

Machiavelli and The Pisan War: Political Crisis and Cultural Creativity
in Renaissance Florence (1494-1509)

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Abstract

On November 9, 1494, the Pisan rebels proclaimed independence from Florence and reclaimed their city without a fight. Their audacious act marked the beginning of a long war between Florence and Pisa that ultimately ended with Pisa's surrender in June 1509. As Niccolò Machiavelli's chancery career (1498-1512) almost matches the entire duration of the Pisan War, one may ask about his role in the conflict. Concerning this, one of the main goals of my dissertation is to bring to light Machiavelli's engagement in the Pisan War and his contribution to bringing down the rebellious city. Additionally, the purpose of this project is to show how the Pisan War affected Machiavelli's intellectual formation. To achieve those goals, my dissertation draws mainly from Machiavelli's early official letters and dispatches (*Legazioni*) and his first political writings. The use of Machiavelli's post-1512 *opere* and contemporary Pisan and Florentine chronicles and histories serves to complement the main source material.

Chapter one reveals Machiavelli's first reflections on citizenship, patriotism, and mercenaries while organizing and directing Florence's forces against the Venetian mercenary army in the Casentino. Chapter two deals with Machiavelli's role in the controversy surrounding the execution of the Florentine captain-general Paolo Vitelli, in which the Florentine secretary coordinated, defended, and justified in his writings the course of action against the captain. Chapter three examines Machiavelli's personal experience with the mercenary soldiers during the siege of Pisa in 1500 and his subsequent diplomatic mission to France. Chapter four considers Machiavelli's role in Florence's attempt to strip the city of Pisa of water, known as the Arno project. It also surveys the Florentine government's endeavor to use visual warlike propaganda, through the works of Leonardo and Michelangelo, to subdue Pisa. Chapter five traces Machiavelli's first experiences with the peasant militia and offers a critical survey of the methods he used to recruit, supervise, and control his peasant soldiers. The last chapter focuses on Machiavelli's active role in ensuring Pisa's surrender via blockade and diplomacy. Together, all six chapters argue that Machiavelli had a prominent role in Florence's efforts to recapture Pisa. Inversely, the Pisan War shaped him and his intellect through the events he was involved in.

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Acknowledgments are also reserved for York University as a whole, which has served as a cocoon for my (and many others) scholarship over the last six years.

To my beloved wife, Sarai, my son Michael, and my parents, I wish to say: “You are my sunshine. This is for you, with endless love.”

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Milos Mitrovic

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Introduction	1
Historiography	3
The Structure	9
Methodology	13
Chapter 1: Baptism of Fire	17
1.1. Introduction	17
1.2. The Origins of the Pisan Conflict	18
1.3. The Rebellion of November 9, 1494	20
1.4. The French King's Betrayal	22
1.5. Internationalization of the Pisan Conflict	24
1.6. Machiavelli and Florence's war with Venice (1498-1499).....	27
1.6.1. Friendship in the time of war: Machiavelli's letters to degli Albizzi	33
1.6.2. Machiavelli and Mercenaries.....	36
1.6.3. Machiavelli and God	39
1.6.4. Machiavelli and the first lessons from the Roman and Florentine history	42
1.7. <i>Per amore o per forza?</i> Machiavelli and the Florentine subjects.....	44
1.7.1. <i>Discorso sopra Pisa</i>	48
1.8. Machiavelli's first <i>Legazioni e Commissarie</i> and the Pisan War	54
1.9. Conclusion	63
Chapter 2: The Vitelli Affair	65
2.1. Introduction	65
2.2. Paolo Vitelli: A traitor?	68
2.3. The Conspiracy	81
2.4. The Execution	91
2.5. Aftermath	96
2.6. Conclusion	104
Chapter 3: <i>Messer Nihilo</i>	105
3.1. Introduction	105
3.2. Preparations for the Siege of Pisa of 1500	105
3.3. The Siege	111
3.4. The First Mission to France	117
3.4.1. Machiavelli and Louis XII	123
3.4.2. Waiting for the ambassadors	136
3.5. Conclusion	142
Chapter 4: Arts and Science in the Service of the State	144
4.1. Introduction	144
4.2. Leonardo, Machiavelli, and The Pisan War	146
4.3. The Arno Project	154
4.4. The Power of the Aesthetic: <i>Anghiari</i> and <i>Cascina</i> Battle Paintings and the Pisan War	167
4.4.1. Machiavelli's role in the commissions	175
4.5. Michelangelo's <i>David</i> and the Pisan War	180

4.6. The statue of David and Machiavelli's Militia	185
4.7. Conclusion	187
Chapter 5: Machiavelli's Militia Project and The Pisan War	188
5.1. Introduction	188
5.2. Machiavelli and the idea of the peasant militia before 1498	189
5.3. A rather "unusual" influence: Abbot Basilio Nardi and the Casentino militia.....	192
5.4. Machiavelli and Madonna of Imola's Romagnol militia.....	198
5.5. A call for <i>armi proprie</i> : Machiavelli's <i>Parole da dirle sopra danaio</i>	205
5.6. <i>Il Decennale Primo</i>	210
5.7. Towards the Florentine <i>ordinanza</i>	212
5.8. The Siege of Pisa of 1505.....	215
5.9. The Florentine militia of 1506: Machiavelli's fingerprints	220
5.10. Oppression, Control, and Desertion	228
5.11. Machiavelli's Militia Paradox: Non-Citizen Militia between the carrot and the stick	235
5.12. Pisan <i>contadini</i> and Machiavelli's militia	238
5.13. Conclusion	241
Chapter 6: The War Secretary.....	243
6.1. Introduction	243
6.2. The Gathering Storm (1507-1508)	244
6.3. Machiavelli and the Pisan Campaign of 1508	250
6.4. The Mouse Trap of 1509	258
6.5. Diplomatic missions to Lucca and Piombino	262
6.6. Machiavelli's <i>Provvedimenti</i> and The Mutolo Conspiracy	270
6.7. The Surrender.....	280
6.8. The Aftermath	284
6.9. Conclusion	286
Conclusion	287
Bibliography	301
Primary Sources	301
Secondary Sources	303

INTRODUCTION

In 1494, King Charles VIII of France invaded Italy to lay claim to the Kingdom of Naples. As the French army approached Florentine territory *en route* to Naples, Piero de' Medici, the *de facto* ruler of the city of Florence, delivered into French hands several important cities including Florence's key port of Pisa.¹ Piero's decision to appease the French king with the territories he had no authorization to concede cost his family and Florence dearly. On November 9, 1494, the Florentines exiled the Medici from Florence and formed a new republican government while on the same day the Pisans tore down the *Marzocco*, the symbol of Florentine domination over their city, and declared independence.² Pisa's audacious act of self-proclaimed independence was a serious blow to the Florentine Republic, re-established after the Medici's exile. In his *Storie Fiorentine*, Francesco Guicciardini, a towering Florentine intellectual and politician, encapsulated what Pisa meant to the Florentines.³ The loss of the port city affected not only Florence's pride and international prestige, but also its economy and maritime trade.⁴ Hence, the plan to retake Pisa became the major political goal of the newly proclaimed republic. However, in several attempts to conquer Pisa, the Florentines failed to subjugate the rebellious city. Fueled by their resolute desire

¹ Allied with the king of Naples, Piero did not pledge his support to the French king when the invasion began. Therefore, to save his regime from the French, he gave them the following fortresses: Sarezana, Sarzanello, Pietrasanta, Libbrafratta, Pisa, and Livorno. See Francesco Guicciardini, *Storie fiorentine dal 1378 al 1509*, a cura di Roberto Palmarocchi (Bari: Guis. Laterza, 1931), 91; Alison Brown, *Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici and the Crisis of Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 220-21.

