavelli has one further constitutional proposal to advance: he maintains that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance.” Skinner, \textit{Machiavelli}, 67; Pocock, \textit{Machiavellian Moment}, 196-8; and Pettit, \textit{Republicanism}, 250.


\textsuperscript{98} Skinner, “Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” 303 suggests that one of the consequence of this “willingness” to endorse the common good is the cultivation of “martial virtues, and to place them in the service of our community,” a theme which “constitutes the leading theme of Book II of Machiavelli’s \textit{Discorsi}.


\textsuperscript{100} As Viroli categorically puts it, “Expansion and war…can have no priority over the liberty and the good order of the city. Ibid, 159. While partly agreeing with the republican principles endorsed by Skinner and Viroli, Hörnqvist has portrayed Machiavelli as equally concerned with what he refers to as the “two myths of civic humanism” – that is, domestic liberty and imperial territorial expansionism. Hörnqvist, \textit{Machiavelli and Empire}, 38-75.

\textsuperscript{101} Skinner also suggests that Machiavelli’s inquiry of the military endeavors of the Romans as well as that concerning the actions of individual men are intrinsically linked to the theme of civic greatness. Skinner, “Pre-humanist Origins of Republican Ideas,” 137-8.
liberty” than the nobles refers to the people’s intrinsic interest in the maintenance of a constitutional system based on the rule of law and freedom from subjection – both foreign and domestic.\textsuperscript{102} In short, whether derived from Aristotelian or Ciceronian texts, neorepublican scholars unequivocally associate Machiavelli’s promotion of liberty with a republican conception of civic virtue and participation.\textsuperscript{103}

Other specialists, such as Najemy and McCormick, have criticized the neorepublican interpretations associated with the works of Skinner, Viroli, Pettit and Pocock. In general, McCormick and Najemy observe, “Machiavelli is more popularly empowering and anti-elitist than what generally passes under the name of republican theory today.”\textsuperscript{104} Contrary to the neorepublican approach, both Najemy and McCormick consider that Machiavelli’s republicanism is much more attuned to the practices of political and electoral contestation than has been hitherto thought. Najemy observes, “The motor driving the history of republics, their forms of government, and their capacity for survival, defense, and expansion is the perpetual antagonism between the nobles and the people.”\textsuperscript{105} Furthermore, Najemy suggests that great part of the discussion throughout the \textit{Discourses} pertains to the problem of “private” and “extra-legal” means by which wealthy and powerful citizens attempt to dominate the people and shape the contours of the polity (from the absence of a system of public accusations in Florence and the “competition for honor” among the noble youth, to the use of “friendship” and patronage in manipulating political affairs). As a result, Machiavelli’s understanding of Rome’s social opposition and discord is shaped by an inquiry about the institutional means by which to limit the power and authority of the ambitious nobles.\textsuperscript{106}

Similarly, McCormick suggests, “Machiavelli sharply distinguished the grandi from the rest of the citizens within republics; from the \textit{popolo}, the plebeians or ‘the people.’” Rather than desiring to

\textsuperscript{102} Skinner, \textit{Foundations of Modern Political Thought}, 159-64. On the connection between civic virtù and liberty with military virtù, see Pocock, \textit{Machiavellian Moment}, 200-4.

\textsuperscript{103} While neorepublican scholars’ notions of freedom appear to reject the idea of virtue – usually understood as the active life in politics as a good in itself and hence related to an idea of human flourishing – they nonetheless cling to a notion of the common good that guides towards a traditional conception of civic humanism. See, for instance, Skinner, “The Republican Ideal of Political Liberty,” 303. This ambivalence in the neorepublican conception of liberty is adequately defined, and challenged, by Patten, who suggests that “Active citizenship, these revisionist republicans argue, should be valued, not necessarily because it is good in itself, but because it contributes to the maintenance of a free society,” then adding that neorepublicans simply fail to provide a rationale for a robust ideal of citizenship and political participation. Patten, “The Republican Critique of Liberalism,” 25-7. Of course there is another caveat to be added here, that is the distinction between the historical analyses of Skinner and Viroli on the roots of a neorepublican form of freedom and the characterization of freedom as non-domination as a distinctive normative ideal as espoused by Pettit.

\textsuperscript{104} McCormick, \textit{Machiavellian Democracy}, 142.

\textsuperscript{105} Najemy, “Society, Class and the State,” 102.

oppress others, as do the grandi, the people desire primarily to avoid being oppressed by the great. [...] The people are naturally inclined to avoid oppression, whether by suffering it themselves or inflicting it on others..."  

In McCormick’s estimation, the universal selfishness underscored in the early stages of the Discourses is qualified by the class distinction between the wealthy and powerful few and the poor and disempowered many. Indeed, McCormick further claims, Machiavelli’s support for a binary opposition of interests and agency between the great and the people is meant to inform and educate his readership – the “young Florentine ottimati” – of the benefits of a “popular republic” as opposed to an “aristocratic” oppressive republic.

Accordingly, both Najemy and McCormick see Machiavelli’s sympathy for the tumultuous status of republican Rome as a result of his preference for an anti-elitist and egalitarian republicanism underscoring a democratic view of the political. Machiavelli, these interpreters insist, emphasizes both the capacity of the people for sound political judgement and robust political agency to the detriment of what they see as the ungovernable and power-thirsty nature of the elites. In other words, the populist-republican Machiavelli sheds light on the distinctively popular and freedom-enabling institutional systems of the Roman republic, whereby popular contestation and elite accountability were integral premises for the promotion and maintenance of a common good.

Thus, Machiavelli ought to be seen as endorsing a “two-polities-in-one” institutional system, whereby the popular “guard of liberty” refers to class-specific “offices or assemblies empowered with veto or legislative authority…magistrate appointment procedures that combine lottery and election…[as well as] political trials” help to curb the excesses of the nobility while encouraging a vivere libero.

Briefly, Najemy and, most prominently, McCormick assert that, by formally incorporating a social binary antagonism into the constitutional and institutional forms of the polity, Machiavelli intended to

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108 “Machiavelli’s notoriously cynical generalizations on the nature of ‘men’ may indicate many interpreters to conclude that he attributes to all people the same passions, especially the appetites for political oppression and material acquisition. However, Machiavelli’s distinction between the grandi and the popolo suggests that the few and the many, respectively, are motivated by two qualitatively different appetites.” McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 5.


deprecate the informal advantages of the economically and politically empowered and, conversely, to empower the disenfranchised and liberty-enabling ethos of the people.\textsuperscript{111}

While drawing on similar popular-demotic premises than those of Najemy and McCormick, other scholars have recently suggested that Machiavelli’s appeal to an ideal of popular resistance to domination – as exemplified by the opposition between the great and the people – ought to be interpreted as a model of “no rule,” beyond the confines of existing legitimate power.\textsuperscript{112} Borrowing from an Arendtian ideal of political action, these scholars consider that Machiavelli’s appeal to a language of conflict and social antagonism does not pertain to a republican legal framework (“the form”), but rather to a “creative” moment of political agency (or “the event”), whereby freedom is exercised as “resistance [and] in contrast to command.”\textsuperscript{113} Closely relying on the post-structuralism of Foucault and Lefort, they thus conceive of the people, not as a particular socio-economic class or group, but as “everyone who finds a motive for action in the sole desire not to be dominated. Conversely, the nobility is everyone who finds a motive for action in the sole desire to dominate.”\textsuperscript{114}

Power, agency and civil discord, then, are to be conceived as the very essence of political life, whereby an “unarticulated desire for freedom as no-rule” functions as a catalyst for the “absence of organization” and the continuous struggle between legal authority and political agency.\textsuperscript{115} Read in this light, Machiavelli’s concept of the “guard of freedom” thus pertains to the people’s capacity to

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\textsuperscript{111} “The ‘sons of Brutus’ stand for all grandi ready to scuttle republics to secure ‘extra-legal’ privileges they expect from alliances of mutually advantages with princes. A ‘free stato’ makes partigiani – factions – its enemies, not its friends…” Ibid, 106-7. “Class-specific institutions ensure that poorer citizens who do not enjoy rapid advancement in material welfare and social status enjoy compensation for their plight; these measures empower them to participate in politics on a relatively equal par with wealthy and prominent citizens.” McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 13. On the theme of elite enfranchisement and accountability, see, also, “Subdue the Senate: Machiavelli’s Way of Freedom or Path to Tyranny?” Political Theory 40(6) (2012): 714-35.
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\textsuperscript{112} On the themes of “no rule” and “constituent power,” see, for instance, Vatter, Between Form and Event, 5-15; by the same author, “Repices are a Species of State: Machiavelli and the Genealogy of the Modern State,” Social Research 81(1) (2014): 217-34; Fillipo del Lucchese, Conflict, Power and the Multitude in Machiavelli and Spinoza (London: Continuum, 2009), 28-9; Miguel Abensour, Democracy Against the State: Marx and the Machiavellian (London: Polity, 2011), 89-101. It should be noted, however, that supporters of the thesis of “no rule” have recently revised or amended their considerations. For instance, Vatter has noticed that the exercise of popular resistance might and should in fact result in forms of institutionalized authority – or what he calls “personal embodiment” of the “status regalis” – which may indeed offer “a revolutionary usage of the personalization of power in status regalis for the construction of a depersonalized public idea of a republican state.” Vatter, “Repices are a Species of State,” 232 and 234.
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\textsuperscript{114} Vatter, Between Form and Event, 79.
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\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 103-4. Consider, also, Claude Lefort, Le Travail de L’Oeuvre de Machiavel (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), 473-4: Political life, “nait pas de l’appréciation du principe de gouvernement...mais de celle du jeu des forces sociales qui s’y organisent.”
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“suspend,” by acts of resistance, the “command-obey relations” presupposed by a framework of legal political authority. Indeed, as Lefort and Vatter suggest, social opposition and civil discord are not mere “inconveniences,” meant to be institutionalized or channelled; much to the contrary, they are the crux of Machiavelli’s political imagination. It is by virtue of this command-resistance antagonism that “the revolutionary origin of political form that defines a republican political life” – or freedom as “no rule” – finally takes place.116

Contrary to these interpretations, scholars associated with the works of Strauss and Mansfield have characterized Machiavelli’s principles of binary social opposition, civil discord and guard of freedom as a result of the Florentine’s skepticism concerning popular rule and political agency.117 Indeed, these scholars suggest, not only is Machiavelli’s republicanism grounded on different principles than the classical republicanism of, for instance, Aristotle and Cicero, but there is also an insurmountable chasm dividing the Florentine’s “instrumental” understanding of social opposition and civil discord and the “anti-elitist” populist thesis of Najemy, McCormick, Lefort and Vatter, among others.118

As Mansfield and Sullivan assert, Machiavelli embraces, and at times re-imagines, the aggressiveness and divisiveness of republican Rome, less as a result of his interest in either civic virtue or the institutionalization of popular demands than in the capacity to “channel” the appetitive desires of both nobles and the people as a means to attain imperial glory.119 Indeed, as Rahe comments, “[Machiavelli’s] account of republican virtue is strictly instrumental...[his] standard for judgement is a republic’s propensity for aggrandizement and not its mode of governance...”120 In a world depicted as “in constant motion” and dominated by human appetites, Machiavelli conceives of the binary domestic antagonism as a necessary but not sufficient quality for the promotion and maintenance of

116 Vatter, Between Form and Event, 95; Lefort, Le Travail de l’Oeuvre de Machiavel, 477-83.
120 Rahe, Against Throne and Altar, 31.
the goals of politics, which can only be attained by the constant appeal to territorial expansion and martial glory. As Sullivan puts it, while “the nobles possess the drive to honor and glory,” they also “love dominion…[which] can induce them to oppress the people… [Thus, Machiavelli] is on the side of the people when the nobles’ oppression threatens, and he is on the side of the great when the people’s defection looms.”121

In this sense, Machiavelli’s preference for a tumultuous domestic mode of life is rather instrumental than ideal; contrary to exponents of a populist Machiavelli, these interpreters assert that little, if anything, distinguishes the interest of the people from the acquisitive ethos of the nobles or the individual prince. The Florentine’s appeal to a popular “guard of liberty” as in Rome “is not because they possess any natural inclination to justice but because a defect in ‘appetite’ renders them more timid and less likely to exploit the opportunities presented to them.”122 Indeed, as Mansfield has suggested, the distinction between the umori of the few and the many is rather shaped by the distinction between “the prince” and “the people” and the extent to which the “heads” of the parties can persuade the “multitude” to embrace conquest and glory as goals of their own.123

Elite manipulation, not elite accountability or civic virtue, is to be seen as Machiavelli’s quintessential lesson of domestic political life; the people, in this sense, are considered as a malleable and passive object, meant to be brought to cultivate – via the promise of security and commodious living, on the

121 Sullivan, Machiavelli and Hobbes, 32. In view of Machiavelli’s alleged alternating sympathy for “popular tenacity” and “elite leadership,” Balot and Trochimchuk, The Few and the Many, 572, and 581-2, suggest that sections of the Discourses (such as I.53-54, III.1 and III.49) and The Prince (chapter 19), are indicative of a tripartite social division of the city – specifically, between the one (“princes of republics,” virtuous “individuals” and “founders”), the few and the many. More to the point, they suggest that the extraordinary actions of individuals are a crucial component in Machiavelli’s account of principalities and republics alike. The recognition of a classical Aristotelian classification at the heart of the Discourses is, however, qualified by Machiavelli’s comments on the character of these divisions – especially between the one and the many in the context of republican Rome, though Machiavelli also suggests that the “heads” of the plebs could be as manipulative and ambitious as the nobles themselves. Indeed, both princes and elites are, by virtue of their psychological and social identification, members of the same group or class and who, in their own estimation, deserve to have recognition and power – and even embody the authority of the polity – in their own persons. On this theme, see Bonadeo, “The Role of the Grandi,” 9-30. This is also the case with respect to the alleged distinction between “the soldier” and “the citizen” as espoused in The Prince, the Discourses and the Art of War. In any case, Machiavelli’s suggestions concerning the antagonism soldier vs. citizen is rather analytical, for this (in Machiavelli’s own words) arte della guerra is understood as a public monopoly whereby only the citizen can practice it (so at least in the context of ancient Rome that he so strongly endorses). In other words, only a part-time soldier, one committed to the civil ethos of the polity and its objectives, can fully and truly endorse the purposes underlining the causes of war. On the citizen-soldier dichotomy, see Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 199-201.

122 Rahe, Against Throne and Altar, 51. My emphasis. Also, Mansfield, Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders, 45: “so when the popular men are posted as the guard of liberty, it is reasonable that they will have more care for it, and not being able to seize it, will not permit others to seize it. Note how the argument loses forces as it is explained: the desire not to be dominated is resolved into an inability to dominate.”

123 Ibid, 114-6 and 141-55;
one hand, and the power of civil religion, on the other – an appreciation for martial enterprises and imperial glory.\(^{124}\) Machiavelli’s republicanism is then to be seen as “thoroughly modern,” since he conceives of political authority, not just as human “creativity,” but also as the consequence of the “reciprocal fear” of its constituent members.\(^{125}\) Machiavelli does present a Roman-based social classification of binary antagonism, these scholars conclude, but he does so in light of an appeal to profit, ambition and acquisition – not natural *logos* or divine reason – and for purposes that are beyond the domestic realm of political life. As Sullivan puts it, “Rome…must be the model for everyone founding a republic” because of the acquisitions that are derived from war and popular participation therein. Thus, “[Machiavelli’s] vaunted embrace of the people is merely an instrumental one. He needs the people to serve his end.”\(^{126}\)

### 2.2 Venice and the Politics of Equilibrium in Machiavelli’s Early Political Works

In view of this debate concerning the intrinsic link between domestic social conflict and foreign martial affairs at the heart of Machiavelli’s political theorizing, scholars have recurrently asserted that Machiavelli’s republicanism is utterly incompatible with the Venetian principles of peace, security and constitutional order. Indeed, neorepublican, popular-democratic and Straussian scholars suggest, Venice was simply at odds with Machiavelli’s conceptions of social conflict, binary social antagonism and the guard of liberty as introduced in the previous section.\(^{127}\) Machiavelli’s scornful criticism of the Venetian republic thus emerges as one of the most crucial unifying motives in his letters, The *Prince*, the *Discourses* and the *Art of War*.

Machiavelli’s early works and letters are filled with criticism and pessimism concerning the role and status of the Venetian republic. Already in his letter to Francesco Vettori of 26 August 1513 we find Machiavelli’s aversion for the model of civil and political life that had shaped the debates and institutions of Florentine affairs after the fall of the Medici: “[Filippo] Casa[vecchia] knows and many of my friends, with whom I am in the habit of talking about these things, know that I had a low opinion

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\(^{124}\) “Peoples and Princes impose necessity on each other only when each party remains hostile to the other, not when both moderate their desires. Their common good is not a compromise of ends but something for each party of what it wants against the other, a hidden tyranny for the princes and a periodic punishment of ambition for the people. Princes and people are distinct in nature, but complementary in a system of artificial necessity, in a ‘multitude’” Ibid, 75-6 and 140; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 128-30; Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 54-5.

\(^{125}\) Ibid, 31-2.


of the Venetians, even at their greatest strength...” As has been recurrently suggested, Machiavelli’s critical attitude toward Venice, its history and constitution, was to be set forth in a more substantial form in the Discourses on Livy. In doing so, the Discourses engages in one of the most pressing issues of early sixteenth-century Florentine political thought: Whether it was preferable to organize a republic representative of the city’s population – what has been usually called governo largo – or rather disposed and delegated to a smaller group of citizens with expertise and knowledge in the art of government – the so-called governo stretto.

As Pocock suggests, the Discourses is “a systematic dissent from the Venetian paradigm,” or Machiavelli’s attempt to counter the spell of the Venetian myth among the young aristocratic members of the Orti Oricellari literary circle. The classical justification of the Florentine “myth of Venice” revolved around the idea that Venice – unlike Florence – was habitually free from faction and constitutional instability. From the now classical study by Gilbert it becomes clear that Florentine contemporaries of Machiavelli who had self-identified as ottimati – those members of powerful, long-established families and mercantile in their origins – viewed the Venetian constitution, with its hereditary councils, its enclosed political system and its powerful senatorial branch, as an appealing mode of governance, especially in view of their political role during the republican and Medicean periods.

Regardless of his objection to Venice, Machiavelli shows himself acquainted with a large variety of institutions, laws and customs relative to the Venetian republic. As Cervelli has noted, chapters 34-5 and 49-50 of the first book of the Discourses refer to some of the integral offices and authorities of the Venetian constitution – from the doge, the senate or pregadi and the major council to the Council of the Ten and the office of Quarantia. Similarly, chapters I.5-6 and 55 also display Machiavelli’s

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130 Indeed, opinions were divided as to what form of republican constitutional organization was better suited for the Florentines, and what model, what historical exemplar, would be most representative of Florentine republicanism. Venice and Rome were the two examples that dominated the debate. On this theme, see Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 19-48.
131 Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 185.
132 Felix Gilbert, “Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari: A Study on the Origin of Political Thought,” Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Studies 12 (1949): 80-1; by the same author, “The Venetian Constitution,” 463-500. This is not to say, however, that the Discourses ought to be read as a municipal text, meant to have an impact in the immediate context of his own times only; much to the contrary, it is precisely because of the staunch critique of Florentine republicanism introduced therein that we can retrieve perennial appreciations concerning Machiavelli’s ideal of politics and society.
133 Cervelli, Machiavelli e la Crisi, 23-4.
know-how of the social and economic organization of the republic of Saint Mark. In any case, the *Discourses* show how Machiavelli adopts (and adapts) this knowledge of the Venetian republic to criticize, and diminish, the character of the Venetian constitution as a sound republican model.\(^{134}\) As Fasano Guarini observes, Machiavelli “discards the myth of Venice and its peculiar balance of different civic forces;” the *Discourses* sheds light on the fragility of both Venice’s internal power and its external policy.\(^{135}\)

The principal argument concerning Venice’s constitution and foreign affairs comes to full light in I.5-6 of the *Discourses on Livy*, whereby the Florentine introduces two possibilities for the creation of a republic.\(^{136}\) Having discussed the existence of “two diverse humors” in every city and the Roman civil struggles, Machiavelli now measures the quality of two constitutional models by means of how suitable they are to the goals of territorial sovereignty and imperial expansionism.\(^{137}\) In other words, Machiavelli already suggests, the soundness of a republic is measured internally by its ability to maintain command over its own territory and secure freedom, and externally by its capacity for either self-defence or conquest.\(^{138}\)

Deploying a typically Machiavellian style of binary oppositions and parallelisms, chapter I.5 introduces a single principle – as the title indicates, “Where the Guard of Freedom May be Settled More Securely” – through a discussion of simple symmetries between two examples, the first symbolized by “the Lacedemonians, and in our times with the Venetians” and the second by “the [ancient] Romans.”\(^{139}\) More specifically, Machiavelli suggests that while the Spartans and the Venetians kept the “guard of freedom” “in the hands of the nobles,” the Romans “put it in the hands

\(^{134}\) As Gilbert persuasively observes, whether Machiavelli was as staunch a critic of the Venetian model as the *Discourses* shows him to be, he seems more interested in turning Venice into Rome’s theoretical “alter ego” than in properly assessing the soundness of the city-republic’s constitution. Felix Gilbert, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” *Lettere Italiane* 21(4) (1969): 389-99.


\(^{137}\) Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 16-7. In view of Machiavelli’s discussion concerning the Roman model we may say that it seeks the maximization of freedom from servitude at home and, as a result, the maximization of domination abroad.  

\(^{138}\) This is already suggested at the end of I.5, where Machiavelli observes that one of the people’s modes to “vent its ambition” was by refusing “to enroll their names to go to war…” Ibid, 17. On the theme of expansion as an end in itself, Connell suggests, “[T]hroughout his writings, the Florentine argued against the territorial state and in favor of an expansionist republic.” William J. Connell, “Machiavelli on Growth as an End,” in *Historians and Ideologues: Essays in Honor of Donald R. Kelley*, eds. Anthony J. Grafton and J.H.M. Salmon (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 261.

\(^{139}\) On Machiavelli’s rhetorical style of political analysis, see Rebhorn, *Foxes and Lions* 206-7.
of the plebs."\textsuperscript{140} Then, Machiavelli invites his readers to reason "which of these republics made the better choice," hence suggesting that the inquiry is open to multiple (or at least two) answers – as he tells us, “There is something to say on every side.”\textsuperscript{141} The first variable brought to the fore is the longevity of a given state’s freedom – arguably a different principle from the one introduced at the beginning of the chapter – and here the Florentine finds that both Sparta and Venice surpass Rome – “because the freedom of Sparta and Venice had a longer life than that of Rome.”

Having thus introduced a binary set of alternatives, Machiavelli deploys a more detailed comparison: “[T]aking first the side of the Romans, I say that one should put on guard over a thing those who have less appetite for usurping it,” therefore introducing his famous characterization of the nobles’ desire to oppress and the people’s wish to live free from oppression.\textsuperscript{142} As per Sparta and Venice, “he who defends” their orders notices that “those who put the guard in the hands of the powerful” attain two objectives: first, they can satisfy the political ambition of the nobles, and second, they “take away a quality of authority from the restless spirits of the plebs…”\textsuperscript{143} The Venetian and Spartan orders represent a form of aristocratic authority, where the “guard of freedom” is held in the hands of the few and these alone get access to the administrative and political posts of the polity, while in Rome the guardia della libertà was entrusted to the plebs – suggesting that, in view of the roles of the nobles and the people within the regime, Rome was a tumultuous republic.

At this point, Machiavelli introduces qualifications to his very system of analysis – first by constituting an exception to that construction and then by developing a new generalization that accounts for those exceptions. Once again, he confirms that there are reasons to choose either constitutional model, but he then qualifies his answer by referring to the “ends” of a republic – either to “make an empire such as Rome,” or to “maintain itself” such as Venice and Sparta.\textsuperscript{144} Machiavelli takes these considerations further in the following chapter (I.6) by comparing “those who governed” them and confirms that both cities ought to be defined as aristocracies: Sparta is defined as ruled by a king and a small senate, which, added to its small population and “the equal poverty of its inhabitants,” allowed the city to remain free.\textsuperscript{145} Venice, as he tells us, “Did not divide the government by names, but under one appellation those who can hold administration are called gentlemen [gentiluomini]” while the rest of

\textsuperscript{140} Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 17.  
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid, 18.  
\textsuperscript{142} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{145} Ibid, 20-1.
the disenfranchised population was referred to as “the populace.” So, he confirms, had the Romans chosen to cease the tumults, they could have “either not employ the plebs in war, as did the Venetians, or not open the way to foreigners, as did the Spartans.”

Machiavelli thus compels his reader to look for multiple answers where there is only one, since, by removing the “inconvenience” of civil conflict, the Romans would have made themselves “weaker” and hence would have taken away the rationale for arming the people as well as their “causes of expansion.” Indeed, as Machiavelli observes at II.3, Rome benefited from its large population necessary for the city to flourish, on the one hand, by bringing foreigners to live in Rome proper and, on the other, by ensuring those new inhabitants access to honor and citizenship. Sparta inhibited the development of its citizenry, excluding foreigners and visitors from its territory, in an attempt to forestall domestic conflict. Venice promoted an aristocratic government that allowed access to office, and hence full citizenship, to members of those families that had first inhabited its territories. Consequently, Machiavelli identifies Venice and Sparta with a form of governing that, in lieu of promoting social dynamism and popular participation in martial affairs, reserved political office (the king and the senate in Sparta, the doge, the pregadi and the Major Council in Venice) to an enclosed group.

A hard, inevitable fate qualifies the comparison and gives a final blow to the republican principles of internal peace and security: “since all things of men are in motion and cannot stay steady…it is necessary to follow the Roman order and not that of the other republics…and to tolerate the enmities that arise between the people and the Senate, taking them as an inconvenience necessary to arrive at Roman greatness.” Machiavelli suggests that Sparta and Venice could not escape the vicissitudes of fortune, since, in order to defend their independence, they were led to dominate their neighbors. This task proved too perilous for the Spartan military elite and for the mercenaries hired by the

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146 Here Machiavelli provides a concise history of the constitution of history that will be analyzed in detail in chapter IV of the present dissertation. Ibid, 20. Also, Machiavelli did not consider the Venetians to be “true nobles” but “nobles in name [in nome],” as he observes at I.55. Ibid, 111. On Sparta and Venice as aristocracies, see Gilbert, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” 392-4; Cervelli, Machiavelli e la Crisi, 22-34; Sasso, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” 37-9; Fasano Guarini, “Machiavelli and the Crisis of the Italian Republics,” 36-9.

147 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 21.


149 Ibid, 133-5.

150 Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 198.

151 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 23.
Venetians; indeed, “it destroyed the constitution of Sparta, and Machiavelli plainly would not have cared if the same thing had happened to Venice.”

The relationship between a city’s order and its foreign and military abilities is unequivocal: the only choice to be made is between domestic turmoil combined with military preparedness and domestic quiet combined with a perilous sense of weakness and anxiety abroad. In this sense, what at the beginning of the inquiry looked like a binary set of alternatives between two forms of *vivere libero* is now portrayed as a contrast between a *vivere libero* and a *vivere servo*, between a free state and a subject one. Not only does Machiavelli deprecate the Venetians (along with their ancient Spartan fellows) for the aristocratic character of their constitution – since the “guard of freedom,” honor and access of office are in the hands of a small group of “gentlemen” – but also for their inability to arm the people – which caused them to rely on mercenary troops and money in their continental enterprises.

The contrast between the Venetian and Roman models, thus, turns out to be Machiavelli’s answer to the debate between the proponents of the *governo stretto* and those of the *governo largo* – with Machiavelli sympathizing with the latter and its ability to militarily organize its people and to maintain its territories. And Machiavelli’s proposition is the direct opposite to that of his Florentine aristocratic intellectuals: as he tells us at I.58, he seems to find predilection for “a thing…[that] has been accused by all the writers.” It would be sound for a republic to organize so as to maintain its domain – as in the case of the German cities – but, in view of the Italian situation, military preparedness and popular participation therein were the solution to the otherwise gloomy state of affairs of the city-states of the Italian peninsula.

In view of these suggestions, Machiavelli’s conclusion in this series of preliminary chapters furnishes proof of Venice’s inadequacy as a republican model as a consequence of both its aristocratic *ordini*

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153 Concerning the Romans, Machiavelli observes that they “never made peace with money, but always with the virtue of arms” while “It would be lengthy to tell how many lands the Florentines and the Venetians have bought: one saw later the disorder of this, and that the things they acquire with gold they do not know how to defend with steel.” Ibid, 199-200.
155 “Having seized a great part of Italy – and the greater part not with war but with money and astuteness – when it had to put its forces to proof, Venice lost everything in one day.” Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 22.
158 The German cities were free and well-armed without being acquisitive, but they were also under the power of an empire – so, we may ask whether the freedom of the Germans would have been different had they lived outside of the protection of the emperor. On this theme, see Connell, “Machiavelli on Growth as an End,” 263-4.
and its inadequate foreign policy and military organization.\textsuperscript{159} In a word, while Machiavelli measures the quality of a constitution by how suitable it is to its purposes he also suggests that these two factors are critically interwoven, they are almost inseparable. And since the purposes of political life require preparedness to overcome the vicissitudes of accident and fortune, the very means with which the Venetians pursue this end undermine the institutions of the state – their unity, security and tranquillity – itself. Indeed, by emphasizing the link between social opposition and martial citizenry, Machiavelli suggests that Venice and Sparta undermined their means to self-defence and freedom. Machiavelli thus claims, these cities’ aristocratic constitutions would inevitably lead to corruption and consequently ought not to be taken as sound exemplars of governance – even if Sparta lasted eight hundred years and Venice would ultimately double Rome’s republican life.\textsuperscript{160}

Not only are Sparta and Venice impracticable models in Machiavelli’s eyes, but, even more importantly, they are both unable to reach “greatness” or the larger objective of strength, freedom, and eternal fame or glory – here standing as the only common good over any particular good. On the one hand, Machiavelli claims, “I would well believe that to make a republic that would last a long time, the mode would be to order it within like Sparta or like Venice.” On the other hand, he suggests, “I believe it is necessary to follow the Roman order and not that of the other republics…and to tolerate the enmities that arise between the people and the Senate, taking them as an inconvenience necessary to arrive at Roman greatness.”\textsuperscript{161} While security and survival are integral principles in Machiavelli’s discussion of Rome, Sparta and Venice, they are not the \textit{terminus ad quem} of the \textit{Discourses} and his conception of the republican mode of life. Machiavelli suggests that they are merely instrumental values to the values of greatness – if at all.

Greatness, not the longevity of a regime, is thus Machiavelli’s stick-and-the-carrot for those who “wish to order a republic anew.” Long-lasting and non-expansive republics seem to have a certain appeal,

\textsuperscript{159} Nonetheless, Machiavelli does praise the Venetian Council of the Ten in its ability to provide resolute answers to urgent problems: “So republics should have a like mode among their orders; and the Venetian republic, which is excellent among modern republics, has reserved authority to a few citizens who in urgent needs can decide, all in accord, without further consultation.” Machiavelli, \textit{Discourses on Livy}, 74-5.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid, 22-3. See, also, Connell, “Machiavelli on Growth as an End,” 163: “Sparta and Venice were thus ‘weak’ because they could not stand the burden of territorial acquisitions.”

\textsuperscript{161} “…credo ch’è sia necessario seguire l’ordine romano, e non quello dell’alte republiche…e quelle inimicizie tra il popolo e il senato…tollerarle, pigliandole per uno inconveniente necessario a parvenire alla romana grandezza.” Machiavelli, \textit{Discourses on Livy}, 23. In reference to the “beginnings” of Venice, Machiavelli mentions that “It turned out happily for them because of the long idleness that the site gave them, since the sea had no exit and the peoples who were afflicting Italy had no ships to be able to plague them: so any small beginning would have enabled them to come to the greatness they have.” Ibid, 7.
since, as he tells us at I.6, he “would well believe” that such an ordering could provide for the necessary power as needed for a city’s self-defense. Preferences aside, Machiavelli disregards such an objective, as he equates greatness with expansion and freedom – “a city that lives free has two ends [finiti]…one to acquire, the other to maintain itself free.” By engaging its population in intense squabbles, the Roman constitution could thus harness the energy of discord for Rome’s military preparedness – toward accomplishing what Machiavelli generally refers to as the “end” of the republic, the greatness of freedom and acquisition. For a republic to achieve greatness, it was necessary to acquire means to increase its strength, principally military power, and to channel the internal conflict of the city into a struggle for freedom and expansion.

Lastly, in spite of Machiavelli’s labelling the Venetians gentlemen “in name” – that is, members of an urban elite with exclusive civic prerogatives – they do not seem to be so different from the landed nobles of Naples, Lombardy, Rome or the Romagna. At I.55 Machiavelli makes the famous suggestion that the dual opposition between the few and the many ought to be qualified by the existence of an urban elite in city-republics, such as those in Tuscany and Venice. In any case, the distinction Machiavelli proposes here seems less historical than analytical, for these examples contradict his dictum at I.37 that “well-ordered republics have to keep the public rich and the citizens poor.” In brief, Machiavelli displays these two “nobilities” and interests – the acquisition of landed property and commercial profit, respectively – as equal threats to a collective form of self-government – the difference, Machiavelli seems to suggest, is one of magnitude and not of character.

162 “Without doubt I believe that if the thing could be held balanced in this mode, it would be the true political way of life [vivere politico] and the true quiet of a city.” Ibid, 22-3.
163 Ibid, 66. At II.2 Machiavelli equates again the “end” of “greatness” with freedom and expansion: “for it is seen through experience that cities have never expanded in dominion or in riches if that have not been in freedom,” “above all it is very marvelous to consider how much greatness Rome arrived at after it was freed from its kings.” Ibid, 129. Machiavelli discusses three different modes of aggrandizement in II.4 – a league of republics (typified by the “Tuscans”), partnerships (“which mode was observed by the Romans”), and direct dominion (“as did the Spartans and Athenians”). Machiavelli rejects the third mode because those cities were unable to keep the dominions they had once acquired – why is not Venice mentioned here? While he does not reject the first mode, he most recommends the second, which enabled partners “to live under equal laws” while maintaining the seat of the empire under its wing. Ibid, 135-7. On the “Tuscan” league option, see Connell, “Machiavelli on Growth as an End,” 266-8; and Alissa Ardito, Machiavelli and the Modern State: The Prince, the Discourses on Livy and the Extended Territorial Republic (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
164 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 111.
165 Machiavelli thus wishes to “clarify” what he truly means by the term “gentleman,” hence distinguishing between the “true” gentlemen who “command from a castle and have subjects who obey them” from the gentlemen “in name” whose “riches are founded in trade and movable things.” Ibid, 111-2.
166 Ibid, 79.
The intrinsic connection between civil and political orders, freedom and foreign policy is already present in the Discourse on the Organization of the Florentine State for Arms – the Cagione dell’Ordinanza – of 1506, in which Machiavelli provides details for the creation and structure of a new citizen militia as well as reasons for recruiting soldiers from the Florentine dominion and not from the city proper. Indeed, the Discourse on the militia allows us to witness the appearance of a vocabulary of political life that he will develop in full in his post res perditas works. For instance, Machiavelli suggests that “justice and arms [iustitia e armi],” laws and military power, are the foundations for any successful empire or state, republic or principality. Most polemically of all, Machiavelli tells his readers that, since Florence has “little justice and no arms at all [della iustitia, ne havete non molta, et dell’armi, non punto],” the city was structurally unable to cope with the potential adversities of internal tyranny and foreign servitude. Whatever its broader aims, Machiavelli’s audacious criticism of the very republic and political superiors to which the Discourse was directed suggests an essential association between domestic laws, their promotion and enforcement, and the raising of a military force as a means to bind together an otherwise loosely assembled population.

The Prince also echoes both the Discourse of 1506 and the Discourses on Livy in claiming that the connection between arms, laws and customs – domestic and foreign affairs – is the foundation of all good states. It is precisely along these suggestions that Machiavelli blames the “ambition of the Venetians” and their deleterious foreign martial enterprises – especially having brought King Louis of France into Italy, which resulted in the loss of their continental territories in the Veneto and Lombardy at the battle of Agnadello. He then criticizes Venice for its reliance on mercenary troops during their continental expansionist endeavors: “If one considers the progress of the Venetians, one will see that

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168 Niccolò Machiavelli, “Discourse on the Militia,” quoted in Mikael Hörnqvist, “Machiavelli’s Military Project and the Art of War,” in The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli, ed. John Najemy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 115. In one of his official dispatches from Verona (December 9 1509), Machiavelli makes a similar suggestion: “We hear that the Venetians in all those places [the recently acquired territories in the Veneto and Lombardy] over which they have authority are having painted a Saint Mark who instead of a book has a sword in his hand; from which it appears that they have found out to their cost that, for holding states, studies and books are not enough.” Cited in Cervelli, La Crisi, 65; see, also, Fasano Guarini, “Machiavelli and the Crisis of the Italian Republics,” 22-3.


170 See, also, the “Tercets on Ambition,” in which Machiavelli refers to the Venetians’ loss at Agnadello as a result of their lack of military spirit (“the sword”) and poor institutional organization (“the book”): “San Marco, to his cost, and perhaps in vain, discovers late that he needs to hold the sword and not the book in his hand. / Yet in a different way man struggles to rule, for the most part; and according as he gains more, he loses it sooner and with greater reproach.” Niccolò Machiavelli, “Tercets on Ambition,” in Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others, ed. Allan Gilbert, Vol. II (Durham: Duke University Press, 1989), 739.
they acted securely and gloriously when they themselves made war…but when they began to fight on land…they followed the customs of war in Italy.” Lastly, Machiavelli considers that the Venetians instigated the divisions between Guelfs and Ghibellines within their own territories, an event that led to the demise of their own continental empire – since the Guelfs in the occupied cities united and revolted against them. Generally, Machiavelli’s reference to Venice in The Prince pertains to their inability to – or rather abandonment of – a more glorious way of engaging in war, their reliance on mercenary troops and their inability to centralize, as the Romans did, the subject territories as part of a broader republican system.

We notice a similar argument in The Art of War, in which Machiavelli criticizes Venice’s deleterious military organization and methods of war, though we also observe the distinction made in The Prince between its poor continental expansionism and its maritime enterprises. In this work, most likely composed in 1519 and the only major text actually published during Machiavelli’s lifetime, a famous condottiere, Fabrizio Colonna, undertakes the task of persuading his interlocutors – three members of the Florentine elite – about the revival of the military culture of the ancient Romans. Colonna then observes that it was “[T]heir own incompetence, not that of their people” that led the leaders of the Venetian republic to desist from creating a citizen army. Even more, Machiavelli’s mouthpiece comments that the Venetians’ poor decisions abroad were the result of “a bad measure in government.” Following the line of reasoning introduced in both the Discourses and The Prince, the Art of War continues with the exposition of the Venetian republic as an unsuitable model of organization, in large part as a result of their deficient political and military means.

171 In any case, while in the Discourses Machiavelli notices that the Venetians provided no military training or role to their people, in The Prince he explicitly mentions that, when they performed on-sea, “with their own gentry and armed plebs, [the Venetians] performed most virtuously.” Machiavelli, The Prince, 51.
172 Ibid, 13-5, 27-8, 84 and 100.
173 However, Machiavelli does seem to suggest that, in spite of their poorly-organized military projects, the Venetians were still to be praised for their civil order. As Fabrizio Colonna observes at I.58, “And if the Venetians had been wise in this, as in all their other regulations, they would have made a new monarchy in the world [E se I Viniziani fussero stati savi in questo come in tutti li altri loro ordini, egliarebbono fatto una nuova monarchia nel mondo].” Niccolò Machiavelli, “The Art of War,” in Niccolò Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others, ed. Allan Gilbert, Vol.II (Durham: Duke University Press, 1969), 568. For Italian renditions of the Art of War, I have relied on the Edizione Nazionale – Niccolò Machiavelli, “L’Arte della Guerra,” in Arte della Guerra e Scritti Politici Minori, eds. Jean-Jacques Marchand, Denis Fachard and Giorgio Masi (Rome: Salerno, 2001).
174 “I shall never depart, in giving examples of anything, from my Romans. If we consider their life and the organization of their republic, we shall see there many things not impossible for introduction into any state into which there is still left something good.” Machiavelli, “Art of War,” 571.
175 Ibid, 726
176 Ibid, 568.
177 As Hörnqvist has noted, unlike the Discourses and its virtuous warlords, “In the Art of War the quality of virtù is attributed to orders, institutions, collectivities, actions, and horses, and only rarely to individuals.” Thus, whereas Venice
Despite his intellectual commitment to a classical understanding of politics and the good life, neorepublican scholars consider that Machiavelli was a staunch enemy of the Venetian model of republicanism. As Skinner puts it, Machiavelli was “the great exception to [the] rule” because “he exhibits none of the fashionable admiration for the Venetian constitution at all.” The main reason behind Machiavelli’s defenestration of the Venetian republic is that the Venetians were unable to embrace, or rather acknowledge, social conflicts as necessary for the creation and maintenance of a vivere politico. As a result of their enclosed system of political life, the Venetians forestalled the equilibrium of forces, conducive to civil freedom. Viroli brings this point further by suggesting that, in spite of Machiavelli’s invitation at I.5-6 to reason about two possible answers concerning the principle of civil discord, Machiavelli nonetheless concludes that “the constitution of a city must be designed in a way that allows the inhabitants to increase in number and gives the populace…their place in institutional life.”

For McCormick, Venice represents the customary aristocratic perception of popular “unruliness” as well as the electoral and institutional attempts by socioeconomic and political elites to legitimate their desire for domination. More to the point, McCormick asserts that for Machiavelli, “Venice is an unrealizable model for grandi who wish to dominate a regime…” because the Venetian constitutional system “undermined social dynamism by prohibiting the people’s participation in military affairs.” Consequently, Machiavelli wished to persuade his young Florentine readership that a form of “Roman” guild republicanism, not a “Venetian” oligarchic republic, was the only means to contain the domineering desire of the upper political and economic sectors of the city as well as to empower the Florentine people.

is praised for its domestic order, this suggestion is mediated by the ability of other republics, more precisely the Rome, to properly organize, in a sound institutional manner, their means for military actions. Hörnqvist, “Machiavelli’s Military Project,” 124.

179 Viroli continues, “The squabbles and conflicts that a Roman-like constitution is likely to produce should be considered inevitable inconveniences if the city is to remain free and able, if need be, to expand.” Viroli, “Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics,” 158.
180 “…Sparta and Venice satisfy the young grandi’s definition of liberty: they facilitate the young grandi’s exercise of offices over the people on their own terms...This is precisely the kind of oligarchic republic that was instituted in Florence when the Medici were expelled in 1494.” McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 47-8; also, Najemy, “Society, Class and the State,” 104.
181 McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 54.
182 Ibid; by the same author, “Subdue the Senate,” 723-4.
Similarly, Lefort and Vatter consider Machiavelli’s view of Venice in the early works as related to his critique of the traditional view that unity and peace were the means to achieve republican virtù. While both authors agree that Machiavelli at times provides a more nuanced account of the Venetian constitution than hitherto thought, they contend nonetheless that these ambiguities are superseded by Rome’s ability to adapt to the changing times, especially during adversity. The Venetian model of internal peace and security simply contradicts the radical and agonistic conception of the political that the Machiavelli of these interpreters champions. Thus, while modern Venice symbolizes the aristocratic ethos of authority and command, ancient Rome represents the expression of agency and freedom, whereby popular civil and military action are the manifestation of “the fundamental requirement for the preservation of the free political life…”

Lastly, Strauss, Mansfield, Rahe and Sullivan suggest that while Machiavelli does indeed conceive of Venice as a faulty model, this is less as a result of his interest in the domestic character of freedom as non-domination or some form of popular democracy than his concern with martial glory and territorial expansionism. As Mansfield posits, Machiavelli’s critique of Venice is as instrumental as his praise for the popular “guard of liberty”: “If the Roman state had been more quiet, Machiavelli says, this inconvenience would have followed: it would have been weaker, and the way to greatness would have been cut off. If Rome had wished to remove the causes of tumult it would also have removed the causes of growth.”

In disapproving of the aristocratic domestic quietism and deleterious military enterprises of the Venetians, Machiavelli contends that there is no choice between quiet and empire – “his argument had been that Sparta and Venice must be rejected as representing themselves an untenable middle way,” observes Mansfield. Put simply, these scholars suggest that Machiavelli’s Venice is not a mere analytical unit of comparison, but a crucial element in his modern conception of the political; Venice

184 “Il est vain…d'ériger la sécurité au principe de l'action politique, car les effets du temps ne sauraient être maîtrisés par quiconque ; la nécessité conduit où la raison ne voulait aller…Ce qui donne à l'État sa raison, ce ne sont pas les concepts d'équilibre, de sécurité et de conservation, c'est la nécessité où il se trouve de faire face aux accidents que font naître en son sein les ambition nourries contre des voisins ou bien celle que d'autres conçoivent à ses dépens Lefort, *Le Travail de l’Oeuvre de Machiavel*, 481-2; also, Vatter, *Between Form and Event*, 106-10.
185 Ibid, 110. “Machiavel met d'abord en évidence les avantages du régime vénitien, habile à exclure le peuple des affaires publiques, mais signale au passage que l'efficacité du système tient à la faiblesse numérique des dominés… la forme des institutions romaines...est la seule bonne, qu'il n'y a pas de moyen terme entre les deux modèles de républiques examinées…” Lefort, *Le Travail de l’Oeuvre de Machiavel*, 481.
is in fact representative of an old model of political rationality and moral virtue that ought to be deprecated and replaced by a diametrically opposed idea of politics based on interest, domination and power.\(^{188}\)

Overall, the early works loudly proclaim Machiavelli’s pessimism concerning the Venetian model of republicanism and foreign affairs. Even when the Venetians proved to be militarily successful – for instance, in their conquests of city-ports in the eastern Mediterranean Sea – the Venetians were, in the eyes of Machiavelli, simply unable to cope with, combat and control, fortune and adversity. That is, what we find from the *Discourse* on the militia and the early letters to *The Prince*, the *Discourses* and the *Art of War* is Machiavelli’s consistent adherence to the idea that sovereignty and freedom were the consequence of the connection between domestic and foreign affairs, between civic life and military action. The early works show the existence of a close correlation between the social and political organization of a polity and its expansionist and military capabilities. Hence, if ancient republican Rome exemplifies the sound linkage between the domestic and the foreign, the mercantile republic of Venice symbolizes, in spite of its longevity, the inability of modern states to struggle with the difficulties of political life *tout court*.

\(^{188}\) As Rahe suggests, in conceiving of Venice (and Sparta) in opposition to Rome, “Machiavelli pretends to follow Plato, Aristotle and Augustine in preferring peace to war, and rest to political ambition…Having offered the bait, however, he quickly makes the switch arguing that such a balancing act cannot indefinitely be sustained and that his lawgiver should fortify the city against the worst…” Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 41-2 and 49; also, Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 102 and 112.
Chapter 2

From Inequality to “Wonderful Equality:”

Society and Civil Discord in the Florentine Histories

1 Introduction:

Machiavelli’s late republicanism has, by and large, remained obscure as a result of the recurrent tendency among interpreters of the Florentine to search for his political (especially republican) lessons in his Discourses on Livy – and, at times, in his letters, The Prince and the Art of War.\(^{189}\) As a consequence of this interpretive inclination, most of those scholars who have undertaken serious studies of Machiavelli’s post-1520 works have recurrently advocated for an unqualified and complete connection between the Discourses (and his praise for the martial and communal virtues introduced therein) and the Florentine Histories (which is consequently seen as a critical assessment of Florence’s republican experience in the context of a “Roman” vocabulary of politics).\(^{190}\)

Significantly, in The Prince and the Discourses Machiavelli recurrently attributed collective and axiomatic traits to the nobles and the people. As discussed in the previous chapter, Machiavelli ascribes to the nobles the inherent desire to dominate the people and power while he assigns the people the wish to live free from the domination of the nobles, which involves the capacity to constrain the destabilizing tyrannical ethos of the elites, as well. The interests and agency of the people make them indispensable for the safety and maintenance of a prince or the promotion of freedom and security in a republican context. It is the first purpose of this chapter to suggest that Machiavelli’s post-1520 political theorizing, particularly as articulated in his Florentine Histories, complicates and even

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\(^{189}\) As Leo Strauss has famously claimed, “The Prince is as comprehensive as the Discourses: each book contains everything that Machiavelli knows.” Strauss, Thoughts on Machiavelli, 17.

\(^{190}\) “Indeed, a survey of all his works might lead one to say that the Florentine Histories is his most contextual work, the one where he makes the powers impinging on him, which he is neither free of nor subservient to, the subject of his reflection. That is perhaps why the Florentine Histories, as opposed to The Prince and the Discourses on Livy, makes so little of innovation and founding in politics and does not dwell on the 'new prince' or 'new modes and orders.'...” Harvey C. Mansfield, introduction to Florentine Histories, xii; later reprinted in Harvey C. Mansfield, “An Introduction to Machiavelli’s Florentine Histories,” in Machiavelli’s Virtue (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 133.
collapses this binary sense of social opposition characteristic of his earlier political vision.\footnote{191} Drawing on a series of appreciations recently developed by Italian Renaissance historians, this chapter shows that while Machiavelli’s analysis of the Florentine nobility highlights their desire for political domination, he nonetheless assigns the people a novel appreciation and capacity for power and authority.\footnote{192} In lieu of a clear-cut conception of popular and noble purposes and agency, Machiavelli’s understanding of society and civil discord reflects the dynamism of his city’s history and thus reveals a much more nuanced moment of political reflection than has been hitherto thought. In fact, nowhere in the *Histories* – or in any of his post-1520 political works – do we find concepts or terms that may echo our author’s famous populist dictum in *Discourses* I.5 that, since the people’s objectives are more honest than those of the great, the people should be made the “guardians of freedom.”\footnote{193} Crucially, as will become clear by the second section of this chapter, Machiavelli’s vocabulary of society and discord becomes much more complex, as he will now deploy a considerably larger number of terms to position the nobles, the people, and the newly introduced plebs, as collective social and political actors. In other words, in analyzing the history of his city Machiavelli abandons the binary analysis of the *Discourses* and *The Prince*, and instead proposes a multifaceted, and at times tripartite, categorization of the warring parties – a language he re-applies in his other post-1520 texts.

In this respect, Machiavelli’s altered conceptions of society and the quarrels of politics imply, not only that Florentine history can hardly be evaluated from the vantage point of his previous political and typological considerations, but also that his own analysis of power and authority was in need of new concepts and vistas. In other words, it is as part of this new “historical” awareness – that is, the distinction between the ancient and the modern contexts – that the Florentine comes to see nobles and people alike as carriers of the hubris that threatens the civil way of life and the common good of the community as a whole.\footnote{194} The Machiavelli of the *Histories* “de-essentializes” the character of the

\footnote{191} I used the “Istorie Fiorentine,” in *Opere Storiche di Niccolò Machiavelli*, eds. Alessandro Montecucci and Carlo Varotti, II Vols. (Rome: Salerno, 2010) for the Italian text. I have also consulted the 1532 and 1551 Bernardo Giunta editions of the *Histories* (available at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze Serie Magliabechi 19.3.135 and 19.6.111, respectively).

\footnote{192} This chapter is most indebted to the work of Guidi, “La Teoria delle ‘Tre Ambizioni,’” 241-60; Bausi, *Machiavelli*, 303-5; Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1228-58; by the same author, *A Great and Wretched City*, 77-104; and Black, *Machiavelli*, 242-62.

\footnote{193} Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, 17-9; compare to Guicciardini, “Considerations,” 394-5.

\footnote{194} Consequently, the political vision that Machiavelli depicts in this and other post-1520 texts clearly defies the neorepublican conception of politics as the activity of both ruling and being ruled, something that neither political group seems to properly exemplify in the *Histories*. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, ed. and trans. Ernest Barker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 1332b-1333a.
nobility and the people – a theme that he had recurrently applied in his earlier works – and consequently conceives of social groupings and their inherent antagonisms as shaped by the mercantile nature of the new leading groups [*nutricati dalla mercanzia*].\(^{195}\) Contrary to one of the most predominant interpretations of Machiavelli’s political thought, his later republicanism can hardly be seen as straightforwardly endorsing a classical and humanist vocabulary of civic *virtù*.\(^{196}\)

Thus, the analysis that follows is driven by two main questions: To what extent did the Machiavelli of the *Florentine Histories* modify those paradigms and axioms that he had famously introduced and discussed in his main political works? How did these concepts survive, if at all, in Machiavelli’s *Histories*, and how do they help the Florentine define his theoretical considerations on the status of Florence and of modern politics in general? If we discover that the late Machiavelli had actually told us a different story from that of his earlier political tracts, we might also be tempted to reconsider our interpretive habits concerning the Florentine’s approach to politics. Understanding why such paradoxes appear in the *Histories* – the utterly ambitious ethos of the popular sectors, the similarity of desires and acts on behalf of both nobles and the people as well as the increasingly complex and tripartite vocabulary of social classification – suggests that students of Machiavelli ought to be cautious against overstressing the “Roman” quality of his political theorizing, and that the political lessons contained in this and other post-1520 texts may be seen as part of the evolution of Machiavelli’s analysis of political life.

2 **Prolegomenon: Florentine Histories III.1**

Focused on the mid-to-late fourteenth century, the introductory section to book III gives one of Machiavelli’s most famous theoretical considerations concerning the role of conflict, politics and society in the context of the *Florentine Histories*.\(^{197}\) Moreover, III.1 ought to be interpreted as an *intermezzo*, or rather a transformative moment, between the events and themes recounted in the previous book and the ones to be introduced in book III. For instance, it provides a short summary of the preceding sections dating back to the origins of Florence (II.1-2) and concludes with a comment

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\(^{195}\) Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 50.

\(^{196}\) Additionally, while my interpretation comes as a direct challenge to neorepublican interpretations of the Florentine, it also seeks to defy a larger number of the prevailing approaches in the Anglo-American academic world that see in the *Histories* a mere recycling of the political themes introduced in Machiavelli’s main political works. On this interpretive problem, see, for instance, Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 209-10; Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City*, 5-7.

\(^{197}\) On the importance of the introductory chapters of the *Histories*, see Gilbert, “Machiavelli’s *Istorie Fiorentine*,” 141-7; and Bausi, *Machiavelli*, 260-1.
on the sociological character and political nature of the Florentines by the time of the final defeat of
the feudal nobility in the mid-to-late fourteenth century (II.36-42). More important, not only does
this section propose a succinct analysis of the city’s early communal history, it also introduces one of
the most theoretically robust discussions of the Histories as a whole. Not surprisingly, then, at III.1
Machiavelli thinks it useful to return to republican Rome as a model of analysis and to apply some
political themes and concepts analogous to the ones present in The Prince and the Discourses –
especially in chapters IX and I.4-6, 17, 37, 49 and 55. As suggested by a variety of Machiavelli
scholars, at III.1 of the Histories Machiavelli draws a series
of parallels between the civil conflicts of the Romans and those of the Florentines in a way that seems
to correspond with his earlier praise of Rome’s freedom and power, and his negative appraisal of
Florence’s history of corruption and domination.

The grave and natural enmities that exist between the men of the people and the nobles, caused by the
wish of the latter to command and the former not to obey, are the cause of all evils that arise in cities. [...] This kept Rome disunited, and…has kept Florence divided…For the enmities between the people and the
nobles at the beginning of Rome that were resolved by disputing were resolved in Florence by fighting.
Those in Rome ended with a law, those in Florence with the exile and death of many citizens; those in
Rome always increased military virtue, those in Florence eliminated it altogether; those in Rome brought
the city from equality in the citizens to a very great inequality, those in Florence reduced it from inequality
to a wonderful equality. This diversity of effects may have been caused by the diverse ends these two
peoples had, for the people of Rome desired to enjoy the highest honors together with the nobles, while
the people of Florence fought to be alone in the government without the participation of the nobles. And
because the desire of the Roman people was more reasonable, offenses to the nobles came to be more
bearable, so that the nobility would yield easily and without resorting to arms. [...] On the other side the
desire of the Florentine people was injurious and unjust, so that the nobility readied greater forces for its
own defense...In Florence, when the people conquered, the nobles were left deprived of the magistracies,
and if they wanted to regain them, it was necessary for them not only to but to appear similar to men
of the people in their conduct, spirit, and mode of living. [...] So the virtue in arms and generosity of spirit
that were in the nobility were eliminated, and in the people, where they never had been, they could not be
rekindled; thus did Florence become ever more humble and abject. And whereas Rome, when its virtue
was converted into arrogance, was reduced to such straits that it could not maintain itself without a prince,
Florence arrived at the point that it could easily have been reordered in any form of government by a wise lawgiver.  

(1) *Debate vs. Fight*: The “diversity of humors” kept the Romans “disunited” and the Florentines “divided,” and since “diverse effects” may result from similar causes “the enmities between the people and the nobles at the beginning of Rome’s republic that were resolved by disputing were resolved in Florence by fighting.”  

(2) *Creation of laws vs. deaths and exiles*: While the conflicts between the Roman nobles and plebs “ended with laws” and moderation, those between Florentine nobles and the people resulted in violence and “the exile and death of many citizens.”  

(3) *Military virtù vs. the destruction of martial virtù altogether*: The “moderate” form of civil conflict that Machiavelli had referred to in his *Discourses* led the Romans to “military virtue,” while the civil quarrels of Florence “eliminated it altogether.”  

(4) *And most polemically of all, Inequality vs. Equality*: Machiavelli suggests that while the discords of Rome “brought the city from equality in the citizens to a very great inequality [disaguaglianza grandissima], those in Florence reduced it from inequality to a wonderful equality [mirabile ugualità].”

It is at this fourth moment of evaluation that we notice how Machiavelli reverses (shockingly, perhaps?) the parallels between Rome and Florence: bypassing almost five hundred years of Roman history Machiavelli stresses that whereas the moderate quarrels of Rome – that is, the *political* struggles of the Roman patricians and their plebeian counterparts – resulted in “great inequality,” the supposedly toxic enmities between the Florentine nobility and the people led to a “wonderful equality.”  

The Florentine returns to the typically Machiavellian vocabulary of the “wonderful” or “miraculous” in order to rationalize, or even debunk, what is conventionally held as inexplicable – or simply considered as common opinion. In the case of this section, we may say, Machiavelli’s appeal to the *mirabile* status of the city is a reference to the necessity of explaining actions and events at which canonical humanists – he is probably thinking of Poggio Bracciolini and Leonardo Bruni here – have only marveled.

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201 Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 105-6.
202 Ibid, 105.
203 Ibid.
204 Ibid.
205 Ibid.
206 For examples of Machiavelli’s use of the “wonderful” in his texts, see *The Prince*, 22 and 52. On his rhetorical style and the juxtaposition of the “marvelous” and the “reasonable,” see Rebhorn, *Foxes and Lions*, 199-201. On the theme of
Certainly, Machiavelli would not have been Machiavelli if he had spouted all this humanist hogwash with a straight face. There is certainly a dose of satire – if not outright criticism – behind his words concerning the wonderful egalitarian status of Florence. For instance, Leonardo Bruni’s funeral oration to Nanni Strozzi of 1428 considers the Florentine constitution as “popular” precisely because it secured “liberty and equality for all citizens,” and because “the hope of attaining office and raising oneself up is the same for all.”\textsuperscript{207} Bruni’s Periclean oration and his claim concerning the equality of the Florentines is arguably a return to the Aristotelian language of isonomia – as Aristotle and other Greek theorists had described the equal condition of a society in which office was accessible to its members by virtue of their natural equal footing.\textsuperscript{208}

Needless to say Machiavelli would not agree with Bruni’s epic view of the equality and liberty of quattrocento Florence. His heavy sarcasm actually undermines the Brunian idealization of the Florentine somewhat broad participatory politics as the basis for a true vivere civile. In spite of Machiavelli’s rejection of Bruni’s humanist vision of Florentine equality as comune opinione, this does not necessarily mean that, as we shall see below, his appeal to the “miraculous” status of Florence ought to be taken as a mere comic inversion, a parody of everything he had conveyed about ancient Rome in the Discourses. Much to the contrary, he distinguishes here between his predecessors who had blindly accepted the Florentine tradition and himself and his audience, who share (or are at least willing to share) his sophistication and openness.

The ambiguity of Machiavelli’s suggestion, with its anti-humanist connotations, shows the inherent tension of the praise for the city’s equality as present in the works of his predecessors and the necessity to encounter, in new and more complex forms, the sociological character and dimensions of the Florentine sense of “equality.” It is precisely for this reason that appealing to irony at this instance is to render Machiavelli’s inquiry into mere rhetorical lure, unable to make these events any more intelligible and rational than those of his humanist counterparts. Instead, Machiavelli invites his readers to remain skeptical and detached, encourage them not only to marvel at the world before their eyes, but also, and even more importantly, to analyze and explain the Florentine situation through a critical lens.