² Giovanni Portovenieri, "Memoriale dall'anno 1494 sino al 1502," in *Archivio storico italiano*, 6, part 2 (1845): 281–360.

³ "Pisa è il luogo dove si traeva la potenza, la sicurezza, l'autorità e gli ornamenti nostri. Perché la perdita massime di Pisa fu sì grande e di sì inestimabile danno alla città, che molti hanno dubitato quale fussi maggiore nel dì di san Salvatore, o l'acquisto della recuperate libertà o la perdita di Pisa." See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 100.

⁴ According to an authentic source, the Genovese Batista Pallavicini, each year the Florentines received from Pisa 60,000 ducats from direct and indirect taxes. See Lupo Gentile, *Pisa, Firenze, e Carlo VIII* (Pisa: Nistri Lischi, 1934), 7, note 1.

for freedom and hatred towards Florence, the Pisans managed to maintain their independence for nearly fifteen years. It was not until June 8, 1509, that starvation in the besieged city and the lack of support from the major European powers, finally compelled the proud city of Pisa to surrender to Florence.

At the head of the Florentine army that triumphantly entered the starving city was not a military captain, as one would expect, but the Florentine War Secretary and Second Chancellor, Niccolò Machiavelli. Shortly after the conquest of Pisa, Machiavelli's colleague, Agostino Vespucci, praised the Florentine secretary's role in Florence's victory.⁵ Likewise, another friend of Machiavelli, Filippo Casavecchia, congratulated him with the following *laudatio*: "I wish you a thousand benefits from the outstanding acquisition of that notable city, for truly it can be said that your person was the cause of it to a very great extent...Every day I discover you to be a greater prophet than the Hebrews or any other nation ever had."⁶ Full of praise for their friend and fellow citizen, Vespucci and Casavecchia testify to a crucial moment in Machiavelli's career, both of them acknowledging and praising no one other than Machiavelli as the chief architect of Pisa's defeat. Considering Florence's many failures to reconquer the rebellious city, one must ask what Machiavelli did to earn the praise of his friends. What was his role during the Pisan War? What do we know, ultimately, about this glorious chapter in his career?

Surprisingly, this part of Machiavelli's life and career did not receive substantial attention in historiography. As it is Machiavelli's intellectual output and political biographies that have largely occupied the attention of scholars, this dissertation will explore the Florentine secretary's

⁵ "If I did not think it would make you too proud, I should dare say that you with your battalions accomplished so much good work, in such a way that, not by delaying but by speeding up, you restored the affairs of Florence. I do not know what to say. I swear to God, so great is the exultation we are having that I would write a Ciceronian oration for you if I had time." See *Machiavelli and his friends: Their Personal Correspondence*, translated by James B. Atkinson and David Sices (Northern Illinois University Press, 2004), 181.

⁶ Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 182.

role in the Pisan War. Thus, the main goal of my dissertation is to illuminate and closely examine Machiavelli's involvement as the Second Chancellor, diplomat, war secretary, and military strategist in the Florentine effort to conquer Pisa. Moreover, my thesis aims to reveal how the Pisan War itself affected, shaped, and altered Machiavelli's ideas and intellect. The war's dynamism, longevity, and constant need for action and innovation, perfectly suited Machiavelli's inquisitive mind and quest for knowledge of human affairs. It honed Machiavelli's already sharp intellect and helped him avoid the obscurity of those lesser-known Medici Chancellors who lived in times of relative peace and prosperity for Florence. With this in mind, this study will suggest that the Pisan War largely shaped the Machiavelli we know today. By establishing a strong connection between Machiavelli and the Pisan War, this dissertation addresses an important element of Machiavelli's life and career, arguing that, ultimately, the Pisan conflict is one of the most underappreciated contexts for interpreting Machiavelli's ideas.

Historiography

From his first days in office of the Ten in June 1498 to the triumph at the Pisan gates in June 1509, the Pisan campaign always centrally preoccupied Machiavelli's mind. Surprisingly, despite its importance in Italian and European politics at that time, the Pisan War has received little sustained attention in historiography.⁷ For example, in one of the latest accounts on the history of the Italian Wars by Christine Shaw and Michael Mallett, the Pisan conflict receives only a few pages of text, with a very short and incomplete summary of the main events.⁸ Yet this represents

⁷ For example, The Pisan War rarely appears in Anglo-American historiography and the historiography of the Italian Wars from 1494 to 1559. For the literature on the Italian Wars, see David Abulafia (ed.), *The French Descent into Renaissance Italy 1494–5: Antecedents and Effects* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995); Christine Shaw (ed.), *Italy and the European Powers: The Impact of War, 1500–1530* (Brill: Boston, 2006); J.C. Zancarini and J.L. Fournel, *Les guerres d'Italie: Des batailles pour l'Europe (1494–1559)* (Gallimard, 2003); Michael Mallett and Christine Shaw, *The Italian Wars, 1494-1559: War, State, and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Pearson, 2012; Routledge, 2019).

⁸ Mallett and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 44-6, and 88-91.

the longest and most detailed summary of the Pisan War written in the English language! Some specific details about the conflict can be found in the diplomatic and political histories of the early modern Italian states, France, the Holy Roman Empire, and Spain.⁹ However, references to the Pisan War in historiography are few and scattered across numerous studies, posing thus a challenge for researchers. While the history of the Pisan conflict awaits a monograph in English that will synthesize the material from various accounts, I hope that my dissertation will make a significant contribution to that end.

For now, researchers interested in the Pisan War must rely heavily on Italian historiography. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian diplomatic and Marxist historians have covered in detail Pisa's revolt against Florence and the city's struggles to maintain its freedom.¹⁰ Although tending to be patriotic in nature and narrow in scope, their work represents a point of

⁹ For Milan during the Pisan war, see Letizia Arcangeli, "Milan during the Italian Wars (1499–1529): Experiments in representation and definitions of citizenship," in Christina Shaw, *Italy and European Powers*, 159–187; Franco Catalano, *Ludovico il Moro* (Milan: Dall'Oglio, 1985); For Venice, see Robert Finlay, *Venice Besieged. Politics and Diplomacy in the Italian Wars, 1494–1534* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); For the Papal States, see Christine Shaw, "Alexander VI and the French invasion of 1494," *Jacobus*, 25–6 (2009): 197–222; For Lucca see Girolamo Tommasi, *Sommario della Storia di Lucca* (Lucca: Maria Pacini Fazzi, 1969); For France, see H. F. Delaborde, *L'expédition de Charles VIII en Italie. Histoire diplomatique et militaire* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1888); Anne Denis, *Charles VIII et les Italiens. Histoire et mythe* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1979); Yvonne Labande, "Entrée de Charles VIII a Florence (17 novembre 1494)." *Etudes italiennes*, Nouvelle serie V (1935): 31–43; For the Holy Roman Empire see Hermann Wiesflecker, *Kaiser Maximilian I*, vol. I–II (Munich, 1981); For Imperial Spain, see José Enrique Ruiz-Domènec, *El Gran Capitán. Retrato de una época* (Barcelona: Ediciones Peninsula, 2002); Luis Suárez, *Fernando el Católico* (Barcelona: Ariel, 2004).

¹⁰ For diplomatic history of Pisa see Vittorio Fanucci, "Le relazioni tra Pisa e Carlo VIII," *Annali della R. Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa*, 16 (1894): 3–83; Gioacchino Volpe, "Intorno ad alcune relazioni di Pisa con Alessandro VI e Cesare Borgia (1499–1504)," *Studi Storici*, VI (1897): 495–587; Giorgio Scaramella, "Relazioni fra Pisa e Venezia (1495–96)," *Studi Storici*, VII (1898): 233–266, and IX (1900): 145–202 and 329–342; Giorgio Scaramella, "Il lodo del duca di Ferrara tra Firenze e Venezia," *Nuovo Archivio Veneto*, NS, a.II, t. V, p. I (1903): 5–47; Lupo Gentile, *Pisa, Firenze e Carlo VIII* (Pisa: Nistri Lischi, 1934); Eugenio Dupré-Theseider, "L'intervento di Ferdinando il Cattolico nella guerra di Pisa," in *Fernando el Católico e Italia* (Zaragoza: Institución 'Fernando el Católico', 1954), 21–41; For the social strife in Pisa during the war against Florence see Bruno Casini, "Gli organi del Comune di Pisa del periodo della riconquista libertà (1494–1509)," *La Rassegna*, n. 9–12, (Pisa, 1957): 13–28; Gino Benvenuti, *Storia della Repubblica di Pisa (Le quattro stagioni di una meravigliosa avventura)*, 3 vols., (Pisa, 1962); Gino Benvenuti, *Storia dell'assedio di Pisa 1494–1509* (Pisa: Giardini, 1969); Michele Luzzati, *Una Guerra di popolo. Lettere private dal tempo dell'assedio di Pisa 1494–1509* (Pisa: Pacini, 1973).

departure for all scholars interested in this topic.¹¹ Building on their scholarship, recent studies by Pisan historian Mario Chiaverini have added important details regarding the siege of Pisa in 1500.¹² However, these studies are not sufficient to understand the conflict as a whole because they only single out certain aspects or events of the war; more research in this direction is required.

The historians of the Second Florentine Republic (1494-1512), too, have shown less interest in the Pisan War than one would expect. In their studies, the war has been mentioned only contextually, usually in connection to the main topic of their work. For instance, the Pisan conflict appears in numerous studies on the Florentine Republic's political, financial, and constitutional history.¹³ However, most of these studies fail to acknowledge the importance the Pisan War had for the cultural history of Florence.¹⁴ As a result, Florentine historiography remains in need of a

¹¹ For example, Fanucci, Volpe, Scaramella, and Gentile traced Pisa's diplomatic relations with other Italian states and major European powers during the first few years of the conflict. They placed the Pisan War in the center of international politics between 1495 and 1499, a fact often sidelined in historiography. Their extensive work with diplomatic sources suggests that France was double-dealing with both Florence and Pisa, a fact very important for understanding Machiavelli's first diplomatic mission to France in 1500. On the other hand, Luzzati and Benvenuti focused on the internal perspective of the conflict by looking into the social and class tensions in Pisa during the war. They emphasized the prominent role the Pisan *contadini* played during the conflict.

¹² Mario Chiaverini, *La guerra del Rinascimento tra Pisa e Firenze* (Pisa: Marich, 2014).

¹³ Some major studies include Nicolai Rubinstein, "I primi anni del Consiglio Maggiore di Firenze (1494-1499)," *Archivio storico italiano*, cxii (1954): 151-94; Giorgio Cadoni, *Lotte politiche e riforme istituzionali a Firenze tra il 1494 e il 1502* (Roma: Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo, 1999); Humphrey C. Butters, *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth Century Florence, 1502-1519* (Oxford, 1985): 83-119; L. F. Marks, "La crisi finanziaria a Firenze dal 1494 al 1502," *Archivio storico italiano* 112 (1954): 40-72; For the constitutional aspects of this "crisis," see Roslyn Presman Cooper, "L'elezione di Pier Soderini a Gonfaloniere a vita," *Archivio storico italiano* 125 (1976): 145-85; Lorenzo Polizzotto, *The Elect Nation: The Savonarola Movement in Florence 1494-1545* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994); Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola in Florence. Prophecy and Patriotism in the Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

¹⁴ While some historians did acknowledge Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti's work for the Florentine government in this period, they generally failed to emphasize the primacy of war propaganda and diplomacy in their commissions and creations, and the Pisan War as one of its main catalyst. For more on Leonardo's life and work during the Second Republic, see Carlo Pedretti, *Leonardo: A Study in Chronology and Style* (University of California Press: Los Angeles, 1973); For Leonardo and Machiavelli see Edmondo Solmi, "Leonardo e Machiavelli," *Archivio storico Lombardo*, 17 (1912): 209-244; Alessandro Cecchi, "Niccolò Machiavelli o Marcello Virgilio Adriani? Sul programma e l'assetto compositivo delle Battaglie di Leonardo e Michelangelo per la Sala del Maggior Consiglio in Palazzo Vecchio," *Prospettiva*, No. 83/84 (Luglio - Ottobre 1996): 102-115; For Leonardo's work as a military engineer for the Second Republic, see Roger Masters, *Fortune is a River: Leonardo da Vinci and Niccolò Machiavelli's Magnificent Dream to Change the Course of Florentine History* (Plume Book: New York, 1999); Roger Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo, and the Science of Power* (University Notre Dame Press: London, 2004); Carlo Pedretti, "La Verruca," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Winter, 1972): 417-425; For Leonardo's work on the *Battle of Anghiari* mural (1505) see Johannes Wilde, "The

study that will acknowledge and further explore the role of the Pisan conflict in the history of the Second Florentine Republic.

Fortunately, the primary material on the topic is rich and diverse in scope, ranging from various Florentine, Pisan, Venetian, Milanese, and French personal accounts (histories, diaries, poems, memoirs, biographies, panegyrics, and letters),¹⁵ to day-to-day government documents, such as diplomatic correspondence, laws, missives, military provisions, *condotte*, and ordinances for the citizen army.¹⁶ Most of these sources are edited, printed, and readily available in libraries,

Hall of the Great Council of Florence,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 7 (1944): 65-81; Carmen C. Bambach, “The Purchases of Cartoon Paper for Leonardo’s “Battle of Anghiari” and Michelangelo’s “Battle of Cascina,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance*, Vol. 8 (1999): 105-133; For major works on Michelangelo’s *David* see Charles Seymour, *Michelangelo’s David, a Search for Identity* (Pittsburgh, 1967); Saul Levine, “The Location of Michelangelo’s David: The Meeting of January 25, 1504,” *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Mar., 1974): 31-49; Michael Hirst, “Michelangelo in Florence: “David” in 1503 and “Hercules” in 1506,” *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 142, No. 1169 (Aug., 2000): 487-492; For Michelangelo’s painting of the *Battle of Cascina*, see Luisa Morozzi, “La “Battaglia di Cascina” di Michelangelo: nuova ipotesi sulla data di commissione,” *Prospettiva*, No. 53/56, Volume I (Aprile 1988 - Gennaio 1989): 67-82.