\textsuperscript{207} Quoted in Najemy, A History of Florence, 209.\textsuperscript{208} As suggested by Pocock, Bruni’s funeral oration is modelled on Pericles’ “Funeral Oration,” which hints at Bruni’s idealization of the Florentine model of citizenship and governance as of equal standard to that of Athens. Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 88-9.
Also, contrary to his earlier discussions of Rome – for instance, at I.2-6 of the *Discourses* – now Machiavelli relies on the history of the Romans to highlight those aspects of the history of his own city that he deems theoretically relevant.\(^{209}\) As a result, Machiavelli underscores the puzzling situation at which the Florentines arrived: on the one hand, Machiavelli certainly identified the ancient feudal nobility with the psychological character, objectives and political problems which he had observed in his earlier political texts. The Florentine nobles recurrently rejected the legitimacy of any authority other than their own, consistently perpetrated violent acts against the people, and routinely fought against the laws that had been established as a result of the early civic republican order of the city.\(^{210}\)

One would then expect Machiavelli to sympathize, and even embrace, the decline of the noble class and the popular party’s ability to eliminate whatever vestiges of a feudal nobility were left in the city. On the other hand, Machiavelli notices, in an almost mournful fashion, that the decline of the landed nobility led to the absence of martial ferocity in Florence and the city’s consequent requirement to purchase security – a theme that Machiavelli consistently mocks in books III-VIII.\(^{211}\) Even more importantly, Machiavelli recognizes here the rise of a novel form of social organization and political leadership – that of an urban merchant class – who not only were inexperienced in the art of war but also provoked novel dangers, which, as we shall soon see, were as perilous as those associated with the nobility. Indeed, books III-VIII consistently underscore the transformative element of the new popular leadership of the city, its commercial and mercantile ethos and, even more importantly, its domineering character and desire for political power.\(^{212}\)

\(^{209}\) Notice, for instance, Machiavelli’s use of the term “people [*popolo*]” in the context of this comparison and with respect to the historical development of the Roman republic – especially when he closes the parallel by referring to the “diverse end these two peoples had.” Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 105. I refer to the distinctive ‘modern’ usage of *popolo* in Machiavelli’s vocabulary in the following section. Additionally, it is worth considering the parallels in Machiavelli’s vocabulary: “equality” vs. “inequality” is opposed to “great inequality” vs. “wonderful equality” in the second part of the comparison. Also, consider the use of the adjective “wonderful” or *mirabile* in the second clause of the second sentence which is directly opposed to the adjective “very great” or *grandissima* in its first clause, in reference to Rome’s final social and political situation after four hundred years of republican government. Cabrini, *Per Una Valutazione*, 367-8; Marietti, *L’Eccezione Fiorentina*, 108.

\(^{210}\) On the theme of the role of the nobility in the late works see, for instance, Bonadeo, “The Role of the Grandi,” 25-7; and Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City*, 86.

\(^{211}\) For instance, in reference to the war against Milan and the death of Duke Giovan Galeazzo Visconti in 1402, Machiavelli jokingly asserts, “And thus death was always more friendly to the Florentines than any other friends, and more powerful to save them than their own virtue.” Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 145.

\(^{212}\) Machiavelli consistently underscores the financial rationale behind the protracted war against Visconti’s Milan: at IV.14 he observes that “it pained [the popular nobles] not to be able to carry on a war without loss to themselves,” in reference to the introduction of two typically Florentine fiscal institutions, the dowry fund or *Monte Commune* and the *Catasto*. Introduced in 1427 as a means to promote a new system of public credit, the *Catasto* was taxation system that had as its main objectives the listing of the citizens’ goods and to calculate fiscal obligations on different types of goods and wealth (whether real property or movable goods and assets). Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 257-60. Also, Machiavelli underscores the merchant ethos of the ruling class by claiming that Rinaldo degli Albizzi, the leader of the oligarchic party
Certainly, in book II Machiavelli first recounts the quarrels between the nobles among themselves, followed by the struggles between the Florentine people and the feudal nobility – and his classification of both groups is consistent with the characteristically Machiavellian contrast between noble and popular behavior. For most of the discussion, which begins with the fights among the Buondelmonti and Uberti noble families in 1215 and ends with the downward integration of the nobility into the popular elite, Machiavelli continues with the clear-cut narrative of noble and popular ideologies that he had recurrently applied in his *Prince* and *Discourses.* While the Florentine nobles are consistently displayed as a warrior-like class, whose identity is expressed through violence, arrogance and capriciousness, the people of the first two books are at times presented as a moderate and law-abiding group, whose main objective is precisely to enforce the rule of law in order to contain the misbehavior of their noble counterparts. In that regard, most of book II narrates the institutional innovations that paved the way for the final victory of the increasingly prosperous popular banking and merchant groups, an event which resulted – as indicated by the book’s end – in the thorough abolition of all land-based privileges as well as the complete exclusion of the nobles from political and military endeavors.

Nonetheless, in spite of the suggestions in book II that the people maintained a prudential sense of agency – that is, they supported and encouraged the rule of law – the fact that they were capable of eradicating an inherently powerful and martially-minded nobility already suggests that they were far from displaying the law-abiding attributes of the people that we see in Machiavelli’s earlier political works. The popular sectors of these sections already show the capacity for the destabilizing ethos in opposition to total political domination equal to their aristocratic opponents, which consequently indicates the people’s lack of modest political aspirations as typified by an Aristotelian capacity to rule and be ruled.

This suggestion is not hard to retrieve from the text: at III.1 Machiavelli explicitly claims that the desires of the Florentine people at this historical stage were “injurious and unjust” in that they engaged

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and the commissioner of the Florentine troops in their fifteenth century war against Lucca, “from being a commissioner [of the troops] he had become a merchant [era diventato mercatante].” Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 165.


214 Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 104. The political elites of the mid-thirteenth century were composed by “a landowning class with ties to their ancestral homes in the *contado* [the city’s surrounding country] and a warrior class whose knights constituted the cavalry of the communal army.” These events and the final slip of the nobility took place over a rather long period of time, a progression which, “was rather a process of evolution within the elite itself…” Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 64 and 75.
with the nobility not so much to share and enjoy political honors with them, but rather to have the
government of the city to themselves.\textsuperscript{215} Consequently, Machiavelli adds, the laws and institutions
introduced by the now victorious popular sectors were simply beneficial to their own party. And the
defeat of the Florentine nobles, Machiavelli notes at II.42, “was so great and afflicted their party so
much that they never again dared to take up arms against the people; indeed they became more humane
and abject”: the feudal nobility integrated into the novel economic and political powers of the city,
becoming members of the elite and commercial strata of the Florentine people.\textsuperscript{216}

While this critical instance in Florentine history may suggest that Florence is in fact a “failed state,”
by the end of III.1 Machiavelli almost stubbornly reverses the parallel between Rome and Florence in
a way that gives further emphasis to this moment of paradox in the history of his city – and in his own
comparative analysis. Whereas Machiavelli first criticizes the quarrels of Florence – since they led to
the demise of the military ethos of the nobility and the rise of the “bourgeois” mentality of its popular
counterparts – he then radically shifts gears and declares: “\textit{Florence arrived at the point that it could
[be] easily reordered in any form of government by a wise lawgiver}.\textsuperscript{217} In reaching this conclusion,
that Florence had arrived at a transformational moment, Machiavelli indicates less that in reforming
the \textit{ordini} of their city the Florentines ought to imitate and pursue the path of the ancients and more
that the deeper axioms and social dynamics of the city simply denied Rome’s prescriptive value.\textsuperscript{218} By
the time of the \textit{Histories} the earlier populist maxims that the people are better anchors of freedom –
because of their ability to embrace and act according to the rule of law and the leadership of the “heads”
of the republic – gives way to the wholesale abolition of the distinction between noble and popular
character and agency.

Already in these few, but nonetheless revealing, lines we notice two puzzles (or contradictions?)
relative to Machiavelli’s praise of the Romans in the first book of his \textit{Discourses}: (1) Florence’s

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  \item \textsuperscript{215} Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 105.
  \item \textsuperscript{216} Machiavelli repeats this point at the end of III.1: “In Florence, when the people conquered, the nobles were left deprived of the magistracies, and if they wanted to regain them, it was necessary for them not only to be but to appear similar to men of the people in their conduct, spirit and mode of living....So the virtue in arms and generosity of spirit that were in the nobility were eliminated...thus did Florence become ever more humble and abject.” Ibid, 104-6.
  \item \textsuperscript{217} Machiavelli refers to Florence's potential political re-founding in the third-person singular of the present conditional tense (“could be easily”), not in the conditional perfect (“could have been easily”) as translated by Banfield and Mansfield. Ibid, 106. My emphasis. Compare to \textit{Discourses} I.49, where he suggests that the Florentines have “ever ordered [the city’s institutions] for the common utility but always for the purpose of their party, which has made not order but greater disorder in that city,” then adding that in cities like Florence, with “disordered beginnings,” so many difficulties emerged that they are never able to reorder themselves.” Machiavelli, \textit{Discourses on Livy}, 101.
  \item \textsuperscript{218} Thus, Skinner’s suggestion that for Machiavelli “the exhilarating hope…is that, if we can find the cause of Rome’s success, we can repeat it” is rather alien to the context of the \textit{Histories}. Skinner, \textit{Machiavelli}, 59.
\end{itemize}
equality shares little, if anything, with the republican equality of Rome; and, as a consequence of the first point, (2) it was still possible to found a new (republican?) power in Florence. Based on these premises it is fair to say that the social conflicts that had exhausted the power and authority of the nobility in favor of the popular ranks had affected Florence’s social and political ethos to such an extreme that their purportedly negative and violent conflictual nature now seemed to contain something positive, and something capable of altering its “corrupt” nature. In any case, these suggestions still fail to address a series of crucial questions: why does Machiavelli, in such a concise and yet theoretically pivotal part of the book, leave open the possibility for political reform in Florence? In a word, why does the Florentine suggest that the result of the city’s ubiquitous and poisonous civil discords could be a happy one – if at all?

The most accredited interpreters of Histories III.1, especially those who take seriously “Machiavelli’s language and reflection...when it comes to contradiction, irony or provocation,” suggest that an answer to these questions is to be found beyond the confines of the Florentine Histories itself, more precisely in the earlier Discourses on Livy, sections I.37 and 55. Sasso, for instance, considers that III.1 of the Histories continues with the line of thought Machiavelli had championed in his most republican treatise in suggesting that this section is not only reminiscent of but a direct allusion to Discourses I.37 – in which Machiavelli reflects on the failures of the agrarian laws at the time of the Gracchi and the consequent decline and ultimate fall of the Roman republic. More important still, Sasso describes this section of the Histories as “paradoxical,” arguing that we should see it as centrally connected to Machiavelli’s pessimism and fatalism by the time he composed the history of the city: “the ‘abjectness’ and ‘humility’ to which Machiavelli makes reference here” Sasso comments, “are but one and the same with the ‘wonderful equality’ that Florence finally had attained by the end of Machiavelli’s ‘parable.’” For Sasso, Machiavelli reverses the typically republican vocabulary of the equality of the Discourses in order to indicate the level of corruption at which Florence had arrived. To follow Sasso’s logic: whenever Machiavelli speaks of “equality” in the Florentine context he refers

219 On the servile origins of Florence, see Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 7-8; compare to Florentine Histories, 54-5, wherein Machiavelli engages in a discussion of the various theses concerning the foundation of Florence (especially those espoused by Bracciolini, Bruni and Poliziano) and provides a rather vague conclusion of his own. On this theme, see Nicolai Rubinstein, “Machiavelli e gli Origini di Firenze,” Rivista Storica Italiana 79 (1967): 952-69.


221 Sasso, Machiavelli: La Storiografia, 193.

to “corrupt(ing) equality.” Sasso’s Machiavelli, then, compares Rome and Florence, not to express any novel or positive instruction, but rather to display his sense of resignation concerning the state of present-day Florence.

Similarly, Bock posits that the conceptual shift present in this section of the Histories is in fact congruent with Machiavelli’s suggestions at the end of the aforementioned chapter of the Discourses. Bock suggests that Machiavelli seemed rather dissatisfied with “his introductory and anthropological explanation of...civil discord as [the] cause of...Roman liberty [at, I.4-6],” and consequently “added an epilogue [that is, section I.37]” to account for the historical circumstances that led to the decline of Rome's republic. Drawing closely on the vocabulary of other neorepublican scholars such as Skinner and Viroli, Bock further observes: “This parallel in the Discorsi shows that the similar contradiction in the Istorie Fiorentine is not a mistake or superfluous, but deliberate and decisive.” For Bock, the important lesson of Histories III.1 is not so much to underscore a transformative moment in Machiavelli’s analysis of political life, but instead to cast light on the distinction between the virtuous city and the corrupt one – between moderation and customs on the one hand, and selfishness and factionalism on the other – as Machiavelli himself had already done in his Discourses.

Mansfield too sees this section as intrinsically linked to the inquiries of the earlier Discourses: while he notices the novelty of Machiavelli’s vocabulary concerning popular agency at III.1 – “What makes the Florentine people thirsty for partisan victory?” – he nonetheless suggests that for Machiavelli the universal and otherworldly character of the Christian religion is the main malaise of modernity – as he categorically puts it, “Christianity is responsible for the special character of parties in Florence.”

More to the point, Mansfield considers this section, or what he refers to as Machiavelli’s “second inquiry,” as primarily concerned with the people’s destruction of the nobility’s military virtue “with no stated advantage to themselves,” a fact that Mansfield connects to the suggestions made in the

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223 In the context of this chapter, Sasso tells us, “equality means and could mean corruption [‘equalità’ vale e può valere ‘corruzione’].” Ibid, 189. My translation.
224 Ibid, 198; and by the same author, Niccolò Machiavelli: Storia del Suo Pensiero Politico (Naples: Instituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici, 1958), 494-6.
225 Bock underscores three particular aspects of Discourses I.37: (1) the necessity of checking the ambition of the nobles, without which the decline of the republic would have come at a much earlier stage; (2) the plebs’ recourse to domestic violence concerning economic interests; and (3) the Gracchi’s agrarian laws which continued with the process of disintegration instead of temporizing the struggles between Rome’s social groupings. Bock, “Civil Discord,” 191-3.
226 Ibid, 191.
Discourses concerning glory as the only and everlasting objective for republics.\textsuperscript{228} For Mansfield, then, the quarrels between Florence’s nobles and the people are the result of “a supernatural force or the belief in a supernatural force...For a Christian people the supreme honor is salvation in the afterlife, in which all men may share a ‘wonderful equality.’”\textsuperscript{229}

As per Machiavelli’s suggestion that Florence could be reorganized “in any form of government,” del Lucchese – following in the footsteps of Lefort and Althusser – asserts that we can assimilate this passage to Discourses I.55, wherein Machiavelli establishes that a republic cannot be constructed “where there are so many ‘gentlemen,’ and, vice versa, that a principality cannot be established where so much ‘equality’ obtains.”\textsuperscript{230} Del Lucchese further proposes that the principle that dominates these early pages of the Histories is “the conception of social conflict, of the historical and theoretical terrain of Rome in the classical age...now put to work on the historical and political terrain of Florence.”\textsuperscript{231} And Sasso too sees a direct connection between the second reversal of III.1 and Discourses I.55: if equality is the basis for a republican form of government, he asks, it is most unclear as to why Machiavelli’s vocabulary is so vague and imprecise – “why did Machiavelli use ‘in any form of government’ in this passage?” Unlike del Lucchese’s radical-demotic reading of the passage, Sasso claims in his thesis of ‘the bleak Machiavelli’ that “with the expression ‘in any form [of government,]’ [Machiavelli] hinted at a thoroughly pessimistic conclusion”: the paradoxical reversals introduced in our section simply suggest the absence of any potential political reform and hence the absence of any conceptual novelty in Machiavelli’s pensée politique tout court.\textsuperscript{232}

Overall, these interpreters make two similar and interrelated observations: firstly, all commentators note that, whatever political ideas the Florentine might cast at this point of the text, they are a mere restatement of Machiavelli’s earlier fundamental convictions concerning the context of Florentine history – in a word, there is nothing new here in Machiavelli’s political imagination.\textsuperscript{233} Secondly, while these scholars arrive at different conclusions based on their respective interpretive appreciations, they

\textsuperscript{228} “One cannot help but recall Machiavelli’s remark in the Discourses about ‘our religion...which makes us esteem less the honor of the world.’” Ibid, 151-4.

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid, 153-4.

\textsuperscript{230} See Lefort, Le Travail et L'Oeuvre de Machiavel, especially 514 and 527; and Louis Althusser, Machiavelli and Us, ed. François Matheron (London: Verso, 1999), passim.

\textsuperscript{231} “The important thing, in other words, is that the necessary and sufficient condition for freedom to be more than just a meaningless word will finally be realized...” Del Lucchese, “Crisis and Power,” “89-90 and 94.

\textsuperscript{232} Sasso, Machiavelli: La Storiografia, 205. My translation.

\textsuperscript{233} Concerning Machiavelli’s use of the concept of ‘equality’ in this section, Sasso claims that “it means, not so much that the republic would still be a possibility; rather it means that [the term ‘equality’] has lost its original meaning...” Sasso, Machiavelli: La Storiografia, 207. My translation.
all seem to read these passages as a result of Machiavelli’s obsession with a binary analysis of political life. That is, Machiavelli’s view of the elite and the people in *The Prince* and the *Discourses* corresponds to the social makeup and the analysis of discord and factionalism present in his most historical work. These scholars agree that Machiavelli’s almost obsessive interest in the tumultuous struggles between patricians and plebeians in the history of Rome is thoroughly coherent with his analysis of Florentine discords and state-building in the *Histories* and once again the *Florentine Histories* is theoretically subordinated to Machiavelli's earlier political works.

However sound and insightful these appreciations may be, they nonetheless fail to value the deep and essentially unresolved conceptual paradoxes at the heart of this section that distance the later Machiavelli from the earlier one of the *Prince* and *Discourses* – again, the popular sectors’ desire to monopolize political power in view of a redrawn social context and the demise of the nobles who were representatives of both military strength and the desire for domination. En route to a more exhaustive analysis of Machiavelli’s post-1520 works, it is fair to say at this point that none of these claims can actually provide a faithful account of the political vocabulary that Machiavelli applies in this critical section of the *Histories*. Whether by returning to the “pessimist” thesis of Sasso, the “utopian” considerations of the more republican-attuned interpreters or even the “ironic” view of rhetorical and esoteric-minded readers of Machiavelli simply fail to notice the political urgency behind the Florentine paradox of equality. If viewed from either of these three perspectives, then, we lose sight of Machiavelli’s almost stubborn necessity to incorporate apposite political reflections concerning men’s capacity to modify their condition.

Indeed, we notice from the very beginning that his description of social groupings and civil discords is conceptually and theoretically antithetical to (or shall we say “disconnected from?”) the one present in his earlier political works. As Machiavelli himself tells us,

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234 Mark Hulliung’s reading nicely symbolizes the problems of these interpretations: “The *Florentine History* complements the *Discourses* by extending the discussion of Florentine affairs found in [the *Discourses*]...the *Florentine History* complements the *Discourses* by completing the process of demonstrating that the republic of Florence was the republic of Rome turned upside down.” Mark Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 61.

235 Straussian, neorepublican and populist scholars are not exempt from this interpretive problem: for instance, in his introductory essay to the *Histories*, Mansfield observes, “The *Florentine Histories*...[unlike the *Discourses* and *The Prince*] remain within the humanist outlook...They show us what Machiavelli wanted to do in his time...as opposed to his long-term design for entirely new modes and orders.” Mansfield, “Introduction,” 125-6. And Skinner seems to agree with Mansfield on this point by suggesting, “The overriding theme of the *Histories* is corruption,” then adding, “As in the *Discourses* – which [Machiavelli] follows closely – he sees two areas in which the spirit of corruption is prone to arise...” in reference to domination arising from external or internal forces. Quentin Skinner, *Machiavelli*, 82. Also, McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 32, where the author refers to the “nature of man” and to the distinction between the nobles and the people in the context of the *Histories*.
The grave and natural enmities that exist between the men of the people and the nobles, caused by the wish of the latter to command and the former not to obey, are the cause of all evils that arise in cities. For from this diversity of humors all other things that agitate republics take their nourishment.

In spite of the supposedly straightforward distinction between the people and the nobles present in this passage (after all, Machiavelli labels their acts and desires as distinct from one another), it is also noticeable how Machiavelli radically alters his lexicon concerning popular agency from the one applied in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. First, Machiavelli addresses the distinctive psychological features of these groups as a “natural” and generalizable phenomenon attributed to, and observed in, all “cities,” but he then qualifies the outcome, the effects, of these binary opposition. In fact, Machiavelli admits that not only are the people and the nobles a recurrent aspect in all historical and political contexts (from Rome to Florence) but the enmities between them are to be seen as the origin of “all the evils that arise in cities” as well. From the outset, then, Machiavelli displays a radically different perspective concerning society and civil discord from that introduced in the early sections of the *Discourses*.

More important still, while we continue to observe Machiavelli’s almost instinctive necessity to interpret political life as a result of the conflict between the popular majority and the elites, his vocabulary concerning popular agency is hardly attuned with that of his earlier political works. On the one hand, Machiavelli’s account of the nobility seems to suggest a substantial continuity with his earlier political expositions: the desire to “command” is an essential psychological attribute that defines the elites’ ethos to transgress all laws and regulations, and to abuse power as well as to gain exclusive control of government for their own benefit. On the other hand, Machiavelli’s vocabulary concerning popular culture and agency is intrinsically at odds with the lexicon of his earlier political texts. While the early Machiavelli consistently refers to popular action and demands in terms of the people’s will not to be “oppressed,” “commanded” or “dominated,” in book III of the *Histories* Machiavelli explicitly claims that the people simply wish “not to obey [non ubbidire],” a theme that

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236 “Le gravi e naturali nimicizie che sono intra gli uomini popolari e i nobili, causate da il volere questi commandare e quelli non ubbidire, sono cagione di tutti li mali che nascono nelle città; perché da questa diversità di umori tutte le altre cose che perturbano le repubbliche prendano il nutrimento loro.” Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 105. My emphasis.

237 Ibid. Of course, in the *Discourses* Machiavelli observes: “I say that to me it appears that those who damn the tumults between the nobles and the plebs blame those things that were the first cause keeping Rome free, and that they consider the noises and the cries that would arise in such tumults more than the good effects that they engendered. They do not consider that in every republic are two diverse humors, that of the people and that of the great, and that all the laws that are made in favor of freedom arise from their disunion...” Machiavelli *Discourses on Livy*, 16.

238 As rightly noticed by Cabrini: “there is a clear distance between [the vocabulary of] this chapter...and the important discussions concerning the struggles between the nobles and the people in the first book of the *Discourses.*” Anna Maria Cabrini, *Interpretazione e Stile in Machiavelli: Il Libro Terzo delle Istorie* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1990), 13. My translation.
strongly resonates with the language of IV.1, where Machiavelli observes that the people wished to be subject “[neither] to the law [nor] to men [non essere né alle leggi né agli uomini sottoposto].” As a result, Machiavelli’s conception of the people in the Histories is hardly attuned to a disposition toward the rule of law and/or liberty – whether to attain civic greatness, freedom as elite accountability or imperial glory.

In fact, the people’s disinclination to obedience carries further implications when compared to the political vocabulary applied to popular agency in The Prince and the Discourses: as mentioned in the previous chapter, Machiavelli’s earlier view of society and conflict recurrently displays the people as the most reliable social and political agents precisely because their objectives are more “decent [onesto]” than those of the elite and, as a result, they have a greater commitment to the life and order of either a civil principality or a republic. In that sense, Machiavelli’s reference to popular and noble cultures as two antithetical conceptions of political life represents a fundamental structural tension which defines the political design of a polity as a whole – as he observes elsewhere, the struggles between the nobles and the people lead to three different results: liberty, license or princely power.

Once one recognizes the conceptual novelty introduced in Histories III.1, however, a number of significant interpretive revisions necessarily follow. From a neorepublican interpretive perspective, for instance, the desire not to be dominated or oppressed carries crucial theoretical and normative connotations in that it equates Machiavelli’s political thought with the operating assumptions of a civic republican or neo-Roman approach to politics – and, within this theoretical paradigm, to a republican conception of freedom as non-domination. In Skinner’s words, Machiavelli’s description of the

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239 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 146. My emphasis.
240 Ibid, 105. My emphasis. See, also, Cabrini, Per Una Valutazione, 368 – though her conclusions lead, full circle, to Sasso’s thesis of a ‘resigned Machiavelli;’ compare to Sasso, Machiavelli: L’Istoriografia, 189-95. To the best of my knowledge, nowhere in his political and historical works does Machiavelli refer to the people’s demands and agency in these terms other than in the introductory sections to books III and IV. For instance, in Discourses I.5 asserts that “the [ignobles] only desire not to be dominated;” I.16 adds that “a small part of [the people] desires to be free so as to command, but all the others, who are infinite, desire freedom so as to live secure;” I.58 where he notices that the Roman people “desired neither to dominate proudly nor to serve humbly…;” or in The Prince chapter 9, where he insists that “the people desire neither to be commanded nor oppressed by the great.” Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 18, 46 and 116; The Prince, 39, respectively.
241 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 18; and The Prince, 39.
242 “From these two diverse appetites one of three effects occurs in cities: principality or liberty or license.” Ibid. While Jurdjevic rightly acknowledges the conceptual distinction between “the nature of the Roman and Florentine people” in the context of the Histories, he then goes on to translate “non ubbidire” as “not to be enthralled,” a term that remains closely attached to the language of non-domination of Skinner, Viroli and Pettit. Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 119.
243 Neorepublicans are, by and large, the interpreters that have made the most of Machiavelli's vocabulary of liberty. As McCormick rightly suggests, “they fixate on Machiavelli’s abstract definitions of liberty at the expense of both his specific policy recommendations...as well as his historical examples that illustrate how civic liberty operates in healthy political
people’s willingness to live unrestrained from personal domination leads them “to be made guardians of liberty,” since their struggles are more attuned to the common good of the polity – understood by Skinner and other neorepublican scholars as freedom “from all forms of servitude whether imposed ‘internally’ by the rule of a tyrant or ‘externally’ by an imperial power.”

It suffices to say here that neorepublicans’ interpretation of popular agency requires some serious qualifications, especially if we are to consider their approach form the perspective of the Florentine Histories. Once again, Machiavelli’s use of the term “not to obey” at such a decisive point in the text implies, (1) that the capabilities and objectives of the people are incompatible with the law-abiding agency required by a neorepublican approach to politics: that of a humble – and almost passive – people that respects the laws and shows little interest in political agency other than the act of vigilance against ambition and tyranny exercised by either external or domestic agents. (2) The people’s disinclination toward obedience in the Histories entails a form of behavior that cannot be equated with the collective good of the polity at large. As a consequence of the second point, (3) popular behavior at this point of the narrative is actually attuned with the desire to politically command and oppress that the early Machiavelli had characteristically assigned to the elites: non-compliance to any form of authority (both personal and legal) results in a form of political agency that is critically confirmed by Machiavelli in the following lines of the chapter – they wished to have the government of the city to themselves. In a way, both parties are shown to be agents of domination because the two similarly display the intention as well as the capacity (even without being exercised as implied by the term “not to obey”) to inflict power beyond the other agent's control and status. (4) Popular motivation at this


244 Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, 156-65; also, by the same author, Machiavelli, 52.

245 Pettit, Republicanism, 32. Certainly, the neorepublican interpretation of Machiavelli’s Discourses has come under criticism, for instance, for having neglected the language of human selfishness that underlines great part of Machiavelli’s considerations of the struggles between the few and the many, or for having overlooked the crucial role that martial expansionism and conquest play in both the Discourses and the language of Florentine humanism at large. On these themes, see Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” and Mikael Hörnqvist, Machiavelli and Empire, 41-50.

246 “On this point, one must not confuse the desire not to be dominated with the will not to obey the law;” rightly writes Lebovici, “[The] desire not to be dominated is equivalent to the desire for freedom as far as its energy leads to the laws, whereas the will not to obey leads to what Machiavelli calls license.” Martine Leibovici, “From Fight to Debate: Machiavelli and the Revolt of the Compi,” Philosophy and Social Criticism 28(6) (2002): 649.

247 For instance, in reference to distinction princely/personal vs. constitutional/legal authority, Pettit claims “Machiavelli is willing to concede...that where people are already corrupt, and unlikely to sustain a suitable form of law, the best way to promote freedom as non-domination may require a prince with fairly absolute power.” Pettit, Republicanism, 100; also, Skinner, Foundations of Modern Political Thought, 156. Based on Pettit and Skinner’s claims, one is then left wondering: if a corrupt people is to be put under the rule of a princely authority, then why does Machiavelli here equate non-compliance to any form of authority (including a princely one) with equality and the organization of a new political way of life?
stage of the text implies the absence of a coherent collective good for which to strive. In fact, non-compliance to either laws or authority suggests a form of agency that is incompatible with the robust political motivation required by a neorepublican conception of civic virtue. Lastly, (5) the term “not to obey” is here used in reference to the people’s ambition and feeling of entitlement to submit others to their own rule, a theme that strongly resonates with the decline of Florence’s martial prowess and the ascent of a new culture of commerce and self-interest discussed by the end of books I-II. As Machiavelli concludes at I.39: “the Florentines...having eliminated their nobility by frequent divisions, the republic was left in the hands of men nurtured in trade…”248 On the basis of these operating assumptions, it is already difficult to identify the vocabulary of Machiavelli’s Histories with a strict neorepublican approach to political theory – at least as proposed and articulated by its chief representatives.

Having thus showed that III.1 presents a radically distinct vocabulary concerning popular agency and civil discord vis-à-vis Machiavelli’s earlier political texts (and consequently in relation to the typically Machiavellian opposition of the elite vs. the people), we are now better equipped to assess and analyze the two crucial parallels between Rome and Florence from the perspective of the Histories: (a) Rome's ultimate “great inequality” vs. Florence's “wonderful equality,” and (b) Rome's consequent tendency toward a princely authority vs. the possibility of reorganizing Florence “in any form of government.” Moreover, this suggestion leads to the following set of questions: is there a contradiction or not between our author's reference to popular agency in the Discourses (especially at I.37 and 55) and in the Histories (III.1)? If so, what are the conceptual and theoretical novelties (implicitly and explicitly) introduced by Machiavelli in the latter text?

The contrast between Rome’s “great inequality” and Florence’s “wonderful equality” recalls (1) the eradication of the old nobility and the rise of a new elite driven, not by military prowess (“honors”), but by economic interest (“property”); and (2), more important, the complete disappearance of any meaningful distinction between the nobles and the people based on their political interests and agency.249 As a matter of fact, in this section we can observe a re-conceptualization of Machiavelli’s prior division between the two ‘humors’ present in the city by virtue of undermining – and even collapsing – the distinctiveness of the interests and agency of these classes in a redrawn social

249 See Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 82-3 where the author identifies Machiavelli’s critique of popular behavior in the Histories with the demise of the military virtue (and the consequent desire for expansion) of the Florentine landed nobility.
Machiavelli assigns the Florentine people the same ambition and arrogant behavior of which he had found the aristocrats guilty in his earlier political texts. Consequently, having compared the ends and final effects of the Roman and Florentine peoples, Machiavelli highlights the violent nature of the latter in a way that casts the actions of the Florentine people as hardly distinguishable from those of their elite counterparts as recounted in the first two books.

Not surprisingly, then, popular agency in the Florentine context is considered contrary to the benefit of the community (in that they wished to monopolize political power) to such an extreme that the nobles’ acts are displayed as defensive in nature – “the Florentine nobles wished to maintain their status and position of power [tale che la nobilità con maggiori forze alle sue difese si preparava].”

Moreover, not only does the defeat of the feudal nobility imply a radical transformation in the nobles’ own political culture (in that the nobles lost their sense of class identification) but it also suggests a modification in the city’s own definition of authority and order which was previously defined by the military virtue and hierarchical stratification of the feudal nobles. Rather than shaped by the nobles’ military “generosity” and spiritedness, the modern history of Florence is congruent with the people’s commercial ethos of self-interest, “liberality” and abjectness.

The innovative view of popular agency as the desire “not to obey” at this particular historical instance then reveals a novel form of power and authority that transcends and displaces the earlier class-specific form of social and political conflict. In this sense, the “wonderful equality” that Machiavelli speaks of in this section is not a mere reference to the nominal egalitarianism that his humanist counterparts had consistently praised in the context of trecento and quattrocento Florence; rather, his insistence on ascribing an egalitarian status to Florence pertains to a context in which class-specificity is overrun by mercantile nature of the new leading groups and the rise of partisan desires. In a word, Machiavelli (a) deviates from his earlier considerations of binary social opposition; (b) offers a revision of his earlier vocabulary concerning popular agency and interests; and (c) the Florentine context defies any such easy categorization and distinction between “noble” and “popular” identities. Obscuring that transformation is, as noted by Najemy and Jurdjevic, the fact that these indistinguishable groups continued to use the class-specific political vocabulary of earlier conflicts in spite of its incongruity.

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250 Bonadeo, “Role of the People,” 368–9.
251 Of course, this does not mean that, if the people’s behavior is considered deleterious to the common goals of the community, Machiavelli then thinks that the nobles’ goals and acts ought to be seen as beneficial and just. Much to the contrary, Machiavelli seems to underpin the similarity of the two groups’ behaviour and their consequent lack of commitment to a common good. Ibid, 105.
with their contemporary and multifaceted social realities.252

What Machiavelli conveys, then, is that while earlier moments of Florentine history may have mirrored the binary social classification of republican Rome, the “modern” history of the city as recounted in books III-VIII – that of a city subject to men “nurtured in trade” – displayed new tensions that defied such axioms of social and political analysis. Consequently, Machiavelli’s suggestions regarding popular agency imply a more subtle and complex understanding of social gradations, characterized by “varying degrees of wealth, standing, and claims to primacy in the city.”253 The comparison of Florence and Rome symbolizes, less Machiavelli’s attempt at highlighting the impetus and virtue of the ancient republic than our author’s interest in drawing a radical distinction between the ancient and the modern political worlds.254 Under these circumstances, then, the interpretation of Florentine history set forth by Machiavelli in this section leads to a moment of paradox: while he condemns the purposes and roles of the people in utterly eliminating the military virtue of the city (or rather the carriers of such task), this very historical events provide clues to his transformative vision of political life.

His new-found language of popular agency and the easiness by which the people could adapt (and adopt) the nobles’ tyrannical behavior suggests that Machiavelli’s political theorizing by the post-1520 texts has become increasingly conservative and more attuned to an aristocratic conception of republicanism that has been previously thought.255 Invoking Rome as a model of the nobility-people tension at the heart of a republican form of life, III.1 thus offers a revision of his earlier vocabulary of popular agency, its law-abiding character and its capacity to preserve a free way of life – or what Machiavelli had referred to as the “guard of freedom.” Indeed, by appealing to the Roman status of society and civil conflict, Machiavelli provides a blunt challenge to his earlier political considerations, whereby binary opposition (the main principle underscoring the benefits of a domestic tension) and popular action were the crux of Rome’s republican success.

253 Ibid, 114. If one were to return to Machiavelli’s discussion of equality and inequality at I.55 of the Discourses, then, one would find that the case of Florence is closer to the ad hoc discussion of Venice, where there are “gentlemen more in name than in fact, for they do not have great incomes from possessions, since their great riches are founded in trade and movable things; and besides, none of them holds a castle or has any jurisdiction over men.” This is arguably analogous to Machiavelli’s almost necessary reliance on hybrid social terms such as “popular nobles [nobili popolari]” in chapters 9, 18, 21 and 22 of the present book. Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 112-3.
255 Butters, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 75.
Once again, revising some of the most integral concepts as present in his earlier political texts, the post-1520 Machiavelli reveals a critical understanding of the people; he indicts the populace for the same misbehaviors he had found the nobility guilty in the early works. In a text in which civic or martial virtue, popular guardianship of liberty or even a healthy tension between two opposing classes have become increasingly unattainable, Machiavelli thus underscores that any long-term solution to the Florentine struggles – to reorder the city “in any form of government” – requires the satisfaction of interests, not their transformation into some form of martial or civic virtue.

In some substantive respects, this section already casts light on the main claim of this chapter and of the dissertation in general: Machiavelli rejects his considerations of the people as the “guard of freedom” and stability evident in his Prince and Discourses and rather indicates a more nuanced and resourceful understanding of their goals and agency as part of a larger and complex analysis of social and political interactions. In fact, Machiavelli’s vocabulary concerning the people’s disinclination to obey suggests that (a) the city did require some stern measures to keep the insolence of the nobles in check; but (b) equally importantly, as a result of the Florentine people’s desire to acquire, not just a voice, but the monopoly of political power, the city needed thoroughly new political and institutional vistas. In brief, Histories III.1 reveals that the post-1520 Machiavelli was moving, not in an “activist” and “engaged” path, as Jurdjevic suggests, but rather in an unequivocal conservative direction. Hoping for his readership to understand Florence’s social and political complexity, Machiavelli portrays his late political theorizing as shaped by the idea that the maintenance of liberty and authority was to be equated with the satisfaction of an increasingly number of different – and at times incompatible – interests. As a result, if we cease to read Machiavelli’s political imagination as a static corpus, if we value the theoretical import of the Histories, we may be better equipped to recognize and appreciate the conceptual novelty of his later republicanism. Reaching this conclusion implies revisiting some crucial sections and events narrated in the Histories – and to assess the implications

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256 As the anonymous speaker of III.5 observes, “…we fought with more hatred and greater rage than we had ever fought together, any other time, so that our ancient nobility was left conquered and again put under the will of the people. Nor did many believe that any cause of scandal or party would ever arise again in Florence, since a check had been put on those who by their pride and ambition appeared to have been the cause. But now it is seen through experience how mistaken the opinion of men is…for the pride and ambition of the great was not eliminated but taken from them by our men of the people…” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 111.

257 As Jurdjevic rightly asserts, “The first chapter of book 3…demonstrating a mid-fourteenth century precedent for political reform” substantiates the later Machiavelli’s appeal to the city’s leaders to recognize “the opportunity to introduce a novel form of republican government in the city.” Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 200-1.

258 “This is my main point of disagreement with the thesis espoused by Jurdjevic in his latest book, that the post-1520 Machiavelli displays “a more engaged, activist republican agenda than any of his earlier writings.” Ibid, 2 and 212.
of his novel view of politics in his history of Florence – to which we now turn.

2 Society and Discord in the *Florentine Histories*

The positive interrelationship between popular desires and agency – the basic objective of wishing not to be dominated – and the political advantages stemming from a binary opposition between the people and the nobility – and his characterization of the people’s political outcome as “guard of liberty” – are borne out by the time of Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories*. As the introductory section of book III suggests, Machiavelli’s abstract vocabulary of society now sharply distinguishes not only the nobles from the people – as discussed in book II – but the people from the plebs as well. Indeed, Machiavelli suggests at the end of III.1, “It remains now to tell about the enmities between the people [*il popolo*] and the plebs [*la plebe*], and the various accidents they produced.”259 In examining these social bases, Machiavelli reveals that the history of his city defied any clear categorization, and, as a result of this, he thinks it is required to revise his own social and political vocabulary and to adopt a more nuanced and recurrently tripartite typology, more suitable to the historical circumstances of a modern polity such as Florence.260

In the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli drastically alters his earlier conceptual vocabulary of class, society and civil discord.261 The *Histories* displays a nuanced and complex battery of concepts that seem to place the Florentine’s examples on a political and social plane different from those of the polities of antiquity.262 Indeed, Machiavelli applies compounded terms such as “ancient nobles,” “popular nobles” or “princes of the plebs,” which defy the tradition binary opposition of noble-people he had recurrently applied in his earlier political works. As I wish to show below, what Machiavelli seems to convey here is not simply a new typology meant to underscore the corrupting ethos of the Florentines, but rather a novel meditation on the distinctive traits of modern polities – with each social group upholding its own sense of social standing, identity and solidarity. In addition to this more refined categorization of noble and popular political behavior, books II-V of the *Histories* reveals this compound of groups as sharing a desire for political domination, at times defined as their preference for tyrannical rule over liberty (II.29, 32-38, IV.28), license over freedom (IV.1, 14), extra-legal

261 On this subject, see the standard and most accepted commentary of Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 23-7.
262 For this ancient-modern dichotomy in Machiavelli’s intellectual corpus, see Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 54-5.
institutions over the legitimate modes of political action (III.29; IV.2, 9 and 29) or the outright opposition to any liberty-enhancing politics (II.35, III.5, 17-18, IV.1 and V.1).

Evidence that Machiavelli formed his mature opinions about political organization in response to the Florentine experience abounds: already in chapter twelve of the second book – a chapter that provides the background to the introduction of the anti-noble Ordinances of Justice of 1293 – Machiavelli delivers clues about his novel conception of society in general and of the people in particular. Following the spasmodic regime changes of the mid-to-late thirteenth century, Machiavelli observes that as the internecine struggles between the Ghibelline and Guelf parties came to a close, “Only those humors were still excited that are naturally wont to exist in all cities between the powerful and the people; for since the people want to live according to the laws and the powerful want to command by them, it is not possible for them to understand together.” The statement is presented in an arguably familiar way, displaying the two groups as driven by distinct interests, with the powerful pursuing a will to dominate and the people wishing to live according to the laws.

Nonetheless, the notion of a clear-cut classification of noble and popular agency of these early sections will be dramatically altered with Machiavelli’s discussion of the anti-magnate laws of 1293 and his portrayal of the architect of the Ordinances, Giano della Bella. In the wake of the establishment of the popular-based office of the Priors, Machiavelli prophetically observes that “[t]his magistracy was the cause, as will be seen in time, of the ruin of the nobles, because through various accidents they were excluded from it by the people and afterwards crushed without any respect [sanza alcuno rispetto battuti].” Next, as a result of some internal quarrels among the nobles themselves, the popular sectors took the opportunity to solidify their position in government. After a series of institutional reforms, the heads of the popular guilds, with the intellectual aid of Giano della Bella, established the Ordinances of Justice: a series of statutes meant to subject the feudal nobles to tougher penalties for crimes against non-elite citizens and, most importantly, to exclude them completely from participating

263 “…restavano solamente accesi quelli umori i quali naturalmente sogliono essere in tutte le città intra i potenti e il popolo; perché, volendo il popolo vivere secondo le leggi, e i potenti comandare a quelle, non è possibile cappino insieme.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 64.
264 Once the Ghibellines had been finally wiped out of the city, the Guelf nobles were given carte blanche and consequently showed respect neither to the laws nor to the Florentine popolo – “And every day someone of the people [qualche popolare] was injured” and “Neither the law nor the magistrates were sufficient to avenge him because every noble [ogni nobile]…would defend himself against the forces of the Priors and the Captain [of the people].” Ibid.
265 Ibid.
in the political life of the city.\textsuperscript{266}

While the Ordinances of Justice were meant to promote some of the most intrinsic qualities of a republican form of government and way of life – equality, collective self-governance and freedom – the outcome of these statutes is far from being the pursuit of communal and collective goods – or what Machiavelli had earlier referred to as “wonderful equality.” Stressing the psychological outcome of the Ordinances, Machiavelli underscores two specific features relative to the approval of the Ordinances – the nobles’ disapproval of the newly-gained popular power and the powerful popular leaders’ distrust of Giano della Bella’s role and objectives therein. As Machiavelli tells us, “the people acquired much reputation, and Giano della Bella much hatred, because the powerful had a very bad opinion of him as the destroyer of their power, and the rich men of the people envied him because it appeared to them that his authority was too great.”\textsuperscript{267} Already in this passage we notice a subtle transformation in Machiavelli’s language concerning the role of the nobles and the people as introduced in the previous chapter of book II – that is, the nobles’ desire to command and the people’s desire to live according to the rule of law.

This suggestion is best represented by the figure of Giano della Bella himself: first, in spite of his “very noble lineage [\textit{di stirpe nobilissimo}],” Giano is given full credit for the anti-magnate statutes, and hence he is portrayed as capable of behaving beyond the constraints of the natural desire for domination of those of his own class.\textsuperscript{268} While Machiavelli highlights the lineage of Giano – a theme he had already considered with the inclusion of the Della Bella family in the list of the Guelf noble families at the end of II.4 – he also suggests that he was “a lover of freedom of the city [\textit{della libertà della città amatore}],” implying that most nobles were hardly lovers of freedom.\textsuperscript{269} Secondly, Machiavelli explicitly claims that Giano was the intellectual architect of the Ordinances of Justice that


\textsuperscript{267}Note Machiavelli’s use of the important political concepts such as ‘reputation,’ ‘power’ and ‘authority’ in opposition to ‘hatred,’ ‘envy’ and ‘bad opinion’: “Acquistò il popolo assai reputazione, e Giano della Bella assai odio; perché era in malissimo concetto de’ potenti, come di loro potenza distruttore, e i popolani ricchi gli avevano invidia, perché pareva loro che la sua autorità fusse troppa…” Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 65.

\textsuperscript{268}As Leonardo Bruni, one of Machiavelli’s main sources for this sections of the \textit{Histories}, observes, “Giano della Bella…was descended from distinguished ancestors, but was himself a man of moderation and strongly populist in his sympathies [\textit{modicus civis et apprime popularis}]” – though Bruni seems to suggest that Giano was in fact a popular man. Leonardo Bruni, \textit{History of the Florentine People}, trans. James Hankins (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 361.

\textsuperscript{269}Machiavelli may also suggest that in spite of their desire for domination, some noblemen could still recognize the limits of their own behavior and prevent themselves from committing arbitrary acts against others and the city itself. Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 56-7 and 65.
annulled the requirement for a witness in charges against noblemen, and strengthened the military role
of the Gonfalonier of Justice – the *primum inter pares* officer among the executive magistrates or
Priors.\(^{270}\) Such an observation may seem unremarkable in and of itself, but in the context of these
events, whereby the people “acquired much reputation, and Giano della Bella much hatred,” it speaks
directly of the rooted suspicion that the virtuous citizen – or the “lover of freedom” – may also be the
carrier of the hubris that leads to tyranny and the demise of liberty – even in spite of his own
considerations.\(^{271}\) Machiavelli’s acknowledgement of the problem of the individual at this particular
instance is coupled with a moment of “fate” that further obscures his discussion concerning social
groupings.\(^{272}\)

Shortly after Giano established the Ordinances, a popular citizen was killed in a fight with several
nobles, including the powerful Corso Donati.\(^{273}\) Since Donati was “bolder” than the other nobles, he
was brought before the Captain of the People: the official in charge of judging Corso according to the
provisions of the Ordinances. In spite of the general belief concerning Donati’s involvement in the
case, the Captain absolved him and, as a result, the people decided to take up arms and assemble before
the house of the creator of the anti-noble laws, Giano della Bella.\(^{274}\) Contrary to any speculation, Giano
urged the people to remain armed, for he also “desired Messer Corso to be punished,” and he
“encouraged [the people] to go to the Signori [or Priors] to complain about the case and to beg them
to provide for it.”\(^{275}\) Machiavelli here underscores the collective mood of the people after meeting
their champion: due to the absolution of Donati, the people, “filled with indignation [*pieno di sdegno]*,”
felt they had been “offended [*offeso]*” by the Captain of the People but also, and most shockingly,
“abandoned [*abandonato]*” by the initiator of the very laws they wished to see observed.\(^{276}\) Even more,
the reaction of the armed people, in a radical tour de force, is contrary to Giano’s advice; instead of

\(^{270}\) Ibid, 65.

\(^{271}\) Certainly, this example revisits the difficulty of building power with the help of the elite, but the implicit assumption of
this section, as will soon see, is the problem of popular support. Ibid and *The Prince*, 39-40. On the theme of extraordinary
individual political figures in the context of Machiavelli’s post-1520 texts, see Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,”
551-76.

\(^{272}\) Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 65.

\(^{273}\) Bruni does not mention Corso Donati; he simply refers to “a certain individual.” Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*,
379.

\(^{274}\) “This absolution so displeased the people that they took up arms and ran to the house of Giano della Bella to beg him
to be the one to see to it that the laws of which he had been the inventor be observed.” Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*,
65-6.

\(^{275}\) The fact that Giano encourages an angry mob to remain armed already suggests that Giano’s consideration on the
soundness of the Ordinances is far from overly positive – after all, if he truly believed in the effectiveness of the laws, why
would he encourage the people to remain armed and to threaten the Priors? Ibid, 66.

\(^{276}\) Ibid. For instance, Bruni makes no mention of the people’s sentiment toward Giano – “the multitude ignored him.”
Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, 381.
transforming their indignation into legitimate demands – or rather a combination of fear and legitimate petitions – “they went not to the Signori but to the Captain [of the people]’s palace, took it, and sacked it,” thus giving an opportunity to the enemies of the laws to retaliate against them.277

Given Machiavelli’s consideration of Giano as a “lover of freedom” and a supporter of the people, it is quite surprising that the people thoroughly dismissed his advice – despite the fact they had requested it – and took a course of action that directly harmed the legitimacy of the popular order: their own moderate advocacy for the rule of law and even Giano’s own reputation.278 Once again, Machiavelli’s narrative of events complicates and even collapses the clear-cut axiomatic characterization of the nobles versus the people. While the people are displayed as violently acting against the laws (and the authorities) they themselves had established, the elites now take a moderate (though tongue-in-cheek) law-abiding course of action when they accuse Giano before the Captain of the people as the instigator of violent acts. Machiavelli has thus subtly blurred the distinctions between the two groupings that is so strongly enforced in his previous works: not only are the popular sectors depicted as behaving contrary to their desire to live according to the law, but the main republican figure of the event happens to be a nobleman whose acts defy the desires of his own sense of social identification.

With the accusation of Giano della Bella before the Captain of the People, “the people armed themselves and ran to all of [Giano’s] houses offering him defense against the Signori and his enemies.”279 Again, we ought to notice here the reversal of roles from the first violent intervention of the people at the beginning of the chapter in this final act: whereas at first the people took arms in order to save their legitimate means of political enfranchisement and have the laws observed, they now rally in order to protect Giano against the lawful officials of the commune – or to prevent the very same laws Giano had created to punish him for the misbehavior of the popular groupings.280

Giano’s response in the final paragraph of the chapter accurately conveys Machiavelli’s sense

277 “Il popolo per tanto…non a’ Signori, ma al palagio del Capitano itosene, quello prese e saccheggiò.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 66. Bruni suggests that they “went immediately to attack the palace of the Podestà” and not to the house of the Captain as mentioned by Machiavelli. Bruni, History of the Florentine People, 381. This is, of course, at odds with Machiavelli’s earlier considerations of the people’s capacity to embrace the rule of law and to properly enact their desires by virtue of a strict realm of political activity.

278 As Machiavelli suggests in the next passages, the bold noblemen did not take much time to benefit from this situation in order to avenge themselves – “Those who longed for the ruin of Giano accused him, putting all the blame on him; so…Giano was accused to the Captain as an agitator of the people.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 66.

279 Ibid.

280 As Cabrini notices, this last chain of events, especially the considerations with respect to Giano, is thoroughly absent from any of Machiavelli’s main sources – all of which suggests that they are Machiavelli’s own creation and that they carry further political implications. Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 108-9.
of ‘tragic shame’ concerning the actions of the people: not only does he mistrust the standing officials for whom he had put his status (and his life) at risk, but he also shows himself to be thoroughly suspicious of the behavior of the people – all of which led him to take a radical course of action: he “chose a voluntary exile.” On the one hand, Machiavelli suggests that Giano chose to leave Florence out of his own volition in order to deny his noble opponents the opportunity to retaliate against him personally; on the other hand, he decided to leave the city because he “did not want…to put these popular favors to the test” as he “feared [their] instability [temeva l’instabilità di quelli].” As Machiavelli categorically states, Giano saw the people as carriers of a potentially corrosive ethos of domination and for this reason he sought to “deny…his friends [that is, his popular supporters] the opportunity of offending the fatherland [per torre occasione…agli amici di offendere la patria].” In a way, not only are these popular sectors behaving in a way that defies the implementation of the rule of law to which they had so strongly committed themselves at the beginning of the event, but, as Giano prophetically suggests, they are also capable of pursuing their factional interests to the detriment of the communal way of life.

Several other passages in the Histories substantiate Giano’s wariness concerning the people’s ethos of domination. In the aftermath of the struggles between the Donati and the Cerchi noble families (II.14-23), Florence’s dominium in Tuscany came under threat as a result of Lucca’s ruler, Castruccio Castracanni. The Lucchese tyrant (so strongly celebrated by Machiavelli in his mid-1520 pseudo-biographical work) had assaulted and sieged the neighboring city of Prato, just northwest of Florence. Thanks to the help of some four thousand Guelf nobles who had been first expelled and now promised full citizenship in exchange for their military assistance, the Florentines re-gained Prato and Castruccio finally returned to his city (II.26-7).

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281 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 66.
282 Ibid.
283 Ibid. Giano’s political foresight is further confirmed in the following chapters with the rise of a new intra-elite dispute, this time between the Cerchi and Donati families. Crucially, chapters II.16—23 recount the rise of Corso Donati, the same nobleman whom Giano and the people had sought to have. In spite of Machiavelli’s constant reference to Corso as a “restless spirit” seeking “to get reputation for himself,” he finally gains “the popular favor” and the “hatred” of his fellow nobles. Popular support was easily taken away from Corso by his noble enemies, as they spread the rumor that Corso wished to overthrow the popular government and turn himself into the tyrant of Florence. Donati’s enemies took up arms against him with the people providing no aid in spite of their previous support for his leadership. Ibid, 67-77.
284 This is further confirmed by the events that followed the departure of Giano della Bella. With the nobles having attempted to weaken the severity of the anti-noble laws, the popular groups took up arms again. In the midst of the disputes, an indirect speech is introduced in which the nobles are reminded of their “pride” and “bad government” as well as their “disunion,” all of which “was nothing other than to wish to ruin their fatherland and to worsen their own condition.” And to the people the speakers remind them that “it was not prudent always to want the ultimate victory” and that “it was neither a good nor a just thing to persecute [the nobles] with such hatred.” Ibid, 76.
As a result of Castruccio’s rapid withdrawal from Florence’s satellite city, Machiavelli observes that new disputes between the nobles and the people took place: the nobles wished “to return, saying that it was enough to have put Florence in peril in order to free Prato” while the people “wanted to follow [Castruccio] and fight him so as to eliminate him…” 285 Once again, Machiavelli further complicates, and even reverses, the disposition of the two social groupings in midst of a debate over the fate of the Lucchese tyrant, with the nobles promoting an arguably moderate mode of action and the popular groups encouraging a bold military campaign against Castruccio. More to the point, having the popularly elected executive – the aforementioned Priorate – take the counsel of the nobles, II.26 concludes with the nobles yielding “out of fear” and the people “uttering words of menace against the great.”286 The people, in spite of the promise made to the exiled nobles who had participated in the campaign against Castruccio, decided not to fulfill their pledge, which Machiavelli considers in arguably acidic and negative terms – “The result was blame and dishonor for the city.”287

It is in the aftermath of another Florentine attempt at getting a foothold in Lucca that we encounter a new example of Machiavelli’s conflicted ambivalence concerning the people’s ethos of domination. Due to a disastrous military campaign against Pisa, which ended with the loss of the Lucchese territory and a large sum of public money, the Florentine people accused of incompetence, and rioted against, those in charge of the military campaign – the so-called Twenty. Fearing for their political position, the governing party elected Walter de Brienne – the French-born duke of Athens – first as “protector, then as captain of their men-at-arms.”288 Shortly thereafter the nobles saw in the duke their opportunity to finally put to rest the increasingly popular government of the city by “putting themselves under a prince who, since his virtue was known to one party, and his insolence to the other, might check the one and reward the other.”289 Crucially, Machiavelli here notices that the nobles, in their incessant striving for domination, thought it better to “ruin the city” in order to “put out the fire burning within them,” which is arguably a reference to their ethos of command and their preference to live under a foreign ruler rather than under a domestic popular government.290 Thus, from their early history the

285 Ibid, 81.
286 Ibid.
287 Ibid, 82.
288 The Duke of Athens had made his first appearance at II.30, when, following another disastrous military campaign, the Florentines chose to give the lordship of the city to Charles Duke of Calabria, who consequently sent the Duke of Athens as his vicar. Ibid, 84-5 and 90.
289 Ibid, 90.
290 Just a few lines thereafter Machiavelli repeats this assumption in reference to some families who overburdened by their debts: “They were desirous of having those debts satisfied by others, and thus by the enslavement of their fatherland to
Florentines show, in their incessant struggle for power and authority, a tendency to embrace tyrants and the demise of their own liberty.

It is at this point of the narrative that Machiavelli begins to prefigure a much more nuanced and comprehensive social vocabulary. As he tells us, the duke put himself to work and, to “increase his favor with the plebs [la plebe],” he prosecuted the Twenty who had led the war against Lucca, killing some while condemning others to exile or to fines.\(^\text{291}\) Significantly, the following chapter further refines the social classification of the city in the context of these events: Machiavelli observes that the executions “frightened the middle citizens” while they “satisfied the great and the plebs.”\(^\text{292}\) We begin to notice how Machiavelli’s late vocabulary of society refers to not two, but rather three distinct classes, with all three sectors acting according to their own desires. And so, in the midst of these events, the duke demanded that the executive officers of the city grant him the “free lordship [la signoria libera]” of the city, for “the whole city was consenting to it [tutta la città vi consentiva].”\(^\text{293}\) As the popular Signori refused to grant the duke the lordship of the city, and seeing that the duke was sufficiently powerful to take it from them by force, they decided to speak to him.

Machiavelli introduces a direct speech on the part of an anonymous official member of government who condemns the duke’s ruthless behavior and who prophetically observes that no good that he may confer to the city will be regarded as compensation for the loss of freedom, as his tyranny will make him so many enemies that it will be impossible to rule by force.\(^\text{294}\) Crucially, the anonymous speaker attempts to persuade the duke by referring to the fickle and inconsistent behavior of the plebs, a theme that strongly resonates with the themes of book III in general, especially – as we shall see – in his narration of the events of the revolt of the Ciompi. Thus, the speaker observes, “The plebs in whom you trust will for any accident, though the slightest, reverse itself. So in a short time you may fear to have the whole city hostile, which will be the cause of its ruin and yours.”\(^\text{295}\) Machiavelli then includes an indirect speech on the part of the duke himself, in which he rejects the claims of the speaker in an

\(^{291}\) Here Machiavelli mentions the killing of a Medici member, Giovanni di Bernardino, who had been sent by the Florentine government to take possession of Lucca in 1340. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 90.

\(^{292}\) “Queste esecuzioni assai i mediocri cittadini sbigottirono, solo ai Grandi e alla plebe sodisfacevano…” Ibid. My emphasis.

\(^{293}\) Ibid, 91.

\(^{294}\) Ibid, 91-3. The content of the speech of the Prior is Machiavelli’s own creation and none of its themes or concepts are found in Machiavelli’s sources for this section. See, Bock, “Civil Discord,” 187-88; Colish, “Idea of Liberty,” 327.

\(^{295}\) Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 92.
arguably ‘un-Machiavellian’ fashion: as he tells us, the duke does not seek to enslave the city but rather to restore its freedom, for divided cities are enslaved and united ones are free.\textsuperscript{296} By getting rid of the discords of the city, the duke claims, he will liberate the Florentines. Seeing that they could do no further good, the Priors thus agree that “the following morning the people would gather at their own piazza [the Piazza della Signoria], and that by their own authority lordship would be given to the duke…”\textsuperscript{297}

Following these events, the agreement is presented before the people gathered in \textit{parlamento}, all of which serves to strengthen the power of the duke.\textsuperscript{298} At this point Machiavelli introduces a crucial political move on the part of the people: when the agreement about the temporary lordship of the duke is submitted to popular verdict – for it was decided that the duke would be granted lordship for one year – “there was a shout from among the people, ‘For life!’,” consequently repeated by the assembled crowd, despite the attempt of one official to reason with them.\textsuperscript{299} Crucially, while Machiavelli depicts the resistance of the Prior in the language of \textit{concordia ordinum}, he categorically observes that “\textit{with the consent of the people}, the duke was elected lord not for one year but \textit{in perpetuity}.”\textsuperscript{300}

Machiavelli concludes this chapter (II.35) in showing the already tyrannical behavior of the duke: while the “frightened and dishonored Signori returned to their houses,” the “palace was sacked by the
family of the duke, the standard of the people torn apart, and his ensign raised above the palace.”

The scene and the result of the for-life lordship of the duke shows that he is not the man to perform the task of pacifying the city; much to the contrary, his tyrannical measures and his “regal pomp” are contrasted to the “civil modesty” of the now-sacked officials. Next, the duke strengthens his position by revoking the powers of the executive Priorates, the popular councils and those of the aforementioned Ordinances of Justice; he creates new taxes and relies on the advice of a series of foreign allies – Baglione da Perugia, Guglielmo d’Assisi and Cerrettieri Bisdomini – all of which displeases not just the ‘middle men’ but the great as well.

As the result of the parlamento shows, the people take in their own hands, irrespective of the decisions of the legitimate governing party of the city, the election of a foreign duke as the perpetual leader of Florence – in accordance with the revelatory speech of the anonymous Prior at II.34. In addition, the concatenation of the speeches of the anonymous citizen and that of the duke of Athens, added to the narrative voice of the author, show how the Florentine people is unable to deal in a competent and effective manner with specific political situations. By giving the people a distinct political voice in this event, Machiavelli suggests that they, like their noble counterparts before, saw in the loss of the city's libertà, and the submission of the republic’s lordship to a foreign ruler, a preferable alternative to engaging in, or making their way through, legitimate channels of political representation.

Note that Machiavelli’s use of the term of popular consenso reverses its civic and humanist significance, linking popular agency with the complete loss of the city’s freedom both externally and internally. We are told that the duke demanded the lordship of Florence because “the whole city was consenting to it”; moreover, he is elected as lord in perpetuity “with the consent of the people” and the acts of the duke were taken “...with great please by those [that is, the aforementioned “people”]

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301 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 94.
302 Ibid, 95.
303 Machiavelli may have been intending to underscore a more subtle message than a mere disapproval of the Duke’s ruling here: by stressing the dangers of tyrannical rule in Florence, Machiavelli seems to address the contemporary tendency of the Medici leaders to turn the city into a principality – hence, by returning to the story of the duke and his fate, Machiavelli commends his anti-monarchical and pro-republican message to his closest readership. Ibid, 95, 98-9.
304 Cabrini, Per una Valutazione 289.
305 The Grande Dizionario (a twenty-one-volume source for the vocabulary of the Italian Renaissance) defines the term consenso in the work and times of Machiavelli along the lines of the classical republican paradigm. It refers to “…with general approval, with the permission of some; by general opinion or agreement – Also: by judgement favourable to all.” Salvatore Battaglia ed., Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana, vol.3 (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Turinese, 1984), 589. My translation.
who, either in ignorance or out of wickedness, had consented to [them].” Arguably, Machiavelli’s use of such a concept, with its humanist connotations, is meant to underscore the connection between popular agency and political representation. While Machiavelli’s main sources for this section, Giovanni Villani and Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, apply a vocabulary reminiscent of Machiavelli’s, they nonetheless offer an account of the rise of the duke that directly blames the lowest sectors of the city for electing and supporting the duke, and simultaneously underscores their own affiliation with the nobility and the wealthy popular sectors – consequently portraying the vivere civile (or the lack thereof) in traditionally civic and meritocratic terms.

Unlike Villani and Stefani, however, Machiavelli disconnects the term from its civic significance and rather links it to popular agency (in reference to the generic and imprecise term “the people”) and with the people’s decision to grant the lordship of Florence to a foreign tyrant. Significantly, the theme of political consenso in the Histories is recurrently applied to moments in which individual figures, such as the duke himself, gain political ascendancy with the added loss of liberty in the city – in a clear reference to Machiavelli’s distinctive pessimism concerning the power of individual figures by the time of his post-1520 texts. And so, while Machiavelli’s reference to a ‘politics of consensus’ at this particular instance may suggest connections with later stages in Florentine history – from the Ciompi revolt to the Medici’s own rise to power – here popular behavior does not appear to be as different from the sort the great are usually blamed for: by applying and reversing the typically humanist idea of political consent, Machiavelli shows that people’s acts are in fact at odds with the moderate, law-abiding and freedom-enabling agency, with a “wonderful equality” as mentioned in the previous

306 “Il che sequiva con dolore e noia inestimabile degli uomini buoni e con piacere grande di quelli che, o per ignoranza o per malignità, vi consentivano.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 93-4.

307 For Villani, see note 106 above. Stefani comments, “the Duke always said ‘our people is good’ [notre peuple est bon] and thus he seemed not to remember who had crucified Christ crying ‘kill, kill.’” Both Villani and Stefani thus suggest that political participation ought to be seen as the realm of the politically sophisticated, both in terms of class affiliation and culture. Marchionne di Coppo Stefani, “Cronaca Fiorentina,” Rerum Italicarum Scriptores XXX 1, ed. Niccolò Rodolico (Città di Castello: S. Lapi, 1903-15), 199. My translation.

308 For Machiavelli’s “anti-humanist humanism,” see Clarke, “Rome: Real or Imagined,” (forthcoming).

309 Machiavelli applies the term consenso or its derivatives fourteen times throughout the Histories, of which the most representative one is Lorenzo de’ Medici’s lengthy speech in the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy. In all other instances Machiavelli applies this concept in reference to the judgement of particular political authorities, ranging from the German Emperor (II.2) and the Pope (V.27) to specific communal officers (the Twelve Good Men at II.26 and the Signoria at II.32), political figures (Benedetto Alberti at III.20 and Lorenzo at VIII.10) or the Florentines (II.35 for the people and 7.32 for the Florentines in general). With respect to Lorenzo’s speech, Machiavelli introduces the term thrice and always in a way reminiscent to the ‘consensus politics’ of the duke – “And you know that our house never rose to any rank of greatness to which it was not thrust by this palace and by your united consent” then adding “My grandfather Cosimo did not return from exile with arms and by violence but with your consent and union.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 329. My emphasis.
section.

Yet the duke’s rule over Florence happened to be rather short-lived, as his savage acts and his ruthless fiscal policies finally led to not one, but rather three distinct parallel attempts to overthrow his regime – “and in three parties of three sorts of citizens three conspiracies were made: the great, the people and the artisans.”\(^{310}\) Machiavelli returns to the more refined vision of society he had applied at II.34 – here referring to the great, the people (instead of the “middle citizens”) and the artisans (in place of “the plebs”). “They were moved, apart from universal causes [their common hatred to the duke], because it appeared to the great that they were not getting back the state, to the people, that they had lost it; and to the artisans, that they were losing their earnings.”\(^ {311}\) Remarkably, in spite of the three groups’ desire to see the city free from the brutal government of the duke, Machiavelli suggests that each of the parties acted according to its own interest, trying to capitalize on widespread discontent with the ruling of the duke for their respective partisan advantage and not for the well-being of the community as a whole.

Chapters II.36-42 recount the final expulsion of the duke and the civil war that concluded with the decline of the feudal nobility of the city with which we began our inquiry. In the power vacuum left by Brienne’s expulsion, the popular elites gained momentum and finally defeated the nobles, creating a new popular government, re-instituting the Ordinances of Justices, and reinforcing the anti-magnate laws that deprived the ancient noble families of political eligibility.\(^ {312}\) Once again, Machiavelli applies the tripartite definition of Florence’s society, as he concludes “The great having been conquered, the people reordered the state: and because the people were of three sorts – powerful, middle, and low – it was ordered that the powerful should have two Signori, the middle people three, and the low three, and that the Gonfalonier of Justice be first from one and he from another.”\(^ {313}\) Hinting at the narrative of the last six books, here Machiavelli suggests that Florence could hardly be understood through adopting the binary opposition of the nobles and the people that he had so strongly supported in the

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\(^ {311}\) Machiavelli will apply a similar vocabulary in the aftermath of the expulsion of the duke: referring to an affair that involved a man of the nobles, he claims that it “gave hope to the great that they could compel the people, since they saw that the lesser plebs was in discord with it.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 95 and 102.

\(^ {312}\) Slightly before the end of the book (II.39) Machiavelli recurs in showing the people and the nobles as reversing their alleged tendencies, with the people taking a belligerent position and the great retreating from open confrontation – “the great, seeing the whole people armed, did not dare to take up arms...” Ibid, 101 and 104.

\(^ {313}\) “Vinti i Grandi, riordinò il popolo lo stato; e perché gli era di tre sorte popolo, potente mediocre, e basso, si ordinò che i potenti avessero duei Signori, tre i mediocrì e tre i bassi; e il gonfaloniere fusse ora dell’una ora dell’altra sorte.” Ibid.
Discourses and The Prince. In fact, as we shall soon see, Florence defied any such simple social classification, so much so that Machiavelli will now need to rely onto compounded terms – such as “popular nobles” or popolani nobili and “ancient nobility” or antica nobilità – in order to make sense of, and analyze, the politics of his city.  

The shift in the city’s social order is nowhere better analyzed than in the famous anonymous speech of III.5. Deploying some of the most vital concepts in Machiavelli’s political lexicon, the speech by the citizen “with most authority” begins with an excursus concerning the Italian cities as unavoidably shaped by the “enemies of freedom,” who, “under color of defending the state either of the best or of the people [o sotto colore di stato di ottimati o di popolari],” merely seek to monopolize political power.  

The orator thus suggests that the discords between the great and the many at this point have been reduced to an ideological fiction – suggested by his reference to the colore of the parties – which transcends the clear-cut distinction between the two groups, and nicely anticipates Machiavelli’s own words in the introduction to book IV. All classes, regardless of their standing and distinction, he further notes, are driven by a desire for “personal utility” and “the satisfaction of a few,” terms which the speaker contrasts to “public utility” and “common glory.”  

Speaking strictly of the Florentine case, the second part of the discourse gives a succinct account of the main factional events of book II concluding with the main theme of III.1: the decline of “our ancient nobility” which had been “put under the will of the people.” Given the destabilizing character of the nobility as introduced in the second book of the Histories, we might expect that, with their final destruction, the city could finally resolve its internecine conflicts. Unsurprisingly, however, the orator rapidly notices that “since a check had been put on those who by their pride and unbearable ambition appeared to have been the cause [che per la loro superbia e insopportabile ambizione pareva

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314 Nowhere prior to the events that led to the final decline of the nobility do we find such a composite term as “popular nobles.” The first moment at which the Florentine introduces this term is at II.36. Machiavelli uses the term “ancient nobility” twice in book III in order to distinguish the new elites from the old feudal nobility. Ibid, 94 and 109-11.

315 “For the prize they desire to gain by victory is not the glory of having liberated the city but the satisfaction of having overcome others and of having usurped the principaluty of the city.” Among the crucial terms employed in this speech – and always in opposition to one another – we find “order” and “disorder,” “private ambition” and “public utility,” “nature” and “time,” “fortune” and “prudence,” and “civic” and “free way of life.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 109-12.

316 “For only the name of freedom [il nome della libertà] is extolled by the ministers of license, who are the men of the people, and by the ministers of servitude, who are the nobles, neither of them desiring to be subject either to the laws or to men.” Ibid, 146. For a useful commentary on Machiavelli’s uses of colore, see Rebhorn, Foxes and Lions, 113-5, though Machiavelli’s use of the term in our section underscores different connotations from the ones highlighted by Rebhorn.

317 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 110. For the structure and the parallels drawn in the speech, see Cabrini, Interpretazione e Stile, 45-50. On the theme of liberty and the satisfaction of partisan interests, see Colish, “Idea of Liberty,” 331-3.

318 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 111-2
che ne fussero cagione],” the city remained nonetheless divided and continued to suffer the same political spasms that it had experienced during the earlier quarrels.\textsuperscript{319} It has become clear to the anonymous speaker (or shall we say, Machiavelli himself?) that blaming the ancient nobles for the current factional disputes is too naïve a diagnosis, a claim that is substantiated by his reference to the belief of “many” in the past conditional form – “pareva che ne fussero cagione.”\textsuperscript{320} Thus, while most, if not all, of the conflicts narrated in book II underscore the arrogance and insolence of the nobility as the main cause of the city’s existential crisis, the republican speaker does not see a substantial distinction between the behavior of the “ancient nobles” and the now-dominating “popular nobles.”

The anonymous citizen thus opposes, in an arguably Machiavellian fashion, “the mistaken opinion of men” and their “false…judgment” of historical “experience,” showing how “the pride and ambition of the great was not eliminated but taken from them by our men of the people.”\textsuperscript{321} As experience – or rather as Machiavelli’s history of Florence – shows, the factional feuds between the “popular nobles” display the same afflictions, acts and desire for domination as those of the “ancient nobility.”\textsuperscript{322} In fact, the events introduced in books III-V show how the popular elites (in this case, the “fatal families” of the Albizzi and Ricci) appropriated the old vocabulary of Guelf-Ghibelline and noble-people simply to destroy their enemies and conquer the state – rather than to promote the collective good of the community.\textsuperscript{323} Florence’s political instability, the orator suggests, resulted directly from the way the excessive desires of each group reflected and triggered foreseeable political difficulties.

Before turning to the final peroratio, the anonymous speaker further strengthens his point by continuing in the language of equality Machiavelli introduced earlier in the third book. While “civil modes and orders” had been insufficient to stop the ancient parties from disrupting the city because they were backed by powerful “princes” (a reference to their affiliations with the Pope and the Emperor) “the city [has now] been brought to such equality” that it could still be capable of ruling itself through “good customs and civil modes [buoni e costumi civile modi].”\textsuperscript{324} Deconstructing the class-specific language of the conflict between the nobles and the people, the anonymous speaker

\begin{itemize}
  \item[319] Ibid, 111. My emphasis.
  \item[320] Ibid.
  \item[321] “…ma è sì vede ora per esperienza quanto la opinione degli uomini è fallace e il giudizio falso; perché la superbia e ambizione de’ Grandi non si spense, ma da’ nostri popolani fu loro tolta.” Ibid.
  \item[322] Ibid, 110-1.
  \item[323] As Machiavelli explicitly mentions “they have revived the names of Guelf and Ghibelline [e il nome guelfo e ghibellino…risuscitano], which had been eliminated and had better never existed in this republic.” Ibid, 111.
  \item[324] “che la Italia tutta e questa città è condotta in tanta uguaglià che per lei medessima si può reggere, non ci è molta difficoltà” Ibid.
\end{itemize}
categorically concludes that all parties shared the desire for dominating others and, consequently, the city continued to suffer the same political problems it had earlier when the noble families had plagued its public life. Nonetheless, his appeal to a republican language of civil modes and nominal equality suggests that the allegedly negative model of conflict in Florence still contained something positive – provided that the regime conformed to a “free and civil way of life.”

Later in book III, in the chapters dedicated to the revolt of the wool carders or Ciompi, Machiavelli introduces the Florentine salaried classes or la plebe as a novel political actor, returns to the problem of popular agency, and hence presents the plebe as driven by the same logic and behavior as their “popular nobles” and “ancient noble” counterparts. The revolt of the Florentine Ciompi, Machiavelli observes, has its origins in increasing divisions between the aforementioned nobili popolani families – the Albizzi and Ricci – a struggle that gradually takes on social dimensions. The first stage of the revolt, Machiavelli tells us, results from some popular nobles associated with the Ghibelline party “who wanted to get revenge from the recent injuries they had received from the Guelfs.”

As we are told, since “the greater part of the arson and robbery...had been done by the lowest plebs of the city,” they feared they would be punished and “abandoned by those who had incited them to do evil.” The anxiety of the plebs is resolved in the following section – III.13 – by way of a direct speech by an anonymous plebeian who highlights three reasons for a forceful popular revolt. (a) The equal natura of men to recognize that power and wealth are the result of violence and deception; (b) the occasione to make their fortune out of the disunion of the leading nobili popolani; and (c) the necessità to redeem themselves from the previous acts of violence by redoubling their efforts so as to

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325 Ibid. I treat the final exortatio and its vocabulary of institutional reform in the following chapter.
326 As rightly noted by Cabrini, the underlying vocabulary and interests of the plebeians at this historical moment follows closely the language employed by their potenti popolani counterparts in the previous sections of the book. Cabrini, Interpretazione e Stile, 93. For the historical context of the revolt, see Anselmi, Ricerche Sul Machiavelli Storico, 168-77; and Gene Brucker, “The Ciompi Revolution,” in Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 314-56.
327 The Ghibelline families fought for re-gaining the right to hold office after the excessive use of the admonishment policy (literally, sending citizens on exile) on the part of the now-leading Guelf families. Being labelled Ghibelline was a common political tactic among powerful families in mid-to-late fourteenth century Florence, as the struggles between the Albizzi and Ricci family clearly shows. The Guelfs are seen as “ancient nobles with the greater part of the most powerful men of the people,” while the Ghibellines are depicted as “popular men of the lesser sort.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 114 and 114-8.
“become…their superiors.”

In the context of this natural condition—which strongly resonates with the theme of “wonderful equality” of III.1—the speaker encourages his plebeian audience to fight for what the rich and powerful have, and to change their clothes and places with them.

The speech functions as an introduction to the events that follow. Whereas the earlier violent acts by the plebs were dictated by fights among the popular nobles, now the Ciompi ascend as a rational and collective political actor. Their political ethos is represented by the anonymity of the speaker and by the first lines of the following chapter, in which Machiavelli, through the narrative voice, bluntly observes, “[T]hese men [the Ciompi] were preparing to seize the republic [occupare la repubblica].”

However, while Machiavelli is shown here to be the first Florentine historian to narrate—and even sympathize with—the demands of the plebs in rational and political terms, he also introduces a series of clues that qualify and question the centrality of the plebeians’ actions and methods.

Firstly, whereas the anonymous speech shows plebs becoming a collective political actor ready to take up the occasione, this event is anticipated by, and directly opposed to, the speech of Luigi Guicciardini at III.11. As Gonfalonier of Justice, Guicciardini warns the elites and the magistrates of the guilds about the dangers of their “disunions,” which is later confirmed by the anonymous speaker’s appeal to the division of their enemies as the occasion to become “princes of all the city [principi di tutta la città].” Additionally, by introducing a series of questions in the speech, Guicciardini, the main official of the Florentine republic, strictly separates himself from the struggles among the elites of the arts—

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330 Note the orator’s appeal to a vocabulary of appearance: in line with the previous speech, which refers to the “color” of the parties, the plebeian speaker sees no difficulty in exchanging places with their wealthy and powerful counterparts—the difference is simply one of “dress” or “clothes,” not of merit or virtue. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 122.
331 Bock, “Civil Discord,” 193-4; Cabrini, *Interpretazione e Stile*, 96. For a different interpretation, see Martine Leivobici, “From Fight to Debate,” 637-49; and, especially, Yves Winter, “Plebeian Politics: Machiavelli and the Ciompi Uprising,” *Political Theory* 40(6) (2012): 736-66. Winter treats the Ciompi speech in isolation from other orations in book III which proves problematic even on his avowed interpretive grounds. While Winter promises not to “reduce the meaning of the *Florentine Histories* to a single and uniform expression of Machiavelli’s authorial intentions,” he fails to accommodate the various ‘voices’ that may be seen to express Machiavelli’s dynamic and complex categorization of both civil discord and popular political action. This important dimension of the text can only be appreciated by Machiavelli’s broader dialogic strategy, which requires us to place the Ciompi as one voice among others in the context of these chapters. See, also, Miguel Vatter, “The Quarrel Between Populism and Republicanism: Machiavelli and the Antinomies of Plebeian Politics,” *Contemporary Political Theory* 11, (3) (2012): 242-63.
335 Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 123 and repeated at 129.
instance, by caustically demanding “what more can you [voi] decently desire from us [noi]?”\textsuperscript{336} In that regard, the moment to take up arms is shaped not by the plebs’ modest demands or the wealth of the elites, but rather by the disunion of the enemies of the Ciompi – a theme recurrently applied in the context of the \textit{Histories}. Notably, not only is the disunity among the elites a common theme in the two direct speeches, but it is also the anonymous plebeian’s first reason for redoubling the efforts of the revolt.\textsuperscript{337}

Secondly, the anonymity of the orator and the collective action of the Ciompi resonates strongly with the passivity of the officials of the republic, who behave “humbly,” as well as with “patience,” “tolerance,” “decency,” and “civility.”\textsuperscript{338} Guicciardini’s appeal to a classical republican language of civil peace and stability highlights the structural inability of Florentine republican institutions to halt such factional struggles, something that is later corroborated by the plebeian orator: “the magistrates [are] dismayed so they can easily be crushed.”\textsuperscript{339} Read in light of this larger concatenation of events, \textit{in utramque partem}, the Ciompo discourse confirms the fears of Guicciardini: the plebs considered the divisions among the elites as the occasion for overcoming the political leadership of the city.

Lastly, while Machiavelli largely celebrates the demands of the plebs, he expresses worries concerning their decision-making power, their potential abuses and their desire to conquer the state. This is substantiated by Machiavelli’s narration of the third and most radical stage of the revolt at III.17, in which he refrains from characterizing the acts of the Ciompi in economic and social terms – as the anonymous speaker had done at III.13. Machiavelli first observes that after the second stage of the revolt Michele di Lando, a fellow wool comber, is elected as Gonfalonier of Justice. While Machiavelli depicts Michele as a man of political clarity, republican moderation and natural sagacity, he also highlights the difficulty the Ciompi had in grasping the import of Michele’s innovations.\textsuperscript{340}

\textsuperscript{336} Ibid, 120.

\textsuperscript{337} “And it appears to me that we are on the way to a sure acquisition, because those who could hinder us are disunited and rich: their disunion will therefore give us victory, and their riches, when they have become ours, will maintain it for us.” Certainly, this recalls the indirect speech given by the duke of Athens at II.35, who claimed that “only disunited cities were enslaved and united ones free,” the civic-minded orator’s speech at III.5 (“this republic of ours can…maintain itself united”) and that of Niccolò da Uzzano at IV.27 (“…we have much more to fear since our party is fragmented and that of our adversaries whole”). Ibid, 93, 122 and 174, respectively.

\textsuperscript{338} Ibid, 119-20.

\textsuperscript{339} Ibid, 123.

\textsuperscript{340} Machiavelli, unlike previous chroniclers and historians, gives further pre-eminence to the figure and acts of Michele – so much so that di Lando is depicted as detached from the “arrogance” of the Ciompi at this stage of the revolt. Mark Phillips, “Barefoot Boy Makes Good: A Study of Machiavelli’s Historiography,” \textit{Speculum} 59(3) (1984): 589-2; Cabrini, \textit{Interpretazione e Stile}, 116; Jurdjevic, \textit{A Great and Wretched City}, 126. For a different interpretation, see Winter, “Plebeian Politics,” 742, who considers Michele di Lando “a Thermidorian figure,” engaging in a moment of “betrayal” vis-à-vis the Ciompi’s social and political interests.
Machiavelli’s narration in sections III.17-18 stresses the political and institutional innovations of the Ciompi: having placed one of their own as head of the republic, they desist from supporting di Lando. Machiavelli underscores the republican and moderate ethos of Michele, stresses the Ciompi’s capacity to act as an autonomous political agent and, crucially, suggests that their intentions mirrored those of their elite counterparts. In fact, while Machiavelli observes that Michele introduced important institutional measures to “quiet the city and stop the tumults,” the radical Ciompi simply desisted from supporting di Lando. Note for instance Machiavelli’s political lexicon in reference to the plebs’ acts: they decided to take up arms again and to withdraw to a nearby square where they “deliberated,” “confirmed,” “decided,” and “ordered” a series of magistrates “from among themselves [infra loro].” Thus, Machiavelli bitterly notes, “the city had two seats and was governed by two princes.” While Machiavelli leaves no doubt about the Ciompi’s wish to construct an alternative seat of power, his vocabulary emphasizes their partisan desires – they created a new Signoria “all among themselves.”

It is precisely for this reason that the Arendtian interpretation of Winter, while original, fails to elucidate the broader theoretical character of the Ciompi events. Winter is right to suggest that the Ciompi sections in general, and the anonymous speech in particular, help deconstruct the ideological and rhetorical vocabulary applied by the aristocratic groups in order to support their status and identity. However, the deconstruction of the vocabulary of power and authority also suggests that the concept of plebeian or popular agency is transformed and reversed in a similar fashion. In other words, if ‘nobility’ now means the use of deceptive tactics and trappings devoid of any ‘natural’ connotation, then what Machiavelli suggests here is (pace Winter) that either group would politically behave the same way – Machiavelli is depicting the now dominant plebs as gravitating toward a similar domineering style of politics.

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341 Michele di Lando engages in a series of acts that combine moderate republican reforms and ruthless violent acts. He first demands the plebs to seek out Ser Nuto da Città di Castello – the henchman of the previous regime – and then erected gallows in the main public square so as to “frighten everyone.” Then, he engages in a series of reforms meant to provide institutional channels to all social and political interests – he appoints new syndics of the Guilds, burns the old electoral bags, and creates a new Signoria with “four [members] from the lesser plebs, two from the greater and two for the lesser guilds” and divides the state into “three parts...one of these to go to the new guilds [of the salaried workers], another to the lesser [or middle sectors], the third to the greater.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 127-8.
343 “...tale che la città aveva duoì seggi ed era da duoì diversi princìpi governata.” Ibid, 129.
344 Machiavelli repeats this claim – infra loro or “from among themselves” – three times in a matter of three paragraphs. Ibid.
345 Winter, “Plebeian Politics,” 747-51. To this should be added that Winter’s interpretive attempt fails to provide a consistent answer to his own politico-philosophical questions. At the beginning of the text Winter claims to tease out a set of ideas that are “not entirely self-conscious” and do not necessarily reflect Machiavelli’s intentions (after all, Winter
Thus, this particular historical instance of plebeian agency reveals a political tendency very similar to the one attributed to their “ancient noble,” and “popular noble” counterparts and consequently arouses Machiavelli’s fear and pessimism about the role and effects of the plebs as agents of political innovation. The preface to book IV suggests that city-republics, especially those that are not well-ordered, change their governments between servitude and license as a result of the struggles between “the men of the people,” who are the “ministers of license,” and the nobles or “ministers of servitude.”346 Notably, in this climax of condemnation Machiavelli first inserts the “men of the people” as a group unsatisfied with its political influence through existing constitutional means; and secondly he condemns the popular nobility that constantly divides itself into various factions and consequently threatens the liberty of the city tout court. Indeed, Machiavelli claims that no group is the sole carrier of the desire ‘not to be dominated’ nor do they accommodate their interests to the common good or vivere libero.347

Lastly, Machiavelli will use the figure of one of the leaders of the late Trecento and early Quattrocento oligarchic regime, Niccolò da Uzzano, to confirm the same point from the perspective of the opponents of the plebeian regime.348 Presented in the aftermath of the Ciompi – and in the midst of the Albizzi and the Medici struggles – Uzzano’s various interventions further confirm Machiavelli’s
considerations regarding noble and popular (and plebeian) behavior in the Histories. For instance, at IV.9 Rinaldo degli Albizzi (the head of the leading party) suggests that the only available policy for them to maintain their political status is to “restore the state to the great and take away authority from the lesser guilds,” adding, “it was prudence to know how to use men according to the times: for if their fathers had used the plebs to eliminate the insolence of the great [i.e., the “ancient nobles”], now that the great had become humble and the plebs insolent, it was well to check its insolence with their help.” Uzzano then intervenes suggesting that Rinaldo’s words were “true” and his advice “good,” confirming the reversal of character traits between the nobles and the people that previous instances had clearly showed. He posits that their alignment with the “humble” nobles would require the use of arms; “and with arms, he judged, there was danger of not winning or of not being able to enjoy the victory.”

Next, speaking to the heads of the oligarchic party concerning the increasing ascendancy of the Medici among the popular sectors, Uzzano boldly asks them to consider the ills of their own party: “you [voi] have baptized our side the party of the nobles and the opposing side that of the plebs [in reference to Cosimo de Medici’s]. If truth were to correspond with the name [quando la verità corrispondesse al nome], victory would be doubtful in any event…” In the following lines Uzzano prophetically notices that while Cosimo’s “liberality…send[s] men flying to a princedom,” “we should…be moved by the example of the old nobility [l’antica nobilità] of this city who have been eliminated by the plebs.” “[A]nd for myself,” he concludes in a caustic republican tone that recalls the language of III.1, “I am one of those who desire that no citizen surpass any other in power and authority,” then adding that there are in fact no distinctions between the two parties – “but if one of these two must prevail, I do not know what cause would make me love Messer Rinaldo [degli Albizzi] more than Cosimo [de’ Medici].”

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349 As Donato Giannotti’s letter to Marcantonio Michiel suggests, “Machiavelli’s feelings might be deduced from the speeches which he attributed to the enemies of the Medici.” Quoted in Gilbert, “Machiavelli’s Istorie Fiorentine,” 142-3. Niccolò da Uzzano intervenes four times in book IV, which already underscores his importance in the context of these events: first (IV.3, IV.9 and IV.17) he intervenes via indirect addresses to the popular nobles while his other participation (IV.27) is a long direct speech addressed to Rinaldo degli Albizzi. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 152, 154, 165 and 173-4.
350 Ibid, 154.
352 Ibid, 175. See, also, Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 72-3 in reference to the oligarchic party and their inability to temporize – instead of eliminate – Cosimo de’ Medici.
Uzzano’s dry contrast of the social bases of the two parties shows that the distinction *antica nobilità*-*nobili popolani-plebe* is a shadowy one, since the divisions among the groupings were in reality singular. Revisiting the language he has just deployed, Uzzano concludes,

[If] one considers well of what sort they are and what sort we are, I do not know why our part deserves to be called the party of the nobles [nobil] more than theirs. And if it is because they are followed by all the plebs [la plebe], then we are in a worse position and they are in a better one for this…if it should come to test in which our weakness was uncovered, we would lose [the state].

In a word, the division between those in power and the ‘plebeian’ Medici is in reality an internal struggle between factions of the financial and mercantile bourgeoisie of the city. Regardless of their social denominations, Machiavelli suggests, the root of their political behavior and intentions was one and the same, for the members of the parties were more nobles (or plebs) “in name” than “in fact” and they both wished to monopolize power by virtue of their social and economic standing. Recognizing that Cosimo’s rise to power is a sure thing, Machiavelli’s mouthpiece delivers a full blow to the political inabilities of his own party, and, in doing so, acknowledges two particular qualities of the soon-to-be Medicean regime: its reliance on shrewd and skilled leaders, and its populist aura.

It is also noteworthy that, in spite of its republican undertones, Uzzano’s interventions take for granted the selfishness and ambition of the clashing groups: his considerations on the nature of society and civil discord, then, are less a condemnation of private interest than a recognition of the ease with which either party could adopt tyrannical means of domination. Uzzano’s analysis of the nobility and the people at this historical instance thus categorically collapses the characterization of social classification and agency from *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. Not only are the people or the plebs...
hardly attuned to the desire to live unconstrained from the dominating ethos of the nobles, but also the nobles themselves, by adopting the mentality of the people, have lost their earlier expectations concerning military affairs.

3 Conclusion

In this chapter I have shown that, contrary to *The Prince* and the *Discourses*, the *Florentine Histories* consistently depicts the people, in its various flavors, as carriers of the ambition and the desire for domination of which the few and powerful are usually found guilty. In fact, nowhere in the history of the Florentines do we find evidence that suggests that the post-1520 Machiavelli ascribes to the people the instrumental role of anchors or guards of communal liberty, as he had famously suggested in the early sections of the *Discourses*. If the Florentine people had showed their “natural” inclination to moderation and compromise, we may say that they would have opposed the nobility via the support of the established institutions which involved a culture of popular debate that would have led to the strengthening of the rule of law and the final stability of a popular regime. Much to the contrary, the popular sectors – from the early republic to the fall of the landed nobility, and from the Ciompi rebels to the “plebeian” allies of Cosimo de’ Medici – are recurrently depicted as self-interested, violent and ambitious, to the extreme of preferring the loss of the city’s liberty to the engagement in legitimate processes of communal politics.  

This critique of popular interests and agency is further substantiated by Machiavelli’s use of compounded terms in reference to the city’s social and political divisions: the early binary opposition of noble-people is now abandoned and superseded by a much more complicated, and recurrently tripartite, distinction among groupings referred to as “ancient nobility,” “popular nobles,” “princes of the plebs.” The world that Machiavelli recounts in the *Histories* is conspicuously marred by what Jean-Jacques Rousseau would centuries later call “sociétés partielles.” Reflecting on the history of the

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358 Unlike McCormick, who claims, “Machiavelli’s distinction between the grandi and the popolo suggests that the few and the many, respectively, are motivated by two qualitatively different appetites,” then adding, “The people are naturally inclined to avoid oppression, whether by suffering it themselves or inflicting it on others [...].” McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 5 and 191. My emphasis.

359 On this theme, see Jurdjevic, *A Great and Wretched City*, 245. Strikingly, Mansfield suggests that in books II and III of the *Histories* Machiavelli does consider the existence of tripartite formulae of the citizenry, though he then “lose[s] interest in it.” Later in the text Mansfield suggests that Machiavelli’s reference to this novel account of society “results merely from the differences between princes and people as they appear in the modern setting.” This latter suggestion by Mansfield is hardly attuned with the historical narrative and the vocabulary of society as deployed by Machiavelli in the context of book III, as substantiated by Machiavelli’s appeal to the language of “popular nobles” and “ancient nobles.” Mansfield, “Party and Sect,” 261-4.
Florentines Machiavelli thus suggests that virtue, whether in its individual or collective form, is too naïve a category to analyze and comprehend a city (and a world) dominated by men “nurtured by trade [nutricati dalla mercanzia].”

In this sense, the post-1520 Machiavelli can hardly be conceived of as singing the old tune of civic virtue, whether in its Ciceronian or Aristotelian form; or of understanding of politics as the realm of ruling and being ruled for the sake of what is commonly beneficial to all of its participants. Self-interest takes precedence over, or rather overtakes, any provision for a common vision of life, or the transformation of the multitude into a constitutive whole or polis. Put bluntly, Machiavelli’s Histories displays the Florentines, and the consequent disposition of the city’s institutions and authorities, as a collection of unassociated individuals.

It is precisely in this light that Machiavelli concludes in book five that this “devastated world [questo guasto mondo]” is unavoidably shaped by individual interests and power struggles. Nonetheless, Machiavelli still finds it useful for his readers to attend to these events. In fact, he asserts that universal lessons could be retrieved from this everlasting political instability of the Florentine context, since learning about these events is “no less useful…than to know about ancient ones [non e meno utile che si sieno le antiche cose a congnoscere], because, if the latter excite liberal spirits to follow them, the former will excite such spirits to avoid and eliminate them.” In spite of this quasi-
apocalyptic view of relentless failure, the Machiavelli of the Histories still seems to embrace these events rather than to merely disapprove of them: Machiavelli would not have been Machiavelli had he chosen to desist from finding solutions to political issues, even the most complex ones.\footnote{Much like in his previous considerations, necessity (not a cyclical view of history) is the operative concept here: the rise of new leaders, institutions, peoples and the like is made possible only by the direst conditions of the present (or at least the imagined dire condition of the present). On this theme, see Pasquale Villari, The Life and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli, trans. Linda Villari (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 282; Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 254; Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 9-11; Sasso, Machiavelli: La Storiografia, 205-7.}

And thus we return to Histories III.1: Machiavelli’s new categorization of society, class and civil discord in the Florentine Histories, then, is not an ironic condemnation of the history of his city; much to the contrary, this section depicts Machiavelli engaging with the themes and subjects to which his humanist predecessors have merely marveled. In that regard, his city’s “wonderful equality” of ends, or the existence of a multifaceted number of interests in a world dominated by commerce (not martial virtue) is the recognition that any long-term solution to the city’s violent struggles required novel means capable of satisfying the interests of all parties. While an egalitarian ethos is certainly the main condition for the founding and maintenance of a republican system of governance, Machiavelli seems to suggest that – as a result of the unequivocally similar ambition of all parties – equality is much more a problem than it is a solution for the modern political context.\footnote{These suggestions betrays tensions with Mansfield’s reading of the Histories. Mansfield suggests that the Histories ought to be read as part of a theoretical continuum in Machiavelli’s corpus: the malaise of the Christian religion required strong political remedies – ‘new modes and orders’ and the revival of a martially-inclined citizenship, as the Florentine had allegedly gestured in the Discourses on Livy. In this sense, Mansfield’s treatment of the Histories as a series of philosophical ‘inquiries’ rejects the relevance of the historiographical tradition – both classical and vernacular – in Machiavelli’s imagination, dismisses the work as theoretically unimportant and hence gives it a subsidiary role as part of a hierarchical Machiavellian corpus. As one of Mansfield’s intellectual companions categorically concludes, “For a full explication and justification of such founding [the aforementioned ‘new modes and orders’], one must turn to Machiavelli’s truly comprehensive works, The Prince and Discourses on Livy.” Mansfield, Party and Sect, 154-62; Lynch, War and Foreign Affairs, 26. My emphasis. Against this reading, see Mark Phillips, “Machiavelli, Guicciardini and the Tradition of Vernacular Historiography in Florence,” American Historical Review 84(1) (1979): 86-105.}

The egalitarian quality of Florence – which Machiavelli’s predecessors and contemporaries had seen and discussed with awe and reverence – now required a new analysis: private interests (whatever their form) had to be offered a clear set of political alternatives and preferences in order to be liberated from the temptation of monopolizing power. And so, whereas the early Machiavelli frequently rejects the pursuit of personal gain as antithetical to any communal benefit – as he tells us in the Discourses, citizens must be kept poor and the public rich – in his more practical discussion on how actual city-republics and their citizens operate, he thinks otherwise.\footnote{Certainly, Machiavelli has consistently mistrusted the wealth and power of landed lords; but, if an even standard of poverty was not possible in reality, he would}
have preferred the ambition of the commercial man to the unproductive benefit of the territorial noblemen. Assessing the history of Florence, thus, Machiavelli confronts his own maxims and principles as deployed in his early political works and suggests that, in view of the complexity of modern struggles and intrinsic interests, a whatever political solution that founders may undertake, they needed to take into consideration the “effectual truth,” the distinction between the early world of their own city and the corrosive “wonderful equality” of modern Florence.

While the confrontation of “virtue” with “corruption” is to be seen as an essential element in the Florentine’s political theorizing, this does not mean, as I suggest in the chapters that follow, that Machiavelli’s understanding of these two crucial terms is static and monolithic.\(^{370}\) Much to the contrary, the Machiavelli of the *Histories* and other post-1520 works does not square self-interest and commerce with corruption and the demise of republican freedom.\(^{371}\) It is precisely in these terms that we ought to interpret Machiavelli’s claim in the introductory chapter to the third book of his *Histories*: in a world in which the driving ethos is “not to obey,” the city required stern measures, novel political vistas, that could assure and guarantee a certain dose of social and political equality.

We still need to understand however how Machiavelli combines self-interest and equality in the absence of the *vita activa* and the *vivere populare*. Is it possible to retrieve from Machiavelli’s late works any suggestion, any logic, concerning the utility of private gain in the context of a republican mode of living? If so, are there any means in which this logic of private ambition could become operative and beneficial for the collectivity? Is it possible to find, in Machiavelli’s own terms, political and institutional conditions by which the self-concerned individual and a state of free government could be combined? Is the post-1520 Machiavelli, in the end, an advocate of the institutional ‘politics of equilibrium’ for which the Venetians had been famously praised?


Chapter 3

The Florentine Histories:

Machiavelli's 'Institutional' History of Florence

And there is no doubt that had Florence enjoyed such prosperity after it had freed itself from the Empire as to have obtained a form of government to maintain it united, I know no republic either modern or ancient that would have been its superior, so full of virtue, of arms, and of industry would it have been.

In Florence, where the administration was by turns in the nobles, the grandees, the commons, the plebeians, the mob, the ruling passion of each was the same; and the government of each immediately degenerated into a tyranny so insupportable, as to produce a fresh revolution.

1 – Introduction

John Adams was unique among the American founding fathers in that he took seriously Machiavelli's ideas. Not only did Adams read Machiavelli but he also openly acknowledged his intellectual debt to the Florentine to the extreme that he claimed to be “a student of Machiavelli.” As a matter of fact, Adams' works are filled with references to Machiavelli's oeuvre. For instance, in the second part of his multi-volume *A Defence of the Constitution of the United States of America*, Adams praises

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Machiavelli and considers him a historian “who may be compared to any of the historians of Greece and Rome.” Even more, Adams placed Machiavelli alongside those who have defended mixed government and, as a consequence, thought it useful to copy the Discourse on Florentine Affairs (a work he renames Machiavelli’s Plan for a Perfect Commonwealth) in full, and to transcribe – at times almost verbatim – over one hundred pages from the first seven books of the Florentine Histories.\(^{376}\)

Strictly speaking of the history of the Florentines, Adams further contends that “the predominant passion in all men in power, whether kings, nobles or plebeians, is the same[, and] tyranny will be the effect, whoever are the governors.”\(^{377}\) He even tells his readers that Machiavelli’s history of Florence – a city which Adams sees as divided into “three generation of inhabitants, that is, the nobility, the people of property and the common people” – serves as a laboratory in which to assess the interaction between human activity and constitutional organization.\(^{378}\) Similar to Machiavelli’s social conception recounted in the previous chapter of this project, Adams sees in Florence the quintessential exemplar of the lack (or perhaps demise?) of political and civil virtue: unlike classical republicans, Machiavelli desists from categorizing political participation as a form of civic \textit{askesis}, through which participants are capable of turning their selfish and factional interests into a common denominator of citizenship and common good.\(^{379}\) In a word, Adams seems to maintain that changing the nature of the Florentines was a rather difficult, if not impossible task, and hence the search for a solution to the state of dominance and political decline must have come about with a reordering of the governing institutions.

More specifically, Adams locates the locus of Florence’s political demise in the constitutional reforms of the late thirteenth century, with the introduction of the guild-based institutions and anti-noble Ordinances of Justice that defined political participation in terms of professional associations – and did so fairly expansively in that a large portion of Florence’s popular sections came to be included in the political decision-making process. And not only did these laws and institutions lead to the total disenfranchisement of the ancient Florentine nobility, but they also boosted the collapse of the clear binary opposition of nobles and people.\(^{380}\) For Adams, the outcome of these reforms clearly shows

\(^{377}\) Ibid, 6.
\(^{378}\) Ibid, 8.
\(^{380}\) “This institution [the Priorates]...occasioned the ruin of the nobility, who, upon divers provocations, were excluded, and entirely suppressed by the people...” to then adding, “By these laws, which were called Li Ordinamenti della Giustizia (but which were in reality as tyrannical as the edicts of any despot could be) the people gained great weight and authority.” Adams, \textit{Defence of the Constitutions of the United States}, 19.
that the monopolization of power by any one group led to the ascendancy of another, as all men aspire indiscriminately to attain offices and power, and to interfere as much as possible in public affairs.

In this sense, Adams credits the Machiavelli of the *Histories* with knowing, or at least imparting historical lessons on, the remedy to the problems of Florence, that is, a constitutional order based on “equal laws made by common consent, and supported, protected and enforced by three different orders of men in equilibrio.”381 Thus, not only is John Adams’ Machiavelli a defender of mixed government, but he is also interested in structures of power and constitutional mechanisms to create stability – the recurrent cycles of factional disputes, Adams tells us, were the result of “the defect in the government” of the city.382 In a word, given the ambition, vanity and selfish interests of all citizens (regardless of their social and political classification) and their improbable rehabilitation, it was all the more concurrent with the “effectual truth of things” to look for failure (and consequently for genuine change) elsewhere, as a means to attain the maximum of liberty and order in a world marred by private ambition. The ultimate cause of Florence's history of political instability, observes Adams through the eyes of Machiavelli, was intimately connected to its flawed institutional organization.

While Adams credits the Machiavelli of the *Discourses* for having resurrected the mixed constitution of ancient Rome, his considerations in his lengthy study of the *Histories* seem to suggest something more. The constitutional principles that Adams’ Machiavelli evaluates throughout the text disclose his

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381 Ibid, 7. My emphasis.
382 Ibid, 31. My emphasis. In his commentary on John Adams' interest in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*, C. Bradley Thompson categorically asserts that “Adams found Machiavelli's analysis of the destruction of Florence shallow and incomplete.” There are a number of reasons for considering this interpretation erroneous: first, Thompson claims that Adams “was often uncertain as to when Machiavelli spoke the truth and when he dissimulated” to then claiming that he “seems to have known there were two Machiavellis: Machiavelli the restorer of ancient republican institutions and Machiavelli the teacher of evil.” From Machiavelli's correspondence at the time of composing the history of the city (which, I must acknowledge, was not available at the time of Adams) we know that he was concerned with his fragile relationship with his commissioners, and it would be unsurprising if he had chalked up his work with bits of irony and paradox – or when Machiavelli “was in jest or in earnest” as Adams himself suggests. In other words, Adams' claim seems to pertain less to Machiavelli's esotericism and more to the Florentine's interest in getting his political assertions 'delivered' in spite of the constrains implicit in a 'commissioned' historiographical project. As a matter of fact, the first clause of the sentence to which Thompson refers provides an arguably open and positive consideration of Machiavelli and consequently leaves no doubt with respect to Adams' evaluation of the *Histories* – “...Machiavel is the most favourable to a popular government...” In a word, given the ideological and contextual constraints implicit in the *Histories*, Machiavelli shows to be a stubborn defender of republican government – even more than in his *post res perditas* political works. Secondly, Thompson boldly affirms that “Adams criticizes Machiavelli in the end for reducing the civil dissensions of Florence” to “the world of fortuna.” As important as this theme is in Machiavelli's works, this is hardly meant in derogatory terms, especially if we consider Adams' transcription of Machiavelli's *Discourse on Florentine Affairs* in the second volume of the *Defence*, where, as a means of a short introduction, he observes: “Machiavel, from his long experience of the miseries of Florence of his own times, and his knowledge of their history, perceived many of the defects in every plan of a constitution [the Florentines] had ever attempted” to then observing “his sagacity too perceived the necessity of three powers...” Thompson, “Adams’s Machiavellian Moment,” 391 and 409; Adams, *Defence*, 441-2; on this theme in Machiavelli’s *Histories*, see Cabrini, *Per Una Valutazione*, 16-7.
interest in institutional arrangements as the necessary condition to establish good government. It is precisely in this sense that Adams conceives of the balance of powers, not as intragovernmental institutions which check one another, but as elements in the society at large whose power integrated purposefully into the fabric of political structure itself.\textsuperscript{383} In other words, the \textit{Florentine Histories} portray a Machiavelli who is interested in exploring one of the quintessential questions in the canon of western political thought: “what sort of constitution is desirable for what sort of civic body?”\textsuperscript{384}

Against this background, I wish to present some aspects of Machiavelli’s thinking concerning the quality of the communal institutions as recounted in his \textit{Florentine Histories}. Even though this issue has played an important part in recent works on Machiavelli, few scholars have studied it from the perspective of Machiavelli’s history of Florence, and they usually focus on passages from \textit{The Prince} and the \textit{Discourses}.\textsuperscript{385} In this sense, this chapter contributes and expands on the existing literature concerning Machiavelli’s interest in the republican institutions of the Florentine commune – particularly from the perspective of the \textit{Histories} and thus of Machiavelli’s ‘late’ political theorizing. Consequently, this chapter casts light on the “institutionalist” nature of Machiavelli’s republicanism by the time of his most historical work and the extent to which his considerations on the good republic underwent considerable alterations when analyzing actual Renaissance states.\textsuperscript{386} In this work, Machiavelli discards most, if not all, pre-existing institutions, criticizes the irregular nature of the various constitutional reforms, and attacks the electoral policies of the Florentines, their reliance on the dictatorial power of \textit{balia} as well as the factional nature of their communal offices. The \textit{Histories} thus provide a synthetic exposition concerning the distinctive factional character of all previous regimes and institutional reforms, hence suggesting that the proper restructuring of the city’s

\textsuperscript{383} “[L]egislation is not yet perfect enough to alter or to remedy, but by making the distinctions themselves legal, and assigning to each its share,” writes Adams in volume three of the \textit{Defence}. Cited in Appleby, “The New Republican Synthesis,” 585.


\textsuperscript{386} As scholars such as John Najemy have noticed, Machiavelli’s early interest in the history of Rome and the ancients in general is superseded by an increasingly Florentine ethos in his later writings. Of course, this shift makes sense since he was finally returning to public life in his capacity as the official historiographer of the city. However, it is worth noting that Machiavelli’s intellectual circle also seems to follow this radical shift: while the \textit{Discourses} and \textit{The Art of War} grew out of his discussions with the irreverent republican youth of the \textit{Orti Oricellari}, the \textit{Histories} and his late political works grew out of an increasingly ‘conservative’ circle of acquaintances ranging from Filippo di Filippo Strozzi and Filippo de’ Nerli to Francesco Guicciardini (I owe this suggestion to Professor Robert D. Black). On the historiographical shift in Machiavelli’s thought see Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 554-9; for an account of Machiavelli’s friendships at the late stages of his career, see Black, \textit{Machiavelli}; and Butters, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 64-79.
government required the participating and enfranchisement of all groups and interests. As John Adams observes, the Machiavelli of the \emph{Histories} sought to understand the polity less in terms of universal or normative postulates and more in terms of institutions and mechanisms capable of dealing with the almost cyclical problem of monopolization of power. The answer for both the late Machiavelli and Adams is, not so much broad popular participation or restricted elite governance, but, as it will be observed in the next chapters, the differentiation of functions as a means to satisfy partial interests as part of a “politics of equilibrium” of ends.

As I showed in the previous section, the \emph{Histories} shows Machiavelli’s increasing awareness of power and domination as a broad social phenomenon, a fact that compelled him to (re)consider a practical political solution based on the needs and habits of Florence's multifaceted and historically evolving social groups. In general, Machiavelli's historical narration, and the variegated vocabulary applied therein, displays the sections of the commune in a constant dynamic overlap and interaction, which exemplifies and corroborates the main theme of this section – that is, the historically defective constitutional ethos of the republic of Florence.\footnote{Partly as a critique of Machiavelli’s own considerations, Adams maintains that the true “evil” and “cause” of the constant factional disputes of Florence was the city's “imperfect and unbalanced constitution of government” rather “than...the perverseness of men.” Nonetheless, throughout his study of the \emph{Histories}, Adams consistently recalls Machiavelli’s accuracy when referring to the ill-conceived Florentine \emph{ordini}. Adams, \textit{Defence of the Constitutions of the United States}, 103.}

In Machiavelli's estimation, then, the idea that human beings are capable of improvement and education is far too naïve as a starting point for political reflection under the conditions of a modern republic such as Florence – and Italy in general.\footnote{Certainly, the Machiavelli of the \emph{Discourses} would also suggest that human beings, broadly defined, are fickle and untrustworthy; nonetheless, as showed in the first two sections of this project, the Machiavelli of the \emph{Discourses} and \textit{The Prince} offers a sustained distinction between the noble and popular political ‘natures’ – especially in terms of the positive character of the dynamic and 'unresolved' (i.e. the continuous development of) friction between the two parties.} It is far better, our author insists, that one begins with a bold appreciation for the inconsistencies of human behavior – hence his interest in the history of his city – and then, on that basis, one might be able to determine the institutional means to put them to the most satisfactory use. Thus, while Machiavelli's \emph{Florentine Histories} does not offer – or at least not in an explicit way – a precise expression of the constitutional ordering he has in mind, his observations on the malfunctioning institutional procedures of the past, alongside his views concerning power and authority, suggest that the Machiavelli of the \emph{Histories} promotes a system of “institutional virtù” – that is, in the context of the manifold and intrinsically pernicious interests of Florence, the
reliability of the republic ought to be institutional, not personal.\footnote{This theme is further analyzed in chapters IV and V, where I discuss the textual, ideological and conceptual relationships between the \textit{Florentine Histories} and the post-1520 texts on constitutional reform. In chapter II, I discussed a number of shocking arguments introduced in the \textit{Histories} with respect to Machiavelli's earlier arguments on civic discord, popular participation, and guardianship of liberty. Jurdjevic, \textit{A Great and Wretched City}, 69-70.}

In this respect, my “institutional” reading of the \textit{Histories} comes as a direct challenge to Mansfield's interpretation, who asserts that the \textit{Florentine Histories} “have their place in Machiavelli's grand scheme, but they do not reveal that scheme. From them alone we get little that is distinctively Machiavellian […].”\footnote{Mansfield, “Introduction to Machiavelli’s \textit{Florentine Histories},” 125-6; also, by the same author, “Party and Sect,” 209-66.} If we take Mansfield's suggestions seriously – in that \textit{Histories} is a 'domesticated' or ‘municipal’ version of the familiar themes and subjects already discussed in his major political works – then, one runs the risk of mistaking Machiavelli's historiographical endeavours for a mere series of anecdotes that muffle the energies of robust political analysis.\footnote{For a powerful critique of Mansfield's “Party and Sect,” see Mark Phillips, “A Comment on Machiavelli's \textit{Florentine Histories},” in \textit{Machiavelli and the Nature of Political Thought}, ed. Mark Fleisher (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 267-75. Phillips considers it a mistake on the part of Mansfield to speak of the \textit{Istorie} as a quarrel between ancient and modern parties as a consequence of the rise of Christianity and the decline of Roman virtue. Additionally, Phillips observes, “By insisting on labeling the \textit{Histories} as 'inquiries' [on the quarrel between ancients and moderns], Mansfield is attempting to impose the character and purpose of the \textit{Discorsi} on Machiavelli's historical work.” Ibid, 269.} In other words, Mansfield dismisses the text's political value and consequently views it as a parochial and idiosyncratic oddity in an otherwise consistent and static corpus. Far from that being the case, I suggest that the \textit{Histories} propose an arguably more sophisticated political and constitutional analysis than reported in Mansfield's exegetic works: if taken seriously, the \textit{Histories} show us a new Machiavelli, one different from the canonical Machiavelli of his major political texts.\footnote{While Machiavelli's ‘new’ interpretation of the history of his beloved city certainly does engage in a critique of the historical works of his predecessors (most especially those of Bruni and Bracciolini), his \textit{Histories} is far from being a mere recasting of the humanist historiographical tradition. As Cabrini notices, Machiavelli's “interpretation [of the history of the city] was meant to underscore and shed full light on…the depth of the ‘crisis’ of the political life and the institutions of Florence – as well as on the origins of this crisis in its remote past.” In other words, as much as Machiavelli ought to be considered a great, and able, historian, his interest in the historiographical techniques and sources cannot be separated from his political imagination (or vice-versa). Cabrini, \textit{Per una Valutazione}, 19. My translation.}

Also, my account wishes to complement the thesis espoused by, among others, John Najemy, who in his seminal work on the \textit{Histories} shows how Machiavelli openly criticizes the Florentine humanist historiographical tradition in order to recast the role of the guild corporate system in the early institutional development of the Florentine republic.\footnote{Najemy, “\textit{Arte and Ordini},” 163-9; by the same author, \textit{A History of Florence}, 63-95.} In Najemy's estimation, the decline of the city's \textit{ordini} were a reflection of the steady erosion of the guilds' role in the electoral and republican institutions of Florence: guild corporatism was politically expunged from the Florentine constitution,
since it had opened the door to the revolt of the Ciompi in 1378. As a result, Najemy considers Machiavelli's historical narration pregnant with a gloomy political lesson that overshadows the last four books of Histories – first with the rise of the oligarchic government of the Albizzi and then with the emergence of the Medici's hegemony.

As sound and insightful as Najemy’s considerations may be, they seem to contradict Machiavelli’s claims in the Histories and in the roughly contemporary Discourse on Florentine Affairs, where our author openly asserts that Florence is a city of “wonderful equality [mirabile uguallità]” or “where equality is great [dove è grande equalità],” a theme that has positive connotations in the conventional republican language of the time and, arguably, in Machiavelli’s own political theorizing, as well.

More importantly, this suggestion indicates Machiavelli's conviction that Florence, in spite of its ubiquitous disputes and ill-organized governments, still maintained a dose of republican liberty. In other words, in the Histories and other post-1520 works Machiavelli considers that, despite its historically spurious orders or ordini and their consequent political ramifications, his beloved city still retained an element of freedom that would allow for the revival, or at least consideration, of a vivere civile.

In the following sections, I consider, first, Machiavelli’s account of the constitution of the primo popolo (literally, ‘first people’), and then focus on the Ordinances of Justice of 1293 and the creation of the first guild-based popular republican government. I show how Machiavelli subtly adds a series modifications from the historical narrative as introduced by his main medieval and humanist sources.

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394 "If Florence had ever been or might have remained a healthy and free political society, this was at least in part owing to its guilds. But like the other Florentine ordini, the guilds too were ultimately defective...” Najemy, “Arti and Ordini,” 172; and Corporatism and Consensus, 315-7. I have discussed this theme in chapter II of the present dissertation.

395 Certainly, Najemy shows himself to be more interested in Machiavelli’s abandonment of the “prince-redeemer” thesis of the earlier works and its consequent replacement by the instructional potential of history to “transform suffering into wisdom,” but the latter suggestion remains at the level of speculation – that is, the idea that the Histories and the Discourse are a “point of departure” for a novel type of political analysis is not fully developed in Najemy’s works. On the implications of this thesis, see Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 551-576. For a different, yet pessimistic, consideration of the Histories, see Sasso, Machiavelli: Storia del Suo Pensiero Politico, 450-90; and, by the same author, Machiavelli: La Storiografia, 42-5 and 203-6.

396 To this should be added, first, that Najemy mainly focuses on book III of the Histories and the role of the Florentine guilds in the revolt of the Ciompi of 1378 therein. Secondly, Najemy's guild-based interpretation of the Histories does not properly assess Machiavelli's account of the government of the primo popolo, the first popular government, the banishment of the nobles, and the Ordinances of Justice of 1293-5 as present in book II – wherein the central theme of the narrative is, as I wish to suggest, the inherent instability of the republican institutions of Florence. For a similar account, see Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 20-110.

in order to further and strengthen his theoretical position. The third section tries to attend carefully to Machiavelli's observations on the oligarchic government of Rinaldo degli Albizzi (books III and IV), paying special attention to Machiavelli's considerations concerning the regime's governmental as well as electoral institutions. This section also discusses the foundation and development of the Medicean stato, its system of electoral manipulation and its organization as narrated in last sections of the book. Contrary to Najemy's guild-based interpretation, I argue that these sections prefigure precisely what John Adams deemed as the crucial lesson in the Florentine Histories: a defective constitution that preserved, and even boosted, the cycle of factional disputes. Machiavelli’s ‘institutionalist’ history then looks at the deep institutional flaws in the city in order to suggest, and elaborate on, a novel constitutional solution that would allow for a (new) Florentine republican revival.

2 The Constitution of the Primo Popolo and the Possibility of New Ordini

Having first discussed the origins of Florence and the “history” of factionalism in the city (II.1-3), Machiavelli turns his attention, for the first time in the Histories, to the problem of ordini at II.4-6. More significantly for this study, here Machiavelli introduces an arguably enigmatic and 'romanticized' version of the constitution of the ‘first people’ or primo popolo to the extreme that, as he explicitly concludes, “on these military and civil orders the Florentines founded their freedom [con questi ordini militare e civili fondorono i Fiorentini la loro libertà].”

Machiavelli tells us that after the death of the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, the enmities between the Florentine Ghibelline and Guelf factions came to a conclusion and “those in Florence who were men of the middle [uomini de mezzo] and had more credit with the people thought it might be better to reunite the city than to ruin it by keeping it divided.” As a result, the Florentines thought that “the

398 Butters, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 75.
399 These early chapters ought to be considered as a crucial exegetic juncture for assessing the political imagination of the late Machiavelli. As a matter of fact, these sections introduce, for the first time, the violent and spasmodic changes of the commune in the context of a new social paradigm: by the end of the thirteenth century, Machiavelli suggests, Florence began its transformation from a feudal-based and martial-oriented society into an autonomous state that grew prosperous by the rise of a new ‘popular’ dominating class of merchants and bankers. Machiavelli’s famous reference to his city's wonderful equality pertains to its transformation from a martial and land-based society to an increasingly commercial society. Nonetheless, his silence concerning the role of the major guilds in these events – after all, why does he not refer to the guilds directly as he does, for instance, at II.10-11? – suggests that Machiavelli’s interest in this stage of the history of the commune lies elsewhere, beyond the confines of guild corporatism. Moreover, and contrary to Machiavelli’s suggestions, the politics of pacification between Guelf and
time had come to take the form of a free way of life and an order [vivere libero et ordine] that would enable them to defend themselves, before the new emperor could acquire forces.  

Not only does Machiavelli apply here one of his pivotal political terms – vivere libero – but he also provides a detailed account of the institutional reforms of the commune: they divided the city into sixths or sexti and created an executive magistracy of twelve Anziani or Elders, two from each sixth, which would be elected every year. Moreover, and “to remove the causes of enmities that originated from judges, they provided two foreign judges [duoi giudici forestieri],” the Captain of the People and the Podestà, in charge of judging civil and criminal cases. Machiavelli dedicates the rest of the fifth chapter to another crucial theme: “because no order is stable without providing itself a defender,” they ordered “twenty banners within the city and seventy-six in the countryside” in a direct reference to the military organization of the city and its surrounding territories. The armies, he observes, “varied the badges on them according to the weapons...And every year on the day of the Pentecost,” the standard-bearers were changed with great pomp.

There are a number of crucial features of this description that are worth emphasizing: first, as has been noted by a number of students of the Histories, Machiavelli conflates the creation of the Captain of the People with that of the Podestà when only the Captain was created in 1250 – the Podestà already existed. While the former was the expression of the Florentine popolo grasso and their allied minuti,

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402 Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 57.
403 According to Najemy, the Anziani were “elected twice a year” and were in charge of “day-to-day affairs of government and had broad judicial, financial, and administrative powers and the exclusive right to initiate legislation...” Also, Machiavelli does not consider other minor, but nonetheless important, offices such as the legislative councils of the Credentia, the Council of the Captain of the People, the one hundred standard-bearers and the consuls of the guilds. Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 67. This further evinces the absence of the corporate guilds from Machiavelli’s narrative in these early sections of the Histories and suggests that their role is far less crucial than previously believed.
404 Applying his typical vocabulary of balance and separation of powers, Adams considers that the “Twelve anziani appear to have had the legislative and executive authority, and to have been annually [sic] eligible – a form of government as near that of Mr. Turgot, and Marchamont Nedham, as any to be found...” Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions of the United States*, 13.
406 Equally important is the opposition between the present and the past: “[S]o much virtue was in these men then, and with such generosity of spirit did they govern themselves, that, while today [oggi] an unexpected assault on the enemy is looked upon as a generous and prudent action, in those times it was reputed contemptible and false [allora vituperoso e fallace si reputava].” Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 58.
407 Ibid. n.1. In his narration of the events that resulted in the constitution of the primo popolo, Giovanni Villani speaks of the podestà “che allhora era in Firenze” to then give full attention to the creation of the Captain of the People. Villani, *Cronica Fiorentina*, 49-50; and Cabrini, *Per una Valutazione*, 57. Additionally, Leonardo Bruni makes no mention of
the latter was the representative of the old nobili, and both offices were held by 'impartial' foreign and autonomous officers. Second, Machiavelli leaves out his own reflections on the Captain of the People as introduced in the first book of the Discourses, where he refers to this office as a direct expression of the servile origins of Florence – and with its uncomplimentary reference to it as hardly accountable and usually subject to factional interests and corruption. Thirdly, Machiavelli attributes to this regime the creation of the military ordini of the city – “they established twenty banners within the city and seventy-six [though they were actually ninety-six] in the countryside and enrolled all the young men under them” – but, as one of Machiavelli's main sources for this section observes, the ordering of these military units was in fact a Florentine feudal tradition – “questo ordine fu molto antico.”