¹⁵ For the Florentine sources see Francesco Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia*, a cura di E. Scarano, in Guicciardini, *Opere* vol. I, (Torino: UTET, 1981); Bartolomeo Cerretani, *Storia Fiorentina*, a cura di G. Berti (Firenze: Olschki, 1994); Marco Parenti, *Storia Fiorentina (1496-1502)* (Firenze, 1994); Jacopo Nardi, *Le Storie della città di Firenze* (Firenze, 1584); Filippo Del Nerli, *Commentari dei fatti civili occorsi dentro la città di Firenze dall’anno 1215 all’anno 1537* (Augusta: Mertz, 1728); Biagio Buonaccorsi, *Diario de’ successi seguiti in Italia e particolarmente in Firenze dell’anno 1496 al 1512* (Firenze, 1568); Jacopo Pitti, “Vita di Antonio Giacomini,” ed. C. Monzani, *Archivio storico italiano*, ser. 2, IV (1853): 75-370; Pitti, “Istoria Fiorentina,” ed. F.L. Polidori, *Archivio storico italiano*, ser. 1, I (1842): 1-197; Luca Landucci, *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516* (G. C. Sansoni, 1883); Vincenzo Acciaiuoli, “Vita di Piero di Gino Capponi,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1853): 13-40; For the Pisan authors, see Giovanni Portovenieri, “Memoriale dall’anno 1494 sino al 1502,” *Archivio storico italiano*, 6, part 2 (1845): 281– 360; Perizolo da Pisa, “Ricordi dall’anno 1422 sino al 1510,” a cura di Francesco Bonaini, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, VI p. 2° sez. 2° (1845): 385-396; Piero Vaglienti, *Storia dei suoi tempi, 1492-1514*, ed. Giuliana Berti, Michele Luzzati, Ezio Tongiorgi (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi e Pacini, 1982); Leonardo Sfrinati, *De Bello italico*, a cura di Paola Ircani (Pisa: Marich, 2017); Lo scrittore anonimo, “La guerra del Millecinquecento,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, v. 2, (1845): 330-375; For the Venetian authors, see Girolamo Priuli, *I Diarii*, ed. Arturo Segre and Roberto Cessi, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 24, part 3 (Bologna, 1912-38); Marino Sanuto, *La spedizione di Carlo VIII in Italia*, ed. R. Fulin (Venice: M. Visentini, 1883); M. Sanuto, *I Diarii*, ed. R. Fulin et al., 58 vols., (Venice: Reale Deputazione veneta di storia patria, 1879– 1903); Antonio Giustinian, *Dispacci*, ed. Pasquale Villari, 3 vols., (Florence, 1876); Francesco Foscari, “Dispacci al Senato veneto nel 1496,” *Archivio storico italiano*, 7 (1844): 721– 948; French accounts on the Pisan War can be found in Philippe de Commynes, *Mémoires*, ed. Joseph Calmette, 3 vols., (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1924– 5); Paul Pélicier, (ed.), *Lettres de Charles VIII*, 5 vols., (Paris: Renouard, 1898– 1905); Jean d’Auton, *Chroniques de Louis XII*, ed. R. de Maulde, 4 vols., (Paris: Renouard, 1889– 96); Jean Godefroy (ed.), *Lettres du Roy Louis XII et du Cardinal d’Amboise*, 4 vols., (Brussels: Françoise Foppens, 1712).

¹⁶ Abel Désjardins, and Giuseppe Canestrini, *Négociations diplomatiques de la France avec la Toscane*, 6 vols., (Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1859– 86); Denis Fachard, *Consulte e Pratiche della Repubblica Fiorentina 1495-1497* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 2002); Fachard, *Consulte e Pratiche della Repubblica Fiorentina 1498-1505* (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1993); Id., *Consulte e Pratiche della Repubblica Fiorentina 1505-1512*, (Genève: Droz, 1988); Gino

or online via Internet Archive, Gallica, JSTOR, and Manus online libraries. All unpublished documents important to my dissertation, including many unedited private letters, diplomatic correspondence between states, and minutiae for hiring and supplying troops, are located across Italy in various archives and libraries.¹⁷ Scholars should be aware, however, that although those sources are very useful in terms of their availability and for comparison with Machiavelli's accounts of the same events, they pose challenges regarding the potential biases and personal agendas of each author.

While Machiavelli scholarship has occasionally mentioned the Florentine thinker's role in the conquest of Pisa, no account examines this question in depth. Interested researchers must rely predominantly on the primary material written by Machiavelli himself, as the secondary sources provide only bits and pieces on the matter, scattered over countless biographies of Machiavelli and specialized studies on his political and diplomatic activity or the Florentine militia.¹⁸ Thus, one of the main goals of this dissertation is to offer a critical synthesis of various accounts of Machiavelli's role in the Pisan War. To achieve this, I draw mainly from Machiavelli's writings.

Capponi, (ed.), "Capitoli fatti dalla città di Firenze col re Carlo VIII a di 25 di novembre 1494," *Archivio storico italiano*, 1, (1842): 363–75.

¹⁷ Most sources can be found in *Archivio di Stato di Pisa* (ASP), *Archivio di Stato di Firenze* (ASF), *Archivio di Stato di Milano* (ASM), *Archivio di Stato di Venezia* (ASV), *Archivio di Stato di Siena* (ASS), *Orsini Archivio Capitolino* in Rome, and *La Bibliothèque Nationale* in Paris (BNF).

¹⁸ It would be literally impossible to enlist here all scholarly works that mention some aspects of Machiavelli's involvement in the Pisan conflict. For that reason, I will mention here only major studies that I used as a point of departure for writing this dissertation. For Machiavelli's diplomatic and political activity during the Pisan War, see Nicolai Rubinstein, "The Beginnings of Niccolò Machiavelli's career in the Florentine Chancery," *Italian Studies* (1956): 72-91; Myron Piper Gilmore, (ed.), "Machiavelli and Florentine politics" in *Studies on Machiavelli*, (Florence, 1972): 3-28; Robert Black, "Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 71–100; For Machiavelli's militia see: C.C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence* (Toronto, 1961), 178-240; Carlo Dionisotti, "Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia e Don Michele," in *Rivista storica italiana*, lxxix (1967): 960-75; John Lerner, "Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli, and the Romagnol militia," *Studi Romagnoli*, 17 (1966): 253-268; Andrea Guidi, *Un Segretario militante: politica, diplomazia e armi nel Cancelliere Machiavelli* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009); Mikael Hörnqvist, "Perché non si usa allegare i Romani: Machiavelli and the Florentine Militia of 1506," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 55, (2002): 148–91; Robert Black, "Machiavelli and the Militia: New Thoughts," *Italian Studies*, no. 69 (2014): 41-50.

Most of this material is edited, printed, and easily available online. The sources I most rely on include Machiavelli's official correspondence during the years 1498 to 1509 with the war commissioners at the Pisan front, government officials within the Florentine dominion, and the Signoria. Most of Machiavelli's official letters and dispatches regarding the Pisan War have been edited and published in several separate collections. Italian scholar Giuseppe Canestrini compiled the first noteworthy collection of documents regarding Machiavelli and the Pisan War, which served as a point of departure for the late 19th-century biographers Oreste Tommasini and Pasquale Villari.¹⁹ Two decades after Canestrini, the Passerini-Milanesi edition (1875-1877) brought together numerous diplomatic missions of Machiavelli and included for the first time the letters received by Machiavelli.²⁰ While this edition includes as many as forty-three of Machiavelli's missions, it represents only a very small portion of his copious output while in office.