In this respect, it is fair to argue that Machiavelli engages in a process of “re-production and re-appropriation” of historical events: unlike his sources, the Florentine gives further ascendancy to the creation of these institutions as part of thoroughly new ordini, the “civil and military orders,” upon which the city “founded its freedom.” Under these circumstances, not only does Machiavelli manifestly alter the historical origin of the manifold republican institutions but, by assigning their creation to a single moment of constitutional reform, he decisively transforms their political significance, as well. First, the establishment of the noble and popular judicial offices (as well as the executive Elders and the new military units) as part of a single moment of reform diminishes the role

408 As a matter of fact, the first podestà were of Florentine origin and only by the early thirteenth century (as a result of the early Guelph-Ghibelline factions) they began to be recruited from other Italian cities. Najemy also observes that the Captain of the People “replaced the podestà as the commune's chief military and judicial official,” which situates the power of these offices as part of two distinct historical periods. Ibid, 64 and 67.

409 At least so Machiavelli notices at I.49 of the Discourses: “...Florence and the other cities born in its mode, being servile had this authority invested in a foreigner, who, being sent by the prince, filled such an office. When they later came to freedom, they maintained this authority in a foreigner whom they called the Captain [of the people].” His mention of “the prince” in this passage might be a reference to the office of the Podestà (as a result of the Imperial dominance prior to the government of the primo popolo) but this is a matter of mere speculation. Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 101.

410 Additionally, while Villani speaks of two groups of soldiers, he further suggests that one group was ‘popular’ in nature and the other was composed by “cavallieri.” The latter is, of course, a reference to the pre-1250 commune and the land-based warrior class whose knights constituted the cavalry of the communal army. Villani, Cronica Fiorentina, 50; also, Niccolò Machiavelli, Istorie Fiorentine [libri I-3], ed. Delio Cantimori and commentary by Vittorio Fiorini (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1962 [1894]), 129-32; Waley, The Army of the Florentine Republic, 71-2 and 74-6, observes that “The advent of the Primo Popolo (1250) was accompanied by an institutional reorganization, but this had little effect on the Florentine army”; Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 54-5; Najemy, A History of Florence, 65-6; and Bruni, History of the Florentine People, 111.

411 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 58; Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 58; and Raimondi, L'ordinamento della Libertà, 62-3.
of the popular institutions that had supposedly played a crucial task in Machiavelli’s political imagination.\textsuperscript{412} Secondly, Machiavelli’s neglect of his own assertion on the servile origins of Florence in the \textit{Discourses} is coupled with the shocking suggestion that the constitution of the \textit{primo popolo} is to be seen as the “true” foundational moment of the Florentine republic and its liberty.\textsuperscript{413} This is further reinforced by Machiavelli’s change of tone on the purpose and success of the crucial Captain of the People, as this section of the \textit{Histories} dramatically alters the pessimistic undertones from the \textit{Discourses}, as we have already noted.

While in his previous exposition this office is displayed as an example of the corrupted state of Florence and the inexorable power of history, by the time of the \textit{Histories} we notice that the creation of the Captain is introduced as part of a moment of institutional innovation that is historically and conceptually disconnected from Machiavelli’s seemingly strong commitment to a cyclical view of history.\textsuperscript{414} Furthermore, Machiavelli both underscores the \textit{virtù} of these institutions and diminishes the status of individual figures; that is, the creation of these \textit{ordini} is always referred to as the result of a communal effort in the nominal sense – “on these military and civil orders the Florentines [i \textit{Fiorentini}] founded their freedom.”\textsuperscript{415} The intended purpose of these novel requirements, then, pertains more to the unity of the city and the pursuit of a common way of life than to the development of civil discords or extraordinary founders based on the lessons of ancient Roman politics – as he puts it, the Florentines were more preoccupied in unifying the city “than [in ruining] it by keeping it divided.”\textsuperscript{416}

These observations are all the more conclusive if we return to Machiavelli’s political vocabulary in these chapters: while the Florentine acknowledges the role of the \textit{popolo grasso} – the “middle men” of Florence – he also asserts that their intention was to “reunite [riunire] the city” and when the citizens

\textsuperscript{412} On this populist-republican interpretation, see Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 64-5; and McCormick, \textit{Machiavellian Democracy}, 101-3.

\textsuperscript{413} This, of course, was Villani’s own suggestion, who, looking back from vantage point of the fourteenth century, saw this era as Florence’s golden age. Villani, \textit{Cronica Fiorentina}, 52, 70, 76; and Waley, \textit{The Army of the Florentine Republic}, 74-5.

\textsuperscript{414} On Machiavelli’s Polybian view of history and its implications in the \textit{Istorie}, see Gilbert, “Machiavelli’s \textit{Istorie Fiorentine},” 135-54; on the problems of such Polybian reading of the \textit{Histories}, see Jurdjevic, \textit{A Great and Wretched City}, 9-11 and 182-3.

\textsuperscript{415} Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 58. While historians consistently show the attempts of the \textit{primo popolo} at limiting the participation of the previous ruling group as well as that of the Ghibelline and Guelph partisans, Machiavelli is thoroughly silent with respect to these restrictive policies – rather, he highlights the consensual status of the city under its new institutions. Gaetano Salvemini, \textit{Magnati e Popolani in Firenze dal 1280 al 1295} (Turin: Einaudi, 1960), 9; Najemy, \textit{A History of Florence}, 68-9.

\textsuperscript{416} Notice how little there is in these sections concerning (individual or group) human behaviour: whenever Machiavelli applies his typical normative vocabulary, he does so with respect to “the form” of government in general and/or the “military and civil orders” of the commune in particular. Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 57-8.
“were united [essendo uniti]” they organized “a free way of life [vivere libero].”\textsuperscript{417} In other words, what Machiavelli emphasizes in these early pages is the search for an institutional measure of enfranchisement capable of altering the ubiquitous ideological divisions (in this case, the intestine quarrels between the Ghibelline and the Guelfs) so as to encourage the common good of all. For Machiavelli, then, a republic must be mixed in an appropriate way; that is, there must be representative institutions meant both to accommodate different groups and to prevent them (irrespective of their social classification) from dominating and co-opting the political agenda of the city.

More important still, the fact that Machiavelli separates the occasione for institutional reform from the slavish origins of the city of the Discourses tells us that something out of the ordinary might be going on here: not only does Machiavelli romanticize this “constitutional moment” in the history of the city, but, in doing so, he suggests the possibility for the creation of a republican system of governance based on the unity and accord of all social sectors of Florence.\textsuperscript{418} As Anna Maria Cabrini has rightly noticed, Machiavelli’s suggestion here implies a moment of optimism for the present that consequently introduces historical lessons on the possibility of founding new ordini based on the political expression of a wide range of interests and forces.\textsuperscript{419} In other words, the institutional success of this government further proved to Machiavelli that the Florentines were still responsive to certain forms of republican politics that could instill in them a dynamic sense of unity and equilibrium. Thus, the teaching of this success seems to be that the prospect for political and institutional renewal was no worse in the present than it had been in the past: the coexistence of these offices representative of noble and popular interests suggests that the roots for a free way of life lie at the heart of a wide institutional system of participation and representation. These sections, then, demonstrate that the early Florentine regime, like Machiavelli’s own, was capable of building a thoroughly novel institutional configuration, one which, since the moment of the city’s freedom from the emperor, aimed at the common benefit of its

\textsuperscript{417} Ibid., 57.
\textsuperscript{418} This is further corroborated by Machiavelli himself in the introductory section to book III, where, having compared the ubiquitous enmities between the nobles and the people in both Rome and Florence, he concludes that “These things can be recognized in part through the reading of the preceding book [book II], which showed the birth of Florence and the beginning of its freedom [avendo mostro il nascimento di Firenze e il principio della sua libertà], with the causes of its divisions, and how the parties of the nobles and the people ended with the tyranny of the duke of Athens and the ruin of the nobility.” Ibid., 106. My emphasis. Also, Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 59; and Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 182-3 (though Jurdjevic does not give the necessary emphasis to this historical juncture and its reverberations in Machiavelli’s political thought).
\textsuperscript{419} “It corroborates that it was still possible, for whoever wished to, to create a new political system based on consensus and unity” Ibid. My translation. This observation, moreover, suggests that the “domestic unity” Machiavelli espouses in these sections does not pertain, by any means, to a “standing together against outside forces” – in reference to “a type of domestic discord peculiar to the Christian era” – as other Machiavelli scholars have recently suggested. See Lynch, “War and Foreign Affairs in Machiavelli’s Florentine Histories,” 20 and 24-5.
citizens.

In this sense, it is hard to agree with populist and democratic interpreters who assert that these early sections of the Histories are representative of Machiavelli’s continuous interest in the dynamic channelling of civil discords into a “two-polities-in-one” republican system – typical of Machiavelli's earlier political works. Italian scholars, such as Fiorini and Raimondi, claim that Machiavelli's comments on the Captain and the Podestà represent the existence of “two republics, the Commune and the People.” Following the insight of Fiorini, Raimondi further asserts that “in order to counterbalance the power of the noble men, the men of the middle instituted orders that suited their own ethos; this event did not neutralize the social conflicts, but turned them into the driving force of government.”

Najemy and McCormick, among other Anglo-American scholars, interpret these sections as part of a longer (guild-driven) concatenation of events. Najemy considers the historical situation of the republic as “popular” in that “the wide base of support indicated by the participation of the militia representatives and the guild consuls...in the Council of the Capitano and their consultation by the Anziani on matters including war and taxes,” Machiavelli consistently highlights the institutional system of equilibrium between the people and the nobility at this historical juncture.

Following Najemy, McCormick suggests that thirteenth-century Florentine republicanism, with its guild-based “occupational specification,” ensured that “citizens besides the most wealthy would hold office.” McCormick further observes that, whereas the guild system suffered a series of setbacks, “Its corporate character...is very close to what Machiavelli attempts to revive through the tribunate in his neo-Roman model.” McCormick somewhat mistakenly applies the language of guild corporatism and of Machiavelli’s preference for a Roman-type of republic to this early section and then seems to fail to notice the subtleties of the historical narration – especially the role of the judicial officers, the crucial role of the feudal nobility and the existence of a free way of life.

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420 Fiorini, L’Istorie Fiorentine, 130; and Raimondi, L’ordinamento della Libertà, 62-4. Translations are my own.
3 From the Priorates to the Ordinances of Justice: The “Naturalness” of Conflict

In spite of his acknowledgement of Florence's “authority and force [autorità e forze]” at this historical stage, Machiavelli considers that these ordini were rather short-lived and came to a conclusion after ten years – as a result of “frequent and new divisions [spesse e nuovi divisioni].” As a matter of fact, there seems to be a sudden break in the narrative here: we move from an idealized depiction of the primo popolo at II.4-5 and the beginning of II.6 to a rapid succession of factional struggles (and regimes) – from the expansion of the territorial dominion of Florence, the Guelph-led regime and their sudden defeat at Arbia in the hands of the new Emperor Manfred (II.6) to the Ghibelline-led government of Count Giordano (II.7), the revival of the Guelph forces with the rule of Charles of Anjou (II.8), the return of the Ghibellines under Guido Novello (II.9) and the government of the twelve Buon Uomini and the Guelph party (II.10). Furthermore, not only does Machiavelli in these chapters show little interest in discussing the various constitutional reforms, but, when he does so, his considerations are vague and imprecise. Lastly, having opened II.6 with a eulogy to the freedom, civility and military efforts of the Florentines, in only five chapters he seems to have changed his mind, since by II.11 Machiavelli comments, quite abruptly, on the “bad condition of the city [era Firenze allora in assai mala condizione].”

Indeed, this sudden shift in the narrative further demonstrates that Machiavelli’s interest in the institutional configuration of the city’s failed attempts is no simple coincidence or a matter of historiographical accuracy, but rather an invitation to political enquiry on the complex interrelationship

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422 As a matter of fact, the first paragraph of II.6 sounds more like a Brunian panegyric than a Machiavellian analysis of historical experience: “Nor could one conceive how much authority and force Florence had acquired in a short time: it became not only head of Tuscany but was counted among the first cities of Italy, and it would have risen to any greatness [grandezza] if frequent and new divisions had not afflicted it.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 58.
423 See Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 184-5 for a superb summary of the various reforms recounted by Machiavelli between II.6 and II.11.
424 For instance, chapter VIII retells the reforms introduced by Guido Novello, the lord of Florence during the rule of the Ghibelline party (in which he considers, for the very first time, the role of the guilds), but nowhere here does Machiavelli apply the type of normative vocabulary he introduces in II.IV-VI or in XI-XIII as it will be observed. Chapter IX, additionally, underscores the economic reasons behind the decline of the Ghibelline government as a result of the introduction of a tax on the citizenry to support the Count's troops. Lastly, chapter X succinctly summarizes the spasmodic factional disputes of the period: “...the fear of one power brought the growth of someone weak, and when that one had grown, he was to be feared, and being feared they sought to bring him down.” This seems to be, in great part, due to Machiavelli's reliance on Bruni at this point: not only does Bruni provide a lengthy account of the renewal of the divisions between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, but he also desists from considering any of the institutional reforms introduced during this period. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 60-3; also, Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 68; and Raimondi, L'Ordinamento della Libertà, 65.
425 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 63.
between partisan interests and state-building. His city, even at the height of the ‘romantic’ period of the primo popolo, failed to realize and embody in practice such an exciting moment of republican freedom and institutional virtù. But, for Machiavelli, recognition of failure does not reflect outright condemnation and opposition: the early republic may have been incapable of overcoming the frequent factional disputes but Machiavelli thinks, frequently and creatively, about the nature of their failure and their political significance as part of a longer continuum of historical events – his historical account then is always coupled with moments of deep political analysis. In the following paragraphs I thus show that Machiavelli’s account of these institutional reforms are synthetically drafted in order to underline, in line with Adams’ claim, that the communal system recurrently failed to put an end to the factional divisions of the city – in great part due to the Florentines’ reliance on irregular and private means of participation.

Following the rapid and convulsive succession of regimes between 1260 and 1282, Machiavelli underscores the paradigmatic moments of both the government of the Priorates or Priori of 1282 and the passing of the Ordinances of Justice of 1293 – a regime that, as Machiavelli observes, seems to have been the result of the “humors...that are naturally wont to exist in all cities between the powerful and the people.”426 After the demise of the Ghibelline party, Machiavelli observes that the Guelf nobili had become “insolent” as they “did not fear the magistrates,” to the extent that “every day many homicides and other acts of violence were done without any punishment.”427 Certainly, here Machiavelli revisits his earlier considerations on the natural quality of the great once they have the upper hand, since the unlawful behaviour of the Guelf nobles, in this case signalled by the physical abuse of the lives of popular Florentines, is indicative of their oppressive appetite, which could be expressed with impunity in a context of poorly organized institutions. However, the irregular and unofficial powers implemented by the popular sectors in order to restrain the insolence of the Florentine nobles (not the misbehaviour of the nobles themselves) are indicative of the structural flaw of this constitution in Machiavelli’s imagination.

In line with this suggestion, Machiavelli notices that leaders of the popular party [e capi del popolo] “thought it would be well to bring back the exiles; this gave the [Pope's] legate [Latino Malabranca] an opportunity [occasione] of reuniting the city [riunire la città], and the Ghibellines returned.”428

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426 See note 26. Ibid, 64. On this passage and the vocabulary applied therein, see chapter II.
427 Ibid, 63.
428 Ibid; and Najemy, A History of Florence, 76.
Already in this early section we observe Machiavelli's sophisticated evaluation of the binary opposition *grandi-popolo* and its implications for a republican system of governance. On the one hand, Machiavelli suggests that the violent nobles operated not simply against the people’s “moderate” desire to be left alone but also against the legitimate republican channels of the city – “the Guelf nobility had become insolent and did not fear the magistrates,” which of course endangered the existence of the free way of life *tout court*. On the other hand, Machiavelli clearly observes that the governing *popolani* relied on personal and unofficial means to control the Guelf nobility – “so as to put a stop to this insolence...the Ghibellines returned” – a theme that, again, suggests the inability of this group and their institutions to cope properly with the social and political role of the Florentine nobles.429

Equally important, notice the structural similarity in the narration of this events and that of the *primo popolo* at II.4: the “popular leaders” – or the *uomini da mezzo* of II.IV – took the *occasione* to reunite the city by means of bringing back the exiles – in the case of the *primo popolo*, the Guelfs; in this case, the Ghibelline nobles. Even more, Machiavelli observes that these events were followed by a moment of institutional reform, for, instead of twelve magistrates, “they made fourteen, seven for each side, who were to govern for a year and to be elected by the pope.”430 In this sense, Cabrini is correct to suggest that the narrative resemblance between II.4-6 and II.11 reveals (yet another) important moment of institutional innovation in Machiavelli’s political imagination that consequently should to be analyzed in parallel with the 'romanticized' description of the *primo popolo*: the divisions between the nobles, the return of the Ghibelline families, and the active role of the popular sectors in these events already suggest that Florence's instability ought to be studied in terms of the existence of a wide and arguably complex system of political interests.431

Next, Machiavelli observes that a shift in the papacy resulted in new quarrels between the Guelfs and

429 Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 63.
430 Ibid. Machiavelli, like Bruni, suggests that the fourteen officials represented, in equal numbers the Guelfs and the newly-returned Ghibellines. Cabrini, *Per una Valutazion*, 87.
431 While Cabrini mentions Bruni's *History* as Machiavelli's main source for this section, Bruni gives further emphasis to the pope's legate. For instance, he mentions that “the citizens had thus become disgusted and weary of this wretched state of affairs and so were not entirely averse to the desire to bring back the exiles” to then observe that Latino “exhorted the people...and at last succeeded in bringing about a civil truce and the return of the exiles.” Moreover, Bruni suggests that the creation of the Fourteen was Latino's own decision and, contrary to Machiavelli, he is less explicit as to how many offices did each party hold as a result of this institutional reform – “He also established the constitution...creating a magistracy of Fourteen Men, representing both factions...” Villani and Stefani, on the other hand, speak of eight officers of the Guelph party and six of the Ghibelline. Cabrini, *Per una Valutazion*, 85-7; Bruni, *History of the Florentine People*, 287 and 289; Machiavelli, *Opere Storiche*, 213 n4.
the Ghibellines, and “the Florentines took up arms...and to deprive the Ghibellines of the government as well as to keep the powerful in check, they ordered a new form of regime.” It is only in this second part of II.11 that, for the very first time, the guild corporations are given a crucial role in Machiavelli’s narrative: not only does he consider the guilds “highly reputed” but he also asserts that “they ordered [ordinorono] that in place of the fourteen, three citizens be created who would be called the 'Priors,’” in charge of governing the city for two months. The creation of these new institutions and the rise of the popular sectors is in great part due to the constant factional divisions among the nobles themselves, who not only consented to these reforms but also underestimated the ambition of the popular groupings. But Machiavelli further notices that both nobles and popular citizens alike could participate in this new regime, “provided they were merchants or practiced an art [potessero essere popolani e grandi, purché fussero mercatanti o facessero arti].”

This reform is arguably a crucial moment, not only in Florentine constitutional history, but in Machiavelli's political theorizing as well. Having described the increase of the Priors from three to then six (and finally to eight in 1342-3), Machiavelli tells us that these offices, which would last until Machiavelli’s own times, were the cause of the decline of the Florentine nobility, in a clear reference to the Ordinances of Justice of 1293 that barred the nobles from access to the priorate and public life in general. As mention earlier, Najemy underscores Machiavelli's combination of the terms arti and ordinare at this historical juncture, which suggests that for Machiavelli a healthy political society ought to be built upon the ideological principles of the guild corporations – for Najemy, the recurrent equation in the Histories is guild=ordini=libertà.

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432 Whereas Pope Nicholas III undertook a policy of pacification in order to diminish the power of Charles of Anjou, his successor, Martin V, restored the power to Charles and consequently compelled the Florentines to resist the influence of the Empire in their city. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 63.

433 In any case, Machiavelli, unlike his Florentine sources (especially Villani), desists from clearly describing the role of the guilds in this moment of institutional organization (Villani, for instance, explicitly refers to the powerful Calimala guild of international merchants and cloth finishers in which the supremacy of the elites was exceptional in comparison to the other six major guilds), nor does he refer to the official title of the Priors (priori dell'arti). See Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 89-90.

434 Ibid, 64; Najemy, A History of Florence, 79.

435 Also, notice Machiavelli’s reference to the 'modern' name of the Priors – “Although at the beginning they were called only Priors, yet later...they added the name Signori” – in reference to the institutional organization of the republic of the Quattrocento and Cinquecento. As Jurdjevic observes, Machiavelli’s account of the traditional chief executive officers of Florence directly refers to his own constitutional template and to the need of abolishing most of the historical magistracies of the city-state. Ibid, 63 and 104-7; Najemy, Corporatism and Consensus, 9; Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 186-7.

436 Najemy, “Arti and Ordini,” 170-2. Moreover, this is a theme that students of Najemy consider as the main theme of book III: for instance, Jurdjevic claims that “the absence of social distinctions between the ostensible 'noble' and 'popular' parties” is best suggested in “books 3-8.” Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 118.
In any case, this moment actually anticipates the blindness of popular power as well as the collapse of the conceptual distinction between nobles and people in Machiavelli's post-1520 political thought. Machiavelli, then, is far from being optimistic with respect to outcome of this moment of renovation: certainly, he acknowledges that the reviving popular movement was sound in that the representatives of the corporate guilds were supposed to maintain and secure the interests of the popolani as well as the autonomy of the city vis-à-vis the internal threat of tyranny and domination. Nonetheless, Machiavelli is also wary of the popular government's restrictive policies at this juncture in Florentine history: when the city stood in need of the supposedly 'moderate' ethos of the popular middle sectors and their minuti supporters, they simply encouraged factional disputes within the city.\footnote{\textit{\textsuperscript{437} In the beginning the nobles consented to it because they were not united; for, as one desired too much to take away the state of another, they all lost it.\textsuperscript{}}}}

The reform of the republican orders at II.11 is further complicated by Machiavelli in the following section – II.12 – with a novelty in the historical, social and ideological development of the city. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Machiavelli explicitly inserts, for the first time in the \textit{Histories}, the conceptual vocabulary to which he had recurred in his previous political expositions: the rule of the nobles is incompatible with free government simply because, if free and with no proper mechanisms to obstruct and control their appetites, noble rule always degenerates into irresponsible behaviour and tyranny. On the other hand, the people, in spite of his previous considerations on the imposition of a pro-popular priorate, seem to hold a 'moderate' interest in living according to the impartial rule of law.\footnote{\textit{\textsuperscript{438} While the Ghibellines made them fear [Mentre i Ghibellini feciono loro paura], this humor [umore] was not discovered; but as soon as they were subdued, its power was revealed.\textsuperscript{}}}

After this observation, Machiavelli reiterates the idea that the republic lacked an institutional brake on the nobles' power, since it was only by virtue of the disunion of the nobles among themselves that they acted in the proper way, or rather contrary to their nature, for the first two years of government.\footnote{\textit{\textsuperscript{439} While the Ghibellines made them fear [Mentre i Ghibellini feciono loro paura], this humor [umore] was not discovered; but as soon as they were subdued, its power was revealed.\textsuperscript{}}}

However, and unlike his previous political works, Machiavelli's considerations on the nobility in these sections are consistently coupled with accounts of his mistrust of the people's final monopolization of the institutions of the republic: the most significant aspect of the reform, then, is that it resulted in the people's control of the highest magistracies of the commune – hence mimicking the desire for
domination of the ancient Florentine nobles.440

Later in the chapter, Machiavelli asserts that the guild-led government added another institutional feature to the executive Priorates that will last until Machiavelli’s own times: “Therefore, the princes of the guilds [I principi per tanto delle Arti], desiring to remedy this inconvenience, provided that each Signoria at the beginning of its term should create a Gonfalonier of Justice, a man of the people,” to whom was given the power of the military and the administration of justice.441 Added to its judicial and military prerogatives, the Gonfalonier was rapidly rotated – it was elected bi-monthly – so as to give the opportunity of as many popular citizens as possible the maximum opportunity of office as well as to avoid the interference of any private interest at once.442 In a word, the case for having an office of this kind, arguably drawn upon humanist and Aristotelian considerations, was to promote the common interests of the community and to prevent the formation of a differentiated political elite. Arguably criticizing the ordering of this office, Machiavelli further notices that while the establishment of the thousand-man strong Gonfalonier “struck [the nobles] with great terror at first [prima quelli furono domi],” they nonetheless “reverted to their insolence” for “they had the means to prevent the Gonfalonier from being able to do his duty.”443 The ‘naturalness’ of the nobles' arrogant behaviour is again conjoined with the existence of an inefficient system of public charges, since the newly-implemented means lacked the capacity to properly indict them for their misbehaviours.444

It is as part of this context of spasmodic reforms, disunion and pervasive factionalism that Machiavelli

440 In the Discourses and The Prince, Machiavelli displays the people as wishing not to be enthralled and the nobles as willing to dominate: on the basis of these broad group psychological traits, Machiavelli then considers the people 'moderate' desire as an essential element in de-stabilizing the effects of noble power. In these events, on the contrary, popular political activity paves the way for an increasing struggle for power and domination between (and within) both noble and popular social groups, a quality that in the Roman context (and in the early Florentine history) is characteristic of the noble sections of society only. As suggested in the previous chapter, this novel conception of noble and people politics reflects the late Machiavelli's awareness of a novel and dynamic conception of power as well as new ground for a sound republican model of governance.

441 Again, notice Machiavelli's use of the modern term “Signoria” and “Signori” in the following paragraph. Ibid, 64-5.

442 The nature of the Gonfalonier was to be a heated issue in Machiavelli’s own times, especially whether the office was to be held for a short period of time and hence constantly rotated or rather appointed for life – as it turned out to be the case with the reforms of 1504. Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 131-2 and 257-8.

443 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 65.

444 “...since the accuser always need to have a witness when he received some offense, no one would be found willing to testify against the nobles. So in a brief time Florence returned to the same disorders and the people suffered the same injuries from the great because the judges were slow and the sentences lacked executions.” Even more, the Florentine people seem to behave according to his old systematic considerations: not only do they wish to live according the impartial rule of the law, but they also display a sense of moderation and compromise as they desire the absence of violence and domination on the part of the nobles. Ibid. On public accusations, see Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 23-8; and McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 67-70.
introduces a far more crucial institutional novelty.\textsuperscript{445} The early priorates and the Gonfalonier seem to have been unable to reduce the nobles' arrogance and desire to dominate, partly because of a system of alliance between wealthy magnate and non-magnate families, and partly because of the inability of the non-elite guildsmen to turn their political action into legitimate decision-making.\textsuperscript{446} For this reason, Machiavelli tells us, one of the most important political documents in Florentine history, the Ordinances of Justice, was introduced: “All the nobles were again deprived of the power to sit with the Signori; the accomplices of an offender were forced to pay the same penalty as he, and they made public report sufficient to passing judgement.”\textsuperscript{447}

To fully appreciate the significance of these reforms in Machiavelli’s political imagination, we need now to look at Machiavelli's reinterpretation of the historical events and his sources. Significantly, Machiavelli openly observes that the Gonfalonier of Justice was first introduced in 1289 as a reaction to the lawless behaviour of the Guelf nobles who recurrently inflicted violence upon the people; but, of course, this could have been hardly the case, since the office of the gonfalonier was introduced along with the Ordinances of Justice a few years later.\textsuperscript{448} This is all the more conclusive if we consider, for instance, Machiavelli’s suggestion that the first citizen to take up such position was the non-elite popular Ubaldo Ruffoli, who, in Machiavelli's main source for this section, is mentioned as having held the gonfalonierate in 1293 – that is, the same year as the main passing of the Ordinances and four years later than suggested by Machiavelli.\textsuperscript{449}

In this respect, while Machiavelli's sources consistently refer to these institutional remedies as the result of a single moment of innovation, Machiavelli separates the creation of the Gonfalonier from that of the Ordinances in order to create a logically and chronologically larger account of these reforms in three consecutive chapters (II.11 on the priors, II.12 on the Gonfalonier of Justice and II.13 on the

\textsuperscript{445} Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 65.

\textsuperscript{446} As a matter of fact, Machiavelli's considerations with respect to “every noble, with his relatives and friends, would defend himself against the forces of the Priors and the Captain,” suggest that the electoral system of this republic was likely to be co-opted by factional interests. According to Najemy, the consuls of the twelve guilds held the electoral authority with the outgoing priors “and with a number of arroti [private invited delegates] appointed by the priors to the electoral committee...the presence on the committee of a potentially large body of arroti selected by the early priors certainly worked to limit the ability of the consults [of the guilds] to act influentially and independently.” Najemy, Corporatism and Consensus, 28-9; see, also, Guidi, Il Governo della Città-Repubblica di Firenze, Vol. II, 6.

\textsuperscript{447} Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 65.

\textsuperscript{448} So at least writes Dino Compagni: “a’ di 15 di febbraio 1292...a loro uficio de' priori aggiunsono uno con la medesima balia che gli altri, il quale chiamorono gonfaloniere di giustizia.” Cited in Guidi, Il Governo della Città-Repubblica, Vol. II, 17; also, Cabrini, Per una Valutazione, 99.

\textsuperscript{449} For instance, as Bruni notices, “The first Standard-Bearer of Justice after passage of the Ordinances was Baldo Ruffoli...” to subsequently narrate the affair of the magnate Florentine who had killed a man of the people in France. Bruni, History of the Florentine People, 373.
Ordinances). It seems entirely clear then that Machiavelli not only revised his sources for this section, but also, in doing so, created an almost organic narrative out of a longer concatenation of events – all related to the previous statement on the natural disagreement between the nobles and the people. In other words, by altering the chronology and scope of the events, Machiavelli created a synthetic or artificial narration that reaches its peak with the dramatic conditions upon which Giano della Bella established the Ordinances of Justice.\footnote{For instance, while Bruni suggests that the introduction of the Gonfalonier of Justice and the Ordinances resulted in the outright banishment of the nobles from public affairs, Machiavelli 'problematises' such historical observation. (1) The “heads of the people” invited the exiled Ghibellines to return to the city as a result of the “insolence” of the Guelfs nobles; (2) the revival of factional disputes resulted in “a new form of regime” in order to “keep the powerful in check;” (3) the gonfalonier was supposedly instituted as a result of the noble Guelfs’ “insolence;” (4) lastly, the Ordinances of 1293 were introduced to deprive the nobles of the power to publicly participate in the priorates. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 63-5.}

To put it differently, the series of institutional innovations introduced in these chapters underscore the transformation of the offices of government into the center for factional domination. The analysis of the priori and the Ordinances, then, far from being the result of Machiavelli's positive view of the struggles between nobles and people, is rather the consequence of Machiavelli's novel conception of institutions and popular power: factionalism would have to be considered as a broad social phenomenon as all groups displaying the same destabilizing ethos for total political domination and republican solutions ought to keep this social novelty into consideration.\footnote{To this it should be added that both institutions are the crucial political building blocks that will shape Florentine politics until Machiavelli’s own times: it is no coincidence that Machiavelli refers to the late-thirteenth century executive office of the priori by its modern term, signoria, throughout these sections.} Unsurprisingly, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the demise of noble power is too naive a diagnosis in the eyes of the late Machiavelli: the aim here is to find new methods for analyzing authority and government, in which new forms republican institutions provide the opportunity for communal and collective goods in a world dominated by private interests.

To return to Machiavelli’s narration, as Najemy has observed, the Ordinances placed the executive power of the republic in the hands of the popular corporate guilds, expanded the anti-magnate laws subjecting the magnate families to tougher penalties for crimes against non-elite citizens, and, most importantly, thoroughly excluded them from actively participating in the political life of the city.\footnote{Najemy, Corporatism and Consensus, 9, 32-3; and A History of Florence, 82-3.} While the Ordinances were the expression of some of the crucial qualities of a republican form of government, Machiavelli underlines the role of the private individual – Giano della Bella – in the creation of these orders. Having underscored his noble lineage and his civic-minded interest,
Machiavelli then goes on to suggest that Giano della Bella wished to see the Ordinances put into practice against Corso Donati – a nobleman accused of having killed a popular man. However, Giano supports the popular sectors and encourages them to remain armed, an event that qualifies the soundness of the Ordinances – after all if Giano believed in the effectiveness of the laws, why would he have encouraged an angry mob to take up arms?

Once again, Machiavelli's recount of the inefficacy of the city’s institutions becomes crucial: if one thought of popular participation as the maxim of this series of reforms, then, its effectiveness is put into question by the people’s reliance on arms and public violence as a means to have their objectives fulfilled. Having no interest in sharing office, then, the emerging popular sectors simply employed their new institutional ascendancy to destroy their factional counterparts – and this popular desire for dominance implies, again, that the root of factionalism and political instability ought to be found on the lack of a broad system of political participation and control, not on the mere authoritative cooptation of the nobles' desire for domination.

With the accusation of Giano della Bella before the Captain, “the people armed themselves and ran to all his houses offering him defense against the Signori and his enemies.” Notice the reversal of roles from the first violent intervention of the people at the beginning of the chapter to this final act: whereas at first the people took up arms in order to save their legitimate means of participation and have the laws observed, they now rally in order to protect Giano against the legitimate officials of the commune (or to prevent the very same laws Giano had created to punish him for the misbehaviour of the popular groups). Giano's response in the final paragraph of this chapter accurately conveys Machiavelli's sense of 'tragic shame' with regard to the social and institutional situation of the city: “Giano did not want either to put these popular favors to the test or to commit his life to the magistrates, for he feared the malice of the latter and the instability of the former...He chose a voluntary exile.”

Giano’s acid final words concerning the constitutional modifications of the city-republic – and the role of the people therein – suggest that every instantiation of institutional reform (and the consequent appropriation of the city’s equality and liberty for political purposes) tends to intensify the factional ethos of Florence’s government. While these popular reforms were meant to promote the equal opportunity of citizens to participate in the decision-making process via the impersonal rule of law,

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453 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 66.
454 Ibid.
the results of the events seem to be quite the reverse: the popular elites simply sought office to support their own partial objectives. In this respect, while Jurdjevic is right to highlight Giano’s “mistrust of the people's willingness to support him” – after all they had begged him for support and advice only then to take a different course of action that wounded Florence's republican institutions – the narrative at this point implies the aforementioned 'institutional' considerations on the part of Machiavelli. For instance, Machiavelli notices that Giano “chose a voluntary exile” so as to deny his fellow noblemen to retaliate against him as well as to deter his popular supporters from harming the city.\textsuperscript{455} Giano, then, shows little respect for his amici's goals and behaviour: their supposedly 'natural' inclination toward moderation and the rule of law is then replaced by Giano's reluctance about their capacity to properly behave according to the very laws they themselves had created.\textsuperscript{456} The sudden conclusion of these events then suggest that the disenfranchisement of any one group (in this case, the Florentine magnates) would result in newer cycles of irregular disputes and institutional reform and/or the cooptation of authority and power.\textsuperscript{457} When nobles and people alike show to be the carriers of the hubris of domination and tyranny, a system of enfranchisement and control seems to be the only prescriptive solution for the Florentine – robust institutional measures, not civil discords.

In this regard, McCormick is correct to suggest that “Machiavelli’s emendations of the Florentine model [of governance] demonstrate his belief that if republics are to endure, the grandi must be granted a prominent place lest they perpetrate oligarchic or princely coups.”\textsuperscript{458} Nonetheless, McCormick's comment ought to be amended too, for Machiavelli’s portrayal of the people in this sections (and elsewhere in the Histories) demonstrates that even their behavior, if unobstructed by sound institutional measures, is detrimental to the city's well-being.\textsuperscript{459} Thus, Machiavelli envisioned (or at

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\textsuperscript{455} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{456} Jurdjevic is right to underscore the fact that, in spite of his exceptional nature, Giano remains an aristocrat and consequently his doubts concerning popular behaviour may be regarded simply as the result of a traditional (not Machiavellian) conception of the people. In any case, Jurdjevic goes on to dismiss such categorization in the following concluding lines, since “Giano’s reluctance to depend on the loyalty of the people's support was evidence of political foresight rather than traditional class prejudice.” Jurdjevic, A Wretched and Great City, 107-8.
\textsuperscript{457} In this sense, Adams’ interpretation of these events is half-wrong (or half-right): he first insists that “if Corso [Donati] had not existed” another powerful citizen would have taken his role – and this is the result of “the defect in government, and the wants of the people that excite and inspirit the ambition of private men.” Adams then criticizes Machiavelli for blaming Corso: “But Machiavel should have laid the blame upon the constitution, not upon the restless disposition or turbulent spirit of Corso” to then conclude that “Machiavel's severity ought however to have been applied to the form of government, not to the temper of the people, the latter being but the natural and necessary effect of the former.” Strikingly, though, Machiavelli’s narration of the events that follow the exile of Giano seem to rather point in Adams’ direction, as confirmed by the popular support for Corso Donati. Adams, Defence of the Constitutions of the United States, 31-3; Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 76.
\textsuperscript{458} McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 102-3.
\textsuperscript{459} Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 106.
least hoped for) conditions under which all groups would be equally dependent on the political institutions of the city-state in order to advance their particular interests.

Machiavelli's portrait of a so-called Florentine “culture of dominance” by the time of the Histories and his late political imagination are nicely summarized by the anonymous republican-minded citizen's speech at the beginning of book III. Speaking of the demise of the feudal nobility, the anonymous citizen harshly criticizes the factional feuds that had risen between some “popular noble” families (or as he calls them, the “fatal families [famiglie fatali]”) and the extent to which their behavior mimicked the desire for domination of the ancient magnates. Deploying much of a typically Machiavellian vocabulary, the anonymous orator notices that the city remained divided and continued to suffer the same political problems that it had earlier during the quarrels between the magnates and the people.

In the final exortatio of the speech, the orator observes that those early divisions and the new ones share the same problem: “to tell you that the example of those old divisions ought not to make you diffident about stopping these [ones]...and this republic especially can not only maintain itself united...but reform itself with good customs and civil modes [di buoni costumi e civili modi riformare], providing that you, Signori, prepare yourselves to will to do it.”

The anonymous speaker makes it clear that while selfish interests have kept the city disunited, it was nonetheless possible to abolish the corrupt political institutions of Florence: “The malignity of fortune can be overcome with prudence by...annulling the orders that nourish sects [annullando quelli ordini che sono delle sette nutritori], and by adopting those that do in truth conform to a free and civil life [un vivere libero e civile].”

460 Not only is his the very first direct speech introduced in book III, but he is also referred to as “with more authority” among the many citizens that “moved by love of their fatherland” went to the Signori to demand the end of the factional conflicts. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 109; Cabrini, Interpretazione e Stile, 41-52. I discussed the speech at length in chapter II.

461 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 111. My emphasis. As a matter of fact, the first section of the speech closely follows (at times almost verbatim) the exhortation to Cardinal Giulio de Medici in his “Minuta de Provvisone per la Riforma dello Stato di Firenze L’Anno 1522 [Henceforth Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Government of Florence of 1522],” in Arte della Guerra e Scritti Politici Minorì, ed. Jean-Jacques Marchand, Denis Fachard and Giorgio Masi (Rome: Salerno, 2001), 646. For instance in the Draft of a Law: “dove le amicizie de’ risti e le nimicizie de’ buoni non abbino luogo; dove gli appetite d’una falsa Gloria si spenghino, e quelli de’ veri e gloriosi onori si accendino; dove gli odii, le inimicizie, i dispareri, le sette, da quali dipoi nasce morti, esili, afflizioni di buoni, esaltazione di tristi, non abbino che le nutrisca, ma sieno in tutto da le leggi perseguitate e spente...” while in the Histories: “From this grows the avarice that is seen in our citizens and the appetite, not for true glory but for the contemptible honors on which hatreds, enmities, differences, and sects depend; and from these arise deaths, exiles, persecution of the good, exaltation of the wicked [di qui nasce quella avarizia che si vede ne’ cittadini, e quello appetite, non di vera gloria, ma di vituperosi onori, dal quale dependono gli odii, le nimicizie, i dispareri; dalle quali nasce morti, esili, afflizioni di buoni, esaltazione di tristi, non abbino che le nutrisca, ma sieno in tutto da le leggi perseguitate e spente...].” Ibid, 110.

462 This suggestion strongly resonates with what Machiavelli underscores as the main reason for the rise of partisan enmities at III.2: “The power of the nobles having been tamed...it appeared that no cause of scandal remained...but the evil fortune of our city and its own orders, which were not good, gave rise” to new enmities. Ibid, 106.

463 Ibid, 112. My emphasis.
Prudential, though nonetheless bold, political innovation is all the more needed given the history of factionalism of the city – even at those distant and at times romanticized past instances.

Recognizing that the times are not necessarily opposed to a new republican government – even after the demise of the civil and military orders of the primo popolo – the speaker’s (or shall we say, Machiavelli himself?) concluding plea reflects on the institutional failures of the past in order to envision and promote a system of governance that would fully and truly advance the collective good of all in a not-so-distant future. The republican-minded speaker thus appeals to those capable of reconfiguring the ill-natured institutions of the city – the organizers of republics or “wise lawgivers” of III.1 and IV.1 – to thoroughly abolish the faction-driven constitution and to adopt a 'true' system of communal life – one that, in his own words, conforms to “a free and civil life.”

In the roughly contemporary Discourse on Florentine Affairs and Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Government of Florence, Machiavelli continues with this line of thought and observes that the organizers of power in the more contemporary Albizzi, Medici and Soderini regimes had all based their decisions on the same rationale used by the leaders of the earlier Florentine regimes. The ambivalent undertones of Machiavelli's 'institutional' history (from the 'ideal' moment of the primo popolo to the demise of the nobility and the rise of a new form of social and political leadership) thus invites us to move beyond the 'ancient' republican history of the city, and, consequently, to look closer in time to the last two forms of governance discussed in his text – the oligarchic regime of the Albizzi and the stato of the Medici.

464 The speech is followed a caustic word on the part of the narrator: “…citizens gave more thought to eliminating the present sects than to taking away the cause of future ones; so they achieved neither the one nor the other…” Machiavelli is here referring to the government’s reliance on already-existing institutions – that is the creation of a balia of fifty six citizens, who consequently relied on traditional political measures, such as relying on the advice of private citizens, arbitrarily admonishing or exiling citizens, fining and/or prohibiting others from being elected to office. Ibid, 112-3.

465 Ibid, 106 and 146.

466 “La cagione perché Firenze ha sempre variato spesso ne' suoi governi è stata perché in quella non è stato mai né republica né principato che abbi avuto le degite qualità sua; perché non si può chiamare quel principato stabile, dove le cose si fanno secondo che vuole uno e si deliberano con il consenso di molti. Né si può credere quelle republica essere per durare, dove non si satisfa a quelli umori a' quali non si satisfacendo le republiche rovinano; e che questo sia el vero si può conoscere per gli stati che ha avuti quella città dal 1393...” Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 621. My emphasis. Also, Machiavelli, Draft of a Law, 646.
4 The Albizzi and the Medici (1393-1492): Institutional Failure and Factional Advantage

The Discourse on Florentine Affairs, Machiavelli's main post-1520 work on constitutional reform, begins with a concise (and yet acid) historical analysis of the failures of the governo stretto of the Albizzi, the Medicean 'principalita' and the governo largo of Piero Soderini. In line with the vision of institutional failure introduced in the Histories, this brief enquiry casts light on the Florentine 'culture of domination' and thus provides further historical evidence for a constitutional solution meant to forge what here Machiavelli refers to as “a true republic [una vera repubblica].” Not only was this ethos of domination the major problem in both regimes, but it was also their major source of vulnerability since, by excluding large portions of society (whether the people at large or some small but nonetheless powerful sectors) from the major channels of political interaction, they boosted factional agitation. In Machiavelli's estimation, then, these regimes (in spite of their different approaches to the Florentine people) exemplified the depth of the corruption of the existing Florentine constitutional model tout court.

More important still, Machiavelli's critique of the last two regimes narrated in the Histories is strikingly congruent with a series of institutional and political axioms that are further developed in his post-1520 political works: in all these texts Machiavelli underscores the short-term quality of the executive bodies, the consistent manipulation of the electoral processes, the reliance on consultative councils of powerful private citizens, the overlapping of many councils and magistrates with analogous tasks, the political disenfranchisement of vast sections of Florence's citizenry, and the inability of the institutions of the city to cope with the selfish desires (i.e. the commercial ethos) of Florence's citizens. As a result, and in spite of the longevity of these regimes, Machiavelli's narration provides historical documentation of their institutional flaws, the fortuitous accidenti that occasioned their

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continuity, and consequently introduces the crucial building blocks for his novel constitutional model.\textsuperscript{470}

Machiavelli begins his considerations of the oligarchic regime in the aftermath of the revolutionary government led by the lesser plebs and the \textit{Ciompi} and notices, from the very beginning, the ineffective quality of the reforms undertaken.\textsuperscript{471} In late-1393 Maso degli Albizzi is elected to the highest executive office of the republic as the gonfalonier of justice, and with his election came the return of what Najemy has referred to as 'consensus politics,' or the separation of political participation from political power, “which remained a prerogative of the elite.”\textsuperscript{472} Again, with his rise to political pre-eminence, Maso introduced a series of reforms that Machiavelli highlights as crucial, in spite of being deleterious, to the future of the Florentine republic. Overall, by wishing to monopolize power in the hand of the very few, the oligarchic government of the Albizzi maintained a constant state of crisis (by virtue of Florence's constant wars against Milan), openly manipulated the electoral system, continued with the ill-fated system of short-term executive officers, recurrently appealed to extraordinary powers to exclude its enemies, constantly relied on the power of private citizens and excluded the generality of Florence's citizens from public debate.

Firstly, as Machiavelli observes in the early sections of book IV, the Albizzi regime operated upon a traditional system of bimonthly rotation of officers, a system which, at least in theory, was meant to prevent the monopolization of power by any citizen or group as well as to provide participatory means to as wide a number of citizens as possible.\textsuperscript{473} Nonetheless, and in spite of its republican underpinnings, this system was in fact applied in order to suppress the opposition to the regime and to

\textsuperscript{470} In reference to the flawed constitution of the Florentines, and as a conclusion to his transcription of the \textit{Histories}, Adams asserts: “when the three natural orders in society, the high, the middle, and the low are all represented in the government, and constitutionally placed to watch each other, and restrain each other mutually by the laws, it is then only that an emulation takes place for the public good, and divisions turn to the advantage of the nation.” Adams, \textit{Defence}, 130.

\textsuperscript{471} “This state was neither less injurious toward its citizens nor less oppressive in its beginnings than that of the plebs had been...” Ibid, 135. Machiavelli introduces the Albizzi family for the first time at II.36 as part of a conspiracy to assassinate the duke of Athens. Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 96. The Ciompi government is followed by a 'transitional government' led by Giorgio Scali, Benedetto Alberti and Salvestro de' Medici that resulted in the beheading of the first, the voluntary exile of the second, the refusal to intervene by the third – and consequently in the final arrival of the Albizzi faction to power. For an analysis of the rise and fall of the Albizzi as recounted in the \textit{ Histories}, see Jurdjevic, \textit{A Great and Wretched City}, 143-7.

\textsuperscript{472} Najemy, \textit{Corporatism and Consensus}, 13-4; and \textit{A History of Florence}, 182-7.

\textsuperscript{473} In reference to the Gonfalonier of Justice during the Albizzi and Soderini systems Machiavelli observes that, “while a gonfalonier of justice for two months is useless, a for-life one is dangerous; consequently, in order to avoid these inconveniences it is required that the gonfalonier of justice be elected and designated for three years.” Machiavelli, \textit{Summary of the Affairs of Lucca}, 648. My translation. See, also, Guidi, \textit{Il Governo della Città Repubblica}, Vol. II, 3-33; and Nicolai Rubinstein, “Machiavelli and the Florentine Republican Experience,” in \textit{Machiavelli and Republicanism}, eds. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10-1.
encourage the monopolization of power by a restricted group of citizens associated with those now-called nobili popolani.\textsuperscript{474} As it emerges clearly from the Histories, the Summary and the Draft of a Law, the two-month office system was too brief to allow for sound resolutions to complex political issues for it bolstered unhealthy factional disputes among hopefuls – to such an extreme that, as Machiavelli reports in book IV, “no magistrate did his duty [niuno magistrato faceva l’ufizio suo].”\textsuperscript{475}

More important still, this system of offices was coupled with the traditional electoral system of squittini, to which Machiavelli makes reference for the first time, in an arguably negative tone, at II.28 in relation to an attempt of the noble magnates to regain the city.\textsuperscript{476} In the context of Albizzi politics, several passages from the Histories elaborate on its implementation and underscore the system's capacity to elect partisan allies in a recurrent fashion – by determining the pool of candidates deemed eligible to the executive offices ahead of time, they were consequently capable of filling the roles of the Signoria for periods of as long as forty months – but also its actual political inefficiency.\textsuperscript{477}

Maso degli Albizzi’s son, Rinaldo, for instance, makes these two points clear in a direct speech to the heads of the oligarchic party at IV.9: he “spoke to all...and [noticed] how through their own negligence [the government] had come again under the power of the plebs...[and] that the cause of this audacity on the part of the multitude arose from the broad [bags] [squittini][. As a result,] the palace [of the Signoria] had thus been filled with men who were new and vile [si era ripieno il palagio di uomini nuovi e vili].”\textsuperscript{478}

\textsuperscript{474} The rapid rotation of office, coupled with a restricted participatory electoral system, as we shall see, was intended to provide an image of wide democratic participation while in fact operating as a closed aristocracy – in that the power remained in the hands of the very few elected Albizzi allies. See, especially, Rinaldo degli Albizzi's speech at IV.9 on the intention of his reforms and the examples noted by Machiavelli at IV.29. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 154.

\textsuperscript{475} Ibid, 176. Speaking of the Signoria of Lucca, Machiavelli notices that its members are elected bimonthly to then observe that this system “is not good, since if honor and prudence are not available in public life they are sought at home, in the private realm [non e buono, perché quella maestà che non è nel pubblico si cerca a casa il privato].” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 614 and 617; also “Draft of a Law,” 648.

\textsuperscript{476} The electoral reform of October-November 1323 introduced a system of imborsazione or pouching the names of all eligible citizens to public office whereby a single scrutiny determined, by lot, the election of priors in preselected groups and for specific terms – bimonthly. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 82-3; Najemy, Corporatism and Consensus, 86-98; for a full account of the Squittino, see, Guidi, Il Governo della Città Repubblica, vol.I, 345-53.

\textsuperscript{477} As Najemy puts it, “Expanding numbers of both nominations and successful candidates contributed to the perception that political participation had never been broader,” and in order to ensure that real power remained in their hands the elite implemented a series of officials “in charge of placing name-tickets in the pouches...to select from candidates successful in the scrutinies a small preferential pool [the borsellino] for whom a certain number of seats on the priorate was reserved.” Najemy, A History of Florence, 183-6; and Corporatism and Consensus, 263-300.

\textsuperscript{478} As noted by editors of the Edizione Nazionale, Machiavelli’s use of the term uomini nuovi has strong ideological connotations: not only is this term directly borrowed from his main source for the section, Giovanni Cavalcanti, but it also highlights the unprecedented status of the newly elected official. Machiavelli will apply this term again at IV.26 in reference to Cosimo's closest ally and adviser, Puccio Pucci, a man of low status defined as 'sagacious' and 'prudent.' Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 153-4, 173 and n8. 390.
citizenry, so at least for their own political benefit and position, here Machiavelli underscores the inefficacy of such electoral maneuvers – so much so that the executive power of the city was now filled by allies of their most staunch partisan enemies. As Jurdjevic suggests, “the overconfident regime had become insufficiently suspicious during the scrutinies, thereby allowing their enemies to seize the palace.”

Again in IV.30, and in spite of Rinaldo's bold second speech, Machiavelli repeats his criticism of the irregular electoral system of the regime: having sent Cosimo de' Medici into exile in 1433, “Niccolò di Cocco [a uomo nuovo partisan of Cosimo] was drawn to be one of the Gonfaloniers for the next two months, and with him eight Signori, all partisans of Cosimo [tutti partigiani di Cosimo]. Such Signoria terrified [spacontò] Messer Rinaldo and all his party.”

Machiavelli, via Rinaldo, refers to this election as a moment of paradox, for, while they had restricted the number of potential candidates to the highest offices, they were nonetheless distributed quite widely amongst elite families – to such a degree that in 1430 the main executive magistracy of Florence was filled by allies of Cosimo in its entirety. Certainly, Rinaldo's reaction to the election of a fully Medicean executive even under this moment of electoral manipulation speaks to the inefficacy of such electoral techniques and the considerable inability of the Albizzi regime to retain power as well as to enforce partisan interest.

Thirdly, in addition to the shortcomings of the electoral system, Machiavelli underlines their consistent reliance on extraordinary consultative bodies (the call to the people to parlamento and the use of dictatorial powers of balìa), which lessened the gravitas of the legitimate means of political interaction and strengthened the authority of private individuals. This recurrent appeal to a system of ad hoc magistracies or councils with full powers (balìa) for limited periods was due, in great part, to the inability of the Albizzi to control their closest and powerful allies as well as to their incapacity to keep

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479 Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 139.

480 Even before Rinaldo’s intervention, Machiavelli notices that “by not watching out for harmful things because they [the leaders of the oligarchic party] did not fear them [the leaders of the so-called ‘plebeian’ opposition] or by nourishing them through their envy of one another, they made the Medici family regain authority. The first of that family to begin to rise was Giovanni di Bicci [Cosimo's father, who] was brought to the highest magistracy by the concession of those who were governing.” Ibid, 143, 160 and 180-1. My emphasis.

481 Also, consider Machiavelli’s bitter conclusion on the squittini system at II.28, “...it appeared that [the squittini] would relieve the city of the annoyance [of electing magistrates every two months] and remove the cause of tumults that arose at the creation of every magistrate...[but] they took this way and did not understand the defects that were hidden under this small advantage.” Ibid, 83. For a similar account of the failures of Florence's electoral system, see Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 615-6.

482 Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 572; Rubinstein, “Machiavelli and Florentine Republican Experience,” 11-2, considers the use of ex officio prattiche to be similar in nature – “that eminent citizens should be summoned was a long-established practice...The citizens who were regularly summoned to these consultative meetings represented the elite of the reggimento.”
their opponents in check through official institutional means. The overambitious popular nobles – who “by not watching out for harmful things...or by nourishing them through their envy of one another” renewed the hatred of the people – engaged in constant disputations among themselves, so much so that they undermined the elite system by, for instance, rejecting proposals that were undoubtedly beneficial to their own party. As a result of these internal partisan struggles and their inability to properly control the electoral system, weighty resolutions took place outside the regular political channels, as the constant call to popular parlamenti and the use of the extraordinary powers of balia clearly show.

To gather the people in parlamento in the Piazza of the Signoria was to appeal to the sovereignty of the Florentine people in proposals of extreme necessity or emergency brought forward by the Priors – and which the people could only accept or reject. Most of the time, parlamenti were called to approve a balia or extraordinary dictatorial power, by which the people delegated its sovereign power to a small council of citizens in order to reform, annul or create political institutions, pronounce certain types of prohibitions or to confiscate goods. Most crucially, members of the balia were both citizens sitting in one of the crucial offices of the republic but also prominent private citizens or arroti.

For example, in the aftermath of his designation as gonfalonier of justice, Maso degli Albizzi rapidly gathered a parlamento and implemented the powers of balia in order to banish and kill the leaders of the previous regime and to make new baggings in the hope that it would guarantee him total control over the legitimate dispositions of power. Similarly, Rinaldo persuaded Bernardo Guadagni (elected gonfalonier for the September-October 1433 period) to call the people in parlamento and create a balia

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483 Machiavelli refers to this constant hostility when, speaking of the rise of the oligarchy, observes: “Those popular nobles...made two errors that were the ruin of the state: one was they became insolent through unbroken dominion; the other was that through the envy they had of each other...they did not take the care they should have for whoever could offend them.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 147; also, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 626; and Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 141-2, who refers to this problem as their inability to inspire “terror” in their opponents.

484 For instance, in 1393 Messer donato di Jacopo Acciaiuoli,” who Machiavelli deems “important in the city and more superior than a companion of Messer Maso degli Albizzi,” sought to introduce a proposal that would permit the exiles to return to the city. Acciaiuoli’s forceful efforts are underscored by Machiavelli in detail: he spoke publicly about his proposal and when his project was rejected by the Signoria, he even escalated to threats: “Messer Donato...gave [the Signori] to understand that as they did not want the city to be ordered with the means at hand, it would be ordered with arms.” Similarly, speaking of Niccolò da Uzzano, one of the heads of the oligarchic regime, Machiavelli comments that his peers “were envious of his reputation and desired to have partners in defeating him.” Lastly, see IV.30, where after Rinaldo's complaints about the fragmentary status of the party, Mariotto Bondovinetti's reply refers to “the pride of the great...” Ibid, 141-2, 174 and 179-80.

485 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 139, 144-45, 177, and 180.


487 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 139.
in order to eliminate Cosimo de' Medici and “to reform the state of the city [ripigliare lo stato].”

Although in the two cases the leaders of the Albizzi capitalized on a moment of weakness on the part of their enemies, their attempts to establish a narrow government backfired: Machiavelli indicates not only that their reforms were meant to disenfranchise a vast section of Florence's citizenry but also that these reforms were hateful to the vast majority of the Florentines – and to some of the more moderate Albizzi allies, as well. In other words, their reliance on irregular and extraordinary powers shows proof of the profound gap between the Albizzi regime's political values and the rest of the disenfranchised population. Thus, however useful the reliance on these means may have been for the leaders of the regime, Machiavelli notices that they “kept up the prestige of the men in private stations and took it away from those in official ones...a thing opposed to every sort of well-ordered government.”

The deep-rooted hostility toward the regime and the systematic failures of their institutional means become clearer in the famous speech offered by Niccolò da Uzzano at IV.33. Speaking to the heads of the oligarchic party concerning the increasing ascendancy and reputation of Cosimo, Niccolò boldly calls upon them to consider the ills of their own party and suggests, by referring to the “name” of the parties, that there was no clear distinction between those in power and those wishing to gain it.

Thus, Uzzano recognizes the weakness of his party and the irremediable rise to power of Cosimo de’ Medici, who, by virtue of his personal skills and populist aura, would soon become the the city’s pater patriae. In that sense, Uzzano recognizes that, in spite of the unfaithful distinction of parties as noble and popular, whatever reforms were to be implemented they required a broad base of popular support: “And if it is because they are followed by all the plebs, then we are in a worse position and

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489 For instance, following the balia made by Maso, Machiavelli's indications leave no doubt as to his view of the regime: “Those who ran to the house of Messer Veri [de' Medici] begged him to take over the state and free them from the tyranny of those citizens who were destroyers of the good and of the common welfare.” Ibid, 139.
490 Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 102. See, also, Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617-8, where, speaking of Lucca’s colloqui de cittadini or extraordinary councils, he concludes that these powers are not implemented in well-ordered republics – “nelle repubbliche bene ordinate non si usa.” In the same text, Machiavelli refers to the major executive offices as lacking honour or maestà in that men of low social standing could be elected to it while having too much autorità given that they held the power to call the people to parlamento, a crucial step for regime change or consolidation of power, and could also expropriate property from citizens without appeal. See, for instance, Rinaldo’s comments to Bernardo Guadagni in reference to the power of balia: “[he] should not be afraid of Cosimo's riches, because when he was in the power of the Signori, his riches would be theirs...” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 177.
491 Of course, here Uzzano alludes to the Albizzi's decision to ally with the old magnate nobility in the aftermath of the passing of the controversial catasto of 1427, a law that stipulated a proportional system of taxation meant to impose harsher fiscal burdens on the cittadini potenti. Ibid, 158-9 and 173-4.
they in a better one for this...if it should come to a test in which our weakness was uncovered [si scoprisse la devolezza nostra], we would lose [the state].”

The overriding critique of the regime was that its offices and electoral system were, contrary to Machiavelli's belief, largely counter-productive to its stability and consequently displayed no actual institutional remedy to the problems of factionalism and domination.