Nearly a century after Passerini-Milanesi, a new critical edition of the Machiavellian diplomatic correspondence appeared. Historian Fredi Chiappelli, in collaboration with Jean-Jacques Marchand, planned seven volumes under the title *Legazioni. Commissarie. Scritti di governo* (1971-1985).²¹ However, due to the closing of the "Scrittori d'Italia" imprint at Laterza,

¹⁹ Giuseppe Canestrini, *Scritti Inediti di Niccolò Machiavelli* (Florence: Barbera, Bianchi and Co., 1857) and *Documenti per servire alla storia della milizia italiana dal XIII al XVI secolo*, (Loescher: Roma, 1883-1911); Oreste Tommasini, *La vita e gli scritti di Niccolò Machiavelli nella loro relazione col machiavellismo*, 2 vol., (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994-2003).

²⁰ Luigi Passerini and Gaetano Milanesi, *Le Legazioni e commissarie di Niccolò Machiavelli* (Florence-Rome, 1875-1877). The majority of Machiavelli's letters and dispatches in the Passerini-Milanesi collection deal directly with the Pisan conflict from 1499 to 1505. They testify to Machiavelli's correspondence with the war commissioners in the camp and the Signoria during several campaigns to conquer the city. It is important to mention that this collection contains documents that are badly attributed to Machiavelli. It took more than six decades for this error to be fixed. In 1964, Sergio Bertelli's edition corrected the previous one by reducing Machiavelli's missions to thirty-four and by attributing to Machiavelli what is legitimately his. See N. Machiavelli, *Legazioni e Commissarie*, a cura di S. Bertelli, (Feltrinelli, 1964).

²¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Legazioni. Commissarie. Scritti di Governo (1501-1503)*, vol. II, a cura di Fredi Chiappelli, (Bari, Laterza, 1973). In reality, Jean-Jacques Marchand and Chiappelli were already the authors of the notes for volume I. The documents published in this edition represent two distinct types of Machiavellian production: the *Legazioni* and *Commissarie*, or the dispatches sent by Machiavelli when he was on a mission; and the Government writings including both dispatches written by the Florentine secretary on behalf of the Ten and other official bodies.

the publication of this edition came to a halt in the midst of volume IV, which corresponds to the year 1505. Later, under the coordination of Jean-Jacques Marchand, the edition that Chiappelli had started was finally printed in seven volumes.²² The first six volumes of Marchand's edition, which cover the years 1498 to 1510, have been indispensable for the writing of this dissertation, based as they are on a new inventory of autograph documents, a new selection of texts, and a new transcription of letters. Also included are several dozen previously unpublished documents from Machiavelli's hand, and a collection of his early political writings, which are essential for understanding the development and trajectory of his political thought.

In recent decades, some of the still unpublished chancery documents have been published in a few journals, including a rich set of thirty texts, by Denis Fachard.²³ Fachard's work on the Florentine *Consulte e pratiche*, which covers the period between 1495 and 1512 in 4 volumes, is an equally important source for this study.²⁴ The years covered in this edition coincide closely with Machiavelli's years in the chancery and his administrative and diplomatic work there. They are valuable not only for Machiavelli scholars but also for historians of the republican institutions and international relations at the time.

The Structure

This dissertation is divided into six chapters that chronologically follow Machiavelli's years in office. Chapter one has two aims: first, to set the stage for the main topic of this dissertation by introducing to the readers a short history of the conflict between Florence and Pisa that led to the

²² J. J. Marchand, *Legazioni. Commissarie e scritti di governo*, vol. I-VII (1498-1527), a cura di Jean-Jacques Marchand (Rome, 2001-2011); J. J. Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli. I primi scritti politici (1499-1512). Nascita di un pensiero e di uno stile* (Padova: Antenore, 1975); Machiavelli, *Opere*, a cura di C. Vivanti, 3 vol. (Turin: Einaudi, 1997-2005).

²³ "Gli scritti cancellereschi inediti di Machiavelli Durante il primo quinquennio a Palazzo Vecchio," in *La Lingua e le lingue di Machiavelli*, ed. A. Pontremoli, Proceedings of the International Colloquium of Turin, 2-4 December 1999 (Florence, Olschki, 2001): 87-121.

²⁴ Denis Fachard, *Consulte e Pratiche della Repubblica Fiorentina 1498-1505* (Genoa: Droz, 1993).

Pisan rebellion of 1494; second, to trace some of the earliest examples of Machiavelli's emerging political thought, born as the product of specific historical circumstances, such as Florence's war against Venice in the Casentino (1498-1499). Based on the close reading of Machiavelli's early dispatches from June 1498 to July 1499 and his first political writing known as *Discorso sopra Pisa*, this chapter explores how Machiavelli's early chancery writings served as a vehicle for the development and transmission of his first political ideas. Despite their official character, the documents confirm the omnipresence of Machiavelli's patriotic zeal, his fervent republicanism, and his utmost loyalty to his government.

The main goal of chapter two is to investigate Machiavelli's role in a five-century-long controversy surrounding the execution of the Florentine Captain Paolo Vitelli in October 1499.²⁵ The official letters and dispatches Machiavelli wrote shortly before and after the event portrayed Vitelli as a traitor, and thus defended Signoria's decision to execute the captain. However, in *The Prince* (ch.xii), Machiavelli changed his tone, implying that it was the captain's fame and Florentine insecurity that led to his execution, not the alleged act of treason. Given that many contemporaries praised Vitelli and doubted his guilt, Machiavelli's ambivalent positioning seems all the more puzzling and thus requires explanation. Through the first sustained analysis of the Vitelli affair, this chapter will shed new light on Machiavelli's early involvement in Florence's political machinations. It will argue that Machiavelli, as a loyal servant to his beloved republic, coordinated, defended, and justified in his writings the course of action against Vitelli not because he genuinely believed Paolo was guilty of treason, but because his execution was required for the maintenance of the public good and the state's security.

²⁵ For Paolo Vitelli's biography see Ariodante Fabretti, "Paolo Vitelli da Città di Castello," in *Biografie dei capitani venturieri dell'Umbria*, 3 vol., (Montepulciano, 1844), 71-87; Giorgio Nicasi, *La famiglia Vitelli di Città di Castello e la Repubblica fiorentina fino al 1504*, 2 vol., (Perugia, 1916); Fredi Chiappelli, "Guicciardini, Machiavelli e il caso di Paolo," *Annali d'Italianistica*, Vol. 2 (1984): 53-63.

Chapter three investigates Machiavelli's role in the siege of Pisa in 1500 and his subsequent diplomatic mission to the French king Louis XII (1500-1501). The main aim of this chapter is to examine those two events in detail and reveal the lessons Machiavelli drew from them. This chapter will show that, although the events were traumatic for Machiavelli, they also provided him with invaluable lessons that he employed as the groundwork for *The Prince*. Machiavelli's experience with auxiliary troops during the siege of Pisa negatively influenced his perception of Florence's dependence on foreign, and especially French, arms. As for Machiavelli's journey to France, it opened up for him a new field of political observation and enlarged his mental horizon. The lessons he learned there on power, politics, and human nature, he projected later in *The Prince*. We will see that there is a clear continuity in Machiavelli's intellectual formation that connects his early chancery writings with his later works.