However Machiavelli may praise the individual character of the Medici leaders, he nonetheless criticizes the institutional disposition of their regime. Firstly, at the beginning of book V Machiavelli tells us that Cosimo also relied on recurrent balìe councils in order to strengthen the position of his own party. “[T]he Signoria that had acceded to the magistracy for November and December...extended the exiles of many, and many others were exiled anew [and] reduced all the great except for a very few to the popular order; they divided the possessions of the rebels among themselves at a low price.”

Unlike the oligarchic regime, however, Cosimo’s continuous use of extraordinary councils was well-received by the generality of the population, for they were meant to banish and even kill those nobili popolani who under the previous government had undermined the political role of a now angry and embittered population.

In any case, Machiavelli’s considerations concerning the recurrent use of balìe and semiprivate consultative bodies also applies to the Medici regime: as he considers in the Discourse on Florentine Affairs, “we cannot call that republic well-established in which things are done according to the will of one man yet are decided with the approval of many.”

In other words, while the Medicean system functioned as an unofficial monarchy, in practice it still required the approval of republican councils and the consensus of the generality of the Florentine population – the call of the people in parlamento

493 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 174.
494 Ibid, 189-90. Machiavelli makes it explicit the Medici's reliance on the balìe at VI.7, where speaking of Cosimo's powerful ally, Neri di Gino Capponi, he observes that “because ten years had already passed since the beginning of their state and the authority of the balìa was over...the heads of the state...judged it necessary to take it up again by giving new authority to their friends and beating down their enemies...in 1444 they created a new balìa [and] gave authority to a few, empowering them to create the the Signoria...lengthened the term of banishment for the banished...[and] deprived of their offices couplers [accoppiatori] of the enemy state...” Ibid, 238; also, Discourses on Livy, 211 and 236.
495 For example, Machiavelli observes that with the election of magistrates by lot (and not by the use of balìe) “it appeared to the generality of citizens that they had their liberty again and that the magistrates were judging in accordance not with the will of the powerful but with their own judgement...” While Machiavelli's message here seems to be that Cosimo gained further ascendancy amongst the people, one may still wonder about the idea that it is not until 1455 that the people gained any (albeit ineffectual) influence in the decision-making of the Cosmeian republic. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 278.
496 As Rubinstein rightly suggests, this passage implies that however effective the institutional reforms during the Medici period may have been Machiavelli's considerations show that they were incapable of eliminating the republican experience from the collective imagination of the Florentines. Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 103; Rubinstein, “Machiavelli and Florentine Republican Experience,” 13.
to then approve the creation of a restricted council with temporary powers.\textsuperscript{497}

The structural flaws of the Medici regime are also evident in their recurrent use of the old electoral system of \textit{squivittini}, as a means to elect partisan allies, to disenfranchise their enemies and to enact policies beneficial to themselves. “Besides this,” Machiavelli adds in the following lines, “they strengthened themselves with laws and new orders, and they made new lists from the lot [\textit{squivittini}], removing from the bags [the names of] their enemies and filling them with [the names of] their friends.”\textsuperscript{498} Even more, Machiavelli notices, “and having been by the ruin of their adversaries,” in a clear reference to the ill-fate of the Albizzi, “they judged that chosen lists might not be enough to hold the state firmly for themselves.” As a result, they introduced further institutional novelties and decided that “magistrates who have authority to shed blood should always be from the princes of their sect,” going on to introduce the “couplers [the typically Medicean \textit{Accoppiatori}] in charge of filling the bags with new names.”\textsuperscript{499}

Again, similar to the leaders of the previous regime, the Medici relied on the constant manipulation of the electoral system or \textit{squivittini} and the implementation of the \textit{accoppiatori}, which entailed an increasingly hierarchical system of patronage and private friendship that, on the one hand, lessened the authority of other opposing and competing groups and, on the other, strengthened the Medici’s dependency on their \textit{palleschi} partisans.\textsuperscript{500} Moreover, the instability of the Medici regime is marked by the continuous attempts to overthrow their \textit{de facto} regime, for, whenever an event gave their followers the upper hand (i.e., the death of Neri Capponi or the death of Cosimo himself), the allies

\textsuperscript{497} This is, perhaps, an advantage on the part of the Medici system, since, as Machiavelli observes in the \textit{Summary}, the \textit{Memorandum}, the \textit{Discourse} and the \textit{Draft}, the leaders of the city ought to recognize the power of popular approval and consequently provide legitimate and authoritative channels of popular participation. Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617; “Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio,” 644; “Draft of a Law,” 647-7; and “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 109. In any case, as Jurdjevic rightly suggests, “The proof of this structural flaw [their necessity to rely on the approval of many people] was evident in the frequent and harsh emergency councils the regime was compelled to summon to preserve its power.” Jurdjevic, \textit{A Great and Wretched City}, 152.

\textsuperscript{498} Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 190.

\textsuperscript{499} Directly elected by the Medici through the power \textit{balìa} and in office for a long period (so at least according to the traditional Florentine constitutional system), the \textit{accoppiatori} were in charge of filling the bags for the election of the executive magistrates, which shaped the \textit{de facto} election of Medicean allies, \textit{a mano}, to the Signoria. \textit{Ibid}. For the \textit{accoppiatori}, see Nicolai Rubinstein, \textit{The Government of Florence under the Medici (1434 to 1494)} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 34-60.

\textsuperscript{500} For instance, Machiavelli consistently pairs Cosimo to Neri Capponi, who “had acquired reputation by public ways.” With Neri’s death in 1555, Machiavelli adds, “the state found it difficult in reasserting its authority, and Cosimo’s own friends, very powerful in the state, were the cause of it, because they no longer feared the adverse party...and they were glad to diminish Cosimo’s power.” Similarly, following the events of the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478 the imminent state of war, Lorenzo de’ Medici “assemble[d] all qualified citizens, more than three hundred in number [!],” Lorenzo boldly claims that the injuries done to his family “out of the hatred and envy they have of our authority, they offend you, since it was you who gave it to us.” Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 277 and 329.
upon which the regime depended recurrently revived their dissent.\textsuperscript{501} To put it differently, the Medici electoral system was simply the by-product of their own political exposure: their constant renewal of tight controls over the legitimate channels of participation during their sixty years of rule was in fact proof of the toxic relations with their closest allies as well as with the rest of the disenchanted nobili popolani.\textsuperscript{502}

Lastly, the Medici implemented a further institutional novelty, the council of the seventy, the only Florentine institution discussed at length in book VIII – a distinctively “pan-Italian” section of the \textit{Histories}.\textsuperscript{503} Following Lorenzo’s return from Naples in 1479, a new moment of internal conflict was prompted by Lorenzo’s peace with the King of Naples and the consequent virtual state of war with the Pope and the Venetians. For this reason, “the princes of the state decided to restrict the government and that the making of important deliberations should be reduced to a smaller number. [T]hey made the council of seventy citizens with the greatest authority they could give it in principal actions. This new order put a check on the spirit of those who were seeking new things.”\textsuperscript{504}

Created in the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy and re-introduced in 1512, the seventy became a powerful deliberative council and part of what Machiavelli bitterly calls in the \textit{Discourse of Florentine Affairs} “a jumble of councils,” which had been instituted “not because they were necessary to good government but to feed through them the vanity of more of the citizens...”\textsuperscript{505}

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\textsuperscript{501} Three out of the four main leaders of the conspiracy against Piero di Cosimo de' Medici were former allies of the family: Luca Pitti, Agnolo Acciaiuoli and Dietisalvi Neroni. Rubinstein, \textit{The Government of Florence}, 179; Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 572; and Jurdjevic, \textit{A Great and Wretched City}, 154.

\textsuperscript{502} It is worth recalling Niccolò da Uzzano’s speech: whatever connections the Medici may have entertained with the generality of the population, it was the result of “the name [il nome]” attributed to Cosimo’s party, not to his political or ideological intentions. This is all the more clear if we compare Machiavelli’s constant depiction of Cosimo’s predecessors as men of the people (from Giovanni di Bicci, Salvestro and Veri) as “political actors who worked on behalf of the people and defended popular interests” and his considerations on Cosimo, Piero and Lorenzo as “princes.” Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 90-1, 134-5, 174-5 and 284-5; also Jurdjevic, \textit{A Great and Wretched City}, 153-7, for the fragile consensus of the Medici power.

\textsuperscript{503} The other institutional/republican features recounted at length in this last book are the republic of Genoa and its \textit{Casa di San Giorgio}. Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 350-3.

\textsuperscript{504} “…in modo che i principi dello stato deliberorono di ristringere il governo, e che le deliberazioni importanti si riducessero in minore numero; e fecero un consiglio di settanta cittadini, con quella autorità gli poterono dare maggiore nelle azioni principali. Questo nuovo ordine fece fermare l’animo a quelli che volessero cercare nuove cose.” Ibid, 340-1.

\textsuperscript{505} Usually referred to as the Pazzi conspiracy, it was an plot led by the Pazzi and Salviati families to assassinate Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano (Cardinal Giulio’s father) in order to overthrow the Medici regime. Machiavelli gives further details of the conspiracy in book VIII of the \textit{Histories}.

After the day of its creation, the seventy were to remain in office for five years (an unusual length for Florentine institutions), were in charge of appointing the Signori a mano and of electing two new magistracies, the \textit{Otto di Pratica} and the \textit{Dodici Procuratori}. There were also several other councils either reformed or introduced by the Medici to which Machiavelli makes reference in his constitutional works (the one hundred, the council of the people and the council of the commune). Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 109. On the complex procedures of the seventy, see
introduce a check to the increasing resistance amongst his allies and other powerful popular nobles resulted in the tightening of his political control over the republic by relying on an even smaller number of citizens to be placed *a mano* and to remain in office in an almost permanent basis.  

Nonetheless, it would be wrong to consider that Lorenzo, as Machiavelli suggests, had the seventy, and with it the control of all political deliberation, in his hands, since the extensive powers and the permanence of its officials were simply the institutional extension of the regime’s own vulnerability. Rather than changing the structural deficiencies of the previous government's reliance on a handful of elite families, the implementation of the Seventy simply meant to reaffirm their position and to institutionalize their power. Just as in the case of the other institutional aspects of the regime, the Histories corroborate Machiavelli's political and constitutional assertions in the *Summary*, the *Draft* and the *Discourse*.

It seems all the more clear, thus, that Machiavelli's narration of the Albizzi and Medici regimes is consistently coupled with a sophisticated argument concerning the failures of Florence's political and institutional tradition. Even more, his historical narrative analyzes, and further expands on, the prescriptive political considerations that the Florentine incorporates in other post-1520 works: the implementation of a sound system of laws and orders that discourages factional struggles, the creation of mechanisms of public participation and control, and the necessity of acknowledging a wide range of interests that, if institutionally free, would perform always to the detriment of the public good.

While these last two regimes seem to have defied their own defective ethos (both having lasted for roughly fifty and sixty years in turn), Machiavelli unfailingly considers their survival to be the result of contingency, of a series of *accidenti*: while the defects of the Albizzi were masked by the “state of crisis occasioned by the external wars” against France and most especially Milan, the government of the Medici survived thanks to the skill and genius of their two main leaders, Cosimo and Lorenzo. *Fortuna* was the driving force behind the longevity these two ill-conceived regimes: Machiavelli ultimately considers, then, that the only possibility for Florence to stand firm is by recognizing its

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506 For a superb account of the seventy and a full list of its members, see Najemy, *A History of Florence*, 362-4.


508 Notice, for example, Machiavelli’s evaluation of the wars against Milan: “And thus death was always more friendly to the Florentines than any other friend, and more powerful to save them than their own virtue.” With regard to the Medici, Machiavelli’s constant pairing of their regime to the individual skillfulness of Cosimo and Lorenzo already substantiates the regime’s instability – Cosimo “alone in Florence was prince.” Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 145 and 281.
'culture of dominance' and by enacting laws capable of harmonizing self-interest and to transform it into public benefit.

5 Conclusion - Machiavelli's Institutional Republicanism: Past, Present and Future

As a word of conclusion, it seems worth revisiting and reflecting on a passage that, viewed from the perspective of his major political works, may sound like a textual oddity or an almost naive speculation on the part of our author.

And there is no doubt that had Florence enjoyed such prosperity after it had freed itself from the Empire as to have obtained a form of government to maintain it united, I know no republic either modern or ancient that would have been its superior, so full of virtue, of arms, and of industry would it have been [


511 This search for sound institutional measures is a recurrent theme in the *Florentine Histories*, as the aforementioned anonymous speech clearly shows. On the theme of rhetorical and creative antithesis in the works and times of Machiavelli, see Struever, *The Language of History in the Renaissance*, 127-31.

...


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industriousness of the city ("no republic either modern or ancient...would have been its superior [non so quale republica o moderna o antica le fusse stata superiore]").

Certainly, as Jurdjevic has observed, “such a grand claim was no doubt partly a rhetorical lure to draw his readers into a particularly dense and analytical text.” But Machiavelli's subtle play between past, present and future in such a central section of the work suggests that he still had high hopes for Florence: the distinctive divisiveness of the past, the weaknesses of the present and the potential accomplishments of the future laid, all together, before the eyes of his readership as a reminder of the depth of the changes required for Florence. As this chapter shows, Machiavelli makes it clear that the city required an original institutional configuration capable of harmonizing the distinctive, and at times incompatible, divisions and interests in order to transcend Florence’s factional disputes. Given his considerations on Florence's power and political culture and his view of society as intrinsically divided into manifold and equally pernicious interests, then, the problems, paradoxes and dilemmas introduced in the Histories seem to point toward a particular model of institutional equilibrium – capable of harmonizing these multiple desires and to turn them into something as close to a common good, liberty and order as practically possible.

It is beyond question that the Machiavelli of the Histories was a staunch republican thinker, in that he preferred a system of governance capable of promoting equality, the rule of law and autonomy, but it should also be acknowledged that he did not regard the republican model as an ideal remedy to all political problems. Precisely for this reason, as this and the following chapters show, the post-1520 Machiavelli confronted a series of questions, challenges and contextual fluctuations that made him reconsider some of his most fundamental political axioms. By grappling with these most immediate problems of both political context and intellectual shift, it is fair to say that the Machiavelli of the Histories and other post-1520 texts is not a nostalgic or even ‘bleak’ historian, but rather a republican thinker that squarely sought to address the challenges of the verità effetuale della cosa.

And it was precisely this aspect of Machiavelli’s history of the Florentines that John Adams poured into his Defence after his long European sojourn: a balance of government is not a mere system of institutions that checked one another but rather the incorporation of societal elements into the very

512 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 7. My emphasis.
513 Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 205.
514 A variety of scholars from different intellectual backgrounds (Italian, British and North American) and approaches have vividly supported this suggestion: see Vivanti, Niccolò Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography, xiv; Black, Machiavelli, xxv; Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 213.
mechanisms of politics. And so, while the Machiavelli of the *Histories* does not seem to deny the value of the *vita activa* as practice in a *vivere civile*, he nonetheless seems to suggest that the active ruling part and its devotion to the public good ought to recognize, and actually merge with, the private interests of the citizenry.\footnote{This suggestion, of course, challenges Pocock’s now classical suggestion that in the world of Italian humanism – and of Machiavelli’s – the republic or *politeia* is the regime by which the activity of politics was to be seen as incompatible with, or rather opposite to, self-interest – which “was to [the classics and humanists] the classical definition of corruption.” Pocock, “Virtue, Rights and Manners,” 42-4.}

From the vantage point of Florence's experimentation with self-government – and with the shadow of the monarchical composite state looming large even during Machiavelli's own times – we are confronted with a crucial conundrum: was there any model, any republican example, to which Machiavelli could turn in order to provide his readership with a novel template for collective co-existence and freedom? Was there any republican government that, in its “historical impurity,” embodied the theoretical and contextual challenges debated by Machiavelli in his most historical work?
Chapter 4  
Machiavelli and Venice:  
Virtue, Commerce and the Path toward a Modello Nuovo

1 Introduction

The main task of this chapter is to cast light on the transformation in Machiavelli’s conception of republican political institutions. I argue that Machiavelli's late historical and political works are representative of a fundamental conceptual rupture with the republican thought espoused in the Discourses on Livy. In the two preceding chapters, I highlighted the qualitatively different portrayal of the role and purpose of social struggles by the time of his Florentine Histories. Moreover, I showed how in his history of Florence grandi and popolo become Machiavelli’s common object of condemnation: the former appear to Machiavelli as the “promoters of slavery,” the latter “promoters of license,” and both classes unwilling to be subject “either to the laws or to men.” Specifically, I argued that the positive evaluation of the divisiveness and aggressiveness of Rome gives way to a rather negative conceptualization of civil discords in the context of modern and Florentine politics.

Similarly, I claimed that Machiavelli recasts his presentation of the sociology of the city and also introduces important qualifications regarding the nobility and distinctiveness of the different groups’ aims and objectives. While the Florentine is certainly conscious of the dangers of concentrating power

518 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 40.
in the hands of the few and wealthy, he is also far from straightforwardly expressing support for direct control over the disposition of power to the people – to the point that Machiavelli desists from characterizing popular agency as the anchors or guards of liberty for the security and stability of a nation. Indeed, as Machiavelli writes in book III of the *Histories*, no group shows the desire “not to be dominated,” nor do they wish to accommodate their desires according to a *vivere civile*.\(^{519}\)

Is Machiavelli’s Florence (or any other contemporary republican state for that being), then, capable of transcending its internecine divisions and of forging a “well-ordered republic,” a way of life based on liberty, stability and prosperity? While this situation does not modify Machiavelli’s interest in providing solutions to political situations, we can observe a departure or re-conceptualization of the status of the good republic – a *repubblica bene ordinata* – in his most historical work. More specifically, I claim that the evolution of Machiavelli’s political thought becomes clearer if we consider the author’s re-evaluation of the Venetian model of republicanism in his post-1520 works. Machiavelli’s (re)interpretation of the republic of Venice’s *ordini* in his later texts is significant insofar as it pertains to a new “moment” in his political thought – mostly characterized by his increasing attention to institutions and constitutional mechanisms of control in a context much more modern than ancient, and politically and ideologically speaking, more “Venetian” than “Roman.”\(^{520}\)

Najemy famously suggests that Machiavelli’s early interest in the history of the Romans, particularly the Roman republic, comes to be superseded by Florentine history by the time of Machiavelli’s most famous historical writing.\(^{521}\) Najemy further considers that this transformation in Machiavelli’s interest in Florentine history can be substantiated by an analysis of the context of the Florentine’s works: while the early political tracts resulted from his discussions with former politicians at the Orti Oricellari, the later work rather grew out of his final return to business under the commission of the Medici family. In terms of Machiavelli’s thinking, Najemy claims that the late texts, particularly the

\(^{519}\) Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 64-5; *Discourses on Livy*, 18; *Florentine Histories*, 105, respectively. For a fine summary of these distinctions, see Bonadeo, “The Role of the People,” 368 and 375.

\(^{520}\) In this respect, I align my interpretation with that of Bausi, who observes that the works of the 1520s are the “arrival point of a slow, gradual but evident process of revision and correction of the democratic and populist, anti-aristocratic and anti-Venetian ideology most notably exposed in his treatise on republics...” Bausi, *Machiavelli*, 309-10. My translation; see, also, Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici, 555 and 573; Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1248-50; and by the same author, *A Great and Wretched City*. Jurdjevic suggests, at various moments, that Machiavelli’s transition from the individual and popular character of political virtue to a mechanistic and institutional conception of politics and decision-making by the time of the 1520s. Nonetheless, in spite of his claim that some aspects of the post-1520 Machiavelli are closer to a Venetian ideal of mechanized virtue, he fails to provide both textual and analytical considerations to support his claim. It is in great part the purpose of this chapter to substantiate and expand upon Jurdjevic’s commentary.

\(^{521}\) Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 574.
Histories, show a process of “self-liberation” from the theme of princely power, individual virtue and the capacity of individual figures to shape the contours of politics. Consequently, Machiavelli began to shift his interest from the individual – who in the late works is rather showed to have a limited scope of action – to structures of power, institutions and mechanisms of control.

This chapter takes Najemy’s thesis a step further and thus considers the post-1520 Machiavelli’s increasing interest in modern republican examples, including those of Venice, Lucca and Genoa. Following Jurdjievic, it suggests that, as much as his interest in Rome is superseded by an interest in Florence’s history, Machiavelli progressively considers the status of contemporary Italian republics as a new conceptual and theoretical model of political analysis. However, I seek to show that Machiavelli’s post-1520 works show no sign of the penchant “activism” and radical restructuring that underlines Jurdjievic’s interpretation of the Histories. In spite of Jurdjievic’s suggestion that the late Machiavelli comes increasingly closer to a Venetian form of republicanism, he omits Machiavelli’s Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca, a text in which Machiavelli conceives of Venice and Rome as equally sound constitutional models. Additionally, Jurdjievic neglects Machiavelli’s suggestions in the Histories concerning the “power” and “order” of the Venetian republic at I.28-9 as well as his puzzling considerations relative to Genoa and its merchant elite at VIII.29.

Focusing on the distinctive language Machiavelli applies in this series of texts, Italian Renaissance scholars have underscored the theoretical rupture of these post-1520 works from our author’s earlier political expositions. Matteucci concludes that there is a fundamental conceptual departure in Machiavelli’s late political works: “Between the mixed government advanced in the Summary of the Affairs of the City Lucca or the Discourse on Florentine Affairs and the one delineated in the Discourses there is a profound difference.” Similarly, Bausi observes that “The Summary of the Affairs of Lucca constitutes the departing point of a new moment in the evolution of Machiavelli’s conception of Venice: the rigid opposition of Rome and Venice comes to be replaced by a much more complex and articulated analysis [of the Venetian republic]” – though Bausi is unclear with respect to the more subtle aspects of this novel ‘theoretical moment.’ Marietti concludes that the “socioeconomic differences” between “the ancient and the [modern] mercantile world” prove to be a,

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522 Ibid.
523 On this theme, see Black, “Review of Jurdjevic’s A Great and Wretched City,” 496-7.
525 Bausi, Machiavelli, 309. My translation.
if not the, crucial distinction between Venice in the *Discourses on Livy* and the *Florentine Histories*.\footnote{Marietti, *L'eccezione Fiorentina*, 93-5. My translation.} Jurdjevic too sees in the late Machiavelli, principally in the Discourse on Florentine Affairs, an increasing sympathy for the institutional model of the Venetian republic.\footnote{Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1256.}

Despite the substantial attention this issue may have received, the central narrative of Machiavelli's interest in, and evaluation of, Venice’s *ordini* has not been fully examined and explained.\footnote{To the best of my knowledge there exists no comprehensive study on the subject. Renaissance scholars such as Mateucci, Marietti, Bausi and Jurdjevic discuss problems relating to this matter in the course of their studies but they do not provide a conclusive and compelling argument concerning the status of Venice in Machiavelli’s later political imagination.} Overall, the post-1520 texts abandon the contemptuous normative terms in reference to the Venetian constitution, refrain from considering Venice simply in terms of its martial performances, separate from its “internal” and “external” affairs, and desist from characterizing San Marco simply as a polity ruled by idleness or *ozio* – or simply as an “aristocracy.”\footnote{Contrà Sasso, who succinctly writes, “Rome, Venice and Sparta were, in the end, different: the former was a ‘mixed’ polity while the latter two were ‘aristocratic’ polities – republican one, monarchical the other [...*da Roma Venezia e Sparta erano...nel profondo diverse: stato ‘misto’ l’una, repubbliche, o monarchia, ‘aristocratiche,’ l’altra*.” Sasso, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” 42-3. My translation.} Furthermore, Machiavelli introduces his evaluation of Venice’s *buon governo* in relation to other modern commercial republics such as Florence, Genoa and Lucca and highlights Venice’s constitutional features to the detriment of the axioms of guardianship of liberty and military prowess that he himself had espoused in his earlier works. Consequently, in the post-1520 works, we sense a Machiavelli less concerned with the potential achievement of civic *virtù* and military *grandezza* and much more preoccupied with resolving the ubiquitous problem of social and political conflict via a Venetian-style system of “institutional *virtù*.”\footnote{Despite the obvious differences which characterize great part of Machiavelli interpreters, they share one fundamental similarity: all consider the analysis of Venice in the *Histories* as a continuity of the assertions introduced in the *Discourses* – especially those chapters in which Machiavelli speaks of the failures of Venice’s in-land martial enterprises. Gilbert, “The Venetian Constitution,” 488-9; Cervelli, *Machiavelli e la Crisi*, 64-82; Skinner, 171; McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 54. Mansfield, “Party and Sect,” 162, respectively.}

Yet Machiavelli’s conception of Venice in these works is instrumental rather than ideal: contrary to his aristocratic contemporaries, he does not set up the *repubblica Veneziana* as an aristocratic model to be imitated or as a mythical Aristotelian mixed constitution – nor does he engage in the type of self-congratulatory language of humanists such as Bruni and Bracciolini in Florence or Contarini in
Venice. Indeed, Machiavelli does not display his sympathy for Venice’s republicanism as his preference for a sealed off aristocracy, as it took place in Venice after the serrata of 1297. As I wish to observe in this and the following sections, the late Machiavelli treats Venice as a source of conceptual and constitutional machinery which could be adapted for use in the difficult circumstances of a mercantile città disarmata.

Given the quality of modern republics – all driven by partial interests and commerce – Machiavelli considers the possibility of forging a constitutional system that attempts to satisfy their active search for political authority by creating a series of restrictive councils that guarantee both political enfranchisement and control. In other words, if unobstructed by healthy institutional orders, nobili and popolo alike show themselves to be carriers of the hubris that leads to tyranny and the demise of liberty. The post-1520 Machiavelli’s republic, then, relies on the institutional means of the Venetian mixed government to achieve its purpose: his modern republicanism reconciles self-interest with the collective good of all.

I begin with an analysis of the language of the Histories in reference to Venice’s ordinì. I first show how Machiavelli’s critique of Venice’s territorial expansion on the Italian terraferma is consistently separated from the republic of San Marco’s institutional virtù. Then, I engage in an analysis of VIII.28-9, wherein Machiavelli compares Venice's ethos of order and stability to that of the modern maritime

532 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 50. In this regard, Machiavelli’s undertaking in the late works could be compared to the “comparative constitutional engineering” approach so famously promoted by Giovanni Sartori (as well as Guillermo O’donnell, Adam Przeworski and Scott Mainwarning, among others) in the mid-nineties. Sartori’s main claim is that, following the democratization wave that followed the fall of the communists regimes in the early nineties, it was all the more crucial to attend to the “constitutional engineering” or institutional arrangements required for the creation and promotion of democratic political processes. Among the institutional provisions underscored in Sartori’s study are: electoral systems, constitutional provisions to shape the relations between executive and legislative powers and the powers of the executive. Overall, Sartori underscores the extent to which both electoral rules and representative offices carry an integral power in the development and stability of political representation. This approach, in line with the late Machiavelli’s interest in the constitutional provisions of Venice, attempts to accommodate effective and efficient choice to its public (codified in the soundness of its electoral and representative rules) and the promotion of conflict management. Giovanni Sartori, Comparative Constitutional Engineering: An Inquiry into Structures, Incentives and Outcomes (London: Routledge, 1994), passim.
534 In this respect, I am in agreement with the thesis supported by Sullivan, Machiavelli and Hobbes, 31-2 and 38 and Paul Rahe, Against Throne and Altar, 29 and 52. Nevertheless, their claims with regards the distinction between classical republicanism and Machiavelli’s modern republicanism requires qualifications: firstly, both Sullivan and Rahe focus their interpretation on the Discourses on Livy only and consequently disregard the existence of any ambivalence or changes of mind in the works of Machiavelli. Secondly, both (especially Sullivan) draw too strong a distinction between commerce and politics in Machiavelli that over looks some of the nuances I introduce here and in the following sections. For a different perspective, see, for instance, Pocock “Virtue, Rights and Manners,” 37-50.
republic of Genoa. Thirdly I introduce one of Machiavelli's most overlooked political works, the *Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca*, as an integral text to interpret the political nuances our author presents in his late political theorizing at large. Overall, I claim that the main foci of comparison between these modern republics are: (a) their merchant nature; (b) business and private interest are strictly identified with the state and so does government with its conduct (c) commerce (wealth) and politics (honor) show themselves to be closely interrelated as part of a mixed constitution.535

2 Venice in the *Florentine Histories*: *Ordine e Potenza*

Venice appears for the first time in the pages of the *Histories* at the end of I.28, where Machiavelli excuses himself for not having included the Venetians in his discussion of the “unforeseen events in Italy following the decline of the Roman Empire.”536 As was customary in this type of historiographical project, the first book of *Histories* establishes the general context for the rest of the text and hence traces the “accidents” that led Italy from the fall of Rome and the incipient beginnings of the major powers up to the year 1434.537 Having discussed the fall of Roman Empire – and the

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535 The theory of the mixed constitution – already present in Plato’s *Laws* and advanced in the works of Aristotle, Polybius and Cicero among others – was based on the contention that the more lasting system of governance results in the combination of two or three good regimes – i.e. Monarchy, aristocracy and ‘good’ democracy. The theory, moreover, held that power should be shared amongst the different parts so that the orders of the regime could check and counterbalance each other, thus putting at bay the dangers of corruption – i.e. Tyranny, oligarchy and license. In the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, ancient Rome, Sparta and modern Venice were consistently invoked as examples of harmonious and well-balanced constitutions embodying classical ideals of the mixed government. Leonardo Bruni's *Laudatio Florentinæ Urbis*, moreover, advances similar claims with regards to Florence and the constituent parts of its body of governance. For Bruni as well as for most civic humanists, the mixed constitution was the source of unity and internal stability: as Bruni tells us, the Florentine constitution was as harmonious as the sound of a harp, “this very prudent city is harmonized in all its parts so there results a single great, harmonious constitution whose harmony pleases both the eyes and minds of men.” By the early Sixteenth century, Florentines (both the defenders of the restricted republic as well as those that promoted a popular republic) consistently referred to the constitution of Venice and its 'mixed constitution' as a salutary template for both the ordering of the government of Florence as well as for the building of offices under their own dominion. See, Russel Dees, “Bruni, Aristotle, and the Mixed Regime in 'On the Constitution of the Florentines,’” *Medievalia et Humanistica* 15 (1987): 1-23; Gilbert, “The Venetian Constitution,” 465-80. On the linkage between the Florentine civic humanist republican ideal and commerce, see, Hans Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), I, 157-257.


537 In this respect, I find Lynch's commentary on the implications and pre-eminence of “the foreign” in the *Histories* historiographically incorrect, for a number of reasons. First, it was customary amongst chroniclers and historians to begin the historical narration with a general – and ‘Italian’ – account of the past, as some of Florence's official historiographers had done prior to Machiavelli’s work. Secondly, as Bausi rightly observes, the organization of Book I of the *Histories* closely follows Giovanni Villani's *Cronica Fiorentina*, where Villani dedicates the first Book in its entirety to a summary of Italy's history from “the origins of humanity,” then introducing the history of Florence in the following book. Lastly, Lynch fails to assess the importance of Machiavelli’s main source for this book, Biondo’s *Decades*, and the extent to which the Florentine reappraises this work. Lynch, “War and Foreign Affairs in Machiavelli’s *Florentine Histories*,” 19-10. Bausi, Machiavelli, 256; Flavio Biondo, *Le historie del Biondo, de la declinazione de l'imperio di Roma, insino al tempo suo (che ui corsero circa mille anni)* Didotte in compendio da Papa Pio; e tradotte per Lucio Fauno in buona lingua volgare (Venice, 1543).
beginnings of the Roman Church (I.1-9), Naples (10-21) and Milan (22-27), Machiavelli finally turns his attention to the origins and deeds of Venice – the only republic discussed in this first book.

And to some it will perhaps appear not a proper thing that we have so long postponed reasoning about the Venetians, since they are a republic that for order [ordine] and power [potenza] ought to be celebrated above every other principality in Italy; but to remove the surprise, and to understand the cause of it, I will go further back in time so that everyone may understand what its beginnings were and why the Venetians delayed becoming involved in the affairs of Italy for so long a time.

This is the paradoxical, and as I wish to show positive, diagnosis of the Venetian republic made by Machiavelli.

In the following chapter, I.29, Machiavelli seems to maintain a similar conception of the origins of Venice as introduced in the early pages of the Discourses. Nonetheless, here Machiavelli underscores a fundamental aspect that is utterly missing from his previous account of the beginnings of the city – the miseries and the suffering in which Venice was born. From its beginnings as a people of émigrés, expelled by the Huns from the fertile territories of the Aquila, to their settlement in the swamps of the “Rivo Alto” and their establishment of laws, orders and security, this account highlights the necessity of the enterprise, the sterility of the sites as well as the industriousness of the Venetian people. Machiavelli first tells us that a number of peoples, “desperate for their security,” “began among themselves, without any other particular prince who might order them, to live under the laws that appear to them most apt to maintain them…”

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538 The “exclusivist republicanism” of Hankins understands the republic as “the government based on the will of the people and therefore the only legitimate form of government” or rather the government “by a plurality of persons…and not to princely governments.” Hankins suggests that whereas this exclusivist conception of the res publica dates back to the fourteenth century, Machiavelli was nonetheless “one of the authors who popularized this practice.” Hankins, “Exclusivist Republicanism,” 453-5.

539 Machiavelli discusses the origins of Florence, for the most part, in the early sections of book II. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 40. My emphasis.

540 More important, perhaps, is the fact that Machiavelli’s panegyric is unique in this book, as the republic of the Venetians is the only Italian power praised for both its ordini and its potenza. Consider the following passage, “But because the Visconti family was the one that gave a beginning to the duchy of Milan, one of the five principalities that later governed Italy, it seems proper for me to count their condition from an earlier time.” Ibid, 14, 26

541 As suggested in chapter 1, the Discourses do refer to Venice as “great” and “excellent” (though not necessarily in reference to their “orders” as Machiavelli does in the Histories), they consistently link the Venetians’ things inside’ with their failures to deal with the “things outside.” See, for instance, Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 22-3, 106, 148, 174, 282-3.

542 Mansfield, Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders, 31.

543 Moreover, the relevant sections of the Discourses refer to Venice neither as a città secura nor as a city of reputation and force. Ibid, 40-1. Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 11 and 21-2. William J. Bouwsma, Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 54-5 makes the assertion that Machiavelli draws a direct linkage between Venice's free origins and the continuity of its way of life.

544 Added to the Aquila, Machiavelli further observes, “Attila...laid waste Padua, Monselice, Vicenza, and Verona...all the peoples surrounding that province, which in ancient times was called Vinezia, driven out by the same accidents, withdrew to these swaps.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 40-1. In the Discourses, Machiavelli first observes that cities built by
Machiavelli then adds that these origins helped the Venetians turn their attention to the Adriatic Sea, since “constrained by necessity, they left very pleasant and fertile places to live in places that were sterile, deformed, and devoid of every comfort.” Whatever the results of its formation may be, one thing is certain: whereas others have marvelled at Venice's beginnings and shown their wonder by discovering some type of divine aid, Machiavelli simply desists from applying the language of divine inspiration or providence. As a matter of fact, Machiavelli asserts that the republic of Venice was born in freedom and industry: the Venetians were “by nature” the masters of their own independence.

Indeed, the geographic disposition of the Rialto added to the sudden migration of free populations to the lagoon “at a stroke,” allowed them to make “those places not only habitable but delightful [dilettevoli].” Industry, simplicity and austerity, not idleness or ozio, shape Machiavelli's description of the beginnings of what seems to be, at this moment, a virtuous primitive life. More important, perhaps, is the fact that Machiavelli's narration continues with the traditional view of Venice's independence at its birth from both the Empire and the Church, which added to its security and peacefulness, perpetuated by the notion of Venetian libertà. Unlike his own city, whose origins – as recounted in Book II – he dates back to soldiers of Sulla, Venice's founding was the result of a

native populations are the result of “dispersed” populations wishing to “live securely, since each part by itself...cannot resist the thrust of whoever assaults it.” Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 7. See, also, Gasparo Contarini, The Commonwealth and Government of Venice, trans. Lewes Lewkenor (Cambridge: da Capo Press, 1969), 4-5.

Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 41. To this “natural” accident that shaped the way of life of the populations of the Rialto, Machiavelli adds that “the peoples who were afflicting Italy had no ships to be able to plague them...” Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 7 and 20. On the problems of an infertile site for the building of a free city, see, Ibid, 8-10.

As Contarini considers, “…it seemed unto them a thing rather framed by the hands of the immortall Gods, then any way by the arte, industry, or invention of men...Neuer was there since the memorie of men, any citie seated in so opportune a place, so secure, and exceeding the beliefe of men.” And again, “But the situation of Venice being rather to be attributed to some diuine prouidence, then to any humane industry…” Contarini, The Government of Venice, 2-3. See, also, Edward Muir, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice, 16-7 and 26, where Muir asserts that most, if not all, Venetian historians maintained a similar mythical origin. Nonetheless, Machiavelli here seems to follow the narration of Biondo, who stresses that the success of Venice was not the product of nature [la maestra natura] or divine providence but rather the result of human ingenuity – “industriousness and ingenuity of man...mastering with art the impetus of the sea [la industria, e lo ingegno umano...vincendo con arte lo impeto del mare].” Biondo, Le Historie del Biondo, 29-30. My translation.

Compare to the origins of Florence in both the Discourses (I.2) and the Histories (II.2): despite the inconsistencies with respect to both the origin of its name and its founders (for Machiavelli himself seems unsure of this), Florence is originally a mercantile city by vocation (it grew out of the commercial needs of the inhabitants of the region). Although this claim does not eliminate the fact that Florence was born under the dominium of others, it nonetheless corroborates the Florentines' capacity to accommodate their actions according to necessity – a capacity that implies, to a certain extent, a particular dose of freedom.

Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 41.

This first aspect of the origins of Venice resonates strongly with Machiavelli's discussion on the origins of cities and colonies in the preface of Book II, where Machiavelli observes that in places in which “nature cannot compensate for...disorder...it is necessary that industry compensate for it.” Indeed, Machiavelli cites the example of Venice, where “the many inhabitants who gathered together there at a stroke rendered it healthy.” Ibid, 52-3.
collective pursuit of security by a series of independent settlers. Venice's independent foundation was thus the source of its own stability.

Following in great part the “mythical” (though certainly not divine) origins of Venice that had intrigued Florentine intellectuals since the early Quattrocento, Machiavelli then categorizes the origins of Venice based on the following principles: (a) Venice is a city founded by a series of native populations; (b) its peoples had been free since its very beginnings; (c) the foundation and rise of the city from the swamps of the Rialto was the result of a collective and impersonal effort; (d) its anonymous founders, without the help of any particular prince, created orders and laws that allowed them to live in security (constituite infra loro leggi e ordini, intra tante rovine...sicuri si godevano). The Venetians, for example, acquired territories (especially ports) in Greece, Northern Africa and the Middle East.

“While they lived in this form,” Machiavelli concedes with a bit of exaggeration, “their name was terrible [terrible] on the seas and venerated [venerando] within Italy” to the extreme that they became the “arbiters of Italy,” in reference to their privileged position vis-à-vis the political affairs of the peninsula. Working by necessity and not by choice – for, as Machiavelli states in the Discourses, there is greater virtue where choice has less authority – the Venetians were capable of avoiding the sterility of their site and of conquering the lands of others, to the point that they were feared abroad and praised within the Italian peninsula. No doubt, Machiavelli asserts that the mercantile way of life of the Venetians was the fundamental factor that allowed them to maintain a free and secure state and to conquer a vast colonial empire – a mode of living that seems to fit their origins and orders.

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550 Ibid, 54. Also, Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 8.
551 According to Edward Muir, the Venetians entertained several legends about their origins, the most popular one being about the peoples from the Aquila that, following the Italian campaign of Attila, fled to the sparsely populated islands in the lagoons at the head of the Adriatic. Venetians had also entertained the legend that traced their origins to the Gauls, “a descent that affirmed the affection and diplomatic ties between Venice and France,” but more importantly, “a heritage that transfused Venetian blood with the nobility of the aristocratic Trojan warriors,” who had supposedly taken refuge in the region after the sack of their city. Most Venetian historians, from Bernardo Giustiniani and Marco Antonio Sabellico to Gasparo Contarini, highlighted the noble origins of the Venetian people that converted the alleged ancient nobility into their independence from the empire of Byzantium. Muir, Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice, 65-72; compare to Florence as introduced in Rubinstein, “Machiavelli e li Origini di Firenze,” 952-3.
552 As Machiavelli himself recounts in the preface to Book II, “because nature cannot compensate for...disorder, it is necessary that industry compensate for it...they cleanse the earth by cultivation and purge the air with fires, things that nature could never provide.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 52-3.
553 Ibid, 41. Contrary to the economic life of Florence, where most ventures and commercial enterprises were run by private individuals, the republic of Venice retained ownership of the largest commercial projects and galleys. Bouwsma, Venice and Republican Liberty, 66.
554 Here we may ask: isn’t Machiavelli’s reference to the Venetian colonial empire the result of a politics of expansionism? Or is it rather a different type of empire that he has in mind? Why is Venice not mentioned in Discourses II.2 then? More
With so much settled in their way of life, the major problem in Machiavelli's "concise history of Venice" concerns its external relations. Driven by their "lust for domination [la cupidità del dominare]," the Venetians began to point their energies toward the mainland and consequently took possession of several towns and cities in the Veneto, Lombardy and the Romagna.\(^555\) Due to this desire for domination — arguably one of Machiavelli's most commonly employed axioms of both political action and misbehavior — the Venetians "came to so great an opinion of their power [in tanta opinione di potenza]" that their possessions on the terraferma exposed them to the aggression of Italian and most especially of Oltramontani powers.\(^556\) Thus, the Venetians acquired a considerable empire on the mainland which over the course of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries resulted in a clear move away from their "natural" and mercantile politics.\(^557\)

Eventually — and here Machiavelli bypasses over one hundred and fifty years of Venetian history — Venice’s adaptation to a new form of external affairs led to increasing resentment among its neighbouring powers, which at last took concrete form in the League of Cambrai of 1508-9.\(^558\) Venice’s poorly prepared continental expansionism, Machiavelli observes, allowed the newly-allied powers to defeat the Venetian forces "in one day" at the battle of Agnadello or Vailà of 1509. And Machiavelli is sure to let the reader know that the Venetian defeat resulted not just in the loss of their continental territories but in the demise of their "reputation and forces [reputazione e forza]," as well.\(^559\) Although

\(^{555}\) Machiavelli makes the case that this shift in Venice’s foreign politics happened during the reign of the Visconti of Milan, probably by the early fifteenth century. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 41. Machiavelli uses this term, cupidità del dominare, in connection to Venice again at VI.26.

\(^{556}\) This is in fact declared by a Venetian chancellor in a discourse dated around late fourteenth century, “the proper thing for Venice is to cultivate the sea and to leave the land alone,” as it would only distract the Venetians from their essential business and even endanger it “by poisoning the good relations between the republic and its customers.” Quoted in Bouwsma, *Venice and Republican Liberty*, 67.

\(^{557}\) Hans Baron marks the date of the Venetian alliance with Florence against the expansionism of Filippo Maria Visconti of Milan (1425) as the end of Venice's politics of isolationism and the consequent beginning of their politics of in-land expansionism. Baron, *The Crisis*, 387. This move toward the mainland had a considerable impact on the Venetian economy to the point that by 1469 twenty seven per cent of the revenue came from these newly acquired territories. Additionally, several Primi and even some wealthy cittadini turned to land ownership in the continental colonies and “Loss of state and private income was accompanied by decline in revenue from trade.” Robert Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980), 165-6. See, also, Renzo Pecchioli, “Il 'Mito' di Venezia e la Crisi Fiorentina Intorno al 1500,” *Studi Storici* 3(3) (1962): 473-4.

\(^{558}\) The League of Cambrai, organized by Pope Julius II after the Venetians' attempt to conquer the Papal territories of the Romagna, was constituted by the French, the King of Spain, the King of Naples, the Hapsburg as well as a number of minor Italian city-states such as Ferrara and Mantua. Bouwsma, *Venice and Republican Liberty*, 98. Lane, *Venice*, 244.

\(^{559}\) After Agnadello, the loss of the terraferma added to the decline of trade, the suspension of the Monte interest payments and the increase in taxation all worked to create a patriciate hungry for office. While some of the poorest patricians pushed for entering the paid offices of the republic other, the wealthiest and better off Primi, paid their way into the Senate – which
the Venetians had regained some of its territories by the time of Machiavelli’s *Histories*, he concludes that the Venetians now live “as do all the other Italian princes, at the discretion of others” – in direct reference to the influence of “kings beyond the Alps” since the invasion of Charles VIII in 1494.\(^{560}\)

Certainly, Machiavelli’s almost moralistic judgement of Venice’s continental undertakings seems to continue with its “old” insight: had the Venetians armed their people, had they applied the lessons of their maritime endeavors to the territorial ones, they would have become, not just the arbiters, but the main power of Italy.\(^{561}\) To put it differently, the Venetians were simply unprepared for such an ambitious endeavour and consequently should have continued with their mercantile way of life. More important, perhaps, is the fact that their power [*potenza*] seems to have been based on a misconception or mere opinion on their part; indeed, as Machiavelli well notices, their “lust for domination” was informed simply by their “opinion [*opinione*]” and “reputation [*reputazione*]” of their “power [*potenza*].”\(^{562}\) Their undertakings were simply based on a mistaken and deleterious conception of their status – for their reputation was the result of the “opinion” of others.

Having thus raised questions about the assertion introduced at I.28 – that because of their “power [*potenza*]” the Venetians “ought to be celebrated above every other principality in Italy” – Machiavelli fails to assess whether the Venetians should be eulogized by means of their good orders [*ordini*].\(^{563}\) In other words, at I.28-29 Machiavelli fails to engage in a discussion of Venice's domestic orders as he had done, for instance, in I.5-6 or III.31 of the *Discourses*, where Venice’s institutions are discussed at some length and compared to those of Rome and Sparta. Consider the following, in reference to

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\(^{560}\) Machiavelli’s discussion of Agnadello is arguably far beyond the historical scope he sets in the Preface – “from the beginning of our city” until the death of Lorenzo in 1492 – and yet a necessary (albeit insufficient) event to categorize the rise and fall of the Venetian republic in Machiavelli’s view. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 8 and 41-2. On the subject of the league of Cambrai and the battle of Agnadello see, also, *Discourses on Livy* 10-12 and 174; *The Prince*, 13-5. Additionally, by the time Machiavelli undertook the writing of the first book of the *Histories*, Venice had already reconquered great part of the cities and territories lost in 1509. Federico Chabod, *La Civiltà Veneziana del Rinascimento* (Florence: Sansoni, 1958), 27-55. In the *Discourses* as well as in *The Art of War* of 1518 Machiavelli observes that the Venetians could have created a new “world monarchy like the Roman [una nuova monarchia nel mondo]” but that they failed to seize the opportunity because they had refrained from arming their own citizens. Quoted in Hörnqvist, *Machiavelli and Empire*, 273-4.

\(^{561}\) In fact, by clearly dividing Venice's policies as *maritima* and *terraferma* Machiavelli “was thus expressing a classical notion of Venetian policy”. Bouwma, *Venice and Republican Liberty*, 67-8. At the same time, Machiavelli reproaches the Venetians for not conscripting her own citizens and subjects into her armies as they had done in their navy, which is somewhat inaccurate, since, for crews as well as for soldiers, Venetians relied primarily on volunteers, not conscripts, Lane, *Venice*, 249.


Venice’s sudden defeat at Agnadello:

They came to that unhappiness in four days, and after a half-defeat; for after their army had been in combat and was retiring, about half of it came into combat and was crushed, so that one of the superintendents who saved himself arrived at Verona with more than twenty-five thousand soldiers among those on foot and on horseback. So if there had been any quality of virtue at Venice and in their orders [ordini], they could easily have remade themselves and showed their face to fortune anew...But the cowardice of their spirit, caused by the quality of their orders [ordini]...made them lose state and spirit in a stroke. And it will happen thus to anyone whatsoever who governs himself like them. 564

Moreover, this short history of the Venetians neglects some other elements of the republic’s “internal” history that are discussed at a certain length in the Discourses – such as the enclosed character of its citizenry and political life and the nature of its citizens (they are gentlemen “in name”) or even the aristocratic attribute of Venice’s constitution. 565 Crucially, Machiavelli’s evaluation in The Prince and the Discourses looks closely at the interrelationship between what he refers to as Venice’s aristocratic ethos and restricted citizenship, its static constitution and its foolish pan-Italian imperialism. 566 In other words, the early political expositions of the Florentine make an explicit connection between “the foreign” and “the domestic,” between Venice’s foreign policy and its constitutional and institutional organization.

This is all the more striking if we return to Machiavelli’s main source for the first Book of the Histories: Flavio Biondo’s Decades. Having narrated the invasion of Attila’s Huns, the migration of a series of peoples from the mainland to the swamps of the Rialto, and the industriousness of the first settlers and founders of the city, Biondo provides a concise introduction of their first form of government – “i primi magistrati di Venetia furono chiamati tribuni” – which is thoroughly absent from the report of the Florentine. 567 Similar to Biondo’s observation, the Machiavelli of the Discourses does seem to have knowledge of this primitive “federal” system of government: “… [the population] grew to such a number that if they wished to live together they needed to make laws, they ordered a form of government…as they joined forces together often in councils to decide about the city…” 568

Thus, while Biondo and the Machiavelli of the Discourses highlight the fact that the Venetian constitution and its orders were the result of the city’s origins, the Machiavelli of the Histories completely bypasses this essential aspect of Venice’s history. More importantly, as Contarini observes in his Historie, these tribunes were the predecessors of one of the essential aspects of Venice's

564 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 282-3. My emphasis.
567 Biondo, L’Historie del Biondo, 23, 29-30 and 43.
568 Machiavelli Discourses on Livy, 20.
institutional fabric: the office of the doge.\textsuperscript{569}

At I.29, then, Machiavelli avoids the issue of the republic’s \textit{ordini}: Venice’s failure at Agnadello is simply categorized as a result of its foreign enterprises – their shift from maritime to continental conquest – and nothing is said about whether this may have been the result, or the consequence, of its domestic constitution.\textsuperscript{570} Whatever Machiavelli’s intention may have been for failing to disclose this theme in this context, it suggests that something out of the ordinary may be going on here. As a matter of fact, given our author’s previous evaluation of Venice’s \textit{ordini} in the \textit{Discourses on Livy}, we cannot help but wonder about their complete omission in this section of the \textit{Histories}.\textsuperscript{571} Even more, it seems as if Machiavelli’s condensed treatment of the history of Venice sharpens the distinction between Venice’s martial and foreign affairs and the result of Agnadello, and its \textit{ordini}. Indeed, the section dedicated to the origins, rise and decline of the Venetian republic devotes a mere two lines to Venice’s \textit{ordini} but Machiavelli provides no judgement on this matter.\textsuperscript{572}

In this respect, it is hard to agree with scholars such as Sasso, who claim that taking Machiavelli’s \textit{laudatio} seriously is to misconceive Machiavelli’s theorizing on Venice \textit{tout court} – those who take it earnestly, Sasso says, “are greatly misled [sono grandemente ingannati].”\textsuperscript{573} For Sasso, the concatenation of the panegyric at the end of I.28 and the categorization of Venice as a martial failure in the following chapter is simply the result of a continuity in Machiavelli’s thought.\textsuperscript{574} Yet Sasso makes a serious interpretive mistake, for I.29 thoroughly omits the issue of Venice’s \textit{ordini}; consequently, Sasso fails to acknowledge the distinction between Venice’s poor preparation for an inland imperial enterprise on the one hand and its \textit{ordini} on the other.\textsuperscript{575} Even more, the Venetians’

\textsuperscript{569} "When every towne had chosen from out his other citizens a chiefe a sufficient man, calling him by the name or title of Tribune, they generally altogether ordained, that vpon certain appointed daies these Tribunes should meete, and consult together the common businesse: but finding in the end an inconuenience….they thought nothing would doe better then to lay the whole charge of the general and common affaires vppon some one particular man…It was therefore by general consent of the xxij. Townes concluded an agreed, that there should one Duke or Prince be chosen…but afterwardes being by vse of time and experience taught, they began with holesome statutes and lawes to abridge his power, bringing it by degrees into this temperature, in which wee now doe see it.” Contarini, \textit{Government of Venice}, 49-51.

\textsuperscript{570} Mateucci, “Machiavelli, Harrington, Montesquieu,” 339-40.


\textsuperscript{572} Machiavelli, \textit{Florentine Histories}, 41.

\textsuperscript{573} Sasso, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” 4-5; also, Mansfield, “Party and Sect,” 162-3.

\textsuperscript{574} “Overall,” Sasso claims, “the twentineth chapter of the first book…read in its context, clarifies the limits within which Machiavelli’s praise of [Venice’s] power and order should be comprehended,” to then categorically state that in Machiavelli’s works “there’s admiration neither for its power nor for its orders [non c’è ammirazione autentica né per la potenza né per gli ordini].” Sasso, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” 6 and 31. My translation.

\textsuperscript{575} As Marietti notices, “[In the \textit{Histories}] the critique of the aggressive politics of territorial expansion is separated from the opinion expressed concerning [Venice’s] institutions and its past.” Marietti, \textit{L’eccezione Fiorentina}, 89. My translation.
belief that their potenza would allow them to conquer a continental empire does not speak, by any means, of their “laws and orders” and their “security.”

At this point it is necessary to ask the following questions: Given Machiavelli’s consistent deprecation of the Venetian continental expansionist projects – which can also be found throughout the Florentine Histories – what does Machiavelli tell us of Venice’s ordini in this and other late works? Why does Machiavelli praise the moment of commercial expansionism of the Venetian republic during the Trecento and what are, whatever they may be, its implications with regards to Venice’s internal orders? More important, are there any suggestions, any textual evidence, in the Histories that may help us solve this puzzling account of Venice?

3 Florentine Histories VIII.29: Venice and Genoa

A partial solution to these questions is suggested by Machiavelli at VIII.29, where he provides an in-depth evaluation of the “fellow” mercantile republic of Genoa, and explicitly insists that Genoa’s history and institutions should be compared to those of Venice. From the onset, there are a number of textual similarities that compel us to wonder about the parallels between these two chapters: both sections introduce the narrative through an excursus – one of Machiavelli’s preferred rhetorical tools in the Histories when it comes to underlining the importance of a subject or event. Secondly, both sections are introduced as a deviation from a general discussion of the struggles between the main Italian powers in their respective contexts and books. Then, the two sections explicitly separate the issue of “foreign” – or pan-Italian – affairs from the “things inside” these two commercial modern republics. Lastly, while Genoa and Venice are both conceived as mercantile republics, Machiavelli takes care to underscore their distinct institutional republican arrangements. How these two

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576 Sasso seems to have questions of his own with regards to the dismissal of the ordini of Venice: “In spite of the extreme complexity and the interleaving political, ideological, moral and emotional elements present in Machiavelli’s narration, this section of the Histories does not resolve, however, the question from which [this discussion] somehow arises.” Sasso, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” 7. My translation.

577 We could speculate that Machiavelli’s interest in the republic of Genoa could have been shaped by his visit to that city in April 1518, when he was assigned a commission to arrange the commercial affairs of certain Florentine traders. Villari, The Life and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli, 265.

578 “And to someone it will perhaps appear not a proper thing that we have so long postponed reasoning about the Venetians...” and “But since one must mention San Giorgio and the Genoese many times, it does not seem unfitting for me to set forth the orders and modes of that city, as it is one of the principal cities of Italy.” Machiavelli Florentine Histories, 40 and 351. This is one of the aspects of the narrative that Sasso fails to notice in his interpretive article. Sasso, “Machiavelli e Venezia,” 5-7.

579 Machiavelli refers to the Genoese in II.21 of the Discourses, where he considers Genoa simply as a colonial city under the influence of the French king. Machiavelli Discourses on Livy, 255.

580 In this regard, while in Book V Machiavelli speaks of the corrupted state of this “devastated world [in questo guasto mondo],” the fact that he compares Venice to a modern republic (not to the ancient models of Rome, Sparta or Athens)
republics undertook their mercantile way of life, and, consequently, how the institutions and policies of their communal governments had an impact on the maintenance of the vivere libero play a fundamental role pertaining to the late Machiavelli’s interest in what I call “institutional virtù.”

At VIII.29, Machiavelli takes the occasion of certain “light engagements” between the Genoese and the Florentines as the point of departure for his discussion of the republic of Genoa and the arguably puzzling role of the Casa di San Giorgio – the quasi-public bank of Genoa, which manage the state’s debt and interests payments.\(^{581}\) Machiavelli tells us that a certain Genoese condottiere, Agostino Campofregoso, took possession of Sarzana (a small town in the coastal zone between Tuscany and Liguria), an event which the Florentines considered “shameful and ugly” and consequently “ordered themselves with money and men” to recover what they thought their own.\(^{582}\) In view of the intensification of the struggle for Sarzana, “it did not appear to Agostino Fregoso...that he could sustain such a war with his private forces, [and he] gave that town to Saint Giorgio,” an organized group of Genoese private creditors.\(^{583}\)

Machiavelli then engages in a more detailed account of the domestic history of the city and introduces the role of San Giorgio in relation to the public affairs of Genoa. He begins his discussion with the battle of Chioggia of 1381, the result of many years of animosities between the Genoese and the Venetians over colonial as well as commercial affairs.\(^{584}\) To sustain the war against the Venetians, Machiavelli observes, the Genoese relied on forced taxes and loans on its merchant community that were consequently repaid with the gabelles on imports and exports that crossed the port of the city.\(^{585}\) By the early fifteenth century, unable to repay its financial obligations, the Genoese commune decided to grant its creditors, mostly wealthy local nobili and popolari, the total sum of the income from the

gives us reason to consider that the Florentine has revised some of the crucial assumptions introduced in his earlier political expositions.

\(^{581}\) Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 350; and Marietti, L’Eccezione Fiorentina, 92.

\(^{582}\) As a matter of fact, the Sarzanese rebellion against Florence and their submission to Genoese power was the consequence of Genoa’s own rebellion against French domination. Steven Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese: 958-1528 (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 260. Machiavelli continues his discussion of the Florentine struggles to recover Sarzana at VIII.30-31, events which come to a conclusion with the illness and final death of Lorenzo de’ Medici. Machiavelli Florentine Histories, 352-5.

\(^{583}\) Ibid, 350-1; also, Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 229-30.

\(^{584}\) This is recounted in detailed at I.32, “And between the Venetians [and the Genoese], many very important wars arose over the island of Tenedos, on account of which all Italy became divided...And although the Genoese were for a time on top and kept Venice besieged for many months, nonetheless at the end of the war the Venetians won out. Through the mediation of the pontiff, peace was made in the year 1381’" in reference to the peace of Turin. Machiavelli Florentine Histories, 44-5; also, Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 328; and Lane, Venice, 195-6.

\(^{585}\) Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 351; on the Genoese system of taxation, see Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 229-35.
customs until they had been “entirely satisfied.” At the same time, these Genoese creditors established the Casa to manage the state's debt and interest payments, which—much like the Florentine Monte—soon began to function as a quasi-public bank. In a word, Genoa with the example of the bank of San Giorgio seems to contradict Machiavelli’s famous dictum in the Discourses that “well-ordered republics have to keep the public rich and their citizens poor,” the Genoese thought it useful to keep the public poor and their citizens rich.

As the city naturally continued to rely on credit from the wealthy elite, the republic renounced all control over San Giorgio and by the early fifteenth century, Machiavelli tells us, it came to be exclusively dominated by private Genoese creditors. Machiavelli then observes that San Giorgio was granted authority over the palace of customs: they “ordered among themselves a mode of government [ordinorono fra loro un modo di governo], making a council of a hundred of themselves to deliberate public affairs [che le cosse publiche deliberasse] and a magistracy of eight citizens as head of all [capo di tutti] to execute them.” The republic’s reliance on credit was such that the Commune granted “the greater part of the towns and cities subject to the empire of Genoa” to San Giorgio.

Thus, the bank's authority over the affairs of the city was such that it obtained the economic and political control of Genoa's subject territories “without the Commune’s being involved in it in any degree [sanza che il comune in alcuna parte se ne travagli]. The control of San Giorgio’s restrained system over the republic was such that the Genoese took away their loyalty from the “tyrannical” republic [quelli cittadini hanno levato lo amore dal comune, come cosa tiranneggiata] “and from this arose easy and frequent changes of state.” Machiavelli concludes this section with an arguably puzzling affirmation:

An example truly rare, never found by the philosophers in all the republics they have imagined and seen: to see within the same circle, among the same citizens, liberty and tyranny, civil life and corrupt life, justice and license [la libertà e la tirannide, la vita civile e la corrotta, la giustizia e la licenzia].

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586 According to the records of the Genoese republic, there were less than three hundred loaners, all of Genoese origin and all members of the most influential families in Genoa, who demanded the government for their public investments. Ibid, 235.
587 According to Epstein, it was proverbial to refer to the Genoese of shareholders in this fashion “[and] some argued that it was good to keep the government on a short leash”. Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 79; and Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 233.
588 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 351.
589 Ibid, 352.
591 While Machiavelli is sure to catalogue the commune as “something tyrannical [cosa tiranneggiata]” he also asserts that the Genoese saw San Giorgio as “well and equally administered [bene e ugualmente amministrata].” Ibid.
592 Ibid, 352.
This is striking: Why does Machiavelli indicate that these “orders [ordini]” that drained away power from the republican political structure of the city to a self-perpetuating committee of shareholders are to be considered as “memorable [memorabile],” as an historical example worth recalling and remembering? More important, why does he consider San Giorgio as a republican-oriented institution, in the last line of VIII.29? In a word, why does our author remind us that the government of shareholders overlapping with the public domain should be considered an example of liberty and vivere civile?

As I wish to observe in the following paragraphs, the Genoese republic provides Machiavelli with an analytical “petri dish” for testing his novel conception of the republic: much like the Florentines, the Genoese were seen as traders and bankers whose devotion to commerce and private interest were inherently at odds with the pursuit of the collective good of the community. Nonetheless, to comprehend Machiavelli’s assertions, it is necessary to assess the objective historical situation of both the Genoese republican institutions and those of San Giorgio at the time of Machiavelli's narration – between the early and mid-fifteenth century. More important, the ethos of Genoa’s republican structures will help us understand Machiavelli’s take on the ordini of Venice at I.29 and the need to compare Venice and Genoa at VIII.29 – as he himself puts it, should San Giorgio “occup[y]” the lordship of the republic, it would make of Genoa “a republic more memorable than the Venetian [una república più che la viniziana memorabile].”

In general respects, the institutional order of Genoa resembles that of most of the Italian city-republics, but there are also some features that makes its nature of government very different from those of Florence, Lucca, Siena and Venice. On the one hand, Genoa’s main offices of governing were organized according to the ideal of a mixed constitution: a for-life elected doge and the magistracy of the twelve Elders or Anziani elected for four months, which, combined with the doge, constituted the main powers of the republic. What makes the republican system of Genoa exceptional is the lack

593 With regard to Machiavelli’s choosing of the term memorabile at this point of the narrative another question follows: does he think of the Genoese example in the same way he refers to another event elsewhere in the Histories as “wonderful” or meraviglioso?
594 How the Genoese organized the republican system of government and how San Giorgio came to acquire such territorial and political power is important where it pertains to the critical aspect of Machiavelli’s analysis of Genoa – the concatenation and opposition of liberty/tyranny, civil life/corrupt life, justice/license, San Giorgio/Commune.
595 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 352.
596 To this account of the commune’s institutions should be added: a one-year elected Officio della Moneta – in charge of the supervision of finances and expenditures of the Comune – and a series of minor standing committees concerning affairs such as colonies and outposts in the Mediterranean. Christine Shaw, “Principles and Practice in the Civic Government of Fifteenth-Century Genoa,” Renaissance Quarterly 58(2005): 50-5.
of a permanent and fixed deliberative council: while both Florence, Lucca, Siena and Venice had regularly-held consultative and deliberative councils (usually referred to as the Great or Major Council), the assemblies of citizens in Genoa were “summoned ad hoc to make proposals and reach decisions” to deal with specific problems – from raising money for the daily expenses of the Comune to administering military campaigns.597

These extraordinary consultative committees were directly elected by the doge and the Elders, had no regular number of participants (they ranged from a few dozen to several hundred depending on the occasion), were evenly made up of nobili and popolari, and lasted for either a few weeks or several months depending on the relevance of the issue.598 What must be remembered here is a particularity of Genoa’s institutional orders: the degree of power the doge and the Elders could exercise over these temporary deliberative assemblies was an uncommon aspect in the world of Italian city-republics.599 In that regard, who would be the doge and the Elders was mostly determined and settled by factional struggles and social divisions, and, while they still had to be formally sworn in by an electoral commission, they were often chosen by councils of allies backing the aspirants. The for-life nature of the dogeship, moreover, seems to have been more a formality than an actual practice: contestation and pressure usually resulted in the alternation of the dogeship between the factions of the Adorno and the Campofregoso families every couple of years.600

“Thus,” Machiavelli writes, “the [Campo]Fregosi and the Adorni,” the two most powerful popular families of Genoa, “fought over the Principate [principato]” – an uncommon, though not necessarily

597 Ibid, 50 and 71-2. While the Venetian Great Council was conceived of as the symbol of the republic's sovereignty and independence, its regular tasks and prerogatives were few if compared to those of the most restricted offices, such as the Senate or Pregadi, the Ten and the Signoria in general. Bouwsma, Defense of Republican Liberty, 61.
598 Interestingly enough, and in spite of their informality, decisions of these councils were accepted as binding. Furthermore, each office, whether regular or extraordinary, was made up of both nobles and popular men; of the popolari, half would be wealthy merchants and half artefici or representatives of the artisans, though they were not official representatives of the arti or trade guilds. While subjects such as foreign affairs recurrently required the creation of consultative bodies of citizens, (supposedly) genuine concerns for the common good were overcome by the restricted number of participating citizens and the doge's electoral power over these assemblies. Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 250.
599 As a matter of fact, in none of the major republics of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries did a committee, let alone an individual, determine the composition of each deliberative and legislative body as the dogeship of Genoa did. Only in Lucca one could find a similar exercise of power on the part of the ‘executive’ office of the also called Elders or Anziani, who could control who they wished to elect for each extraordinary council or colloquio. Nonetheless, as I show in the following section, not only is Machiavelli overly critic of this type of ad hoc assembly, but he observes that the power of the Lucchese Elders was restricted by both their short-term stay in office and the city’s traditional mechanism of electoral sortition. Christine Shaw, “Counsel and Consent in Fifteenth-Century Genoa,” English Historical Review 116(468) (2001): 845.
alien, term to refer to the dogeship of the Genoese republic. While the system of communal government between the mid-fourteenth and the early-sixteenth centuries would seem to have been nicely set up for collective administration, its informality and its lack of institutional checks on the doge and the Elders encouraged manipulation by those who wanted to establish their own dominance. In fact, as Machiavelli rightly notices, these constant competitions between the Adorno and the Campofregoso groups for the dogeship of the city were in great part encouraged by the irregular qualities of the Genoese republican orders – the “easy and frequent changes of state [facile and spesse mutazioni dello stato]” that Machiavelli makes reference to were seen as “something tyrannical [come cosa tiranneggiava].” To put it differently, the difficulty with the Genoese republican system was the anomalous nature of its constitution, which made it hard to find a solution that factions and distinct interests would deem reasonable.

Consequently, the idea of a concordia ordinum in republican Genoa – so strongly promoted by civic humanists at the time of Machiavelli’s writing – was conceived as a mere ideal (and yet promoted by the very institutions that failed to cope with the Genoese civil strife); the unstable institutional nature of the republic incited social discord and consequently created opportunities for private individuals holding position of power to enhance their private interests to the detriment of the common good. More to the point, the struggles over these interests were carried to such an extent that at times the Genoese would prefer the loss of their liberty – and their submission to a foreign power – in exchange for internal peace and stability.

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601 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 352. While the doge was theoretically a primus inter pares and a rector who would administer “justice equitably, keep the peace and not spend too much,” there were several examples of incumbents who thought of the position as the lordship of a princeps. Shaw, “Civic Government in Fifteenth Century Genoa,” 69-70; also Hankins, “Exclusivist Republicanism,” 455.

602 According to the data compiled by Epstein, Genoa from 1338 to 1538 suffered fourteen popular revolts, eleven noble-led revolts, seven joint revolts, six revolts led by the Campofregosi and one civil war. Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 'Appendix,' 325-7. It is important to notice that Mansfield's translation of the crucial term “mutazione dello stato” simply as “change of state” fails to properly categorize the value and import of the Italian original – simply because the Italian concept implies more than a mere shift or a historical variation of governmental affairs. See, for instance, Sasso, Studi sul Machiavelli, 208-13.

603 While it was a lifetime appointment, few doges actually managed to survive in office for more than a few years – let alone actually dying in office. Additionally, Genoese doges recurrently turned to foreign powers (especially oltramontani) as a means to beat off internal competition for office as well as to secure the city from foreign invasion (most of the time associated with a rival faction). Paul Coles, “The Crisis of Renaissance Society: Genoa 1488-1507,” Past and Present 11(1957): 19-24.


605 Genoa’s history is marked by a constant alternation between submission to foreign powers, whether the Duke of Milan or the King of France, and internal tyrants, such as Tomasso de’ Campofregoso, who ruled the city more as a humanist prince than a republican doge. Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 264. Compare with Machiavelli’s account of the rise and fall of the Duke of Athens at II.34-6, where he asserts that the Florentine popolo preferred the loss of their independence
Genoese Commune the embodiment of tyranny, the corrupt life and license. But what about San Giorgio? Why does Machiavelli praise the overlap of a quasi-oligarchic commercial enterprise with the public domain?

Founded in 1407, the Casa di San Giorgio was granted the administration of most tax revenues of the Genoese commune, reason for which the Genoese government turned to the Casa for money in time of need – whether to undertake military campaigns or simply to pay for the regular expenditures of the city. Being completely autonomous in its structure, the doge and the Elders had no influence over the Casa’s officials nor did they have direct control on how its affairs were run. As a matter of fact, it was San Giorgio itself that had a considerable impact on the policies of the communal government: “the eight members of the Officio di San Giorgio [the executive office to which Machiavelli refers at VIII.29] were often among the official bodies called to participate in the deliberative bodies, particularly on financial questions.”

More important than San Giorgio’s economic power was its political and territorial influence over a large portion of the Genoese domain in the Mediterranean – especially in the eastern Mediterranean and the region of Liguria. Unable to cope with the financial and political burden required to secure and govern those territories, they were handed over to the Casa for a limited period of time. In any case, while scholars underscore the temporary nature of the Casa’s governing powers over the territories of the Genoese republic, this system of territorial and economic control lasted, while intermittently, from the early fifteenth until late-sixteenth century – that is, from the time when the bank was conceded in full to private bankers until the time when San Giorgio’s power began to decline. In that regard, the Commune’s reliance on the Casa for governing its colonial territories

and the submission of the city to a foreign ruler as a preferable alternative to the existing republican institutions. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 89-95. Also, compare to his own account of the Genoese situation in Discourses II.21; Mansfield, “Party and Sect,” 255.

Montesquieu seems to have been struck by the nature and power of this institution, as well: “It is a very fine thing in an aristocracy for the people to be raised from their nothingness in some indirect way; thus, in Genoa, the bank of St. George, administered largely by the principal men among the people, gives the people a certain influence in government, which brings about their whole prosperity.” Charles de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, The Spirit of the Laws, eds. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller and Harold Samuel Stone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 15.

Additionally, so much was the real political power of San Giorgio that foreign states would usually send envoys to the communal government and to San Giorgio – and the Casa would send its own autonomous envoys for diplomatic missions abroad, as well. Shaw, “Civic Government,” 59, 63.

For example, the territories in the Black Sea, ceded to San Giorgio in 1453, were lost to the Turks in 1474; also Famagosta, in present-day Cyprus, was conceded to the bank in 1447 for twenty-nine years and again lost to the Turks in 1464; Corsica, Pietrasanta and other Italian territories were also ceded to the Casa in early-to-mid fifteenth century only to
implies, first, the incompetence of the government of the city – much more preoccupied with the ubiquitous internal battles between families and social groups. While the Commune became increasingly indebted as a result of the city’s internal and external struggles, the bank continued lending money to Genoa which, as a result, secured and guaranteed its debts with the concession of its territories. Secondly, San Giorgio’s territorial role evinces its superior organization as a political institution – capable of governing “the greater part of the towns......subject to the empire of Genoa...without the Commune’s being involved in any way.”

Certainly, the Casa took up the burden of this enterprise to protect its own financial assets in those colonial cities and territories. Nonetheless, its governance seems to have been considered by the Genoese – and by Machiavelli himself – as an example of civic order and stability in comparison to the increasingly unpopular dogeship and Elders – whose personal feuds were recurrently the cause of some of the most pressing problems of the city. Unhappy with the irregular and conflict-driven nature of the Commune’s institutions, then, Genoese citizens saw in the consensual and regulatory character of the Casa as the example of an effective administration of the common interest of the city – here understood as peace and stability within and territorial composition of Genoa abroad – as well as the quintessential instrument to control the protracted social discords that dominated the republic.

Most crucially, the social composition of San Giorgio brings light to Machiavelli’s general exposition on the Genoese example: Genoa is commonly referred to as a complex and multi-faceted society, one in which nobili as well as popolani were sub-divided into smaller sections, whose claims to political be lost in battle to either Milanese or Florentine forces by the end of the century. Lastly, other Northwestern Italian territories were conceded to the Casa by early sixteenth century only to be recovered by the Genoese Commune by 1562. Ibid, 59-60.

609 As both Epstein and Shaw suggest, conceding these places to San Giorgio was a way of taking them out of the sphere of internal political conflict while averting their sale to foreign powers. Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 260-79; Shaw, “Civic Government,” 60-1. What seems rather contradictory about this suggestion, however, is the fact that great part of those wealthy and powerful Genoese fighting for dominance over the Commune were active in San Giorgio, as well.

610 As a Genoese citizen, Francesco de Aiguino of Voltri, said “it would be better to be ruled by Genoese [in reference to the Casa of San Giorgio] ‘so that we are not shown to be slaves.’” Quoted in Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 249.


612 For instance, a large number of wealthy Genoese citizens were concessionaries of the alum mines in the Papal territory of Tolfa, while others, such as the Spinola, were great alien merchants of London. Additionally, as merchants and bankers, members of the bank had a particular interest in securing their assets in the Eastern Mediterranean (and even in areas of the Black Sea and the Middle East), especially with regard to the protracted commercial and territorial struggles with the Turks and the Venetians. Coles, “Crisis of Renaissance Society,” 19-20, 24-6.

613 Oftentimes was the Casa unwilling to cooperate with the doge and the Elders, either because its officials considered the policies of the Commune unfair or driven by factionalism and private interest. Epstein, Genoa and the Genoese, 279.
and social predominance often resulted in exploiting factional differences. However, while the city’s government often (if not always) resulted in the overcoming of one faction by another, the men who ran the Casa were not drawn from different social groups than the men who fought to be elected as Anziani, doge or to any of the extraordinary councils. Additionally, the councils of the Casa were made up and run very much like those of the Commune: half of its members being popolari and half nobili and the daily affairs being administered along the same procedures as those of the communal councils.

And yet, as Machiavelli himself notices, while the same groups composed both institutions, there does not seem to have been any power disputes within San Giorgio – rather they managed to forge a system of equilibrium and cooperation to administer their interest in the Casa as well as those of the city. More importantly, the well-ordered laws of San Giorgio “are regarded as the foundations of arms, money and government, not vice versa; arms and government there are the defenders of laws.” For Machiavelli, the Casa, with its clearly determined institutional order and prerogatives, entailed a system of government of stability and equilibrium amongst the different groups and factions, the same groups that composed the commune of Genoa. To put it differently, while the system of communal government in Genoa, with its informality and its lack of institutional checks and balances, was set up for factional manipulation, San Giorgio was seen as an institutional means by which citizens satisfy their own needs and desires – mainly, commercial profit – only in light of the needs and desires of the other members and the Genoese in general.

Its ordini – that is, its permanent institutions through which competing aims could be channelled – and not the virtue of its members, characterize the Casa di San Giorgio as a beacon of internal peace and buon governo, as the one efficient and fairly administered public institution of Genoa. It is precisely these characteristics of the Casa that led Machiavelli to compare it to the republican organization of the Venetians: both systems of governance were stable in that they incorporated self-interest under a strict public regulation within the search for a common way of life – a vivere civile.

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614 For instance, Paul Coles’ seminal piece on Genoa refers to a four-fold stratification of society during the fifteenth century: there were the wealthy families of noble origins, the wealthy popolari or popolo grasso – who prove to be a constant challenge to the nobles – the artefici or popolo minuto and the cappette or salaried popular class. Coles, “Crisis of Renaissance Society,” 17-9.

615 For instance, Salvago Spinola, a well-known and powerful noble, was a member of the Office of the Eight of San Giorgio and a prominent participant in the communal government during the same period – roughly between 1440 and 1442. Shaw, “Civic Government,” 63-4.

616 Ibid, 63.

In doing so, Machiavelli continues with his prototypical critique of “ideal” philosophical conceptions of politics and consequently turns Genoa (and Venice) into a “factual” example of good governance – which is arguably at odds with the accounts of some of his contemporaries. It is perhaps for this reason that Machiavelli thinks of San Giorgio and the Genoese as “an example truly rare never found by philosophers in all republics that they have imagined and seen...”618

Thus, Machiavelli, the citizen of a mercantile city (and the member of a mercantile family himself), provides an arguably distinct assessment on how modern republics ought to operate. While in the Discourses he recurrently reproves the relationship between property and republicanism – in his 'ideal' republic citizens must be poor and the republic rich – here Machiavelli links commercial interest with the sound and peaceful orders of a modern republic.619 This is certainly at odds with the thesis espoused by civic republicans and civic humanists, most especially Pocock and Baron, who consistently claim that commerce was antithetical to the language of Florentine civic humanism tout court. As a matter of fact, Pocock recurrently refers to the danger of commerce as corruption in the vocabulary of Machiavelli’s republicanism.620 More importantly, perhaps, is the fact that Machiavelli’s conclusion concerning the symbiotic relationship between commerce and republicanism strongly resonates with the political attitudes of his Florentine contemporaries, especially those who adumbrated Venice as a model of the well-ordered republic.

Composed in the early 1520s, Francesco Guicciardini’s Dialogue on the Government of Florence identifies the prosperity of the commercial classes and the city in general with the “ideal” political organization for Florence.621 Guicciardini, through his mouthpiece in the dialogue, Bernardo del Nero, introduces Venice – with its doge, senate and Great Council – as a blueprint for the reform of his city's government.622 Moreover, del Nero praises the Venetian system of government for precisely the same reasons Machiavelli considers San Giorgio “memorable:” “Free cities mustn't object to their citizens’ desire for...appetite, or if you like ambition, [since it] is useful in making men think about

618 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 352.
619 See, for instance, Mansfield's account of Discourses II.19 in Machiavelli's Virtue, 249-50.
622 Ibid, 101-15 and Allison Brown's introductory comments at xvii-viii. In his account of the constitution of the Venetians, Guicciardini makes another interlocutor, Pagolantonio Soderini, claim that while “they don't admit the rich citizens more than the others...their wealth derives from the great power of their dominion, and from the size of the city and the opportunities it offers.” Ibid, 103.
and perform generous and exalted needs.”

Much like del Nero’s Venice, where the merchant community could profit from the publicly-regulated and run ventures, Machiavelli supports the coexistence of self-interest and the collective good. To do so, he proposes a means by which citizens’ behavior does not appeal to the language of virtue and incorporates an “institutional” measure of regulation that deters the rise of factions and encourages the coexistence of self-interest and the collective interest of the city. In other words, his response to the challenges of actual Renaissance republics focuses on a republic becoming capable of forestalling the factional attempts of desireful citizens. His enterprise, then, looks not to the citizens and their virtue, but rather to institutional arrangements to prevent civil discord.

Nonetheless, while the example of Genoa and San Giorgio provides textual evidence of the moment of transformation in Machiavelli’s conception of politics, the implications, content and purpose of this re-evaluation remain unclear. Are there any other texts wherein Machiavelli makes his republican agenda more explicit, where he directly speaks of governmental behaviour, institutions and mechanisms of control that help us corroborate this ‘Venetian turn’ in his Florentine Histories?

4 The Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca: Lucca and Venice

This section introduces and analyzes one of the most overlooked political works of Machiavelli, the Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca, as an “interpretive key” to the political theorizing developed in the Histories and other post-1520 texts. No study has been fully dedicated to this text,

623 In Book I, del Nero praises Venice’s economic policies because the interest of the merchant coincided with the larger public good and his commercial activity was intrinsically considered a civic one: in the well-ordered state the patrician maintains himself attached to his trading and commercial ethos. Ibid, 49 and 108. Nonetheless, while his fellow Florentine civic humanists (those of the calibre of Bruni, Poggio and even Savonarola and at times Guicciardini) consistently referred to wealth and commerce as a prerequisite for the survival and virtue of the city-republic, Machiavelli does not, by any means, square wealth with the virtuous vita activa. See, for instance, Jurdjevic, “Virtue and Commerce,” 728-31 and 739.

624 As a commentator observes “All merchant nobles of Venice operated as one large regulated company of which the board of directors was the Senate.” Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, 75-6.

625 While built on different premises, I find Benner's conclusions on San Giorgio accurate: San Giorgio “recognizes that human beings will never produce cities where freedom, civilità, and justice reign completely secure and unchallenged...Yet the citizens of San Giorgio refuse to let these omnipresent human conditions dominate human life or undermine their own demanding, self-imposed, standard of civilità. They neither give free rein to corruption-producing conditions nor try forcibly to repress them.” Benner, Machiavelli’s Ethics, 203.

626 There is no original Machiavelli available for this work; also, the title of the text comes from Giuliano de’ Ricci’s transcription, Machiavelli's nephew and collector of his works. I have consulted the Ricci edition, available at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Serie Palatino E.B. 15 10 and the Edizione Nazionale. All translations of the Summary are my own. For further information on this work, see, “Introduzione,” in Niccolò Machiavelli, “Sommario delle Cose della Città di Lucca,” in Arte della Guerra e Scritti Politici Minori, eds. Jean-Jacques Marchand, Denis Fachard and
the first of a series of works that unequivocally show that the post-1520 Machiavelli’s political theorising was moving in a conservative direction. Departing from his earlier negative vision of Venice, the post-1520 Machiavelli advocates a Venetian-styled mixed regime, which indicates that his analysis of politics was surprisingly closer to the aristocratic side of the Florentine republican spectrum that previously thought.

Given the contextual character and shape of the text, its analytical evaluation of a modern republic and its distinctive comparative nature, this short pseudo-diplomatic relazione or report can be presented as a textual example of the moment of transformation in Machiavelli’s conception of good government. Moreover, this is one of the few texts in which Machiavelli explicitly – and positively – considers the ordini and the mechanisms of government of Venice. In fact, the language Machiavelli applies in the Summary is in many ways suggestive of a search for what I refer to as “institutional virtù” or excellence as the effects of institutions and mechanisms of control. Machiavelli compares the Lucchese example to ancient Rome and contemporary Venice, with the Florentine speaking highly and in favour of the latter two. In this sense, Machiavelli’s suggestions concerning his preference for a mixed constitution substantiates his new pro-Venetian sympathies – since he subordinates the Roman example to the typically Florentine aristocratic view of Venice as an ideal constitutional model.

Machiavelli composed the Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca during his sojourn in Lucca between July and September 1520, where he had been sent as envoy in a commercial mission to defend the interests of some Florentine merchant families allied with the Medici. Overall, the Summary

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627 For a few exceptional treatments of the Summary, Villari, Life and Times of Machiavelli, 280-2; Matteucci, “Machiavelli, Harrington, Montesquieu,” 338-49; Bausi, Machiavelli, 303-11; and Black, Machiavelli, 229-31. As mentioned below, the Summary was composed between July and September 1520, just months before Machiavelli undertook the writing of the Florentine Histories (1520-24) and the Discourse on Florentine Affairs (December 1520 to early 1521). Also, as mentioned by Guidi, “Machiavelli e I Progetti di Riforme Costituzionale a Firenze nel 1522,” 584-3, Machiavelli wrote the Draft of a Law and the Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio between February and April 1522.


629 Guidotti, “Ricordo per Niccolò Machiavelli [Henceforth Memorandum to Machiavelli]” and “Il Cardinale Giulio de’ Medici a Niccolò Machiavelli [Henceforth Letter to Machiavelli],” 54-8 and 61-2, respectively. Certainly, Machiavelli composed two texts while in Lucca, the Summary and the famous pseudo-biographical Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca. While Machiavelli penned the Life as a “model for a history,” the mythical portrayal of Castruccio was also meant to ridicule the model of humanist historiography he would apply and criticize by the time of composing the Florentine Histories. James Atkinson and David Sices, eds., “Zanobi Buondelmonti to Niccolo Machiavelli,” in Machiavelli and Friends: His Personal Correspondence (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1996), 328-9.
takes the form of an ambassadorial report – texts which Machiavelli had composed and dedicated to the main Florentine offices in charge of foreign affairs during the republican period, the Signoria and the Ten of War or Dieci di Balia. Customarily, non-resident official representatives of the Florentine republic were required to provide an analysis of the political, economic and military situation of the visited state from as detached a point of view as possible. These reports were of critical significance in that they presented first-hand, and at times personal, information to those officials dealing with Florentine relations with other powers.

As suggested in the Instruction to Raffaello Girolami of October 1522, Machiavelli was well aware of this custom:

I have seen...men prudent and experienced in embassies using this method: they put, at least every two months, before the eyes of him who send them the exact condition and situation of the city or the kingdom where they are sent as representatives. When well handled, this device brings great honour to the writer and provides great utility to the commissioner, because he can more easily make plans when understanding matters in detail than when not understanding them.

Similarly, the ante res perditas Report on German Affairs of 1508 describes a broad series of aspects concerning the status of the German states – from its institutional, political and military affairs to Machiavelli’s own experience with some of the crucial German political figures. Machiavelli’s reports as a Florentine agent abroad allow us to witness the moment of transformation in his vocabulary of politics – from the difficulties of innovating in the case of the French system in the Portrait of French Affairs, to the uncorrupted status of the German populations of the Report on German Affairs.

In both works, however, Machiavelli puts in the foreground his role of “servitore” to those in power and consequently avoids any explicitly partisan or prescriptive suggestion as we find in the

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631 Black, Machiavelli, 229.


Summary. 635 Consider how Machiavelli displays his duties as envoy in the Report on German Affairs, having been on the site [at Maximilian’s Diet in Konstanz], having heard many men talk many times, and having had no other assignment but this one, I will make reference to all of the important things I have gathered . . . Nonetheless I will not present these [aspects] as truthful and reasonable, but as things I have heard – for it seems to me that the task of a servant [servitor] is to bring before the commissioner [al signor suo] whatever it has been learned, since something good and useful may be retrieved from this. 636

It is noticeable how Machiavelli conceives of the utility of his Report as servant of the Florentine republic and the extent to which these considerations resonate with the aforementioned Instruction of 1522. While it may be the case that some of his diplomatic reports did express political interests, Machiavelli’s description in both texts evidently conveys a customary understanding of these relazioni. 637

Turning to the Lucchese Summary, the texts is customarily divided into two sections. 638 In the first part, we can observe how Machiavelli reproduces the pattern of the diplomatic relazioni: Machiavelli describes the political division of the city into thirds and the number of officials representing each third in the main executive office of the city-state. Secondly, Machiavelli retells the institutional organization of Lucca, the duration of council membership, and the electoral processes by which the elector takes his vote to the bossolo or urn. 639 Following this portrayal of the Lucchese institutional system, Machiavelli hints at a comparison between the electoral systems of Lucca and Florence, to then observe, “Which of these two modes is best, whether the Lucchese or yours, or the Venetian one, I will leave it to the judgement of others.” 640 In this regard, the description of this first section of the Summary is comparable to the ante res perditas work he undertook as Florentine envoy in that it reproduces a summary of the political situation of the Lucchese republic from a deferential and detached perspective. Not only does Machiavelli refrain from incorporating any suggestions concerning the status of the Lucchese republic, but he also desists from indicating any ideological preference with respect to Lucca or his own city and commissioners.

In spite of Machiavelli’s interest in reporting to his commissioners, there is no evidence that suggests

635 Ibid.
639 Ibid, 613-17.
640 Ibid, 617. My emphasis.
that he was demanded to compose such type of report during his Lucchese sojourn. In fact, his duties while in Lucca as described in the *Memorandum to Niccolò Machiavelli* of July 10 1520, were quite specific and nowhere is there a requirement for Machiavelli to write back to his bosses on the political character of the visited city-state. As Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici writes, “You [Machiavelli] have to demonstrate to the Signoria [of Lucca] that you have been sent by the Signoria [of Florence] and by Your Most Reverend Lordship in particular to make them understand, with the skills you may require, that the said Michele [Guinigi] should fulfil his duties with our merchants.”

Furthermore, it is all the more controversial that Machiavelli refers to Florence and his alleged addressees as members of the now-defunct republican offices. This suggestion is not hard to retrieve from the text. Machiavelli mentions the main college and the gonfalonier as the “Signoria” of Lucca, then subtly adding, “[O]r rather, wishing to call themselves by an old name, they called themselves the Elders [Anziani],” as the Florentine main office was called prior to the reforms of the late *dugento*. He also mentions some extra-legal consultative bodies and electoral procedures that strongly resonate with the typically Florentine republican *pratiche* and scrutiny systems. Lastly not only does Machiavelli consider Florence in republican terms, but he also desists from mentioning both the current Medici leaders and their regime.

Given that Machiavelli frames his text as a republican dispatch, “it is hard to believe that Machiavelli would have intended to keep his thoughts on the Lucchese constitution and its implications for Florence to himself.” There is certainly a dose of satire – if not outright criticism – behind his appeal to a form of writing intrinsically linked to the Florentine republican experience – and his role as servitore therein. His heavy sarcasm becomes even clearer once we consider that the 1494-1512 popular republic was something of a taboo for Medici leaders and that his commissioners had in fact subverted the city’s communal experience. Writing as a semi-official envoy during one of the most

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22 Guidotti, “Memorandum to Machiavelli,” 56-7. My translation. Once Machiavelli arrived in Lucca (on July 7th 1520) the Florentine Signori commissioned Machiavelli to deal with two other official, but nonetheless minor, tasks: one pertaining to the production of coins and another related to the expulsion of three Sicilian scholars who had been part of the Medici studio in Pisa. Guidotti, “Letter to Machiavelli,” 61-2.

642 *Anziani* was the name of the executive power of Florence prior to the struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines and the reform of the *Priorates* by the nobili popolani. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 57-61.


645 Ibid, 229. Black suggests that the shape of the *Summary* is suited to the pro-republican youth audience of the *Orti Oricellari*, for which Machiavelli had recently composed the *Art of War*. While plausible, Black’s thesis undercuts the prescriptive and activist undertones of the text that suggest a strong parallel with the 1520-22 constitutional works. On this theme, see Bausi, *Machiavelli*, 307-8.
critical periods of the Medici regime, Machiavelli hardly spouted this description of the Lucchese republican constitution with a straight face.

Contrary to the traditional shape of dispatches, the *Summary* engages in an in-depth evaluation of the republic of Lucca, a fact that, given the republican undertones of the text, suggest that the *Summary* is closer in its character to the prescriptive *Discourse on Florentine Affairs* of 1520-1 and the *Draft of a Law* and the *Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio* of 1522. As Machiavelli himself observes, his aim in the *Summary* is to provide a normative judgement on the institutions of Lucca. More important, the *Summary* introduces the institutions of Lucca in comparison to two arguably distinct republican paradigms: ancient Rome and modern Venice. As I observe in the following paragraphs, the analysis of the Lucchese institutions subtly turns into a (favorable) consideration of the Venetian organization of government, so much so that by the end of the text Machiavelli refers to Venice as a “well-ordered [bene ordinata]” republic.

Machiavelli begins the treatise with a general outline of the organization of the government of Lucca, which, organically speaking, resembles the model of the mixed government. The government of Lucca is divided into three main offices. First, there is the Signoria or Council of Elders – *Anziani* as the Lucchese call it, which is composed of nine magistrates – three from each third or *terzieri* of the city – and a gonfalonier of justice, all of whom together constitute the highest executive office for a period of two months. Secondly, there is the senatorial council that is composed of thirty-six citizens elected for six months and, thirdly, the Great Council of seventy-two citizens chosen for one year.

Then, Machiavelli observes, the executive colleges of the republic have ample authority over the surrounding dominion of the city-state – the *contado* – but no jurisdiction or “*autorità*” over the citizens and the affairs “inside [*dentro*]” the city. In terms of its domestic affairs, while the Elders are referred to as “the motor of the city,” they are simply competent to convocate extraordinary consultative councils or *colloqui de’ cittadini* of private citizens and to bring forward the decrees prepared by

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647 “To conclude, this is what can be said of the good [buono] or the bad [reo] in the government inside Lucca [*dentro di Lucca*].” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 620.
648 “These three organs hold all of the responsibilities of the state [*Sopra questi tre membri si gira tutto il pondo del loro stato*...].” Ibid, 613.
649 *Anziani* was the name of the executive power of Florence prior to the struggles between Guelfs and Ghibellines and the reform of the *Priorates* by the nobili popolani. Ibid, 614 and *Florentine Histories*, 57-61. The General Council of Lucca was composed of ninety officers and not seventy-two as Machiavelli mentions – so at least is stated by the Statutes of 1446, still in vigour by 1520. See, Villari, *Life and Times*, 300.
Rather, it is the Great Council of Seventy-two that holds most of the responsibilities that pertain to the internal affairs of the city, ranging from deliberating over new laws and passing death sentences, to naming ambassadors and receiving and writing letters to foreign states. As Machiavelli asserts, not only does this Council rule the affairs of the city, but “[It] is the prince of the city...in the end there is nothing that could restrain nor appeal its decisions.”

Yet, despite the fact Machiavelli labels the Great Council “prince of the city [principe della città],” this was hardly the case. As students of Lucca have shown, the prerogatives of the extraordinary colleges, most especially the organization of extraordinary consultative bodies, were a key component of the mechanisms of power in quattrocento and cinquecento Lucca. Indeed, the Elder’s power of convoking a limited number of private citizens to provide counsel and decision-making to the republic was one of the main means through which important and powerful Lucchese citizens had a direct say in the orders of the city. This was the case because citizens of high rank found it difficult to gain access to the college of the Elders as a result of the various prohibitions included in the city’s Statutes of 1430 and 1443. Thus, the Lucchese grandi’s only way of directly engaging in the affairs of the polity was the extraordinary councils chosen by the Elders. Regardless of the accuracy of Machiavelli’s description, what is significant about this first sketch is his own vision of the Lucchese institutions as abstract structures of power and authority, which, as we shall observe, allow him to

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651 “…ma solo dentro alla città raguna i consigli, propone in quelli le cose che vi si hanno a deliberare, scrive alli imbasciatori e riceve lettere; raguna le pratiche, che loro chiamano ‘Colloqui’ de’ loro più savi cittadini, il che fa scala alla deliberazione, che si ha a fare ne’ consigli, vigila le cose, ricordale e infatti è come un primo motore di tutte le azione che si fanno nel governo della città” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 613-4. Pratiche – whether stretta or larga – were ex officio councils of private citizens that formed an important, and sometimes essential, element in the decision-making process of Florence. Machiavelli’s continuous reference to Florentine terms in reference to Lucchese institutions – Signoria vs. Anziani, Pratiche vs. Colloqui – seems to underline the comparative analysis that comes about in the second section of the work. On the role of Pratiche in the Florentine republican context, see, Felix Gilbert, “Florentine Political Assumptions in the Period of Savonarola and Soderini,” Journal of Warburg and Courtauld Studies 20 (3-4) (1957): 187-214.

652 “È questo Consiglio generale il principe della città, perche fa legge e disfalle; fa triegue, amicizie, confina, ammazza cittadini, e in fine non ha appello, né alcuna cosa che lo freni, pure che una cosa sia vinta i 3/4 di esso.” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca”, 616-7.

653 Bratchel, Lucca, 89-98.

654 Ibid, 127.


656 Contrary to Machiavelli’s depiction, the constitutional history of Lucca epitomises the model of the republican Italian city-state. Lucca is considered a government centred on the goal of achieving civic peace and avoiding discord and factionalism, with citizenship as the only restriction to offices. Ibid, 89-90.
After this first descriptive section, Machiavelli introduces his “method” of comparative evaluation of Lucca’s mechanisms of government. Deploying a typically Machiavellian rhetorical style of binary oppositions and parallelisms, Machiavelli presents first simple symmetries between two examples to then announce qualifications to that very system of analysis – first by constituting exceptions to that construction and then by developing a new generalization that accounts for those exceptions. Initially, Machiavelli tells us (or rather tells the officers of a now-gone Florentine republic) that the task of the rapporto is to compare the institutions of Lucca to those of Florence – and perhaps those of the Venetian republic. In this regard, the second clause of the passage promises not to provide normative conclusions as to which city's modes are best since, as an 'official' dispatch, the text was simply meant to supply an objective consideration of the subject-matter. Nonetheless, in the following paragraph Machiavelli shifts gears and claims that “we cannot but praise Lucca's institutions; yet I would like us to consider what is good or bad [di buono o di reo] in this form of government.”

Having described the executive office of the Elders as simply having jurisdiction [autorità] over the affairs of the surrounding country, Machiavelli succinctly evaluates the constitution of Lucca as a sound order. However, speaking generally of the mixed government and its effects [effetti], Machiavelli opposes the Lucchese to the Venetian institutions and stresses that the former overlooked the “dignity” or maestà of the Elders – offices traditionally held by citizens of high rank. On the one hand, the Elders of Lucca are granted no “authority [autorità]” over the citizenry, which Machiavelli considers as “very well-ordered [benissimo ordinato] because this is how it has been observed by good republics [buone repubbliche]” – and here he names both ancient Rome and modern Venice. The reason for this supposition is a simple and practical one: given their social and political

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658 “Quale per tanto sia migliore di questi due modi, o il Lucchese, o il vostro, o quello de' Veneziani, ne lascerò giudicare ad altri.” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 616.
659 Rehborn, Foxes and Lions, 206-7
660 “Né si può dallo effetto se non generalmente lodarli; pure io voglio che noi consideriamo quello che in questo governo è di buono o di reo.” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617; also, Black, Machiavelli, 229.
661 Though the concept of dignity or maestà had been traditionally employed in reference to the power of a regum auctoritas, it was also employed in contexts in which political power was associated with moral uprightness or prestige/social pre-eminence of a group – and not necessarily that of a prince or emperor. See, Salvatore Battaglia and Giorgio Barberi Squarotti, eds., Grande Dizionario della Lingua Italiana, Vol. XII (Torino: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Turinese, 1961), 403. In the Florentine republican context, high status or maestà was also employed by Florentine lawyers in reference to the qualities and prerogatives of the Signoria and its members. Lauro Martines, Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), 445-6.
662 As Machiavelli tells us, neither the Roman consuls during the time of the republic nor the Doge and the Signori of Venice – that is, the executive officers of these two republics – had any jurisdiction or autorità over the citizenry. On the
rank, should these political actors be granted jurisdiction or autorità over important affairs, it would result, in a short period of time, in “bad effects [cattivi effetti]” in direct reference to the potential threat of arbitrary monopolization of power. Lucca deserves praise, then, in that the executive branch – the Elders – had little, if any, power over the citizens, and consequently Lucca avoids potentially tyrannical consequences.

On the other hand, due to the short-term nature of the Elders, it was continuously necessary to have recourse to extraordinary consultative councils (the colloquii de’ cittadini) to the advice of private citizens, something that in the context of Lucca’s constitution underscores a poor organization of power and office. The Lucchese situation, then, exemplifies a subversion of the proper constitutional arrangement, as it consistently relies on extraordinary bodies of private, and powerful, and ambitious citizens. Additionally, Machiavelli seems to suggest that the Lucchese republic is the realm of what Black refers to as “the over-mighty private citizen,” in that influential citizens sought through familial and patronage networks the prestige that had been denied to them in public office.

Here Machiavelli applies one of his typical axioms of political analysis in that he considers the relationship between different forms of government and how they deal with the desires of different social groups – though this time he engages in an analysis of actual Renaissance republics. The reason why high status or maestà and jurisdiction or autorità should be vested in different offices and groups is that, if the few are not given access to authority, they would still seek to upset the governing

663 The fact that Machiavelli directly refers to the reader in the informal second person-plural corroborates the previous asseveration about the normative/evaluative terms of the text as a direct counsel to the Signori of Florence. Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617.

664 After this preliminary passage we notice that only Lucca and Venice are still part of the equation we notice that Florence is dropped out of the comparison (and ancient Rome is added to the exercise). In this case, Florence does not seem to ‘fit in’ according to Machiavelli’s comparative analysis: the evaluative modus operandi pertains to the existence of a mixed constitution, added to the fact that by the time of the Summary Florence was far from being a republic (despite the remnants of some its traditional institutions). Secondly, the comparison seems to be between Lucca and good mixed governments – hence Florence deserves to be left out of the examination.

666 For instance, in the Discourses Machiavelli praises republican Rome for creating and using laws by which the people are satisfied – or given some form of jurisdiction – and the great are given dignities and honor – i.e. maestà. On the opposite end, in the Florentine Histories, Machiavelli openly criticizes the popular sectors of Florence for having thoroughly dismissed the dignities of the ancient nobility and for having monopolized political power. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 104-6 and 110. See, also, Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 196-8.
orders – but it also seems that if the many are given power, they too will oppress the few. 667 Yet Machiavelli also makes it clear that a good mixed government is one in which citizens of high rank, those whose descent and occupations give them standing and wealth enough to shape the contours of the city, must be admitted and given a definite role within the legal framework of the republic. As Machiavelli explicitly suggests in a crucial passage of the Summary, the Lucchese state of affairs, “is not good [non e buono]” because the highest offices are filled with citizens of low reputation – as a result of the rules requiring long intervals between renewed tenure in office of the same individual. Consequently, he categorically observes, “[I]f honor and prudence are not available in public life they are sought at home, in the private realm [quella maestà e quella prudenza che non è nel pubblico si cerca a casa il privato].” 668

By analyzing the importance of high status or maestà as an abstract concept, Machiavelli introduces his first prescriptive judgement on modern republican constitutions: though they should avoid the social and political mali effetti that come as a result of the monopolization of jurisdiction by any single authority, they should also acknowledge, in fact encourage, the participation and reputation of those that seek access to the highest executive offices. 669 These sections make clear that for Machiavelli the abstract concept of maestà refers to a dual mechanism of political enfranchisement and control, since those citizens of status who are not paid with prestige and dignity for their public behaviour would try to obtain it through private means [modi privati]. 670

Indeed, Machiavelli observes this lack of “honor” and “prudence” (as the expression of the power of the laws) is the main cause of civil discords in a city: republics that are “well-ordered [bene ordinate]” introduce institutional mechanisms meant to avoid both the lack of institutionalized honor and the desire for too much jurisdiction or authority in the public realm. Having thus showed that the example

667 Also, notice how in his account of citizenship Machiavelli does not speak of a civic aristocracy bestowed with a particular chiarezza or civic virtue in that their main goal is the pursuit of public glory.
668 Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617. My emphasis (Many thanks to Andrea Casatella for helping with the translation of this oddly-structured passage). Even though eligibility to the college of the Elders was relatively open to all citizens, the reforms of the early 1400s stipulated a more refined set of restrictions. Among the most important ones we find the time-period within which the same person could be re-elected to college, the limited number of family members sharing office in successive colleges, and the complete exclusion of doctors of law and medicine. All of these stipulations, especially the last provision, excluded from the executive body men of considerable political and social importance. Bratchel, Lucca, 89.
669 “A head [un capo] of the republic without honor, as it is in Lucca, is bad [sta ben male]” Machiavelli writes, “Because, being in office for two months and having many restrictions attached to their functions, they turn out to be men of little reputation.” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617.
670 As we will see in the next chapter, this is one of the recurrent demands on the part of the upper sectors in republican Florence. Gilbert, “Florentine Political Assumptions,” 190-2.
of Lucca requires qualifications, Machiavelli thus shifts the binary opposition between Lucca and Florence (and Venice) to a novel, and in his analysis more complete, parallel. In this respect, the Venetian *doxe* and *signori* do not hold full authority, Machiavelli claims; they simply embody honor:

> And if one considers who is in charge amongst the Signori in Venice, or who was a consul in Rome, one would see that the heads of these states, while they had no authority [direct, over the citizens] did possess honor [maestà]. Because [as mentioned above], while it is a good thing that they should lack the former [autorità], it is equivalently bad that they should lack the latter [maestà]...as in the state of Lucca.  

Machiavelli’s rhetorical parallelism thus begins with a commentary concerning Lucca’s form of government (and a passing comparison to Florence and Venice), for which the city deserves praise, to then introduce a revision to the binary opposition by virtue of Lucca’s Elders and their lack of prestige, a commentary that thoroughly qualifies the prescriptive use of the Lucchese example. Machiavelli thus shifts the focus of the commentary from Lucca to a comparison between Lucca and Venice and Rome on the features and qualities of the three republics’ main offices of government – hence praising the latter two to the detriment of the Lucchese example.

Certainly, Machiavelli does consider it a dangerous enterprise to organize a government in such a way that *autorità* falls into the hands of a few members of the upper echelons of society, since – given their acquisitive nature – they would invariably hold sway over the polity. Nevertheless, Machiavelli leaves no doubt as to the necessity of providing participatory channels *as well as* mechanisms of control for the “will to power” of the powerful and wealthy. Even more, not only does he explicitly consider how the Venetian institutions deal with the ordering of offices in arguably positive terms, their government is “good, civil and well-ordered [buono civile e ben considerato],” but he also attributes the application of this institutional mechanism to republican Rome during the time of the consuls.  

And this is why, according to Machiavelli, the Lucchese republic incorporates the irregular extraordinary consultative councils of private citizens, which “are not used in well-ordered republics.” Consequently, in republics such as Lucca private families turn out to be more powerful than official magistrates. While the legitimate officers of the republic lose authority and prestige,

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671 Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617 (Many thanks to Michael Nafi for helping with the translation of this passage).

672 Machiavelli uses the term *civile* at various times in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses* always in reference to a government that obtains its power from the respect of the laws. Also, the context of this and other considerations on the Venetian institutions seem to be that of the republican reforms of the Florentine constitution – the creation of the popular Great Council in 1494 and the institution of a for-life Gonfalonier – both of which were arguably based on the Venetian orders. Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 617-8. My emphasis.

673 “Nelle repubbliche bene ordinate non si usa.” Ibid, 617. Is Machiavelli referring to or transgressing the axiom of *ridurre ai principii* that he openly supports in his early works?
private citizens monopolize power and destabilize the legitimate institutional modes of expression.674

In these passages just discussed, Machiavelli openly argues that the sound constitutional order of both Venice and Rome depends chiefly upon the stability of its institutions to such an extent that there is no need to rely on extra-legal or private measures to solve political problems.675 Arguing that political ascendancy is a thing sought after by men of high rank, Machiavelli seems to make the case that the buon governo of Venice and Rome is the result of a system meant to avoid constant innovation and mutation via unelected and unofficial channels – and of course this is different from the Discourses, where innovation is seen to be necessary, often through unofficial (and even violent) channels.676

The good government Machiavelli proposes is not the result of a virtuous citizenry; rather, it is the outcome of a system of “institutionalized virtù” that includes both reputation, representation and rotation of offices by which men are to behave publicly – whether they so consciously intend or not. In other words, Machiavelli argues that in modern republics a responsive answer to the many interests of their citizens requires, not that its citizens pursue republican virtue, sacrificing their personal desires to the fatherland, but rather sound and regular institutional arrangements that forestall factionalism and discord.677

Even more striking is the fact that Venice appears as a prime example of Machiavelli’s well-ordered republic rather than a mere “failed state,” as he himself had argued in his earlier political works. Instead of turning the Venetian republic into a model of the republic disarmata, Venice is now catalogued and praised as a first-rank exemplar of civil order and buon governo.678 More specifically, Machiavelli gives us reason as to why he thinks highly of Rome and Venice, two arguably distinct

674 Indeed, as Matteucci observes, “In brief, Machiavelli believes that neither a principality nor a ‘democratic republic’ are suitable solutions for small states; [rather, it requires a] mixed government by virtue of which it political represents the aristocratic humor [Insomma, egli non crede, come soluzione positiva per un piccolo Stato, né al Principato, né a una repubblica democratica e non mista, che cioè non conservi nel suo seno anche l’umore aristocratico].” Matteucci, “Machiavelli Politologo,” 243. My translation.
675 Or as Machiavelli puts it in the Histories, “Cities, and especially those not well ordered, that are administered under the name of republic, frequently change their governments and their states not between liberty and servitude...but between servitude and license.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 146.
676 See, for instance, Sullivan, Machiavelli, Hobbes, 59.
677 Republics that are endowed with “good laws and orders” he states in the Histories, have long-lasting governments, while those that “have lacked and are lacking such orders and laws have frequently changed and are changing their governments from a tyrannical to a licentious state.” Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 146.
678 This is arguably at odds with I.II and I.VI of the Discourses, where Machiavelli first claims that Sparta and Rome are mixed governments (where “all three types of government had their shares”) to then claim in the latter chapter that Sparta and Venice are mere aristocratic regimes – where “Sparta set up a king, with a small senate...” then claiming “Venice has not divided control according to names.” Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 11 and 21-22.
republican regimes: Lucca deviates from the good order of Rome and Venice because its distribution of functions is not that of a sound mixed government. As Machiavelli claims,

In Rome, the people distributed, the senate counselled, and the Consuls, together with the other minor magistrates, executed policies; in Venice, the [Great] Council distributes, the Pregadi counsel and the Signoria executes policies.679

Notice the parallels between Rome’s popolo and Venice’s Great Council: for the late Machiavelli the “institutional virtù” of these two models is defined, not as an intragovernmental system of institutions which checked one another – or as the channelling of two opposing social forces for that being – but as the direct inclusion of the elements in the society at large in the fabric of the political structure itself. In a word, the institutional world to which Machiavelli appeals in the Summary can be defined as a political organization of “equal ends,” whereby the institutional structure of the city and the power of its various composing groupings do not correlate with a system of equal access to office. Much to the contrary, the objective of the institutional setting Machiavelli proposes in this text is to immunize the city from factionalism by making all citizens “complicit” – not virtuous – in the attainment of the republican goals of freedom from servitude and domination.

In light of his comparative characterization of constitutions, Machiavelli presents the mixed government as an abstract model through which republics can be catalogued as sound or bad depending on the organization of their institutions and the distribution of offices and powers. What renders the Lucchese example unsuitable is not its orders, but rather the functioning of its orders: for the Machiavelli of the Summary it is the way in which the mechanisms of the mixed government are implemented that allows a state to maintain a vivere civile. Hence, the conceptual transformation Machiavelli introduces here is evident: Venice is a well-ordered republic and its ordini are categorized as those of the “ideal” mixed government of Rome.680

The essence of this government exemplified by Rome and Venice is that functions are to be distributed and compartmentalized into distinct offices – and hence he also seems to prefer the Venetian voting procedures because they decisively separate the function of executing from the function of proposing or counselling.681 Moreover, Machiavelli contends that both Rome and Venice are well-ordered

680 Silvano, Vivere Civile e Governo Misto, 95.
681 Finlay, Politics in Renaissance Venice, 61, 74-5 and 197.
republics, but the former one seems to have lost part of the paradigmatic stature it had in his previous political works. What seems to arise from this discussion is a constitutional world of order and equilibrium that deprecates the typically Florentine institutional procedures whereby functions are, to say the least, unevenly distributed and irregular in nature – something that serves only to give undue weight to factional interests. As the spirit of this order emerges, more attention is paid to the institutional orders required for the stability of a republic and its vivere civile: the world of Rome’s tumults and tribunes and its popular guardia della libertà seemed an exemplary model of the ancient republican strengths, but in their unsullied “purity” they have come to be a distant myth.

If there is a difference of substance between Venice (and Rome) and Lucca (and Florence), it lies in the restlessness and the irregularity of the latter’s institutions. The roles of the three offices in Lucca are confused and intermixed to the point that the orders of the Anziani, the Thirty-six and the Seventy-two overlap with one another: “These orders are confused in Lucca [A Lucca sono confusi questi ordini] because the smallest number distributes and the few and the many in part counsel and in part put policies into effect.” Machiavelli suggests that the Lucchese (and Florentine) offices do not hold strictly defined duties, to the extent that the Thirty-six and the Great Council both share similar prerogatives and responsibilities. As the executive and deliberative functions are in the hands of a single office, the temptations of power may pervert the proper functioning of the state – the choices of magistrates may be determined by private ambitions. The Council (the principe della città) proposed, resolved upon and executed policies and this alone sufficed to make the Lucchese Council an ideal environment for the rise of discord and factionalism – and consequently a threat to the vivere civile.

And yet, Machiavelli tells us, Lucca shows no signs of those political mali effetti. Crucially, Machiavelli considers that social groups in Lucca do not seek direct control over the actual disposition

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682 The structure of differentiation of tasks as well as the mutual dependence of institutions which was the essence of the mixed government turns out to be an identifiable similarity between Venice and Rome. Fasano-Guarini, “Machiavelli and the Crisis of Italian Republics,” 34-7.


684 Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 573-4. In this respect, while Machiavelli notices that the Great Council holds some juridical prerogatives and labels this fact “bene ordinato,” he nonetheless asserts that Lucca ought to have a small judicial office “to scare the poor and stop the insolence of the youth [a fare paura [there is a blank in the transcription but the editors of the Edizione Nazionale believe it should read ‘umili’ or ‘la plebe’] e a frenare l’insolenza de’ giovani].” He concludes this section by asserting that the lack of any of these two modes in a republic irreversibly results in political disorders – “should any of these modes be missing, it would cause great disorders to the republic [qualunque l’uno di questi duoi modi che manchi nella repubblica fa disordine].” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 618.

of public offices, which allows the city to maintain a *vivere civile* despite its poorly organized customs. To account for this fragile balance, Machiavelli appeals to the economic language of self-interest: Lucca remains stable only because “honor and advantage [gli onori e gli utili] are sought with little ambition in that city,” and “those who could take advantage of its institutions are wealthy and think more highly of their own affairs [chi li arebbe a cercare è ricco e stima più le sue fascende]...[and] care less about who administers government [viene a curarsi meno di chi gli amministri].”

Nonetheless, in the following lines Machiavelli counsels his interlocutors (now referred to as the organizers of republics) that the orders of Lucca are inadequate for a well-ordered republic – “he who orders a republic should not imitate it.” The Florentine considers that, despite its good effects, the balance between Lucca’s citizenship (self-interest) and its institutions (honour and the common good) is a fragile one. To put it in Machiavelli's vocabulary, Lucca’s civic order owed more to accident and *fortuna* than to the *virtù* of its citizens and/or institutions.

Machiavelli’s conclusions in this comparative study of republics speak of the difficult enterprise of coupling personal desires and demands with the collective good of the citizenry in the modern context. A government that does not consider the ascendancy and the quality of its citizens (and this seems to be a direct reference to the necessity of attributing office to the commercial classes of Florence), one that is endowed to magistrates without the need to keep an eye on the interests of parties, is simply too unpredictable an order in a world of *fortuna*. What Machiavelli seems to be asserting here, then, is that although Lucca is not ruled by factionalism and private interest, its *fortuna*-driven republic symbolizes the risks that other city-states may endure should they follow its example. In Florence, (despite its nominal *mirabile ugualità*) with its divisions, parties and discords, and an unstable alternation between regimes, such a conception of politics appears to be a mere ideal – if not a thoroughly foolish conclusion.

Thus, the political effects that Machiavelli refers to with regard to Lucca and the well-ordered republics of Venice and Rome should be considered as a direct result of a republic’s sound and rigid

687 Ibid.
688 If we are to take Machiavelli's knowledge of the Lucchese situation seriously, his claim should be read as a direct reference to the Lucchese leading families' limited enthusiasm for pursuing factional divisions in the public realm. Scholars have made the claim that the healthy economic situation in *Cinquecento* Lucca – coupled with the fear of returning to the moment of divisions which had resulted in the tyranny of Paolo Guinigi in the early *Quattrocento* – were the main reasons behind the peaceful political settlement of the aristocracy and the continuous acceptance of the restrictive statutes of 1430 and 1443. Bratchel, *Lucca*, 126-9.
institutional foundations. Having claimed in the *Discourses* that Venice is an aristocracy because the *autorità* of the city is “in the hands of the powerful,” the Machiavelli of the *Summary* insists that Venice is a mixed and sound political body. In line with the characterizations of Venice and Genoa introduced in the *Histories*, this comparative analysis stresses that commercial republics should pursue a mixed type of order with strictly regulated offices to promote, and not simply to neutralize, political ambitions. In line with the “institutional virtù” of the Venetian republic, Machiavelli’s response requires precisely the opposite to that situation described by most contemporary commentators: communal virtue results from the independence of the citizen from the state’s objectives – honor or *maestà* and individual prosperity turn out to be two sides of the same coin. Secondly, this system of institutional virtù properly and clearly divides the tasks of each institution and council and third it encourages political participation via fixed channels of governance. In other words, as Giovanni Silvano observes, Machiavelli’s *Summary* is the result of “an authentic process of ‘institutional engineering.’”

Lastly, Machiavelli expresses doubts that suggest a deeper awareness of Rome as an ideal or even mythical creation, not as a sound procedural blueprint meant to resolve the ubiquitous problems of actual Renaissance polities. Contrary to the claims introduced in his earlier political texts, here the Florentine desists from endorsing Rome and its commitment to an armed people; his sole reference to republican Rome pertains to a world of institutional provisions consistent with the Venetian model of institutionalized virtù. Machiavelli does not comment on the latter issue openly, but it is possible to see this theme applied to the Florentine context in his subsequent writings on constitutional reform – in which, as I wish to show, he would eventually embrace the idea of “institutional virtù.” To understand the full range of this shift in Machiavelli’s thought, we must turn to those texts in which

689 “The ideals of virtue and commerce could not therefore be reconciled to one another, so long as ‘virtue’ was employed in the austerely civic, Roman, and Arendtian sense...” Pocock, “Virtue, Rights and Manners,” 48

690 Machiavelli concludes that Lucca employs *Leggi de’ discoli* or ‘laws of the undisciplined,’ an attribute of the General Council through which those citizens that are voted *discoli* are confined to exile for three years. Yet Machiavelli claims that this law is not enough to put a halt to the ambition of citizens. Again, this seems to point to the use of *maestà* as a principle of order and stability: given the power of the popular Great Council – it is the *principe della città* – those who perceive that they are marginalized or dissatisfied eventually grow indignant and may turn to private and violent means of redress. Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 618.

691 Silvano, *Vivere Civile e Governo Misto*, 94-5. On the prescriptive nature of the *Summary*, see Black, *Machiavelli*, 231: “His aim is to give advice on constitutional change, and it is clear that he has Florence in mind. [...] It has to be wondered whether Machiavelli actually had the Medici in mind as potential readers of his Lucchese analysis. The Soderini republic was a delicate issue both for him and for them, but in the ‘Summary’ he seems to be raising, on the basis of comparison with Lucca, possible reforms to the Florentine constitution that only the Medici were in a position to enact.”

692 Pace Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders*, 45-50; Rahe, *Against Throne and Altar*, 51-2 – though the latter does refer to the context of commerce in the works of Machiavelli.
he applied the conceptual Venetian mechanisms of control to the problem of devising a republican government in Florence.
Chapter 5
Machiavelli’s *Nuovi Modi di Governi*:
The 1520-22 Texts on Constitutional Reform

Coloro che ordinano una republica debbono
dare luogo a tre diverse qualità di uomini che sono in tutte le città: cioè primi, mezzani e ultimi.693

Machiavelli repeats the conventional theme [that the best and virtuous citizens...should occupy the highest ranks]: good political order requires that the wisest and most honoured citizens sit in the highest magistracies [and] he stresses this point in the *Discursus Florentinarum Rerum*.694

1 Introduction

In this chapter, I provide further evidence pertaining to Machiavelli’s intellectual shift in his considerations of the good republic, the vivere civile, and the implications of Venice as a conceptual model of republicanism. Following the previous discussions of the *Florentine Histories* and the *Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca* (chapters II-IV), I present an interpretation of Machiavelli’s 1520-22 texts on constitutional reform and I claim that they introduce a consistent characterization of the “politics of equilibrium” and the mixed government as the most robust solution to secure the vivere libero in the context of actual Renaissance states. As observed in the two previous chapters, Machiavelli uses this Venetian line of argument in several passages of the history of Florence, in his comparison of republics in the *Summary* and again in these works contemporary with the *Florentine Histories*.

In spite of their distinct interpretive approaches and interests, Machiavelli scholars have argued in favor of a conceptual and theoretical continuity in the post-1520 works. Bertelli observes that between the *Summary* of mid-1520 and the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs after the Death of the Younger Lorenzo de’ Medici* of 1520-1 “there is a close connection” then claiming that “the starting point of

693 Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 111. I have consulted the Ricci manuscript of the *Discourse*, available at the Archivio di Stato di Firenze, Carte Strozziane, Serie Seconda, no. 6.
both the [Histories] and the [Discourse] is one and the same.” Guidi makes the bold claim that the Summary and the works on constitutional reform introduce “a unique political orientation” as a result of the abandonment of previous theoretical claims and inclusion of a tripartite sociological division. The Histories and the Discourse, Rubinstein notices, introduce similar observations on the corrupt society and the potential reordering of its institutions to the point that their connection is “evidente.” Following Rubinstein’s observations, Jurdjevic asserts that these two texts should be read as part of the same political project involving similar social and political conceptualizations – hence forging a consistent theoretical continuum that he deems “Machiavelli’s hybrid republicanism.”

In accordance to these commentaries, then, I situate Machiavelli’s later republican treatises as part of an intellectual moment that supersedes his earlier interest in the Roman model and rather introduces a constitutional template that speaks directly to the Florentine world as it was before Machiavelli’s eyes. Moreover, scholars such as Najemy have consistently argued for the structural and contextual distinction between the republicanism of the post-1520 works and that of the Discourses on Livy: while the latter grew out of his discussions with the republican-minded youth of the Rucellai gardens, the Histories and his late constitutional works resulted from an increasingly “aristocratic” circle of acquaintances ranging from Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi and Filippo de’ Nerli to Francesco and Niccolò Guicciardini.