Chapter four is divided into two parts. The first deals with the Florentine government's attempt to divert river Arno from its course in order to deprive Pisa of water and eventually force the city's surrender. Apart from Roger Masters' unconvincing attempt to prove the alleged friendship and cooperation between Leonardo da Vinci and Machiavelli, the Florentine secretary's role in the Arno project has attracted little to no attention in historiography. Yet Machiavelli's dispatches from August 22, 1504, to the end of October 1504 reveal that he played a prominent role in the project. From his office in Florence, Machiavelli first coordinated the recruitment and placement of more than 2,000 workers from the *contado* and *distretto* towards the work camp and then dealt with the project's many difficulties. Although the Arno project failed, it represents one of the most ambitious of Renaissance engineering projects. The second part of this chapter examines the Florentine government's use of visual imagery and propaganda, embodied in the masterpieces of Michelangelo and Leonardo, to raise the spirit of its citizens and direct public

funds towards the Pisan War effort. While the historiography of the Anghiari and Cascina battle murals and the statue of David is immense, the importance of the Pisan War as the political context in which these works were commissioned remains under investigation.²⁶

Chapter five has two aims: first, to explore Machiavelli's intellectual and practical work on the Florentine militia, and to offer, for the first time in historiography, a critical assessment of his famous project. Contrary to modern historiography that traces Machiavelli's exposure to peasant militia from 1502 and his time spent with Cesare Borgia, I will show that his initial experience with peasant soldiers came years earlier by way of two previously unacknowledged sources: abbot Basilio Nardi and Caterina Sforza of Imola. Their successful leadership of the Casentino and Romagnol militias respectively strongly influenced Machiavelli's military thinking, and thus contributed to the creation of the Florentine militia in 1506. Second, Machiavelli's campaign for *armi proprie* has often been praised in historiography, as many have attributed the successful end of the Pisan campaign to Machiavelli's "citizen militia". However, apart from its purpose and potential, Machiavelli's peasant militia has never been assessed in historiography from a social perspective. Thus, in this chapter, I consider the experience of recruitment from the side of the peasants, showing that Machiavelli's militia was not a "citizen" militia at all and never attempted to be one, for the reason that the Florentine *ottimati* would never have accepted it as such. Due to the lack of benefits received by the peasants and the oppressive measures exercised against them by the government, peasants often refused to join Machiavelli's militia or deserted

²⁶ For the *Battle of Anghiari* painting see Martin Kemp, *Leonardo da Vinci* (Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1981), 234-247, and 360-361; Travers Newton and John R. Spencer, "On the Location of Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari," *Art Bulletin*, 64, (1982): 45-51; For the *Battle of Cascina* mural see Johannes Wilde, "Michelangelo and Leonardo," *Burlington Magazine*, XIV, (1953): 73; Charles de Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo*, 2nd ed., (Princeton, 1947): 216-217; Luzia Morozzi, "La Battaglia di Cascina di Michelangelo," 320-324; Nicolai Rubinstein, "Machiavelli and the Mural Decoration of the Hall of the Great Council of Florence," in *Musagetes. Festschrift für Wolfram Prinz zu seinem 60. Geburtstag am* (Berlin, 1991), 275-285; Alessandro Cecchi, "Niccolo Machiavelli o Marcello Virgilio Adriani? Sul programma e l'assetto compositivo delle Battaglie di Leonardo e Michelangelo per la Sala del Maggior Consiglio in Palazzo Vecchio," *Prospettiva* 83-84, (1996): 102.

from it. This stands in stark contrast to the experience of the Pisan peasant fighters, who were granted citizenship rights in 1499. What motivation did the Florentine peasantry have to fight as subjects of an empire that offered them no privileges? I claim that Pisan peasants who fought in the war and negotiated peace alongside their nobles and citizens were far more in the mold of “Roman” citizen-soldiers than Machiavelli’s Florentine peasants ever were.

Finally, chapter six aims to demonstrate that during the last few years of the conflict, especially after the removal of the celebrated general Antonio Giacomini (1506), Machiavelli took over as chief architect of Pisa’s conquest. Previous chapters will have shown that the Pisans had maintained a long, heroic, and successful defense. They would certainly have continued it longer without the implementation of Machiavelli’s plan to create despair within the city by burning its crops and preventing the entry of food. Despite his lack of military background, Machiavelli used his rich diplomatic and political experience to bring about Pisa’s surrender. His ideological and practical work in creating the Florentine militia, along with his military stratagems, led ultimately to Pisa’s defeat on June 8th, 1509.

Methodology

My study of Machiavelli and the Pisan War takes a distinctive approach to the primary material. Rather than dismissing Machiavelli’s early dispatches as terse and dry official correspondence, I read them closely and grouped them according to the themes they cover. This approach has proved fruitful as it has allowed me to explore several important topics that re-emerge in Machiavelli’s post-1512 opus. My dissertation will demonstrate that Machiavelli’s early correspondence with republican magistracies and officials on the periphery of the Florentine dominion, together with his political speeches and poems, are an essential historical source for scholars hoping to trace the trajectory of his ideas over time. Although this correspondence is

formal, brief, and written for a specific purpose, it nevertheless reveals Machiavelli's personality, attitudes, wishes, fears, and desires. In these dispatches, he criticizes, advises, consults, warns, reminds, praises, and lectures his friends and fellow officials. These letters thus reveal to us a differently constrained Machiavelli than the one who speaks in *The Prince*, where the author's ideas are colored by his personal and professional failures and his desire to impress the new Medici lords.

Likewise, Machiavelli's critical skills, sharp tongue, prickly nature, and undoubtedly the turbulent times in which he lived and worked, separate him from the previous chancery tradition. According to Machiavelli's scholar Robert Black, while there was a continuity between the humanist chancellors at the end of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century, that was not the case with Machiavelli.²⁷ Although it seems that his *scritti di governo* are far less independent because he wrote them from Palazzo Vecchio where those documents could be censored, my research will show that Machiavelli's voice shows far more freedom of thought than one would expect. Similarly, for his *Legazioni*, sent from France or Borgia's court, Machiavelli had more autonomy as an author. Sometimes he went too far with his input so that his friends from the chancery had to warn him about it. This confirms that Machiavelli broke the barriers with the previous tradition and that his official documents deserve more attention than they have received so far.

Ultimately, the present study does not adopt any particular ideological paradigm in examining Machiavelli's role in the Pisan War. Leaving aside the centuries-long academic bickering over which school of thought Machiavelli should be assigned to, I approach the Florentine thinker not as a political theorist, champion of democracy, or even as the evil Machiavel,

²⁷ Black, "Machiavelli in the chancery," 32.

but as a practical man who passionately served his government and faithfully defended some of its most controversial decisions. Thus, regarding Machiavelli's role in the Pisan War, I use a multidisciplinary approach as much as possible. As well as the diplomatic and military histories that have often been consulted by Machiavelli scholars, I turn to cultural, art, and social history, particularly in chapters four and five.

Work on the present study has not been without challenges. While the quantity of primary materials is abundant and encouraging for researchers, problems still exist and are not easy to overcome. One of the most daunting challenges regarding those documents, especially in comparison to Machiavelli's post-1512 opus, is their official character and purpose. It is sometimes difficult to discern what Machiavelli truly believed at the time of their composition. Where is the line between private and public? Did Machiavelli agree or disagree with the decisions his government made? Did he always follow the official line in his dispatches, or did he have the freedom to express his own opinions? The fact that Machiavelli did not always confine himself to transmitting the orders of his superiors, and that he often could not resist giving advice, providing directions, and making suggestions, only complicates the matter. One way to address this challenge, though not ideal, is to compare Machiavelli's pre- and post-1512 observations on similar topics with other sources, as this dissertation does. Where such comparison was not possible, I have consulted accounts on the same or similar topic from contemporary chroniclers and historians such as Vaglienti, Parenti, Landucci, Guicciardini, and others.