Nonetheless, while these scholars have rightly emphasized the import of the Discourse on Florentine Affairs and the Summary on Lucca and their connection to the Florentine Histories, they have failed consistently to accommodate and introduce Machiavelli’s two other writings on republican reform: the Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Florentine Constitution in the Year 1522 and the incomplete

698 According to Jurdjevic, what distinguishes Machiavelli’s late works from his earlier political ones is that the former are the result of a synthesis of “Greek and Florentine traditions” that “produce a hybrid republican theory.” Jurdjevic’s reference to the “hybrid” nature of the Florentine's later republicanism seems to point in the direction of a “watered-down Aristotelianism” that is in line with the thesis of J.G.A. Pocock. Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1229, 1248 and 1250; and Bausi, Machiavelli, 250, 303-5.
699 I am grateful to Professor Robert D. Black for making this suggestion. On the historiographical shift in Machiavelli’s thought, see Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 554-9; for an account of Machiavelli’s acquaintances at the late stages of his career, see Black, Machiavelli, 213-4; and Butters, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 64-79.
Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio on the Reform of the Constitution of Florence of the same year.\textsuperscript{700}

In these two short works, in combination with the Discourse on Florentine Affairs, we see a Machiavelli that was neither resigned to the absence of political reform nor ideologically tied up to the desires of his Medici commissioners and 'dedicatees,' Cardinal Giulio di Giuliano and Pope Leo X – known in the world as Giovanni di Lorenzo di Cosimo.\textsuperscript{701}

Much to the contrary, the reading proposed here underlines the explicitly republican vocabulary and undertones of Machiavelli’s constitutional blueprints and consequently stresses Machiavelli’s almost stubborn assertion that Florence was a city capable of receiving and responding positively to republican institutions. Consequently, given the overall prescriptive nature of these three texts, it is safer to make assumptions about how Machiavelli felt a republic should be reformed by the very powers that attempted to resolve the ongoing question of the city's constitutional arrangements; and Machiavelli had good reasons to believe that, more than ever before, the Medici were ready to listen to him.\textsuperscript{702}

Moreover, my analysis shows that Machiavelli’s reference to social categories and groups in these three constitutional texts pertains to their incorporation in a system of mechanized and “institutional virtù” since the structure and institutions of power, not the agency of its participants, compels individuals to undertake political functions with an eye on the common good. In this sense, in the Discourse, the Draft, and the Memorandum, Machiavelli continues by elaborating a theory of the complex distribution of institutions and compromise à la Venice that replaces the thesis of civic

\textsuperscript{700} Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law” and “Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio,” 642-4 and 645-54, respectively. I have consulted the manuscripts of both the Draft and the Memorandum (available at the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Carte Machiavelli) to verify the accuracy of the Italian editions. All translations of the Draft and the Memorandum are my own. For an exceptional treatment of the interconnections between the Discourse and the Draft, see, Fabio Raimondi, L’Ordinamento della Libertà: Machiavelli e Firenze (Verona: Ombre Corte, 2013).

\textsuperscript{701} On Machiavelli’s alleged resignation and pessimism by the post-1520 works, see Sasso, Machiavelli: La Storiografia, Vol. II, 185-99. Black dismisses the import of these two works (especially the Draft) because “the document must reflect discussions with Cardinal Giulio’s circle and not just Machiavelli’s ideas, unlike the Discourse and the Memorandum.” It is unclear as to how Professor Black comes to this conclusion: while the manuscript of the text does show it was written in three stages and that Machiavelli’s additions turn the Draft into an increasingly aristocratic template, Black suggests that the Florentine may have begun its composition at an “earlier date.” In a word, Black’s suggestions give too much emphasis to the alleged oddity of the Draft when (even in his own terms) the date of the composition of this text seems to overlap with that of the Discourse and the Memorandum. Black, Machiavelli, 239-42.

\textsuperscript{702} According to Najemy, by the time Machiavelli earned the commission to compose the Histories, and at least one of the constitutional texts, (1) the Medici regime was far from being popular even among its closest allies; (2) after the death of Lorenzo the younger in 1519 the regime lacked an obvious candidate around whom to organize their power; (3) the Medici themselves were unsure as to how to institutionally materialize their power in Florence after the death of the last secular heir of the main branch of the family; (4) Cardinal Giulio (who was now based in Rome) was seriously inclined toward a republican restoration. See Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 574.
conflict and popular 'guardianship of liberty' as the foundational moment for liberty and power he had so boldly introduced in his earlier republican expositions. In line with Jurdjevic’s latest research, the interpretation here introduced might help explain at least one textual paradox inherent to Machiavelli’s post-1520 works – that is, the alleged incompatibility between Machiavelli’s critical observation of Florentine political history and his consistent and hard-headed insistence that Florence may still devise a sound form of republican governance.

Finally, the discussion of the problem of authority adumbrated in these texts can also be detected by reference to the economic language Machiavelli introduces: in the constitutional works Machiavelli warns his readership against the disrupting the commercial interests of the increasingly powerful mercantile sectors and hence proposes their political enfranchisement via exclusive formal outlets of power. In this respect, and in spite of his reference to the nominal equality of citizens that prevails in Florence, his constitution can hardly be seen as an endorsement to the language of civic virtù so strongly advocated by neorepublican scholars. By incorporating the customarily Florentine tripartite portrayal of society – as he calls them “the three sorts of men who exist in all cities, namely, the most important, those in the middle, and the lowest [primi, mezzani e ultimi]” – Machiavelli asserts that all groups, including the city’s powerful and wealthy anti-Mediceans and the people, wish to be party to the deliberations of government in order to safeguard and pursue their own interests. In other words, as he had already hinted at in the _Florentine Histories_, the elite (regardless of their attachment to the Medici) and the people are consistently considered in political terms – their behavior is political and their interests must also be defined in political terms. Consequently, unlike the recent work of McCormick and Jurdjevic, while Machiavelli consistently calls for the introduction of popular channels of participation, his provision is far from being the manifestation of a people-based and/or anti-elitist form of republicanism.

Contrary to the argument of scholars committed to an elitist interpretation, here Machiavelli desists from introducing the language of “extraordinary” foundational moments generally understood as the instrumental application of “violence and arms.” Instead, as I observe in the following section, while these works underscore the magnitude of the reforms required for the maintenance of the free way of life, Machiavelli advocates institutional reforms that are conspicuously silent with regards to the use of violent methods. See, for instance, Strauss, _Thoughts On Machiavelli_, 66-7 and 263-73; Mansfield, _Machiavelli’s New Modes and Orders_, 110-8; Sullivan, _Machiavelli, Hobbes_, 62-5; and Rahe, _Against Throne and Altar_, 48-9.

“And whereas Rome, when its virtù had turned into pride, was reduced to such straits that it could not maintain itself without a prince, Florence arrived at the point that it could easily [be] reordered in any form of government by a wise lawgiver.” Machiavelli, _Florentine Histories_, 105.

See, for instance, McCormick, “Machiavellian Democracy,” 297-313; by the same author, _Machiavellian Democracy_, passim; and “Subdue the Senate,” 714-35.
I begin in the first section with an in-depth analysis of Machiavelli’s main work on constitutional reform, the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs*, and I provide a critique of the so-called neorepublican and populist interpretations of Machiavelli. The next section relates my discussion on the *Discourse* to Machiavelli’s two other texts on constitutional reform, the *Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio* and the *Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Constitution*. Here, I introduce further qualifications to both neorepublican and populist interpretations, mostly by underscoring the economic and Venetian vocabulary of Machiavelli, a theme that shows the connection between Machiavelli's late republicanism and the Florentine aristocratic intellectual milieu in which they were composed. I conclude my examination of these texts with a series of preliminary conclusions on the conceptual rupture in the late works of Machiavelli with respect to his earlier political expositions.

2 The Discourse on Florentine Affairs of 1520-21

Machiavelli’s first attempt at a template for constitutional reform introduces, almost from its very beginning, a vocabulary of structures of power, liberty and authority that resonates strongly with his roughly contemporary works, the *Histories* and the *Summary of the Affairs of Lucca* of mid-1520. Crucially, from these early paragraphs of the *Discourse* Machiavelli introduces a thoroughly new republican vocabulary when compared to his *Discourses on Livy*: we notice that he simply does not invoke the Roman republic or its history and he abandons great part of the themes and subjects that had allowed him to make of Rome the paradigmatic example for present-day republics. In fact, Machiavelli casts his template based on the history, political culture and deeds of his fellow Florentines – and as it will become evident in the following paragraphs, his conceptual vocabulary and his republican solution are strictly Florentine in nature, as well.

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706 In that regard, and in spite of their interest in cautious and faithful appreciation of texts, scholars committed to a Straussian interpretation of Machiavelli consistently fail to assess the import of the 1520 works. Likewise, neorepublican scholars of the caliber of Pocock and Skinner systematically neglect these constitutional works. I treat Viroli’s and Bock’s appreciations of the *Discourse* in the following paragraphs. Students of Machiavelli committed to a populist-democratic reading of Machiavelli give some consideration to the *Discourse* but thoroughly bypass the two other works on constitutional reform. See, especially, McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 103-24.

707 As noted in the previous chapter, Machiavelli began and completed the composition of the *Summary* between July and September 1520 while in Lucca, roughly two months prior to his commissioning to write the “annals or else the history of the things done by the city and the state of Florence” – as suggested in his personal letter to Francesco del Nero dated 8 November 1520. Thirdly, as observed by a number of scholars, Machiavelli wrote his *Discourse* between December 1520 and early (probably February) 1521. This substantiates the thesis that these works are closely interrelated. See, Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends*, 329.

708 We need not infer his attempt to think beyond the Roman paradigm of republicanism since he tells us directly his intention. In the last appeal to his readership, Machiavelli claims that those who have “remodelled republics and kingdoms” in practice, such as the founders of Athens and Sparta – “Solon and Lycurgus,” are “after those who have been gods, the first to be praised.” In view of this suggestion, we notice that neither does Machiavelli refer to Rome’s history or institutions nor does he invoke its founders – whether Romulus or Numa. Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 114.
Commissioned by and dedicated to Pope Leo X after the death of the young Lorenzo de' Medici, the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs* begins by declaring that “The reason why Florence throughout her history has frequently varied her methods of government is that she has never been either a republic or a princedom having the qualities each requires.” Drawing on the historical rationale that he was about to introduce in his *Florentine Histories*, this blueprint for reform underscores the irregular and faction-driven nature of Florentine politics and history. On the one hand, Machiavelli observes, Florence has never been a stable princedom: while things during the time of Cosimo and Lorenzo de' Medici (1434-1492) were done according to the desires of one man, they were approved according to the consensus of many. On the other hand, Florence cannot be considered an enduring republic either because any lasting republic must provide for the interests of those citizens who, unless satisfied, are likely to cause great disturbances to the orders of the polity. In Machiavelli's view, then, the “well-ordered republic” must fulfill the different ambitions of its citizens: in institutional terms, the Great Council and the senate together with the executive offices were expected to satisfy their distinct “clients” – to which he will later refer as *primi, mezzani* and *ultimi*.

Machiavelli then proceeds to discuss the previous governments beginning with the oligarchic republic of Maso and Rinaldo degli Albizzi, established after the repression of the Ciompi revolt in 1382. Machiavelli criticizes the reforms that turned the Commune into a republic governed by *ottimati* as the *Signoria* had “slight prestige [*maestà*] and too much power [*autorità*], being able to dispose without appeal of the life and property of the citizens.” He then openly criticizes the Medicean regime of Cosimo and Lorenzo, which, as he succinctly defines it, “tend[ed] more toward the

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710 As Machiavelli himself writes at the end of this work, the leadership of the Medici family in Florence was in the hands of two religious men – Cardinal Giulio and Pope Leo X – and for this reason he notices “Your Holiness and the Most Reverend Monsignor...must cease to be and you wish to leave behind a perfect republic [*una repubblica perfetta*].” Ibid, 114.
711 While the Medici *Stato* had crushed and replaced the traditional institutions of the Florentine Commune of the *Trecento*, it still relied on a series of 'republican' offices meant to enfranchise popular and aristocratic allies – the so-called *amici* – via a refined system of electoral manipulation. See Von Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, 3-6 and 22.
712 From the onset, thus, Machiavelli desists from speaking of the *grandezza* of the Roman *imperio* and its constant civil discords; instead, our author gives attention to Florence and sees a city in decline that cannot have or sustain any other enduring purpose but to guarantee its survival [durare]. Najemy, “Machiavelli and the Medici,” 558.
princedom than toward the republic [pendé più verso il principato che verso la repubblica].”

Machiavelli further observes that, while Cosimo behaved with “friendliness” toward the people, now the Medici “have grown so great, since they have gone beyond all the habits of citizens, there cannot be such intimacy.”

Lastly, Machiavelli adds that while the Florentines were able to found a popular republic (1494-1512), they did not succeed in making it stable and enduring: neither did it satisfy the desires of all citizens nor was it capable of punishing those willing to usurp political power. Machiavelli observes that this regime was so far from being a true republic [era tanto manca e discosto da una vera repubblica] that had its Gonfalonier, Piero Soderini, been shrewd and wise, he could have easily turned the republic into a tyranny. All these forms of government, Machiavelli succinctly adds, had been defective mostly because their alterations were not the result of “the fulfilment of the common good,” but rather “the strengthening and security of the party [that is, the party making them].”

In these passages just discussed, as in his Summary and the Histories, Machiavelli observes that authority bestowed upon the city’s magistrates in Florence’s previous governments far exceeded the power that any official ought to possess in a well-ordered republic. More importantly, the Florentine insists that each previous regime – whether oligarchic, princely or popular – failed to recognize the universal quality of political impulses and desires of the distinct social groupings. This is in great part the inherent problem of the historical-institutional organization of the city: the Medicean principality (1434-94 and post-1512) was simply unable deal with the demands of its ottimati enemies

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715 Machiavelli tells his readers that this regime lasted longer than the previous one mainly because it had the favour of the people and it was governed by the prudence of two bright men, first Cosimo and then his nephew Lorenzo de’ Medici. Nonetheless, he further adds, the new Medici have grown so great that there cannot be such intimacy between their leadership and the support of the people: such an attempt would be a dangerous one so that “they would actually lose [Florence].” Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 102-5.

716 Ibid.

717 Arguably a reference to certain powerful ottimati, such as Bernardo Rucellai who, while not necessarily aligned with the Medici, consistently attacked Soderini for his ‘popular’ bias. See, Albertini, Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato, 17-20; and Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 19-23.

718 Niccolò Guicciardini’s reliance on Machiavelli’s Discourse is so evident here that he dares repeating Machiavelli’s arguments on Soderini almost verbatim: “And [Soderini’s regime] was so far and remote from a true republic that a for-life Gonfalonier, if he was intelligent and wicked, could easily make himself prince [of the city] [Et era tanto manca et discosto da una vera repubblica, che uno Gonfaloniere a vita savio et cattivo facilmente si poteva fare principe; s’egli era buono, facilmente ne poteva essere cacciato].” In this sense, the fact that a pro-aristocratic partisan as the young Guicciardini closely draws on Machiavelli’s work already suggests that the Discourse was far from being conceived as a radical and pro-popular blueprint. Guicciardini, “Discursus,” 396. Additionally, while Machiavelli wishes to account for all Florentine governments since 1393, he desists from discussing the present Medici government because it is “a recent affair and everybody knows it [cosa fresca e saperlo ciascuno].” Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 103.

719 Ibid, 103.

and those of the people who had experienced the republican Great Council of 1494-1512; the Albizzean governo stretto (1393-1434) as well as the republican governo largo of Savonarola and Soderini (1494-1512) were both incapable of incorporating the political demands of the generality of the population. In doing so, this early section of the Discourse already substantiates the social and political evaluations of the Histories, in which all social sectors and their demands are to be seen as irreducibly political.

In the following passages, Machiavelli presents two general patterns to be pursued, either a principality or a “well-ordered republic [una repubblica bene ordinata]” then rapidly adding that, given the “great equality [grande equalità]” that exists among the Florentines, only a republican government “having its distinctive parts” can be successfully established in this city. In the same context of the Florentine Histories, where Machiavelli elaborates on the defeat of the ancient Florentine patriciate class, the emergence of a popular elite and the consequent creation of the guild-based communal system, Machiavelli focuses on the relationship between social equality and republican government. It is in the Histories – especially in books III and IV – that Machiavelli had referred to the social parties of Florence as intrinsically similar in their agency and objectives: the distinction between the nobility and the popular parties so strongly endorsed by Machiavelli in the Discourses on Livy is now replaced by a more complex and articulated understanding of social groupings as sharing similar qualities and appetites.

Following the analysis of the first half of the Histories, our author claims that, due to the absence of a feudal and land-based aristocracy – “noble lords of walled towns and boroughs [nobili di castella e ville]” – “to form a principedom where a republic would go well is a difficult thing, and through being difficult, inhumane and unworthy...” Based on this almost moral affirmation – for his is not a city

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722 Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 104-5. Here Machiavelli directly refers to the constitutional blueprints put forward by a series of aristocratic or philo-Medicean intellectuals between 1516 and 1519/20 such as the aforementioned Discursus of Niccolò Guicciardini as well as those of Lodovico Alamanni and the Medici secretary, Goro Gheri. Nonetheless, Machiavelli is not the first one to make such type of claim with respect to the ‘nature’ of the Florentines; for instance, and speaking from an Aristotelian conception of the political life, Savonarola rejects the monarchic solution for Florence mainly because the “vivere politico” and “la libertà” are “naturale” for this city. Cited in von Albertini, Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato, 14-5. On this so-called duality between principality or regno and republic in Machiavelli’s political thought, see, Alfredo Bonadeo, “The Role of Grandi,” 22-3.
723 Jurdjevic, A Wretched and Great City, 118-9; and for a neat discussion of Machiavelli’s social vocabulary by the time of the Histories, see Marietti, L’Eccezione Fiorentina, 109-11.
724 “As to the principedom, I shall not discuss it in detail, both because of the difficulty of establishing one here and because there are no facilities for doing it...in all cities where the citizens are accustomed to equality, a principedom cannot be set up except with the utmost difficulty...the establishment of inequality would be necessary...” Machiavelli, Discourse on Florentine Affairs, 106-7. This affirmation resonates strongly with Machiavelli’s own categorization of the Venetian
dominated by “noblemen of castles” – Machiavelli insists that only a republic could have duration in Florence. In spite of his recurrent condemnation of Florence's political culture, Machiavelli overtly observes here that the Florentines were capable of transcending factional disputes – if only they recognized and adopted a form of government to keep them united. As a matter of fact, Florence is a city that, from its obscure origins, has been shaped by commerce and exchange, by a mercantile genealogy, and consequently responds to a particular political way of life – one that presupposes a certain dose of freedom and equality. Nonetheless, from this general, and almost moral, overview of the composition of the city Machiavelli then observes that a well-ordered republic has to take into consideration three sorts of qualities of men.

Speaking directly to his interlocutor, Machiavelli asserts, “Those who organize republics ought to provide for the three different sorts of men [qualità di uomini] that exist in all cities, that is, the most important, those in the middle and the lowest [primi, mezzani e ultimi].” The Machiavelli of the Discourse already seems to introduce a different sociological characterization from the one he had applied in his earlier political works, since he asserts that the citizens of any republic are of three – not simply two – diverse natures and that their aspirations must be satisfied if the republic is to survive. In that regard, his reference to the city's equality (by virtue of the absence of a landed-class) in combination with the tripartite classification of Florentine society strongly resonates with II.42 of the Histories, where Machiavelli observes that “The great having been conquered, the people reordered the state: and because the people were of three sorts – powerful, middle and low – it was ordered that the powerful should have two Signori, the middle people three, and the low three...” By virtue of its history – or rather its “popular” history after the demise of the feudal nobility – Florence is a city still be capable of enjoying equality and freedom.

Moreover, the abstract equality that leads our author to prefer a republican blueprint differs from the actual situation of a Renaissance state, wherein the competitiveness of interests overlaps with – or rather puts into question – the search for a common and generalizable good. By applying a

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patriciate as nobles “in name:” the Venetian nobles are wealthy in movable capital and goods – not in immovable goods and land – and so are its Florentine counterparts (at least as stated in the pages of the Histories and the Discourse). Moreover, his considerations on the relationship inequality-principality seem to confirm the previous affirmation – that the present Medici “have grown so great that...they have gone beyond all the habits of citizens.” Ibid, 106.

725 Ibid, 107. While Machiavelli rarely employs the term qualità as a synonym for, or in reference to, the umori of the city – a number exceptions do appear in Discourses I.48 and Florentine Histories II.36 (I owe this reference to Professor John P. McCormick).

726 Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 104.
conventional language of three ambitions as a general category of analysis then Machiavelli directly speaks to a modern context that little has to do with the binary opposition that he had introduced in the early sections of the *Discourses on Livy* or in chapter 9 of *The Prince*. In light of Machiavelli's reference to the three ambitions, his republican blueprint ought to be read in direct opposition to the monarchical government that some fellow Florentines had presented to the Medici since their return to power.

For instance, in his *Discorso* of 1517, Lodovico Alamanni claims that the Florentines are of three sorts or qualities: there are those who pretend to govern the city because of their status [*di più credito, di più cervello e di più nobilita*]. Then there are those who simply wish to gain access to honors and offices [*si contenta di onori...e delli offici*] without having a true say in the decision-making process, and lastly there is a third and larger group that could be satisfied merely by not burdening it with taxes and by assuring to it economic autonomy [*si satisfa quando ella non teme di gravezze extraordinarie et quanto la città è abondante e puossi lavorare*]. Additionally, while Alamanni first proposes the return to the regime of Cosimo, and the consequent democratic facade of this order, by the end of his discourse he observes that only a strong 'hands-on' monarchy would solve the constant social and political struggles of the city. Florentines are so accustomed to living under the rule of the Medici [*un capo*] that it would simply suffice to make official their intention and turn the “civility [*civiltà*]” of the young patricians into “courtly customs [*costumi cortesani*].”

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728 This variant of the traditional one-few-many discourse was, as Pocock notes, “something of a Florentine cliché.” In fact, Francesco Guicciardini and Lodovico Alamanni had used it already and Donato Giannotti will use it later in the 1528-30 period; in the sharply divided city of Florence, it was far the more necessary to categorize the different types of citizens and plan a mixed government as a combination of all three types, writes Pocock. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, 286-7. On the general underpinnings of this theory, see, Guidi, “La Teoria delle ‘Tre Ambizioni,’” 242-4. For a detailed account of the proposals presented to Cardinal Giulio and Pope Leo X, see, Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, 20-37.

729 The Alamanni family is a crucial player and arguably a paradigmatic example of the complexity of the political affairs in the years of the post-republican Medici state. Piero Alamanni (Lodovico's father) is a mild but powerful supporter of the Medici while Luigi (Lodovico's brother) is a fierce defender of the republic to the extent that he would eventually participate in the conspiracy to assassinate Cardinal Giulio de' Medici in May 1522. As per Lodovico himself, not only is he an avid supporter of the Medici but he is a frequent participant of the *Orti Oricellari* gatherings at the Rucellai Palace and an acquaintance of Machiavelli. Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato*, 33-6. As suggested by Corrado Vivanti in his intellectual biography of the Florentine, the relationship between Machiavelli and the young Alamanni was such that “we can conjecture that it was from Machiavelli himself that [Lodovico] had derived the ideas he was now espousing.” Vivanti, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 140-1.


would gain the authority for which they constantly fight, citizens of second order would gain access to honors and offices and those of the third would willingly accept a monarchy as long as extraordinary taxation and other economic efforts are not imposed upon them.\textsuperscript{732}

While Machiavelli applies similar categories of analysis as Alamanni, their political visions lead them into opposite directions. Having discussed and rejected the idea of forging a principality in Florence (after all, Florence is a city of “great equality” and hence unsuited to a princedom), Machiavelli considers that all three social groups should be granted access to formal political outlets. In that respect, Machiavelli incorporates and re-appropriates the conventional vision of politics of his contemporaries: Machiavelli and other advisers agree on the fragility of Medici rule but only he substantiates the intrinsically political nature of all Florentines regardless of their social and economic disposition.\textsuperscript{733} This definition, as we will see, turns out to be Machiavelli's general rule for the devising of a new republican government for Florence, one that attempts to enfranchise and regulate all social sectors with no appeal to the language of civic virtù.

Similar to his considerations concerning Florence’s institutions in books III-V of the Histories, Machiavelli claims that the previous governments of the city resulted in a “jumble of councils [\textit{una confusione di consigli}]” which did not encourage the vivere civile and the common good of the city but rather the factional leadership of a particular council and group.\textsuperscript{734} Consequently, Machiavelli recommends the abolition of most of the previous offices and advocates the creation of “three ranks [\textit{tre gradi}] in a republic, and no more [\textit{e non più}]” each of which would represent a particular social sector with strict functions and prerogatives.\textsuperscript{735}

Following the pattern of the Venetian mixed government he had introduced in the Summary of Lucca,

\textsuperscript{732} Ibid, 368-9. See, also, Goro Gheri, “Istruzione per Roma,” in \textit{Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato}, ed. Rudolph von Albertini (Turin: Einaudi, 1970), 360-4, who claims “the bad disposition of the many in a city without a head does not have the same effects than a city ruled by a head and its friends – as the experience of so many Italian cities shows.” My translation.

\textsuperscript{733} Machiavelli’s blueprint in the Discourse on Florentine Affairs was so novel that Alessandro de’ Pazzi in his discourse of 1522 calls it “uncommon to this city [\textit{insolita a questa Città}]]” and even “bizarre.” Pazzi, “Discorso,” 429. My translation.

\textsuperscript{734} Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 109. In this respect, it is also fair to observe that the separation of powers in Florence – in the sense that each organ of government supposedly had a particular prerogative to undertake (defence, finance, justice, commerce, war and the like) – did not pertain to a clear distinction between proposing, executing and sanctioning laws as we presently understand it. In fact, the process of elaboration and execution of laws belonged in a general sense to the Signoria whereas the validation – that is, the formal and juridical approval of laws – pertained to the Great Council. See, Jérémie Barthas, \textit{L'Argent n'est pas le Nerf de la Guerre: Essai sur une Prétendue Erreur de Machiavel} (Rome: L'École Française de Rome, 2011), 212-3.

\textsuperscript{735} Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 109.
Machiavelli recommends creating a for-life Council of Sixty-five that assumes the executive responsibilities of the old Signoria, the Eight of Practice and the Twelve Good Men, and exclusively represents the Medici allies or palleschi.\textsuperscript{736} Then, the senatorial Council of the Chosen [Consiglio degli Scelti] of two hundred members chosen for-life replaces the old Medicean Councils of Seventy, the One-Hundred, of the People and the Commune and stands for the larger and powerful ottimati who have opposed the Medici move toward a principality.\textsuperscript{737} Finally, the Council of One Thousand replaces the Great Council (which had been closed since 1512) and represents the third and wider group of the Florentine citizenry.\textsuperscript{738} The new popular council would elect all the magistrates of the republic with the exception of the officers of the upper Sixty-five and Two-hundred, whose election would be given to Cardinal Giulio for a limited period. Additionally, a group of thirty-two citizens from both upper offices combined would form a court of appeal. As a compensation for the people’s removal from the upper executive offices, Machiavelli proposes the office of the Provost as an addition to the sixteen gonfalonieri, an institution which had traditionally acted as a popular voice: four provosts would be chosen either by the Medici or the Council of one-thousand, whose tenure would be restricted to one month and be in charge of overseeing the enactments of the Sixty-five and the Two-hundred.\textsuperscript{739}

In analyzing Machiavelli’s constitutional template it is useful to return to roughly contemporaneous texts commissioned by the Medici from leading intellectual figures.\textsuperscript{740} For instance, Alessandro de’ Pazzi’s Discorso of 1522 proposes the organization of a mixed republic along the lines of some traditional Florentine institutions: Pazzi agrees with Machiavelli that neither the regime of Cosimo the

\textsuperscript{736} Ibid. “Head of the Sixty-five would be a Gonfalonier of Justice, rotating every two or three years. All the functions of the present Signoria, [Eight of Practice] and the colleges would be exercised in alternate years by each group of thirty-two, plus the Gonfalonier of Justice; the thirty-two not in power during a given year would act as advisers, so providing public replacement to the unofficial system of pratiche,” or consultative councils of private citizens that Machiavelli had criticized in his Summary of Lucca for undermining the status of the official government. Black, Machiavelli, 234-5. On the organization and power of the Signoria, the Eight of Practice and the Twelve Good Men, see Guidi, Il Governo della Città-Repubblica, Vol. II, 5-14 and 54-60; and Rubinstein, The Government of Florence under the Medici, 229-30.

\textsuperscript{737} Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 109; on the councils of Seventy, One Hundred, the People and the Commune, see Guidi, Il Governo della Città-Repubblica, Vol. I, 135-41.

\textsuperscript{738} Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 109.

\textsuperscript{739} Ibid, 109-10. The Sixteen Gonfaloniers of the People were a consultative organ that was part of the Colleges; at first, they held a military role in that they were the commanders of the compagnie territoriali, an institution that dates back to the original republican constitution of Florence of the mid-thirteenth century. Black, Machiavelli, 235.

\textsuperscript{740} The debates on constitutional reform are commonly divided into three stages: there were those that counselled the young Lorenzo up until his death in 1519, such as Lodovico Alamanni, Goro Gheri and Niccolò Guicciardini; then those like Machiavelli that were invited to write after the death of Lorenzo in 1519; and there is a third group of intellectuals (which once again included Machiavelli) gathered by Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici after the death of Pope Leo X. While the contexts seem rather different (especially between the first stage and the latter two), most writers agreed on the fact that the social and political situation of the city called for some organizational reform. See, Bonadeo, “The Role of the People,” 370-4; and Albertini, Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato, passim.
elder nor the popular republic of Soderini could provide the necessary institutional mechanisms to maintain Medici leadership and put a halt to the increasing demands for representation. Nonetheless, and referring to Aristotle’s *Politics* and the Venetian republic [*come dice Aristotele...ma ancora...veggiamo lo esempio nel governo Veneziano*], Pazzi urges the creation of an autonomous and for-life senate of one hundred citizens “of good quality [*di buona qualità*]” in charge of electing most other offices. Then, he considers the creation of a “prince, as in Venice,” in reference to the Venetian for-life office of the Doge; finally, Pazzi counsels the re-opening of the republican Great Council – though he also asserts that it would simply accept the decisions taken by the Senate and the Medici themselves.

In line with Pazzi’s *Discorso*, Machiavelli’s *Discourse* too proposes a mixed government, one in which citizens of high rank would actually have a voice via the creation of a new “executive” system and a senate. Machiavelli adds that while the citizen body of Florence seems rather homogeneous, there is a small group of “high-minded [*d'animo elevato*]” citizens, who, in their own estimation, merit precedence in the ordering of offices. Contrary to all expectations, Machiavelli does not reject this claim but rather observes, in the very following clause, that “this desire must be satisfied in organizing a republic [*a’ qualli è necessario nell'ordinare la republica satisfare*].” Indeed, Machiavelli asserts, if the desires of these prominent citizens are not taken into consideration, they are likely to upset the order of government. In a direct reference to those citizens who pressed for the creation of a restricted senatorial council, Machiavelli affirms that these wealthy and powerful citizens should be given a more significant political role than the one they had had during the present and the previous political orders.

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743 In the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century, Florentine *grandi* consistently (and quite forcefully) requested the creation of a small council in which, much like the Venetian Consiglio dei Pregadi, a very select group of influential citizens would actually have a voice and check the powers of the Signoria and the Great Council. With the creation of this institution, the Florentine *grandi* hoped, their influence would have a dramatic impact on the prestige and actual power of the Great Council – their strategy was to gain an autonomous voice and marginalize the popular sectors in the city's decision-making process. I will return to this historical circumstances in the following section. On the debates concerning the reform of the Florentine institutions during the republic, see Silvano, “Early Sixteenth-century Florentine Republicanism,” 49-53.
745 “On account of the way in which these groups are chosen – since important and influential men now sit in them only rarely – either this governmental dignity must be lowered and be put in unsuitable places (which is contrary to all political order), or must be abandoned to private individuals,” the latter being a direct reference to the government controlled by private bosses as in Cosimo's times. Ibid, 108. As Gilbert observes, Florentine patricians who opposed the popular reforms of the republic first succeeded at implementing a for-life Gonfalonier of Justice with the constitutional reforms of 1502, though they later became vehement enemies of Soderini as he desisted from agreeing to follow the 'natural step' of the
As aforementioned, one of the reasons why Machiavelli positively states that their desires are to be accounted for is that they are not real *gentiluomini*, but rather “gentlemen-in-name.”

Despite their wealth and social position, they have no aristocratic status or title; they have no direct command over men, but they do have social and economic influence: their wealth makes them believe they should be granted access to political office and honors over the rest of the citizenry. And here Machiavelli provides a more fine-grained observation as to what his “new modes and orders” ought to provide:

“To men of this sort it is not possible to give satisfaction unless dignity [*maestà*] is given to the highest offices in the republic – which dignity [*maestà*] is to be maintained in their persons.”

We begin here to encounter the language Machiavelli had introduced in his recently concluded *Summary of the Affairs of Lucca*, wherein Machiavelli praises the constitution of the Venetians precisely for promoting what here he calls the “honor” or *maestà* of the executive offices. In fact, the use of this term in a civic context refers to the acceptance that the elite’s economic and social prominence is not an obstacle for the creation of a republican order. “By no possibility can this [honor] [*maestà*] be given to the highest offices in the government of Florence if the Signoria and the members of the College [of the Ten] remain as in the past,” Machiavelli repeats in the following lines.

Because of the many prohibitions attached to the either too broad republican or too restrictive Medicean offices, men of reputation are unlikely to engage via formal means of political participation, and consequently upset the political ordering of the city.

Machiavelli’s reference to honor or dignity in a strict constitutional sense, then, already suggests (a) private economic status and public goods are not necessarily incompatible; and (b) legal means of activity hinder the *grandi*’s reliance on extra-legal means that would simply weaken the republic and the *vivere civile*. Indeed, and the Machiavelli of the *Discourse* is explicit about it, the main objective of this apparent contradiction of terms – that is, to provide dignity to a social sector or institution in a city in which *aequum ius* is the rule – is the search for political and social stability and equilibrium,

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749 In Lucca, Machiavelli told us in his *Summary*, the overlap and admixture of offices and prerogatives permitted the government to be controlled by constantly invoked extraordinary councils of unelected private citizens. Similarly, in the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs* Machiavelli observes that if “dignity [*maestà*] and influence” are recognized then “It will not be necessary to consult private individuals...which is pernicious in any republic.” Ibid, 109.

not the devising of a civic-minded population.

In view of this claim, it is hard to agree with the neorepublican interpretation of Bock and Viroli, since this text does not, by any means, relate to the classical axiom of equal laws and equal access of all citizens to the offices of the republic.\textsuperscript{751} For instance, referring to the \textit{Discourse}, Viroli claims that “if a \textit{vivere politico} is to be preserved, the highest magistracies must be open to the best citizens” as if these offices were to be distributed according to merit and/or these offices contributed to some civic pedagogical function.\textsuperscript{752} This observation is rather difficult to justify in the context of the text \textit{Discourse} given Machiavelli's consistent reference to the distribution of office based on a tripartite conception of Florence's society.\textsuperscript{753}

Certainly, Machiavelli does conceive the “well-ordered republic” as a result of the proper incorporation of the parts within the whole, but he does not conceive of the “whole” as the means to provide “the poor citizens...the same possibilities as the others to win public honors” as suggested by Viroli.\textsuperscript{754} In spite of the nominal equality that dominates Florentine social interactions, men of high rank are simply referred to as important, bold and weighty, terms that do not imply the virtue or even moral or civic \textit{askesis} that Viroli, Bock and other republican scholars applied to Machiavelli's \textit{Discourse}. Departing from his earlier vision concerning the elite’s ethos of domination, Machiavelli now asserts that the city's powerful and wealthy citizens ought to be satisfied in political terms.

As a matter of fact, the Machiavelli of the \textit{Discourse} already shows to be beyond the confines of the language of civic humanism and the strict classical conception of politics as the rule of law under which the passions of free and equal citizens are shaped. Consequently, nominal equality understood as the formal access to political participation does not seem to be a proper category to assess Machiavelli's template on constitutional ordering. Social standing and self-interest, not merit and civil prerogatives, seem to distinguish these men of high standing from other groups; reputation or dignity, then, is not the direct result of these citizens’ public deeds, but rather the effect of the recognition and institutionalization of their private status. Good citizenship in this text, it is fair to say, is closer to the

\textsuperscript{753} Even more, Viroli asserts that the example Machiavelli espouses here is that of republican Rome: “in which civic virtue was rewarded and poverty did not block access to the highest magistracies.” Viroli, “Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics,” 155.
\textsuperscript{754} Ibid, 174. My emphasis.
tradition of interest politics than to “the conventional image of the political man as a good man who benefits the *vivere politico*.”

Yet Machiavelli is far from encouraging a mere oligarchic government: while he seems to share fully with Pazzi, Guicciardini and other members of the Florentine elite the persuasion that a Gonfalonier of Justice and a senate ought to be “the heads of the government,” he nonetheless maintains that the generality of the population [*l’universale*] ought to account for a fundamental political role. Machiavelli openly counsels Pope Leo X that the only way to escape “these vexations [*fuggire questi mali*]” inherent to the objective historical situation of Florence, is to “satisfy [*satisfare*]” the people. To care for this dissatisfaction, Machiavelli considers the establishment of a series of legal institutions to serve as an outlet “to take away from anybody who may be your enemy [the] opportunity for reopening [the popular Great Council] to your indignation and with the destruction and ruin of your friends.” In accordance to the argument introduced in the *Histories*, wherein the people’s interests and agency are proposed in political terms, Machiavelli notices that unless their identity and goals are given a lawful means whereby they can manifest their opposition to the elites, they too will provoke disturbances harmful to the state and the free way of life.

By making this claim Machiavelli is not attempting to magnify the potential danger of the Florentine *popolo*, nor is he appealing to this potential threat as a mere rhetorical lure to convince Giulio to accept his republican template. As a matter of fact, most, if not all, contemporary Medici advisers counseled the various leaders of the family (from Giovanni and Lorenzo to Pope Leo X and Cardinal Giulio) to administer the *Stato* so that the people are not ill-treated. Already in 1515, the philo-Medicean secretary Goro Gheri acknowledges the explosive situation of the regime since the closing of the Great Council in early September 1512 and counsels Lorenzo to treat the Florentine *popolo* “fairly.”

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756 While in Pazzi's template the three offices pertain to a mixed regime – wherein the one, the few and the many ought to be associated with monarchy, aristocracy and democracy – he ultimately supports the government of the “men of quality [*uomini di qualità*].” Additionally, in appealing to the Aristotelian conception of the mixed government, Pazzi invokes the government of the *mediocri* – in institutional terms, the *ottimati* – as the only category of citizens that knows both how to command and be commanded. Pazzi, “Discorso al Cardinale Giulio,” 429-30.
758 Ibid.
759 “Therefore, if one is to set up a republic in Florence, this Hall [the Hall of the Great Council] must be reopened and this allotment made for the generality of the citizens [*l'universale*].” Ibid, 111.
760 “…questa ciptà, havendo venti anni passati tenuto un governo tanto popolare et universale come ha facto...dificilmente si può levare all'universale questa fant(a)sia del desiderare quel governo più libero et universale di ques(to). Goro Gheri, “Istruzione per Roma,” 362.
Similarly, both Francesco and his nephew, Niccolò Guicciardini, like Machiavelli, observe that the sudden transition from the republic to the authority of the Medici meant that the government was removed from the people or l'universale: the closing of the Hall of the Great Council had taken away from the people the sweetness of eighteen years of popular republican government.  

Lastly, while Lodovico Alamanni thought that the people would content themselves merely by not being imposed heavy taxes upon them, he also suggested that the people would always wish to re-open the Great Council; therefore, he bluntly adds, the Medici would not be able to gain their support – neither by their 'good' behaviour nor by a fair fiscal administration.  

Simply put, Alamanni’s discourse displays the Medici state of affairs in such toxic and explosive terms that it presents the path to a monarchical coup d’état as the only solution to the Florentine social and political situation.

Certainly, Machiavelli only among his contemporaries dared to recommend to Pope Leo X as practical advice that a republican form of life could have a duration in Florence – and this was already a blunt move on the part of the Florentine regardless of the shift in his thinking from the earlier works. As aforementioned, Machiavelli’s republican template accommodates popular participation so as to give the popolo the voice they had lost since the closing of the Great Council in September 1512.  

By the time of his post-1520 constitutional blueprints, then, Machiavelli sees the people’s interests inherently in terms of an effective exercise of power – relative to the wish to realize their voice in what appears to be a common enterprise in governing. Moreover, this is illustrative of how popular agency is far from being conceived along the lines of the axiom of “guardianship of liberty” or an objectively healthy popular social and political behavior: Machiavelli abandons the conceptual vocabulary of his earlier expositions and instead circumscribes popular action to a legal and political realm.

None of these claims, however, substantiate the thesis that the Discourse invokes a “tribunician” or a popular-demotic system of governance. Scholars such as Jurdjevic and McCormick espouse the idea that the Discourse on Florentine Affairs introduces a series of elite-controlling and – explicitly popular – citizen-empowering prerogatives for the revived Florentine republic in that it incorporates “tribune-

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761 “Et forse ancora la ciptà...si potrebbe ridurre a governo tanto popolare che sarebbe di questo peggiore.” Guiccardini, “Discursus,” 362.
763 Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 111.
764 Machiavelli, Discourses on Livy, 12-3.
765 Or to put it in McCormick’s own terms, “offices or assemblies empowered with veto or legislative authority that exclude the wealthiest citizens from eligibility...[and] magistrate appointment procedures that combine lottery and election...” McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 2-3.
like offices [and] the provost (proposti), into [the] plan.” Furthermore, these authors claim that in this text Machiavelli counsels the restitution of the power of the republican Great Council to the point “it might eventually take precedence” over the Medici and the other specified upper offices. Machiavelli’s template for constitutional reform, they further insist, “covertly” introduces anti-elitist popular-democratic institutions and electoral systems of governance such as the provostial officers. McCormick and, principally, Jurdjevic assert that the precedence of popular action is also detected by Machiavelli’s omission of the language of “economic prosperity” that “stems for the earlier conviction that the generality of the citizens wish merely not to be oppressed and securely enjoy the fruits of their labour.” Finally, they observe that the strength of the provosts’ veto power relies in their capacity of “delaying” the decisions taken by the upper councils of the Sixty-five and the Two-hundred and to appeal them to the rather popular Council of One-Thousand.

As sound and insightful their considerations might be, their respective readings of Machiavelli’s constitutional thought cannot be supported by the Discourse. As the aforementioned passages on the political inclusion of the ottimati imply, Machiavelli neither distributes office on the basis of a “popular bias” nor does he give the office of the provost the ascendancy or precedence – as espoused principally by McCormick. Certainly, Machiavelli discusses the necessity to satisfy the impulses of the larger popular sector of citizens to then observe that, given the status the populace had gained during the republican period of early sixteenth century, this ultimi cannot be satisfied unless the Great Council is restored. This claim, nonetheless, is far from introducing a straightforward popular bias: Machiavelli explicitly draws a distinction between his “well-ordered republic [repubblica bene ordinata]” and simple popular inclusiveness, which, in his own estimation, “is likely to make [the republic] fall more rapidly.”

Much like his observations in the Summary of Lucca, then, the republic of the Discourse is a mixed one, whose stability results in the political representation of all social components and

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766 Ibid, 103. Jurdjevic observes that given the characteristic of the template for constitutional reform, i.e. the dispersal of authority, Machiavelli aligns himself with a “popular” conception of the polity. Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1253-4.


768 Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1254.

769 McCormick summarizes his claim by stating that “the organs dominated by wealthy citizens, the Senate and consuls, enjoyed great agenda-setting and proactive authority. However, plebeian institutions, such as the tribunes and the popular assemblies, granted common people similar power, and also provided them with negative authority over aristocratic conduct sufficient to channel it in liberty-preserving ways.” McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 112.

770 As Machiavelli notices, “without satisfying the generality of the citizens, to set up a stable government is always impossible [Senza satisfare all'universale, non si fece mai alcuna republica stabile].” Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 110.

771 Ibid, 106.
“diverse qualities of men [diverse qualità di uomini].”

By the same token, the official role of the two main popular institutions – the Great Council and the Provost – is highly constrained. Even though these offices certainly magnify the legal and overall political status of the popolo, they are far from being an efficient provision for the discussion, evaluation and exchange of ideas on state policy among popular citizens themselves. Both the Great Council and the Provost are organs that simply constitute and represent the people's expressions of disapproval toward individual policies and policy-makers as well as to “delay” the decisions and discussions made by the upper bodies. And such mechanisms of venting popular dissent are necessary, for if the popolo has no lawful ways of manifesting opposition, they will likely provoke disturbances to the ordering of the state, mainly because the Florentine people of the 1520s had been raised in and educated by almost two decades of republican government.

On the opposite end, Jurdjevic and, especially, McCormick have taken this claim in isolation and have consequently failed to evaluate it as part of the broader categorization of offices and magistracies included in Machiavelli’s complex program for reform. The Florentine popolo – via the established offices of the Great Council and the Provost – is far from being depositary of a thoroughly positive political and constitutional ethos. This system of offices and the intrinsic participation of the people therein, implies that Machiavelli's conceptualization of the good republic by the time of the Discourse has changed. Contrary to the observation of popular-democratic and republican scholars alike, then, Machiavelli sees popular interests and their consequent activity straightforwardly in political terms – and not in the strictly passive orientation that the Machiavelli of the Discourses on Livy had referred to as the people’s “guardianship of liberty.”

On the other hand, Machiavelli's consideration on the “political” nature of the people in the Discourse is far from referring to the “dispersal of authority equally throughout multiple and mutually independent councils,” or to the power of popular-exclusive offices to “propose laws before and

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772 In this respect, Bausi’s comment on the Discourse is enlightening: “...by virtue of its institutional criteria and its political mechanisms, mixed government...is...predominantly organized for the benefit of the numerically restricted and socially predominant groups.” As a result, Machiavelli's mixed republic mimics the demands of the Florentine ottimati, “who fought for a Venetian-styled reform of the Florentine constitution: they promoted a for-life gonfalonier (equivalent to the Venetian doge), and consequently the creation of a senate...in their opinion, mixed government was the means to guarantee the supremacy of the ottimati elites while promoting some form of popular participation – an indispensable aspect for the introduction of any institutional reform.” Bausi, Machiavelli, 303-5. My translation.

773 Notice, for instance, how Machiavelli consistently claims that the popular power should be “restored...[and promised] it will be restored [renderla e parte promettere di renderla]. Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 110-1.

774 Bonadeo, “Role of the People,” 369 and 375-6.
conduct discussions among the people collected in assembly.”

While McCormick has rightly asserted that the popolo of the Discourse is far from being a passive invigilator which simply reacts to the political actions initiated by the grandi, he has mistakenly conflated political representation with active policy-making. If we are to take Machiavelli's considerations on the re-opening of the Hall seriously, then, we should acknowledge that “The Great Council was not meant to be a deliberative body; its principle function was to vote and to elect [much like the Comitia Centuriata in Rome]. Its most important task was to choose the men who were to sit on the various executive boards.”

This aspect of his thinking can be detected also by the omission of any reference to the deliberative character of the council of One Thousand in the Discourse; briefly, there are no conceptual signs of any positive decision-making on the part of the people (or their formal outlets of participation) in Machiavelli's constitutional blueprint. Machiavelli simply speaks of the importance of satisfying the political needs of the popolo, which is systematically characterized in legal terms, and refers to popular offices that are capable of delaying discussions [fermare deliberazione] and distributing honours and offices [distribuendo gli onori].

While the Machiavelli of the Discourse claims that the popular desire must be satisfied in a republican setting, in the same text he seems to be wary of those solutions that merely aimed at enlarging the social base of the republic. Such type of governo largo (defended by some Savonarolan frateschi intellectuals and criticized by their elite arrabbiati and pro-Medici palleschi counterparts) fails to account for the strong desires of the lesser ottimati and the pro-monarchic palleschi – and hence simply privileges the constant extra-legal battles of these groups to gain political influence. Additionally, while the office of the Provost is depositary of a legal role in that, through it, the people could express disapproval of individual policy, it can be hardly defined as an organ of political deliberation and decision-making.

In other words, while the Provost allows the people to exercise restraint and control upon the offices dominated by citizens of high rank, the popular representatives hold no actual

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775 Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1253; and McCormick, Machiavellian Democracy, 8, respectively. My emphasis.

776 Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 12. My emphasis.

777 Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 111-3. Contrary to this observation, Jurdjevic asserts that “Machiavelli's use of 'satisfaction' implies participation for its own sake in the deliberations of government.” Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1254. My emphasis. Similarly, McCormick asserts, “In the relationship between the provosts and the Great Council we can observe how closely aligned, for Machiavelli elite accountability, a supposedly negative function, is with popular rule, an extremely positive one.” McCormick, “Greater, More Honorable,” 255.

778 “The said Signors resident in the Palace are not to do anything in a Provost's absence; he would not have to give his vote, but merely be a witness of their proceedings...So in the same way the Thirty-two could not decide anything without the presence of two of the said Provosts; yet the two would not have there other authority than to delay a decision considered among the Thirty-two and appeal it to the Council of the Selected.” Machiavelli, Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 111-2.
capacity to make any positive contribution to policy-making – I take up the alleged compatibility of Machiavelli’s praise for the Roman tribunes and the Florentine provostial office in the following section.\[779\]

Thus, Machiavelli’s constitutional blueprint introduces a series of crucial variations from the republican observations of the *Discourses*. First, the organization of a *governo misto* is in direct relation with the incorporation and harmonization of partisan interests in a structure of power that compels its participants to “behave publicly” – consequently addressing the “effectual truth” of Florence’s political dilemmas squarely in Florentine social and political terms. In addition, Machiavelli’s conception of the people as an entrenched political actor in a system of socially compartmentalized councils, then, does not imply his endorsement of the classical meritocratic system of participation so strongly espoused by neorepublican scholars such as Bock and Viroli. Much like his analysis of the constitutions of Lucca and Venice, the constitutional template of the *Discourse* owes more to distinguishing functions among offices than to a classical ideal of citizenship as the art to alternately rule and be ruled.\[780\]

Secondly, the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs* shows no signs of the conceptual vocabulary that had allowed Machiavelli to claim in the *Discourses* that the people are better “guards of liberty.” McCormick’s assumption on the need to “arm the people militarily with weapons and training [...] and arm them constitutionally with tribunes and assemblies” is less apt in the context of the post-1520 works – in fact, it is seems rather alien to it.\[781\] Incorporating and applying a system of offices that represents the specificity of the three social groupings of the city pertains less to a Roman means to “subdue the senate” than to forge a Venetian government in *equilibrio* in a modern world in which political desires are utterly universal.\[782\] In this respect, Machiavelli’s template corroborates his rapprochement to the Venetian-style of republicanism: in the world of a mixed constitution, the *ottimati* can only become a “civic aristocracy” insofar as there is a popular office and the *ultimi* can

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\[779\] Jurdjevic charges Skinner, Bock and Viroli for the exact same reason: they all failed to acknowledge that Machiavelli’s conceptual shift can be detected by the omission of the Roman model. Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1250.

\[780\] In fact, most of the traditional governmental powers are still concentrated, albeit temporarily, in the for-life chosen upper magistrates: the Sixty-five, Machiavelli observes, “should have all the authority and carry on all of the business that today the *Signoria*, the Eight of Practice and the Colleges carry on...and this [the Sixty-five]...would be the chief head and the chief arm of government.” Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 112.


\[782\] McCormick, “Subdue the Senate,” 721, 726 and 730.
actually apply the prerogatives of the Council and the provost insofar as there is a 'civic aristocracy.' Lastly, interpreters of this work overlook the fact that in it, Machiavelli has little, if anything, to say about both the plebe armata and the “extraordinary founding modes” that had been extensively discussed in his previous political works. If we accept this interpretation, that for Machiavelli the good republic replicates the military and tribune-like orderings of Rome, we still face the difficult challenge that in this post-1520 series of texts, most especially in the Discourse, Machiavelli does not invoke Rome nor does defend his template by referring to a Roman example.

Thus, the spirit of republicanism of the Discourse is strong indeed, but it is perhaps more Venetian and perhaps more Florentine aristocratic than espoused by the different interpretive variants – whether neorepublican or popular-democratic. In fact, adapting his political theorizing to Florentine historical and political conditions allows Machiavelli to understand that satisfying ambitions – such as political participation for its own sake – is a central dimension of the vivere libero. Additionally, in the Discourse Machiavelli also shows to be aware of the limitations of the potential political power and value of the people as a political actor. While he may maintain a certain bias toward the Great Council, the impetus and interests of these three social forces – which Machiavelli represents in the typically Florentine vocabulary of primi, mezzani and ultimi – represents Machiavelli’s attempt at reconciling and resolving, or at least trying to resolve, concrete problems – read: factionalism – and the Discourse indicates a direction reminiscent of the Venetian system of institutionalized and mechanized virtù. Not only does Machiavelli accept the institutional power of the ottimati – in both of their princely Medicean or anti-Medicean flavours – but he also incorporates the language of dignity or maestà, reminiscent again of the Venetian model. Lastly, a great part of the error on the part of these interpreters lies in their failure to include Machiavelli's two other texts on constitutional reform in their evaluation and analysis – to which I now turn.

3 The Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio and the Draft of a Law of 1521-2

This section analyzes the accounts on constitutional reform introduced in the unfinished

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783 As Bonadeo puts it, the Discourse shows (a) “Lack of leadership is perhaps [the city's] most serious deficiency;” (b) Machiavelli “still proposed the use of the rather primitive and notoriously inefficient Great Council;” and (c) “Machiavelli...is somewhat suspicious about the people, for...once in power, might display and exercise that same ambition and arrogant behavior and power of which he had found the aristocrats guilty.” Bonadeo, “Role of the People,” 375.
785 Bonadeo, “Role of the People,” 375-6.
Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio of January 1522 and the Draft of a Law for the Reform of the Florentine Constitution of May of the same year. It draws on these texts to further assess the so-called popular-democratic and neorepublican interpretations of the Discourse on Florentine Affairs. In the last few paragraphs, it turns to three specific issues pertaining to these interpretive approaches: (1) the alleged importance of the office of the provost; (2) the omission of the language of economic prosperity in the Discourse; and (3) the absence of any reference to the language of civic virtue and citizenship in the post-1520 works. In other words, these two short works confirm the claims introduced in the previous sections: Machiavelli’s late republicanism reveals that his thinking about the nature of government has changed from his earlier expositions. It confirms the prevalence of a republican mode of governance as Machiavelli’s most preferred regime, but it also substantiates the claim that the Machiavelli of the post-1520s is ideologically closer to the Venetian form of republicanism than previously thought. In both the Draft and the Memorandum, Machiavelli continues with his search for compromise as the underlining objective for the allocation and distribution of power via the creation of a mixed system of offices with strictly defined prerogatives and tasks. Lastly, Machiavelli accepts the institutional role of the Florentine aristocracy and links their commercial interest with the sound orders of a modern republic, reminiscent again of the Venetian model.

From the very onset, Machiavelli considers the buon governo along the lines of the tradition of the mixed government he had already introduced in both the Summary and the Discourse. For instance, in the Draft, Machiavelli states,

Considering, our Magnificent and Excellent Lords, as no law and no order is more praiseworthy among men or more acceptable to God than those by which a true, united and holy republic is established, in which advice is freely given, deliberations prudently undertaken, and orders faithfully carried out...[with the satisfaction] the people and [the provision of] security to any good and honest citizen [Considerando i nostri Magnifici e Eccelsi Signori come niuna legge e niuno ordine è più laudabile apresso agli uomini, o più accetto appresso a Dio, che quello mediante il quale si ordina una vera, unita e santa republica, nella quale liberamente si consigli, prudentemente si deliberi e fedelmente si eseguisca...con sodisfazione del popolo e securtà di qualunque buono e onesto cittadino].

Speaking directly to the potential reformers of the republic, Machiavelli repeats, almost verbatim, the exhortation to his Medici dedicatee inserted in the final paragraph of the Discourse – that the greatest

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786 For the dates of composition of these two texts, see Guidi, “La Teoria delle Tre Ambizioni,” 245-6.
787 The description of the three separate offices leaves no doubt as to the influence of the Florentine tripartite conception of society plays in this text. Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law,” 646; also, Guidi, “Machiavelli e il Progetto Constituzionale,” 589.
good in the eyes of both men and God is that which is done on behalf of one's patria. He then goes on to provide a series of abstract characteristics of a buon governo and the language Machiavelli employs in the last passage is, not only reminiscent, but rather a continuation of his post-1520 works. More specifically, Machiavelli has recourse to the language of the mixed government he had applied in the roughly contemporary Summary of the Affairs of Lucca: a “true” republic – the repubblica bene ordinata – is one in which the institutions of government pertain to distinguishable political functions and prerogatives. Machiavelli’s vocabulary, then, directly refers to the distribution of power and the construction of stable constitutional foundations in that these political roles – counseling, deliberation and execution of policies – are strictly separated into different magistracies.

After this concise exhortatio, Machiavelli introduces a tripartite system of offices that, despite certain differences, continues with the evaluation of the mixed government introduced in the Discourse. Machiavelli promotes the re-opening of the two main offices that had shaped Florence's republican political experience: first, he asserts that the Great Council should be re-opened with its prior “orders and authority” – such as the distribution of honors and the election of all magistrates and offices with the exception of the Gonfalonier and the senate. As he had already claimed in the Discourse, this “new” popular Council, with its “ancient number,” would replace the various offices of popular participation that had been recurrently and directly elected by the pro-Medici Signoria. Then,

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789 “I believe that the greatest honor possible for men is that willingly given them by their native cities [la loro patria]; I believe the greatest good to be done and the most pleasing to God is that which one does to one's native city [alla sua patria].” Machiavelli, “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 118.
790 Good government is one in which the universal interest prevails over civil discord and factionalism, where public action does not rest on “the friendship of the wicked and the enmities of the good.” Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law,” 640.
791 Compare to the section of the Summary where Machiavelli asserts that “In Rome, the people distributed [offices], the senate counselled, and the consuls and the other minor magistrates executed [laws]; in Venice, the [Great] Council distributes, the Pregadi [the Senate] counsels and the Signoria executes [the laws].” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of Lucca,” 618.
793 Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law,” 647. Similar to the Discourse, the Memorandum counsels the replacement of the Councils of the People and the One-hundred for a new Great Council. Machiavelli, Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio, 643-4. The republican Great Council was abolished in August 1512 and replaced by the aforementioned Council of the One-Hundred, the Council of the People and the Office of the Commons; moreover, these offices were considered a Medicean-branch of popular participation with arguably less prerogatives than those attributed to the Great Council of 1494 – as their members were directly chosen by the Medicean Signoria.
794 Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law,” 648 and 652; and “Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio,” 644; also, Bertelli, “Nota Introductiva,” 248-9. While the Council seems to hold on to much of the prerogatives it had enjoyed during the republican period, Machiavelli suggests that a group of twelve citizens – ten from the major arts and two from the minor ones – along with Cardinal Giulio would take the authority [autorità] of the extraordinary power of constitutional reform – known in the Florentine context as balià. At the same time, Machiavelli suggests that this extraordinary power is to be exercised for a year only, after which neither could it be extended nor pass onto another council or group of actors.
Machiavelli counsels the introduction of a Gonfalonier for three years because “while a Gonfalonier of Justice for two months is useless, one for life is dangerous.”

Again, his discussion of the duration of the highest executive officer of the city resonates strongly with his treatment of the Lucchese Elders – Lucca’s executive magistrates, whose short-term stay in power compelled powerful and wealthy citizens to seek other, rather extra-legal, means to actively shape the political affairs of the city.

In the following lines, a third office is introduced: “so that the city is not deprived of a middling council,” Machiavelli proposes replacing the Council of the Seventy as well as the abolition of the Council of the People and the One Hundred (all Medici creations after the coup of September 1512) for a new senatorial office of One-Hundred members elected for life. Similar to the arguments introduced in the Discourse, Machiavelli observes that this new office – new in terms of the traditional republican institutions of Florence – would provide for those things that the Great Council cannot attend [che provvegga a quelle cose alle quali il Consiglio grande no può provvedere...]. Secondly, this new senatorial office should have the authority the Council of Eighty enjoyed during the republican period [abbi tutta quella autorità...che aveva per lo adietro il Consiglio degli 80]. This latter passage is arguably a direct reference to the pro-Venetian reforms endorsed by the Florentine ottimati during the early sixteenth century: while the Eighty of the republican period had little, if any, weight in the republican decision-making process, it became the ottimati centre of power during the transitioning period after the expulsion of Piero Soderini in 1512 – that is, until the return of the Medici to the city during the first days of September of the same year.

Contrary to the Florentine republican Eighty, whose members were chosen directly by the Great Council and were limited to the election of ambassadors and commissaries, Machiavelli’s senate elects its members autonomously – and also elects its own substitutes in case of death.