Ultimately, scholars should be aware that there are still some of Machiavelli's autographs written during the Pisan War that remain unedited and unpublished. The recent discovery by Daniele Conti of Machiavelli's *Frammenti Storici* in the Florence National Central Library proves this point. Machiavelli's grandson, Giuliano de' Ricci (1543-1606), engaged himself in

reorganizing and copying some of the papers of his grandfather into a manuscript known today as “Apografo Ricci.”²⁸ Thanks to Ricci’s work, we have today 100 pages of completely unedited and unknown texts by Machiavelli covering Florentine history for the period between 1497 and 1515. Findings from this work could completely change our perception of Machiavelli’s years in the chancery and help us solve the challenges discussed above. Written most likely in the post-1512 period, the *Frammenti*, composed without fear of censorship or sanction from his superiors, will probably provide us with a clearer picture of how Machiavelli perceived his years in public office.

I hope that the Machiavelli scholarship will welcome this study with all its new findings, innovative approaches, and imperfections. The fact that in the period from 1498 to 1509, Niccolò Machiavelli, the Florentine War Secretary and Second Chancellor, served as the chief architect of the Florentine military effort to conquer Pisa deserves attention in historiography. Machiavelli wrote countless letters and dispatches regarding the conflict, partook in several diplomatic missions within Italy and abroad on its account, and organized a militia for the ultimate blow against the rebellious city. From his first dispatches in 1498 to the triumph of 1509, the Pisan problem centrally preoccupied Machiavelli’s activity and writing. It served as a cauldron for the later political ideas and theories for which he is famous. Thus, without a proper understanding of the influence the Pisan War had on Machiavelli and his intellectual formation, we can never fully understand the Florentine political thinker. I hope that my dissertation will make a significant contribution in this direction.

²⁸ Florence, Florence National Central Library, Palatino, E.B.15.10 striscia 1414.
https://www.corriere.it/cultura/20_ottobre_08/machiavelli-carte-ritrovate-1773d4b4-08c4-11eb-ab0e-c425b38361b4.shtml

CHAPTER 1

BAPTISM OF FIRE (1498-1499)

1.1. Introduction

One of the main goals of this chapter is to examine Machiavelli's first year in the office and his early correspondence with the war commissioners and Florentine officials in the *distretto*. Due to their official character and the lack of lengthy theoretical digressions or lessons that were not expected from the Florentine secretary by his superiors, Machiavelli's chancery writings did not attract sufficient attention in historiography. However, a close reading of Machiavelli's early dispatches shows that from the day he assumed his post in the Republican administration in June 1498, the conquest of Pisa was his top priority. Swept up by republican zeal, patriotism, and ardent desire to contribute to the war efforts, Machiavelli took advantage of every occasion to criticize, praise, advise, comfort, and lecture his colleagues and government officials within the dominion. In doing so, Machiavelli revealed to us some of the themes that occupied his intellect at the time, such as the notion of ideal citizenship, love of the *Patria*, care for the Florentine subjects, intervention of God and *fortuna* in human affairs, dichotomy between love and force, and many more. As the themes that emerge in Machiavelli's earliest writings appear again in his post-1512 opus, this chapter attempts to make a visible bridge in his intellectual formation.

Apart from Machiavelli's early correspondence, this chapter aims to assess Machiavelli's first diplomatic missions in Piombino and Forlì from a new angle. The mission to Piombino has been glossed over in historiography, while the scholarly work on Machiavelli's mission to Forlì has largely been preoccupied with the question of whether it was Machiavelli who outwitted Caterina Sforza or the other way around. On the contrary, my intention here is, rather, twofold;

first, to examine the missions in their wider political and military contexts, emphasizing the Pisan War as the main reason behind them; second, to reveal the lessons Machiavelli learned during his first missions as they proved to be valuable for his understanding of the problems that plagued the Florentine state.

1.2. The origins of the Pisan conflict

To better understand Machiavelli's first year in the office and his treatment of the Pisan conflict, we need to delve first into its history that long predates Machiavelli. The following text will show that the rivalry of Florence with the city of the leaning tower was the most heated of the whole communal period, starting for mostly economic reasons during the first quarter of the thirteenth century and escalating over time as each city strove for hegemony over Tuscany.²⁹ In the Middle Ages, due to its favorable geographical position close to the mouth of the Arno River, Pisa came to enjoy a considerable degree of economic growth and political power. This situation naturally led to a conflict with Genoa, the other great maritime power in the region. In the Battle of Meloria in the Ligurian Sea in 1294, Pisa was defeated and consequently lost much of its former influence in the Mediterranean.³⁰ During the same period, the Florentine Republic was expanding its influence in Tuscany through well-established trading networks in Italy and abroad. With the expansion of the Florentine economy, Pisa became a serious trade rival and an attractive prize for a trading center like the landlocked Florence.³¹

²⁹ The conflict between Florence and Pisa has been the object of diverse interpretations; for Piero Pieri, it was a short revival of the ancient communal spirit. See Piero Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare italiana* (Turin, 1952), 376-77; For Eugenio Dupr -Theseider, it was a rivalry between two cities with different economies and political systems exacerbated by foreign intervention. See E. Dupr -Theseider, "L'intervento di Ferdinando il Cattolico nella guerra di Pisa," in *Fernando el Catolico e Italia* (Zaragoza, 1954): 19-41; For Michele Luzzati, the Pisan War was an attempt at political affirmation and social redemption by the lower classes. See M. Luzzati, *Una guerra di popolo: Lettere private del tempo dell'assedio di Pisa (1494-1509)* (Pisa, 1973).

³⁰ For the conflict between Pisa and Genoa see David Abulafia and Rosamond McKitterick, *The New Cambridge Medieval History: c. 1198–c. 1300* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 439.

³¹ For the subsequent Florentine maritime expansion, see Michael Mallett, *The Florentine Galleys in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1967).

In the final decades of the fourteenth century, the balance that had reigned for almost two centuries shifted to the advantage of Florence. While the latter experienced success in the creation of a domain of regional dimension, Pisa faced the difficulties of a severe economic and political crisis. However, when the lord of Pisa, Gherardo Appiani, sold the city to Gian Galeazzo Visconti, lord of Milan, at the beginning of 1399, it seemed that Florence might be the next prize in Visconti's ever-growing empire.³² However, Gian Galeazzo's sudden death in early September 1402 proved a blow to the fortunes of the Pisans. Relieved of the Visconti threat, Florence saw the possibility of resolving the contest with its Tuscan rival once and for all. In the division of the vast Visconti dominions, Pisa was handed over to Gian Galeazzo's illegitimate son, the weak and ineffective Gabriele Maria Visconti, who in turn sold the rights to the city to Florence in the summer of 1405.³³ Not surprisingly, the Pisans, whose antipathy to Florence exceeded even their hatred of the Milanese domination, refused to submit to the arrangement and prepared for war. After a long campaign, the Florentine troops captured the city on October 9, 1406. Pisa took its place alongside San Miniato, Arezzo, Pistoia, Cortona, and later Livorno as a formerly independent city subsumed within the growing sphere of Florentine domination.³⁴

The Florentine acquisition of Pisa was a major event in the history of late medieval Italy. It brought to a close the long rivalry between two of Italy's leading commercial centers, ended the independent history of one of the peninsula's great maritime republics, and gave Florentine trade an outlet to the sea. During the time of Cosimo and Lorenzo de Medici, the wealth, prosperity, and international prestige of Florence soared, due largely to the benefits conferred by possession of the

³² Bueno de Mesquita and Daniel Meredith, *Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan (1351–1402)* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).