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795 Machiavelli observes that the first Gonfalonier should be elected by the Great Council from among three candidates chosen directly by the still philo-Medicean Signoria. Machiavelli, “Draf of a Law,” 648. In the Memorandum he adds that Giulio could elect the first Gonfalonier himself: “Again, Your Lordship could, by undertaking these reforms, elect the Gonfalonier himself by virtue of his authority [Protrebbe ancora vostra Signoria, nel fare la riforma, eleggere Lei per sua autorità questo Gonfaloniere].” Machiavelli, “Memorandum to Cardinal Giulio,” 644.
796 Compare to Pazzi, “Discorso,” 415.
798 Ibid, 647-49.
799 As Bertelli notices, “The oligarchic power was reinforced by the Council of the Eighty, which acquired the character of a senate and increased its number to one hundred and thirty, held all the powers of governing: the election of the Signoria, the Ten of Liberty and Peace, the Eight of Ward, and, above all, all prerogatives concerning financial issues.” Bertelli, “Nota Introductiva,” 248, my translation; also, Albertini, Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato, 10, 18-9; and Black, Machiavelli, 141.
the Great Council is given the power of electing the members of most minor offices of the republic, the One Hundred are granted the power of designating candidates qualified for those very same posts.\textsuperscript{801} Finally, and most crucially, Machiavelli counsels that this senatorial office should have two exclusive prerogatives: the organization and regulation of fiscal laws and deliberation upon and final reform of the office of public debt, the so-called Monte comune.\textsuperscript{802} As he explicitly observes, “it is again an attribute of this Council of One Hundred...the deliberation on, the approval and organization of the office of public debt [Apartengasi ancora a detto Consiglio del Cento...deliberare, e per conclusione vincere ciascuno anno la riforma del Monte].”\textsuperscript{803} The for-life senators of the Draft, then, have increasingly gained political and economic power if compared to both the objective historical situation of the republican government of 1494-1512 and Machiavelli’s earlier political works.\textsuperscript{804}

In fact, the creation of an autonomous senate with strong powers over fiscal and economic affairs was one of the fundamental demands of the Florentine elite during the republican period.\textsuperscript{805} Machiavelli’s call for the creation of this senate is all the more striking if we compare the policies introduced in the Draft to the works of some aristocratic intellectuals of early Cinquecento Florence. For instance, the

\textsuperscript{801} As Guidi rightly points out, the original manuscript of the Draft seems to have been written in three stages, each of which consistently modifies the powers of the upper offices of the republic to the point that “Machiavelli hints at a true project of compromise between the popular thesis [the creation of a so-called governo largo] and that of the aristocracy [the creation of a so-called governo stretto].” Guidi, “La Teoria delle Tre Ambizioni,” 250, my translation; compare to Pazzi, Discorso, 432.

\textsuperscript{802} Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law,” 649-50. According to historian Filippo Nerli, the Council of the Eighty held fiscal functions though they had to then be approved by the popular Great Council something that shows the lack of autonomy of this office. Fillipo de’ Nerli, Commentarij dei Fatti Civili Occorsi dentro della Città di Firenze dall’anno 1215 al 1537 (Florence: David Raimondo Mertz and Gio. Jacopo Majer, 1728), 134-9 and 182. This is also in line with Guicciardini who in his Discorso di Logrogno endows “more restricted places [luoghi più stretti]” on matters of financial policy requiring experienced deliberation on the subject. Cited in Silvano, “Florentine Republicanism in Early Sixteenth Century,” 54. On the financial situation and the institutional orders of the Florentine republic at the time of the Great Council, see, Bartha, L’Argent N’est Pas le Nerf de la Guerre, 194-215.

\textsuperscript{803} Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law,” 650. My emphasis. The Monte comune was a fundamental office Florence's social and political life: not only was it responsible for a guaranteed dowry system so that families might be assured a progeny, but it was also in charge of financing the defence of the Florentines via the hiring of mercenary troops. For a concise history of the office of public debt, see, Marvin Becker, “The Florentine Territorial State and Civic Humanism in the Early Renaissance,” in Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 118-38.

\textsuperscript{804} As Bartha observes, “…des aristocrates cherchaient les moyen d’enlever au Grand Conseil son pouvoir législatif en matière financière et à se les approprier au sein d’un conseil restreint, de type sénatorial.” Bartha, L’Argent n’est Pas le Nerf de la Guerre, 196-7.

\textsuperscript{805} Savonarola favoured a reform of the Monte in that he demanded the suspension of interest payments entirely – needless to say that this proposal likely contributed to his downfall by making his government unpopular with the class of wealthy and powerful state creditors. These reforms finally took place under the rule of Piero Soderini, as he imposed a series of regulations on the office of public debt (for instance with the Provisone of April 16 1504 that shifted the control of forced loans from the Officials of Public Debt [Ufficiali del Monte] to the Signoria and the imposition of a lower interest rate for public debt holders) that was far from being welcomed by the Florentine financial aristocracy. Albertini, Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato, 8-19; Gilbert, “Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari,” 215-46; Silvano, “Florentine Republicanism in the Early Sixteenth-century,” 45; and Bartha, L’Argent N’est Pas le Nerf de la Guerre, 206-7.
same belief is shared by one of the most staunch aristocratic defenders, Piero Capponi, who already in 1494, demanded “a Council of the Chosen, as is customary in Venice, which is very much necessary in order to undertake certain tasks...[uno Consiglio di scelti, il quale è necessarissimo et per fare alcuna electione di più importanza et per fare alcune deliberationi come a Vinegia si costuma...]” then adding that this office should be in charge of the most crucial economic affairs of the city-republic.\textsuperscript{806} In his Discorso of 1517, Lodovico Alamanni also recognizes the fiscal and economic prerogatives of the autonomous senate “[whose members] are satisfied with the honors and offices of the city [che si contenta dell’ onori della città et dell’ offici]” as it was the case in the repubblica Veneziana.\textsuperscript{807}

Similarly, in his Discorso di Logrogno, Francesco Guicciardini mentions the necessity of creating an autonomous senatorial magistracy conformed by the “the most excellent [citizens] of the city [i fiori della città]” to replace the republican Council of the Eighty that would handle the election of ambassadors and the approval of fiscal and financial policies.\textsuperscript{808} A similar line of thought is introduced by Niccolò Guicciardini in his Discursus of 1518-9. A senate of one-hundred and twenty for-life elected officers of “the best quality [di maggiore qualità],” he writes, would be in charge of “all affairs I mentioned above regarding businesses as well as public expenditure and debt [tutte le deliberatione che di sopra dicevo, et circa le imprese et circa il provedere et spendere e danari].”\textsuperscript{809} Finally, in the roughly contemporary Discorso al Cardinale Giulio, Alessandro de’ Pazzi proposes, “as we have seen and still see...among the Venetians [come ne abbiamio visto e veggiamo...nel governo veneziano],” the organization of a “senate” of one hundred members elected for life. Furthermore, and speaking directly to Machiavelli’s same interlocutor, Pazzi conceives of the senate as the central organ of organization and government, one that would be in charge of important political prerogatives ranging from naming ambassadors and commissaries to reforming and implementing taxation policies

\textsuperscript{806} Piero Capponi, Discorso di Piero Caponi, 162-3; cited in Silvano, “Florentine Republicanism in Early Sixteenth-Century,” 50.

\textsuperscript{807} Alamanni, “Discorso,” 377.

\textsuperscript{808} “…è necessario darli uno mezzo di uno consiglio di cittadini, a quella similitudine che sono ora li ottanto, el quale consiglio sia di uomini eletti e del fiore della città, con chi si consultino e deliberino tutte le cose importanti della repubblica.” Francesco Guicciardini, “Discorso di Logrogno,” in Opere Inedite di Francesco Guicciardini, ed. Giuseppe Canestrini (Florence: Barbera, Franchi e corp. 1858), 273.

\textsuperscript{809} In fact, he adds in the following paragraphs, “Et che gli Officiali del Monte non potessino fare provisione alcuna se non fussi deliberata in Senato et così la riforma del Monte, non si potessi fare imposizione di danari se non deliberata prima in Senato.” Guicciardini, “Discursus,” 398 and 401.
It seems all the more clear at this point how in Machiavelli’s mind the upper magistracies should be entrusted with crucial political, fiscal and financial functions – something that was alien to the traditional organization of the Florentine republic and echoed the typically Venetian demands of the *ottimati* of the early Cinquecento. More importantly, in line with leading figures of aristocratic party early sixteenth century Florence, the Draft incorporates a Venetian senate with specific political and economic prerogatives. For instance, the Venetian *Pregadi* controlled precisely the same financial and fiscal matters underscored by Machiavelli and his contemporaries. Most crucially, the overlapping of the commercial interest of Venice’s merchant class and the public domain forged a character of collective concern in which the city as a whole, directly or indirectly, had an interest.

In that sense, the interest of the Venetian merchant traditionally coincided with the larger public good and his private commercial interest was also considered a civic one: in the well-ordered republic, the patrician maintains himself attached to his commercial ethos. Crucially, it was believed that public intervention and political participation prevented the rise of the disruptive forces of wealth (most especially accumulation large fortunes) and consequently promoted a system of “institutional virtù” as the main tool for Venice’s stability. As one of the most renowned students of Renaissance Venice puts it, “all merchant nobles of Venice operated as one large regulated company of which the board of directors was the Senate,” and this institutional overlapping of public and private interests was the main reason for the republic’s long-standing success. In other words, the common good of the community was considered to be the result of coordinating honor and private objectives, and not simply the promotion and devotion of the common good devoid of the influence of the “corrupting” forces of commerce and private interest.

Nevertheless, Machiavelli has a different consideration as to who the members of these class-restricted offices would be and how they were to be defined, since he does not take into consideration


811 “The Senate had control of important business of state: finance and taxation, foreign affairs and commercial policy. Almost all legislation that came before the Great Council was first approved by the Senate, and the Great Council usually passed what was placed before it. […] The Senate was the seat of debate and decision, a congregation of the Primi…Sovereignty aside, there is no doubt the Senate was il signor di la terra.” Finlay, *Politics in Renaissance Venice*, 59.

civic humanist categories such as “moderation,” “intelligence” or virtù (or even cervello or intelligentsia) as his aristocratic counterparts had previously done.\textsuperscript{813} Whereas aristocratic intellectuals proposed the creation of a separate magistracy in order to concentrate power in the hands of either office – most of the time in the senate and the \textit{ex officio} practicha stretta – Machiavelli considers simply as an autonomous council through which the political desires of a single class (a powerful economic class, nonetheless) is to be represented.\textsuperscript{814} As a matter of fact, for Machiavelli, each and every single social group should be given a role in the factual disposition of public power.

Still, the presence of such offices underscores the importance Machiavelli gives to forging a compromising solution based on the tripartite the Venetian model of government meant to, as he calls it, “satisfy [satisfare]” the manifold political interests of all Florence's social sectors.\textsuperscript{815} In this respect, Machiavelli goes beyond the aristocratic considerations of Guicciardini, for while Guicciardini considered the composition of the senate as the institutional recognition of the Florentine elite, he nonetheless recognized certain channels of mobility.\textsuperscript{816} Machiavelli’s blueprints, on the contrary, consider the creation of a senate as rigorously enclosed office, hence desisting from classical ideas of merit and competition for office. Additionally, Machiavelli’s late constitutional works suggest a departure from earlier Florentine republican ideals of membership, whereby eligibility for office was determined by a series of prerogatives relative to guild membership – for instance, neighborhood, family, etc. The real emphasis of these short works is on the realities of reform: satisfying ambitions of the Florentine social classes and safeguarding the city’s order and autonomy. The novelty lies in the attention paid to institutional mechanisms by which the individual and group desires are less suppressed or converted and more applied to a yet larger collective desire.

Yet to speak of Machiavelli’s constitution as resulting in hindrances and limits to the patricians’ “desire

\textsuperscript{813} Gilbert, “Florentine Political Assumptions,” 190-2; and Moulakis, “Realist Constitutionalism,” 215.

\textsuperscript{814} For instance, while Alamanni considers the city as divided into “tre sorte di uomini,” he advocates a government that simply represents the “prima, per essere di più credito, di più cervello, pretende ad lo Stato et governare” and the “seconda” who “pensano alli oficii et alli onori.” The “ultimi,” Alamanni adds, “a chi basta poter fare le sue faccende senza timore di troppa gravezza,” are thoroughly excluded from the political orderings of government. Alamanni, \textit{Discorso}, 369. On the other hand, while Niccolò Guicciardini and Alessandro de' Pazzi advocate a “governo di tutte a tre” they also claim that the senate should take the leading role or “li magistati di buona qualità, essendo eletti non a caso, come si può dire quando al consiglio grande si faceva.” Alamanni, “Discorso,” 377-9; Guicciardini, “Discursus,” 402-6; Pazzi, “Discorso,” 430.

\textsuperscript{815} Machiavelli consistently calls for the cancellation of those offices and laws that imposed the partial authority of a given group over the city in its entirety. Whereas in all three texts Machiavelli observes that the Medici and the palleschi maintain the autorità to elect either the Gonfalonier of Justice, the Senate, the Balià and the electoral college or accoppiatori, he is also clear as to the duration of such extraordinary power – the present Balià should be abolished and its authority be given to the reformers and Giulio for a year, after which neither can they extend the prerogative nor pass it on to another council. Machiavelli, “Draft of a Law,” 652-3.

\textsuperscript{816} Moulakis, “Realist Constitutionalism, 215-6.
to oppress” is to provide a partial interpretation of Machiavelli’s late political theorizing. McCormick based his thesis on the idea that in the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs* Machiavelli introduces “covertly” a Roman tribune-style office meant to empower the people and punish the grandi’s desire to oppress.\(^817\) While this office of the provost certainly plays a fundamental role in the context of the *Discourse*, this cannot be substantiated by an intertextual reading of the *Discourse*, the *Draft* and the *Memorandum*. In fact, Machiavelli’s silence on the incorporation of such provostial office (or even the role of the traditional office of the Sixteen Gonfaloniers of the People) in these short 1522 works expresses doubts with respect to the relevance and implications of this provostial office in Machiavelli’s post-1520 texts *tout court*. If the *Discourse* introduces the provosts to veto and exclude prominent citizens from co-opting the “free way of life,” then why is this office absent from the contemporary *Memorandum* and *Draft*? In other words, if this particular office ought to be understood as an explanatory key for interpreting Machiavelli’s constitutional blueprint, why does he rather promote a Venetian-type of constitution by the time of the *Draft* and the *Memorandum*?

More to the point, if this “Roman” office (in that it was drafted upon the example of the tribunes of republican Rome) was introduced as a rhetorical means to persuade the Medici of the benefits of the popular government and the dangers of the aristocratic one, it is unclear what office, if any, takes the “persuading” role in the 1522 texts.\(^818\) To put it differently, given the absence of the provosts – let alone the sign of any appeal to republican Rome or its institutions in the typically Machiavellian fashion as present in the *Discourses* – in these texts, it seems all the more clear that the ascendancy of this office in the context Machiavelli’s post-1520 writings requires qualifications; for Machiavelli the centre of gravity lies elsewhere, beyond the confines of a means to force the grandi to publicly “behave or die.”\(^819\)

Secondly, the thesis introduced by Jurdjevic with respect to the vocabulary of the post-1520 texts loses ground if we compare the language of the *Discourse* to that of the *Draft* and the

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\(^817\) McCormick defines the provost as “a lottery-determined magistracy reserved for common citizens...like the tribunate in Rome...Machiavelli establishes the provost as a subset of sixteen ‘Gonfaloniers of the Companies of the People,’ an office originally associated with the popular militia during the guilds’ armed struggle with the magnates in the early Florentine republics...Machiavelli leaves open whether his reconstructed popular Gonfaloniers will be selected each year by city ward, the guilds, by the Great Council, or by Leo himself as long as he lives.” McCormick, *Machiavellian Democracy*, 8, 79, 103-5 and 125.

\(^818\) McCormick claims that Machiavelli incorporates the ideal of the Roman tribunes in the form of a less specific provostial office because the Medici and their friends would not have accepted that type of institution *prima facie*. Ibid, 103.

Memorandum. Jurdjevic categorically claims that while “The [the Medici partisans] urged the concentration of power in the hands of an aristocratic senate and specifically argued that the people would assent so long as they were spared of extraordinary taxes,” then adding that “Machiavelli has no interest in considering questions of finance and taxation.” In the Draft of a Law and the Summary of Lucca Machiavelli explicitly recognizes the fiscal and economic powers for which the ottimati had consistently fought and assigns them their own class-specific office. Crucially, the Draft provides the senatorial One Hundred with specific economic and fiscal-specific functions that strongly resonate with the ideas of the most staunch aristocratic Florentine intellectuals, such as Neri Caponi, Francesco and Niccolò Guicciardini and Alessandro de' Pazzi. Certainly, Machiavelli is more interested in the problem of political participation as a broad social phenomenon than his aristocratic counterparts, but this is not sufficient reason to deny the intersection between the late political thought of our author and that of his ottimati contemporaries.

The economic senatorial prerogatives of the Draft and the Discourse are in fact crucial evidence of the Venetian turn in Machiavelli's late republicanism: while the Florentine does acknowledge the importance of the people as a new political actor, he also embraces the economic and institutional power of the Florentine aristocracy and gives them “top tier posts for life, much like the Venetian republic.” In this respect, the tension between virtue and commerce or civic virtue and private interest so strongly endorsed by Pocock – recall his statement that “corruption” was the term associated with the pursuit of wealth in the republican lexicon of the Renaissance – falls short in the context of Machiavelli’s more practical discussion on how actual republics ought to operate. If anything, Machiavelli’s post-1520 blueprints propose a compromising republican constitution between that espoused by the most fervent republicans and the supporters of the oligarchic governo stretto – and to some extent of the defenders of the monarchical reform – in an attempt to legitimize the complex social make-up of Renaissance commercial societies. Virtue becomes, accordingly, not public spiritedness and the willingness in the service of the common good, but an ingenuous artifice devised to turn partial desires and social distinctions into as common an interest as potentially feasible.

820 Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1254.
821 Ibid, 1254-5. My emphasis.
823 See, for instance, Butters, “Machiavelli and the Medici, 64-79.
824 Jurdjevic, “Machiavelli’s Hybrid Republicanism,” 1255; but in A Great and Wretched City, 213 he asserts “Machiavelli now acknowledged that the city's elite needed to be satisfied on its own terms.”
825 Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, 464.
4 Conclusion

These constitutional texts corroborate the thesis that in his later writings Machiavelli abandons the ‘tumultuous’ conceptualization of good government that he espoused in his earlier political texts, especially in his reply to the first ten books of Livy. In these prescriptive texts, where much is said about ordinì and governì and little about virtù and discordia (let alone la plebe armata), Machiavelli endorses the Venetian form of institutional virtù as a conceptual example for realizing a state endowed with a strong constitution. Machiavelli’s insistence on characterizing Venice as a buon governo rests upon his search for a stable compromising solution which results in a clear separation of tasks among three distinct “qualities of men.” Unlike the thesis promoted by McCormick, then, Machiavelli espouses a vision of the state based on the idea of institutional and political equilibrium that leaves behind the axiom of extra-legal violence and “guardianship of liberty” as a founding principle for a conception of the political.

Indeed, this idea of the mixed government owes much to the classical tradition, in which each political office represented three different 'pure' forms of government – the one, the few and the many. Yet Machiavelli's conceptualization of the mixed government in these works shows the “in-betweeness” of his later political thought insofar as he proposes a pessimistic view of human nature (not a novelty in Machiavelli’s political theorizing, though), which, in combination with institutional premises and hindrances, compels those in power – and those wishing to achieve power – to behave publicly. Contrary to the neorepublican characterizations of our author, then, political action plays no civic or educative role in the teachings of the late Machiavelli; instead, the ‘modern’ republican constitution Machiavelli espouses in these late texts pertains to a conception of politics in which the main task of public office is to satisfy [satisfare] the now irreducibly political desires of the citizenry.

Finally, these works make explicit the transformation or “final phase” in Machiavelli's conception of politics: the rigid opposition “Rome versus Venice” that structured the theoretical analysis of the first book of the Discourses comes to be replaced by a rather dynamic comprehension of “Venice and Rome.” The arguably pessimistic undertone of Machiavelli's views of Venice's foreign and martial affairs is superseded – at least to a certain extent – by a positive assessment of its constitutional and

828 This aristocratic form of mixed government, Bausi observes, seems to be Machiavelli's only path to restore a republican government in Florence – “sembra evidentemente a Machiavelli l'unica e l'ultima possibilità d restaurare la repubblica a Firenze, approfittando della particolare situazione in cui si era venuta a trovare la casa medicea...” Ibid, 307.
institutional soundness. In a context in which the “myth of Venice” was at the order of the day, Machiavelli accepts the Venetian style of institutionalized virtù, rooted in a system of balanced constitutional system of councils and incorporates the language of maestà, again, strongly associated with the Venetian model.

The vocabulary Machiavelli applies in this series of texts also shows that his political thought has changed: his texts reproduce the vocabulary of contemporary aristocratic intellectuals and their typically Venetian demands for formal outlets of political power. This is not to say, however that Machiavelli has come to endorse the Florentine aristocratic vision of Venice in its entirety: his conception of Venice, as already indicated, is rather instrumental than ideal; he does not set up the repubblica Veneziana as a model to be imitated (as Francesco Guicciardini and other Florentine aristocratic intellectuals had done) but treats it as source of constitutional machinery which can be thought out and adapted for use in the very difficult circumstances of post-1520 Medicean politics.829

The conceptual rupture I have shown throughout this chapter implies that there are two ways of forging a vivere civile at the heart of Machiavelli's political theorizing. One sees the res publica embodied in the language of civil discord and popular liberty, whereas the other applies a typically – pro-Venetian – Florentine lexicon and sees in creating a balanced system of political enfranchisement the crux for the survival of the republic and of free government.

This is indicative of a modello nuovo: the sociological and political complexity of early modern cities like Florence shares little with the peasant-like orders of ancient republics such as Rome and hence needs to be placed in a novel context of analysis. In the world dominated by private interests, of commercial profit and advantage, the classical republican thesis appears too anachronistic to be a proper analytical tool. In the more practical stage of his late works, Machiavelli sees a symbiotic relationship between private interest and the common good, between commerce and virtue.830 The well-constructed republic is not that which encourages the citizen to willingly embrace the common good, but that which encourages individual desire for power and wealth to coincide with common utility. In this sense, Machiavelli’s “later sense of republicanism” is much more attuned to the balanced

830 In that regard, Mark Hulliung's critique of Baron's (and consequently of Pocock's) appreciation of the humanist re-evaluation of classical republican ideals is worth considering in the context of Machiavelli's constitutional works: “Missing...in [Baron's] analysis is an appreciation of the extent to which the humanists' goal of peace was the result of their admission of the trader –mercilessly castigated by Aristotle and Cicero—to the rank of citizen in republican theory. By this adjustment in Greek and Roman political thought humanists were...merely admitting the facts of life...in the modern city-state of traders as opposed to the ancient city-state of warriors.” Hulliung, Citizen Machiavelli, 17.
distribution of powers and the rule of the law, of rational and efficient distribution of powers, to provide personal security and to distribute honors – certainly a move toward a modern conception of liberty and sovereignty in an attempt to establish a *buon governo* under the “corrupting” circumstances of modernity.
Chapter 6
Conclusion: Machiavelli’s Republicanisms

When the three natural orders in society, the high, the middle, and the low are all represented in the government, and constitutionally placed to watch each other, and restrain each other mutually by the laws, it is then only that an emulation takes place for the public good, and divisions turn to the advantage of the nation.\(^{831}\)

Machiavelli’s Florentine Histories and other key post-1520 works ought to be interpreted within the framework of his “late republicanism.” In general terms, Machiavelli scholars have largely ignored the political status and import of the Florentine Histories. More often than not, students of the Florentine’s political theorizing have either overlooked this late work or have treated it as a domesticated version of Machiavelli’s political ideas present in the better-known political tracts, The Prince, the Discourses, and at times, his letters and the Art of War. Contrary to previous interpretations, it has been my intention to underscore the conceptual differences, the historical nuances as well as the theoretical underpinnings of Machiavelli’s political imagination by the time of the composition of the Histories and the post-1520 political works in view of what contextual scholars have labeled “the intellectual development” of an author.\(^{832}\)

In this sense, I have made the case that these later works represent a new direction in Machiavelli’s analysis of political life and activity, showing unequivocally that he was moving in a Venetian direction by the 1520s – and consequently away from any form of Roman-based republicanism. I do not mean to suggest, however, that Machiavelli abandoned the republican project to which he had invested a large portion of his earlier texts and even his career as a civil servant.\(^{833}\) Nor do I mean that these later writings portray Machiavelli’s sense of resignation – as a consequence of the historical fate of the civic republican experience or his tragic view of history. Finally, my view does not imply that

\(^{831}\) Adams, Defence of the Constitutions of the United States, 130.


\(^{833}\) On the theme of the “monarchical” Machiavelli, see Silvano, Vivere Civile e Governo Misto, 95-108; by the same author, “Florentine Republicanism in the Sixteenth Century,” 143-71; Martelli, “Machiavelli dalla Repubblica al Principato,” 15-31; and Bausi, Machiavelli, 306.
his political analysis therein is an “intellectual artifice” shaped by an increasingly monarchical world.\textsuperscript{834}

Much to the contrary, in his exploration of Florentine history – and in his various constitutional blueprints – Machiavelli does appear as a staunch republican thinker; that is, Machiavelli consistently, and almost stubbornly, advocates for a collective form of self-governance as the most sound system of rule – and he does so even despite the historical context of Medici rule and patronage, and with the idea of the centralized modern state already looming just north of the Alps.\textsuperscript{835} In spite of his continuous appeal to a republican form of government, the later writings of Machiavelli represent a moment of transformation and departure from his earlier conceptions of society, discord, power and liberty toward an attraction to collective structures of power and constitutional mechanisms to create what I referred to as a “politics of equilibrium.”

This development in Machiavelli’s analysis of political life becomes evident once we recognize his newly found sympathy for the Venetian constitution, a system of government particularly favored in early sixteenth century Florence by advocates of an aristocratic republic, such as Piero Capponi, Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi, Francesco and Niccolò Guicciardini and Alessandro de’ Pazzi, among others.\textsuperscript{836} Indeed, Machiavelli’s new political vision was evident to Florentine historian Jacopo Pitti, who in his \textit{Istoria Fiorentina} notices that Machiavelli’s template for constitutional reform was welcomed by republican-aristocratic and popular-republican partisans alike. Pitti observes that, on the one hand, Machiavelli’s proposal promoted the re-opening of the popular Great Council – preserving its power and organization before the Medici coup of late-1512 – and, on the other, it favored “the authority of for-life senators [with] the power of enforcing fiscal laws \textit{l’autorità de’ senatori a vita...per la facoltà delle imposizioni del danaro].”\textsuperscript{837}

\textsuperscript{834} Baron, \textit{In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism}, 146-7; Salvatore di Maria, “Machiavelli’s Ironic View of History: The \textit{Istorie Fiorentine},” \textit{Renaissance Quarterly} 45(2) (1992): 248-70; and Sasso, \textit{Machiavelli: La Storiografia}, Vol. II, 202-7, respectively.

\textsuperscript{835} It is in this particular sense that my revisionist interpretation of the late Machiavelli could be aligned with Pocock’s ‘moment’ thesis, whereby Florentine (and Machiavellian) republican thought showed itself unable to solve its own creation, its own problem – that of a republic that could exist and survive in spite of its own finitude. Pocock, \textit{Machiavellian Moment}, vii-ix and 83-6.

\textsuperscript{836} Von Albertini, \textit{Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato}, 8-10.

\textsuperscript{837} Jacopo Pitti, “Istoria Fiorentina,” in \textit{Archivio Storico Italiano}, ed. Gino Capponi 1.1 (1842): 124-6. My translation. It should be noted, however, that Pitti refers here to Alessandro de’ Pazzi and his \textit{Discourse} to Cardinal Giulio de’ Medici of early 1522. In any case, shortly thereafter Pitti presents a summary of the proposed reforms, which leaves no doubt that the project he has in mind is Machiavelli’s \textit{Draft of a Law} – and not Pazzi’s \textit{Discourse}. On this point, see Guidi, “Machiavelli e I Progetti di Riforme Costituzionali,” 588-9. For a different interpretation, one that suggests a form of patronage behind Machiavelli’s intellectual evolution, see William J. Landon, \textit{Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi and Niccolò...
In all post-1520 texts analyzed in this project – the *Florentine Histories* of 1520-25, the *Summary of Lucca* of 1520, the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs* of 1520-1, and the *Memorandum* and the *Draft* of 1522 – Machiavelli consistently and undeniably supports a constitutional ideal that, first, accepts the legitimacy of the demands and authority of the powerful and wealthy social groupings – an unequivocal sign of his new Venetian direction. As I argued in chapters IV and V, not only does Machiavelli strongly maintain that the upper offices of the republic ought to be accorded honor (*maestà*) or the highest social status, but he also suggests that these councils should be given for life to the city’s elite. This represents an intellectual departure from his earlier political expositions, whereby Machiavelli lays bare and questions noble psychology as a result of the elite’s ethos of domination and unpredictability of conduct. More important still, Machiavelli’s considerations on the status of the powerful and the wealthy in these later texts suggest an important point of intersection with the Florentine advocate of Venetian republicanism par excellence, his *amico* Francesco Guicciardini.

Secondly, contrary to his earlier suppositions – especially as introduced in his *Discourses on Livy* – the Machiavelli of the post-1520 tracts simply desists from ascribing to the people the instrumental role of anchors or guardians *della libertà*. Much to the contrary, popular groupings are consistently depicted as ambitious, violent and power-thirsty to the extreme that Machiavelli’s narrative makes it difficult to distinguish between the desires and acts of the city’s elite and those of the people – an idea that is at times suggested in the *Discourses* but forcefully presented by the time of the *Histories*. From the constitution of the so-called ‘first people’ in the late-thirteenth century and the demise of the
Florentine landed nobility, to the revolt of the Ciompi and the oligarchic and Medicean regimes, Machiavelli consistently criticizes the domineering status of the popular sectors. As I demonstrated in chapter II, this critique of popular interests and agency is further substantiated by Machiavelli’s appeal to compounded terms by the time of his most historical work; rather than applying the typically Machiavellian binary language of social opposition, the texts of the 1520s display a rather multifaceted, and recurrently tripartite, language of politics and society.

Such a conceptual revisionism on the part of Machiavelli makes it clear that the governing terms of the discussion are far from being those of a particularly “Roman” binary antagonism between the few and the many, the great and the people. Indeed, Machiavelli’s appeal to social categories such as “ancient nobles [nobili anziani],” “popular nobles [nobili popolani],” and “plebs [la plebe]” in the context of Florentine history suggests that the post-1520 works operate on different conceptual and theoretical assumptions than the earlier political texts. Indeed, as suggested in Histories II.42 (and throughout books III and IV), the Discourse on Florentine Affairs and the Draft of a Law, Machiavelli collapses his initial binary distinctions between popular and noble consciousness, revealing that the qualities he had previously assigned to one group were actually inherent to all classes.841 These conceptual novelties lead, once again, to Machiavelli’s rapprochement to Florentine political culture and a Venetian conception of constitutionalism, whereby it was customary to refer to politics and society in terms of the existence of “three ambitions” or tre ambizioni.842

Hence, even if Machiavelli generally deployed a characteristic set of binaries in his earlier political texts in order to render certain phenomena (i.e. Roman history) intelligible, the evidence introduced in the last four chapters of this project strongly argues for a more complex schema than the one on which students of Machiavelli usually rely.843 Consequently, I have shown that by introducing and interpreting Machiavelli’s “later sense of republicanism” – which I have presented as much more attuned to Florentine aristocratic political theory and its image of Venetian practice than previously

841 For instance, by suggesting that the acts of the ‘first people’ were detrimental to the liberty of the city (which led to the voluntary exile of their hero, Giano della Bella); that the people’s acts were in fact conducive to the ultimate rise to power of the Duke of Athens; that the desire of the radical Ciompi was to “acquire the republic” as an example of their desire for total domination; or that there was little distinction between the “popular nobles,” their allied “ancient nobles,” and “the plebs” as suggested by Niccolò da Uzzano in his various speeches. For a full list of the various hybrid terms introduced in the Histories, see Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 245.

842 Guidi, “La Teoria delle Tre Ambizioni,” 241-60; Bausi, Machiavelli, 303-4; Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 77.

843 As Jurdjevic rightly suggests, most examples of a psychological distinction between the nobility and the people in the early works are usually derived from Roman, Spartan and even French cases, with Machiavelli having to nuance his own considerations when it comes to analyzing the Venetian case – for instance, at I.55 of the Discourses on Livy. Ibid, 105.
thought – we can diminish the amount of static and monolithic interpretations to which the Florentine’s political imagination has been recurrently subjected.\textsuperscript{844}

Equally important, Machiavelli’s appeal to the language of republican egalitarianism (whether “wonderful” or otherwise) does not embody an ancient conception of equality of political roles – whether as the Greek \textit{isonomia} or disposition to rule and be ruled, or as the Roman legal \textit{ius aequum} as equal access to offices – as clearly suggested in his texts on constitutional reform.\textsuperscript{845} There is no revival of classical (whether Roman or Aristotelian) conceptions of egalitarianism in these late works; in fact, at times, Machiavelli suggests that equality is rather a problem than a solution in the context of modern republics.\textsuperscript{846} But how can that be?

The essence of equality, for Machiavelli, lies in its capacity to deliver freedom from sedition and tyranny and to enfranchise and satisfy otherwise potentially disrupting interests in order to guarantee social and political stability. Machiavelli’s \textit{equal ends}, or what I called his “politics of equilibrium,” is pursued by an institutional setting designed to produce compromise; that is, the “politics of equilibrium” maintains the correlation between the institutional structure of the city and the distribution of real power among its constituent parts while engaging all appropriately qualified citizens in functionally differentiated offices of government. There may be no equality between citizens in the sense that not all participants shared any one of the roles set out by Machiavelli in his constitutional blueprints – for instance, within the tripartite institutional ordering of the \textit{Summary}, the \textit{Discourse} and the \textit{Draft of a Law} – or the ideal of enjoying eligibility for any of those offices. But that is not the point of the late Machiavelli’s “politics of equilibrium”; rather, its objective is to immunize the community against factionalism by making all members complicit in the operation of the city’s constitutional systems – again, as John Adams’ theorizing would suggest, a move away from civic humanist reappraisals of Roman and Greek thought and toward a much more modern understanding of citizenship.

\textsuperscript{844} On this theme, see Mansfield, “Party and Sect,” 209-43 and the (harsh) responses by Mark Phillips and J.A. Gunn in the same volume.
\textsuperscript{846} For instance, by suggesting that the desire to dominate is an inherent universal aspect of all members and groups in a given community (in this case, Florence). In that sense, Machiavelli’s reference to the proper function of the city’s republican institutions was rather meant to guarantee that all social sectors and interests were given their appropriate influence.
While the late Machiavelli acknowledges the necessity to secure political access to all social groups, this participation is not equal in respect to the political classification and prerogatives of its members.\(^{847}\) Much to the contrary, by promoting class-based and watertight offices, Machiavelli conceived of the republic as a system meant to curb the abuses of power to which a volatile tripartite society like Florence was inclined. To put it differently, Machiavelli’s post-1520 project (pace Pocock, Skinner, Viroli and also Jurdjevic) does not pertain to classical republican language of politics and citizenship, understood as the capacity to alternately rule and be ruled.\(^{848}\) Far from conceiving the political community as a natural process actualized by the rational goodness of man, the late Machiavelli conceived it as a process of “constitutional engineering,” or as a Burckhardtian work of art, meant to promote freedom from tyranny, security and prosperity – surprisingly closer to \textit{la liberté des modernes}.\(^{849}\)

In view of this suggestion, I have shown that Machiavelli has come to embrace the typically Venetian system of “institutional virtù” or a balance of interdependent councils that ensured that no private interest could become sufficiently powerful to dominate the political arena.\(^{850}\) In customary Venetian terms, this “institutional virtù” properly and clearly divides the tasks of each institution and council, erodes the power of private consultative bodies and encourages political participation via fixed channels of governance. It is precisely in this sense that Machiavelli’s \textit{Histories} is an expression of his “later sense of republicanism,” whereby he addresses, through the lens of the history of the Florentines, the political subtleties and the constitutional requirements for the development of a republican self-government in a world marred by partisan and private interests.

As I have proposed in chapter III, Machiavelli’s general vision in the \textit{Histories} is rational and constructive, rather than pessimistic and destructive, as Machiavelli displays Florence’s various constitutional orders as dysfunctional and driven by the mutual mistrust of its various acting groups –

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\(^{847}\) In terms of the Roman \textit{aequum ius} in the context of the Discourse on Florentine Affairs, Viroli suggests, “Machiavelli’s message is unequivocal: if a \textit{vivere politico} is to be preserved, the highest magistracies must be open to the best citizens.” Needless to say that Machiavelli’s “unequivocal” political vocabulary in these late texts makes reference to neither an open system of office nor to the excellence of the polity’s citizenry. Viroli, “Machiavelli and the Republican Idea of Politics,” 155.

\(^{848}\) This clearly at odds with Pocock suggestion that civic humanists embraced, “in a totally non-cynical sense…the adage that one should love one’s country more than one’s soul…” Pocock, \textit{Machiavellian Moment}, 75.


\(^{850}\) Venice’s constitution was conceived of as a working whole characterized by lively collaboration and competition among the different councils and their members, in which the interest of the individual was considered compatible with the civic one. Bouwsma, \textit{Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty}, 17-8; Finlay, \textit{Politics in Renaissance Venice}, 38-9.
all of which, in his own estimation, prevented the articulation of collective and competent forms of policy-making.\footnote{As Jurdjevic has rightly noticed, “Machiavelli intended his synthetic vision of institutional failure in the Histories to justify and elaborate on the specific institutional proposals in his [Discourse on Florentine Affairs].” In any case, Jurdjevic’s thesis also requires qualifications: first his take on the later works of Machiavelli as resulting in what he has called Machiavelli’s ‘activist’ republicanism, or the Florentine’s call for a thorough renewal of the city’s institutions happens to omit the Summary, the Draft and the Memorandum, texts in which Machiavelli deploys an arguably more conservative republicanism than the one proposed by Jurdjevic. Secondly, Jurdjevic’s reading underscores the absence of economic interests by the time of the Florentine Histories, which is in fact a crucial theme in both the Histories, the Draft and the Summary. On this theme, see Black “Review of Jurdjevic,” 495-8.} The late Machiavelli therefore seeks to refashion the Florentine republican system of government in accordance with political functions, the city’s social orders and the effective exercise of power for the sake of securing order and stability.\footnote{It is in this regard that my revisionist interpretation of the late Machiavelli is surprisingly compatible with that of the ‘modern territorial state’ thesis recently introduced by Alissa Ardito. Indeed, Ardito suggests that the new political landscape of early Sixteenth-century Italy (one generally dominated by the powers of the territorial monarchies just north of the Alps), “forced Machiavelli to leave the humanist city-state and seek new vistas and promontories of political thought.” Ardito is right to suggest the import of the enterprise in intellectual and historical terms, but this is not to suggest that Machiavelli’s intellectual imagination was constrained by historical circumstance – in a word, to suggest that his republicanism was trapped within a novel political paradigm. Alissa Ardito, Machiavelli and the Modern State, 19.} Such efforts, guided by notions of accommodation of interests, institutional procedures and effective governance, led Machiavelli to a novel understanding of the political – one in which the foundations and normative ideals of a republican mode of life ought to be adapted to effective action, and not the other way around. In a word, in drawing attention to the works of the 1520s what we find is the existence of (to bastardize Sheldon Wolin’s famous phrase) “an economy of republicanism” in Machiavelli’s political theorizing.\footnote{Sheldon Wolin, Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 221-4.}

More important still, by the time Machiavelli began the composition of the Histories, only Venice, Lucca and Genoa maintained their republican independence – in spite of their respective spasmodic struggles with external or internal domination.\footnote{On the governments of Venice, Lucca and Genoa in the early sixteenth century, see Bouwsma, Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty, 100-1; Bratchel, Lucca, 131-2; and Christine Shaw, “Genoa,” in The Italian Renaissance State, eds. Andrea Gamberini and Isabella Lazzarini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 220-36, respectively.} It is certainly no coincidence that Machiavelli dedicates some vital writing to the internal ordering of these cities: chapters I.28 and 29 of the Histories refer to the “orders” and “power” of the Venetian republic; chapter VIII.29 analyzes the case of the republic of Genoa and how the Genoese were capable of departing from French and Milanese domination by placing the effectual power of the city in the hands of a domestic banking elite; the Discourse and the Draft of a Law address the theme of honor and private interest, strongly associated with the Venetian constitution; and the Summary of mid-1520 draws a comparative analysis between
the orders of Lucca and those of Rome and Venice, with Venice appearing as the paragon of the well-ordered republic.

Machiavelli’s discussions of Genoa, Florence, Lucca and Venice in his late works share another fundamental feature: they consistently refer to and assess these city-republics with a view to their constitutional orders, institutional measures of political enfranchisement and election, and fiscal administration in a world dominated by commercial interests. In drawing attention to the existing republican models of the Italian context, Machiavelli engages in a sensitive analysis of their institutional processes in a way that defies his own ideal of the composite state as described in his earlier political texts – that is, one shaped or determined by the occurrences and struggles between two social groupings as found in his early writings. His answer to the problems of modern polities, then, is not so much a “politics of consensus” than a strict institutional differentiation of functions (deliberation approval, and enactment), capable of swiftly responding to the interests of its multifaceted constituent body.855

It is not too far a stretch to suggest, then, that Machiavelli’s interest in – and at times praise for – these republics by the late works comes as a consequence of the decline of the Roman paradigm of republicanism, so strongly defended in his previous discussions.856 The late Machiavelli shows himself aware of the distance between the ancient Roman style of republicanism and the situation of contemporary republics, for instance, by avoiding reference to the Roman republic in the Discourse on Florentine Affairs, by placing Rome and Venice on the same side of the spectrum of republican orders in the Summary of Lucca and by suggesting that Florence was a city still capable of republican liberty as polemically discussed in the third and fourth books of the Histories.857

855 Indeed, this strict distinction of functions is a recurrent theme in the 1520-22 constitutional works and hence the linchpin of the constitutional model advanced by Machiavelli. The Summary mentions, “In Rome, the people distributed, the senate counselled, and the Consuls, together with the other minor magistrates, executed policies; in Venice, the [Great] Council distributes, the Pregadi counsel and the Signoria executes policies.” The Discourse recommends the abolition of most offices and advocates the creation of “three ranks [tre gradi] in a republic, and no more [e non più].” The Draft of the Law notices, “Considering, our Magnificent and Excellent Lords, as no law and no order is more praiseworthy among men or more acceptable to God than those by which a true, united and holy republic is established, in which advice is freely given, deliberations prudently undertaken, and orders faithfully carried out...” Machiavelli, “Summary of the Affairs of the City of Lucca,” 618; “Discourse on Florentine Affairs,” 633; “Draft of a Law,” 643, respectively.


857 The problem, then, was to prevent aristocratic domination on the one hand and, on the other, popular anarchy; in other words, to prevent the decline into what in Florentine Histories IV.1 Machiavelli refers to as the conflict between tyranny and license. Machiavelli, Florentine Histories, 146.
What can better convey Machiavelli’s distance from his earlier preference for the Roman ideal of republicanism? Perhaps the point would be made clearer if turned around: What would contemporary defenders of the Venetian republic say with respect to Machiavelli’s old paradigm of Roman republicanism? The distinction between Machiavelli’s earlier and later conceptions of republicanism is exemplified by one of Francesco Guicciardini’s most famous passages from his Maxims and Reflections.

How wrong it is to cite the Romans at every turn [a reference to Machiavelli’s Discourses]. For any comparison to be valid, it would be necessary to have a city with conditions like theirs, and then to govern it according to their example. In the case of a city with different qualities, the comparison is as much out of order as it would be to expect a jackass to race like a horse.\textsuperscript{858}

Guicciardini’s observation nicely reflects, on the one hand, the extent to which the earlier republicanism of Machiavelli relied on Rome as a storehouse of exemplary political principles – with Machiavelli allowing himself to reconcile the ancient and the modern worlds as a suitable mode of theorizing. If political and historical analogies are difficult to undertake, Guicciardini observes, then Machiavelli’s appeal to republican Rome as an exemplar of reform for modern times is an unfeasible enterprise tout court. On the other hand, Guicciardini’s criticism also represents the progression and distance of the later texts from the earlier ‘romantic’ Machiavelli – so at least from Guicciardini’s perspective – suggesting a closer resemblance between the two Florentine intellectual champions than previously thought.\textsuperscript{859}

Drawing a distinction between the past and the present and thus recognizing the limits of ancient republican Rome as a guide to politics, Machiavelli now systematizes, rationalizes and captures the shortcomings and benefits of the republican orders of the present.\textsuperscript{860} Indeed, his conclusions in these texts appear pregnant with possibility and much closer to the realism with which he has been commonly associated: in an almost Guicciardinian tour de force (pace McCormick), Machiavelli abandons the idealism of the Roman past and replaces it with a study of the concrete, the “effectual

\textsuperscript{859} As Ronald Beiner has rightly argued, “From Guicciardini’s perspective, Machiavelli…is still a philosophical dreamer,” though this suggestion gives way to a closer resemblance between the two Florentine intellectual champions by the time of Machiavelli’s late works. Additionally, Guicciardini’s conclusion leaves us with one simple response: horses ought to be compared to horses and jackasses ought to be compared to fellow jackasses. Ronald Beiner, Civil Religion: A Dialogue in the History of Political Philosophy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 304. (I owe this paragraph in its entirety to professor Beiner).
\textsuperscript{860} Indeed, scholars have made the claim that this skeptic view is already present in the Discourses proper: there is a tension between Machiavelli’s considerations of the Roman example as an admirable model and his comments on its viability for the politics of the present. Jurdjevic, A Great and Wretched City, 70.
truth of the thing,” the state of republicanism in the late Italian Renaissance. Put bluntly, the tumultuous civil life and expansionist populism of the Romans endured little resemblance to the social and political world before Machiavelli’s own eyes.

The Histories and the constitutional texts of the 1520s thus exemplify Machiavelli’s general attempt to find a solution to the following question: Can freedom and a civil way of life be preserved in a world and a state dominated by a multiplicity of interests? Throughout this project I have found reason to suggest that Machiavelli’s vocabulary of “institutional virtù,” in combination with his revision of the social basis of his analysis of political life, operate beyond the confines of the tradition of classical republicanism. More to the point, I have made the case that the later works of Machiavelli can be hardly seen as functioning upon one of the most integral tenets of civic humanism, that of “virtue versus corruption” – the virtue of the natural citizen versus the commercial interest of the private individual – as the two irreconcilable sides of a republican conception of civil life.

Indeed, in his monumental Machiavellian Moment, Pocock (and before him the also immense work of Baron) took great pains to demonstrate that “the theses and antitheses of virtue and corruption” illuminate the history of western political thought, from its Florentine Renaissance rediscovery to its transformation and re-implementation by the time of the American republican experience. As I showed in chapters IV and V, Machiavelli’s commitment to the Roman populist dictum to “keep the public rich and the citizens poor” gives way to a novel appreciation of the objectives of political life by the time of his post-1520 writings. Machiavelli proposals in the Histories and the constitutional works suggest that republican liberty was to be founded not so much on the choices of the individual


862 “When Florentine civic liberty was collapsing in the early sixteenth century, the stern critic Machiavelli considered one of the most serious causes of Florence’s decline to be the optimistic belief that the wealth of individual citizens could promote virtue...povertà...forces the depraved nature of mankind to develop a communal spirit and compels men by dire need to preserve virtù...” Baron, In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism, 255-6; also, Pocock, Machiavellian Moment, ix-x.


864 Julie L. Rose, “‘Keep the Citizens Poor’: Machiavelli’s Prescription for Republican Liberty,” Political Studies 2015 (forthcoming) nicely summarizes the meaning of this famous oft-cited claim: “Republican citizens must not despise poverty, they must not value personal wealth more than the public good, and they must not permit material pleasures, particularly those of foreign origin, to be a distraction from public concerns.
and his nature as on devising institutional mechanisms for channeling human desires and interests in ways that would benefit the community. In a word, Machiavelli’s “later sense of republicanism” is much more attuned with the idea of a commercial form of republicanism than previously thought.  

It is precisely along this line of thought that Machiavelli introduces the problem of authority as representative of the tension between the appetite of the individual and the institutional mechanisms by which that private desire is neither suppressed nor transformed, but rather absorbed and rehabilitated by a social world designed to produce collective benefits reliably. Machiavelli’s praise for the far-reaching fiscal and economic power of a for-life senate of the Draft of a Law of 1522; his puzzling reference to the Genoese bank of San Giorgio as representative of liberty, civil life and justice; his recurrent references to the satisfaction of interests [satisfare] in the Histories and the Discourse; or his reference to “honor and advantage [gli onori e gli utili]” in the Summary as two compatible characters of civil life all suggest that the typical distinction between a Machiavellian-republican and a post-Hobbesian-liberal conception of politics requires qualification.

As a final concluding speculation, my reconstruction of the late Machiavelli bears directly on the quarrel between the Atlantic-republican and liberal-republican interpretations of Machiavelli, a debate that extends beyond the confines of Machiavelli and Renaissance Florentine republicanism. From this vantage point, it is worth noting that interpreting the late works of Machiavelli as I have done throughout this project – as an exploration of the problems of authority, liberty and interest in the context of Machiavelli’s Florentine Histories and other post-1520 works – might help to explain one of the most crucial, and apparently paradoxical, transitions in the history of political thought – how, if at all, did Machiavelli’s republican thought influence the American experience?

As I mentioned in chapter III, efforts to find a connection between Machiavelli’s republicanism and the framers of the American experience face one particular problem: there is little, if any, textual

865 To the best of my knowledge, there is little literature concerning this “commercial turn” in the works of Machiavelli. For some exceptional treatments, see Matteucci, “Machiavelli Politologo,” 245; Jurdjevic, “Virtue, Commerce,” 721-43; Marietti, Machiavelli: L’Eccezione Fiorentina, 89-95.


reference to Machiavelli in the works of, for instance, Madison, Jefferson and Hamilton.\textsuperscript{868} John Adams, however, was unique, in fact exceptional, among the founding fathers in that he directly and explicitly referred to the works of Machiavelli.\textsuperscript{869} Indeed, roughly two thirds of the second volume of his reaction to the French minister Baron Anne Robert Turgot is dedicated to the \textit{Florentine Histories} and the \textit{Discourse on Florentine Affairs}.\textsuperscript{870} Most crucially, not only did Adams paraphrase and draw on two of Machiavelli’s late works, but in doing so he was powerfully influenced by the Florentine’s “later sense of republicanism.”

The most convincing proof of the impact of the post-1520 Machiavelli upon Adams’ ideas comes from the conclusion to his transcription of the \textit{Histories} in the second part of the multi-volume \textit{Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America Against the Attack of M. Turgot in His Letter to Dr. Price}. Composed after Adams’ eight-year European sojourn, where he engaged with, and was exposed to, much of the political affirmations of French, Italian and English intellectuals, this work reconstructs, at times with great detail, the history of the Swiss cantons and the German city-states as well as that of the Italian city-republics.\textsuperscript{871} In reference to the Florentine constitution and the state of affairs under the regime of the Medici, Adams asserts,

\begin{quote}
When the three natural orders in society, the high, the middle, and the low are all represented in the government, and constitutionally placed to watch each other, and restrain each other mutually by the laws, \textit{it is then only that an emulation takes place for the public good, and divisions turn to the advantage of the nation}.\textsuperscript{872}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{868} On this theme, see Ardito, \textit{Machiavelli and the Modern State}, 238-43, where she mentions the existence of a “Madisonian Impulse” in Machiavelli, or the idea that “Machiavelli deserves to be recognized as the first modern political theorist to envision the possibility of a republic with a large population extending over a wide territory.”

\textsuperscript{869} Thompson, “John Adams’s Machiavellian Moment,” 389-417.

\textsuperscript{870} Most strikingly, as Appleby has persuasively shown, the mature John Adams of the \textit{Defence}, like the post-1520 Machiavelli, reassessed the political convictions he had previously formed as a revolutionary leader, taking measure of his own conclusions about political possibilities. Appleby, “The Changing Thought of John Adams,” 579-80.

\textsuperscript{871} It is in great part as a result of its various interests and themes that Adams’ \textit{Defence} has been classically considered as oblique or simply “anomalous” as a result of their alleged lack of structure or esoteric nature. On the alleged anomaly of Adams’ thought, see Gordon Wood, \textit{The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 580. On the transformation of Adams’ thought from the bi-cameral Massachusetts constitution to the ‘aristocratic’ republicanism of the \textit{Defence}, see Appleby, “The Changing Thought of John Adams,” 482.

\textsuperscript{872} The sections prior to this statement are full of cryptic references, though all linked to the republican theme par excellence – the antithetical nature between freedom and tyranny. First, he makes reference to the famous introduction to book VII and Machiavelli’s suggestion therein, that there are two distinct forms of disunions, parties and discords, citing Tacitus’ Calgacus’ speech to his troop about Rome’s insatiable appetite for conquest – “ubi solitudinem faciunt pacem appellant [they make a solitude and call it peace].” Then, Adams suggests that “in any form of simple government…the government itself is a faction and an absolute power in a party,” concluding this passage with a quote from Jean Racine’s \textit{Attaliah}, “De l’absolu pouvoir, vous ignorez l’ivresse.” Adams, \textit{Defence of the Constitutions of the United States}, 128-130. My emphasis. On this theme, see Jacob Soll, “J.G.A. Pocock’s Atlantic Republican Thesis Revisited: The Case of John Adams’ Tacitism,” \textit{Republic of Letters} 2(1) (2010): 21-38.
There are three points worth underscoring here: (1) Adams mentions that the balance of government is less an institutional premise whereby different powers check one another and more a system of class-specific offices meant to represent the ranks and states of society – “the three natural orders in society” – into the structure of political power itself.873

Similarly, in the brief introduction to the transcription of the Discourse on Florentine Affairs – a text that Adams labeled “Machiavelli’s Plan for a Perfect Commonwealth” – Adams quotes Machiavelli’s famous dictum concerning the tripartite view of society and politics in full.874 Adams does criticize Machiavelli with respect to the institutional configuration of the Discourse – as he tells us, the appointment of a popular council of one thousand citizens “would have ruined all the good effects of the other divisions of power” – but he praises Machiavelli precisely for having perceived “the necessity of three powers.”875 By invoking this tripartite principle of social and political classification Adams acknowledges and embraces the shift in Machiavelli’s social analysis of the state.

(2) Adams admits the inevitability of both wealth and power and the necessity of assigning institutions meant to channel the eros tyrannos of high-ranked citizens.876 The question at issue, then, was to find institutional outlets capable of satisfying the elites on their own terms so as to guarantee the liberty and security of the community. By the same token, not only does Adams shed light on the almost cyclical problem of oligarchic power (or the monopolization of power by any one group), but he also draws attention to the problem of equality in the modern context. Echoing Machiavelli’s suggestions

873 Appleby recognizes this novelty in the political thought of the late John Adams, but she insists on the influence of French constitutional thinker Jean-Baptiste De Lolme, whose Constitution de l’Anglaterre of 1771 served as a model for disenchanted democrats who sought in the English constitution a model for the achievement of the rule of law, the defense of individual rights and the enjoyment of public stability. While this may be the case, the fact Adams chooses to conclude his transcription of Machiavelli’s Histories with a passage that so nicely summarizes his own intellectual convictions suggests, again, that Adams finds echoes of his own political thought in the works of the late Machiavelli. Appleby, “The Changing Thought of John Adams,” 586-8.

874 “There are three orders of men in every state, and for that reason there should be also three ranks or degrees in a public, and no more; nor can that be said to be a true and durable commonwealth, where certain humours and inclinations are not gratified, which otherwise must naturally end in its ruin. Those who model a commonwealth, must take such provisions as may gratify three sorts of men, of which all states are composed; that is, the high, the middle sort, and the low.” Adams, Defence of the Constitutions of the United States, 242.

875 “[Machiavelli] did not see an equal necessity for the separation of the executive power from the legislative,” then adding, “The following project contains excellent observations, but would not have remedied the evils.” In spite of this word of criticism, Adams praises Machiavelli’s Discourse in the following paragraph, “Machiavel by these observations demonstrates, that he was fully convinced of this great truth, of this eternal principle, without the knowledge of which every speculation upon government must be imperfect, and every scheme of a commonwealth essentially defective.” Ibid, 241-2.

876 For instance, reasoning from the problem of the permanence of elite power, Adams mentions the case of Corso Donati, “But Machiavel should have laid the blame upon the constitution, not upon the restless disposition or turbulent spirit of Corso: because it is impossible for a man of Corso’s genius, valour and activity, in such a government, not to be restless and turbulent...” the “…sovereignty of the signori was inadequate to either purpose.” Ibid, 32-3.
in the *Histories* and the *Discourse on Florentine Affairs*, Adams incorporates the idea that government is an ingenuous artifice meant to curb “the predominant passion of all men in power, whether kings, nobles, or plebeians.”

In so doing, Adams develops Machiavelli’s suggestion that institutions can help to achieve a “politics of equilibrium” that seeks the common good, despite the necessary persistence of inequalities of wealth and power.

Finally, (3) By making reference to “an emulation” of the common good as well as to the ubiquitous existence of “divisions,” Adams accepts Machiavelli’s newly found “institutional virtù,” whereby the city – or rather the state – provides a framework for citizens to promote their appetites and desires – and, often, to satisfy them. This suggestion, again, strongly resonates with the absence of an Aristotelian or classical republican conception of citizenship in the works of Machiavelli. “Emulation…for the public good,” or turning partial interests into the advantage of the generality of the population, already suggests that Adams’ expositions are au-delà the classical republican tradition. The primary language by which his republican ideas are conveyed explicitly suggests that little, if anything, is left of public-spiritedness, the *vita activa* and civic *askesis* in the political universe of Machiavelli and Adams. Indeed, what Adams conveys through the lens of Machiavelli’s *Histories* is a neo-Harringtonian world whereby commerce or the pursuit of wealth is to be seen as compatible with (and even beneficial to) the common good.

It is a consequence of these common characteristics that we may be able to refer to a “Machiavellian impulse” in John Adams’ inquiries (and an anachronistic “Adamsian impulse” in Machiavelli’s works?) and to Machiavelli himself as an already active participant in the transformative process of republican ideas during the early-modern and modern periods on both sides of the Atlantic.

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877 Ibid, 7.

878 While I do not necessarily agree with his suggestion that capitalism and commerce in the context of seventeenth and eighteenth-century Europe were understood as one and the same thing – the “harmless” pursuit of private interests meant to curb the more inherently dangerous passions of human nature – I do find Machiavelli and Adams as being active participants in the ideological transformation described by Albert O. Hirschman. Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests: Political Arguments for Capitalism and Its Triumph* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 3-66.


880 This theme, I think, is what separates my interpretation of Machiavelli from that of the so-called liberal-republican tradition. Scholars affiliated with this interpretive approach (such as Herzog, Pincus, Rahe and Sullivan) suggest that Machiavelli was absent from the debates that concerned the idea of a commercial society, which, in their own estimations, begins with an original synthesis of Machiavellian and Hobbesian (and post-Aristotelian) understanding of political life in
invokes Machiavelli in the pursuit of a system of government not so much in terms of the typically
Machiavellian turbulent and militaristic republic but as one that emphasizes the importance of sound
institutions in pursuit of a system of social equilibrium of ends. The satisfaction of interests, and not a
civic ideal of learning how to rule and be ruled in turn, is the main premise of the institutional
principles proposed in Machiavelli’s post-1520 political and historical writings.

My analysis suggests that political theorists and historians of ideas alike ought to reconsider their
traditional patterns of interpretation when it comes to reading the works (and times) of Machiavelli.
Indeed, if we expand our scope beyond the recurrent binary of political texts, if we enlarge our point
of interpretive departure to include the Florentine Histories and other late republican treatises, we may
find ourselves in a better position to realize that Machiavelli’s thought was not fixed or static. Much
to the contrary, the Florentine’s political theorizing is characterized by a thoroughgoing dynamism:
while the Machiavelli of the Discourses advocates a tumultuous form of civic life based on the ancient
Roman model, the Machiavelli of the Histories promotes a republicanism reminiscent of the Venetian
model of “institutional virtù.” Consequently, scholars should not speak of Machiavelli’s
republicanism; it is advisable instead to recognize and apprehend the existence of two distinct – pre-
1520 and post-1520 – Machiavellian republicanism.

England and the American colonies. Consider, for instance, Sullivan’s rendition of this intellectual transformation:
Machiavelli and Harrington, she suggests, “do not support a commercial society...[still] their ideas about politics cannot
be said to be classical [republican].” “Machiavelli and Hobbes, then, are the primary source of this liberal republicanism,
but the thought of each had to be radically transformed before either could contribute to this new combination.” Sullivan,
Machiavelli and Hobbes, 8-10.
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