³³ The deal, in which the Genoese had a hand, was exceedingly complex. In the end, Gabriele Maria Visconti received just 80,000 florins, though, under the circumstances, he was glad to get even that much. See Bella Duffy, *The Tuscan Republics (Florence, Siena, Pisa, and Lucca), With Genoa* (Wentworth Press, 2016), 214-215.

³⁴ Duffy, *The Tuscan Republics*, 216.

port of Pisa. For Florence, the conquest marked a leap forward in its program of systematic territorial expansion that now encompassed nearly the whole of Tuscany, with the exceptions of Lucca and Siena.

1.3. The Rebellion of November 9, 1494.

Considering the importance of Pisa to the Florentine economy and the Tuscan state, it is shocking that the Pisan rebels, on November 9, 1494, were able to proclaim independence and reclaim their city without a fight. While Piero Medici's inept dealings with the French king were largely responsible for the disaster, other factors played a part as well. For example, although Florentine rule did indeed bring some benefits to the Pisans (such as the famous *Studio* and military protection), it also suppressed Pisa's long republican tradition and its ardent desire for liberty.³⁵ Likewise, Piero de Medici's hasty decision to deliver Pisa into French hands without a fight

³⁵ The views of Anglo-American and Italian scholarship on Pisa under the Florentine dominion in the fifteenth century (1406-1494) significantly differ. While the Anglo-American scholars tend to see the Florentine rule over Pisa in a positive light, pointing at its various benefits for the population, Italian scholars of the fifteenth-century Pisa argued that Florentine rule over Pisa was repressive, and certainly never friendly or beneficial. The Anglo-American scholarly research on fifteenth-century Pisa, as Michael Mallett put it, "has spent more time reflecting on the past glories" than on the new situation created by the acquisition by Florence. See Michael Mallett, "Pisa and Florence in the Fifteenth Century: Aspects of the Period of the First Florentine Domination," in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (Evanston, Ill., 1968), 403; See also Michael Mallett, *The Florentine Galleys in the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1967); Nicolai Rubinstein, "The Place of the Empire in fifteenth-Century Florentine Political Opinion and Diplomacy," *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, xxx (1957): 125-135; Paul F. Grendler, "The University of Florence and Pisa in the High Renaissance," *Renaissance and Reformation*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (August / août 1982): 157-165; Paula Clarke, *The Soderini and Medici: Power and Patronage in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (Oxford, 1991). On the contrary, Italian scholarship has traditionally focused on three topics: Florentine repressive control, heavy taxation, and economic depression. The point of departure is Pietro Silva's work that covers the period between 1406 and 1433. According to Silva, "Rich Florentine businessmen moved to Pisa after 1406 behaving like real padroni, rude and arrogant." (Silva, 535). Also, according to Silva, the wool industry, one of the main sources of the Pisan economy was prohibited, as well as the freedom of shipping and unloading. For this reason, many rich Pisans decided to live in Florence, far from the center of their activities. All of this contributed to the economic ruin of Pisa. See Pietro Silva, "Pisa sotto Firenze dal 1406 al 1433," in *Studi Storici*, vol. XVIII (1909-10): 133-183; For similar arguments see Maria Luisa Mori, *La Dominazione Fiorentina a Pisa dal 1451 al 1469* (Pisa, 1936); Ultimately, according to Pisan historian Lupo Gentile, the Pisan rebellion of 1494 has much to do with the Florentine rule over the city and its *contado*. (Gentile, 9, cit., 2 and 3). To what extent the Florentine domination was unbearable for the Pisans illustrates a message from the Pisan ambassadors to the French king from December 2, 1494, claiming that Florentine domination "was like the one in Pharaonic Egypt." See Gentile, *Pisa, Florence, and Carlo VII*, 9-11. Given the contradictions between the two scholarly traditions, much remains to be determined before a clear picture of the state of Pisa in the fifteenth century can emerge, and with it a better understanding of the Pisan rebellion of 1494.

showed the Pisans that Florence was militarily feeble in comparison to France, whose protection Pisa now craved. Thus, the arrival of the French king in Pisa on November 08, 1494, provided an opportunity for the populace to demonstrate where their sympathies lay.³⁶

Contemporary chroniclers agree that, a day after the French king's arrival in Pisa, Simone Orlandi, at the head of a delegation representing all citizens, went to the Medici palace to beg the king to liberate Pisa from the Florentine yoke.³⁷ Whether the king's response to this plea was positive or negative is open to a debate, but the popular rumor was that he had given his assent. The effect of this belief on the Pisan *popolo* was irreversible. According to Portovenieri, shortly after the meeting between the king and the Pisan delegation, people started flocking into the streets shouting "libertà" and "Franza."³⁸ The crowd soon turned violent, throwing the *Marzocco*, the symbol of Florentine domination in Pisa, into the river Arno and attacking Florentine officials. This development was not what the king had desired or expected, but under the circumstances, he accepted it.³⁹ On the very same day, with no knowledge of what had transpired in Pisa, the citizens of Florence rose against the Medici regime, expelling Piero and his family from the city, and proclaiming the Second Republic.⁴⁰ In a whirlwind series of events, the French king's passage

³⁶ The sense of communal liberty lost in the past was still strong in Pisa at the time of the French invasion. Thus, many Pisans sought the presence of the French king as a pretext and opportunity to throw the Florentine yoke. However, Gentile insists that the king's arrival in Pisa, on November 8, did not provoke enthusiasm from the outset because the Pisans were afraid of his intentions. See Gentile, *Pisa, Florence, and Carlo VIII*, 18.

³⁷ The Florentine chronicler in Pisa, Piero Vaglienti, labeled Simon Francesco delli Orlandi as a Florentine rebel who, according to him, had already stirred the Pisans against Florence in 1479. Even before the French arrival, Vaglienti warned the Florentine commissioner in Pisa, Pier Filippo Pandolfini, about Orlandi's whereabouts but no action against him was taken. Orlandi had met the king in Asti as an ambassador seeking Pisan independence. This suggests that Pisa's independence did not come as a surprise. See Vaglienti, *Storia*, 42.

³⁸ Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 287.

³⁹ Just a day after the rebellion, the French king left Pisa for Florence, leaving behind a force of 300 soldiers led by Robert De Balzac d'Entraques. On November 12, the Pisans formed the provisional government and sent their diplomats across Italy to seek support for their independence. See Sanuto, *La Spedizione*, 111; Delaborde, *L'expédition de Charles VIII*, 449; Gentile, *Pisa, Firenze, e Carlo VIII*, 14.

⁴⁰ It is interesting to notice that people in Florence, like those in Pisa, shouted *popolo et libertà* while chasing out Piero II the Medici. According to Brown, Piero abruptly interrupted a less authoritative government that his father had maintained for years, which generated hatred in Florence. See Brown, *Piero de' Medici*, 222-227.

through Tuscany en route to Naples had brought about radical political changes in Florence and its dominion. At the time, the Florentines could not fully appreciate the implications of the Pisan rebellion. However, the events that followed made them realize that the loss of Pisa was more consequential for the republic than anyone could have imagined.

1.4. The French King's Betrayal (1495-1496)

While the king's expedition to Naples continued, both Pisa and Florence looked repeatedly to convince the king of their own rights: the former, to maintain their liberty; the latter, to retake the rebellious city. However, the ensuing events showed that the king had never intended to honor his word. Instead, by playing off their centuries-long rivalry, King Charles VIII planned to manipulate the two Tuscan republics to his advantage throughout his Italian campaign. For example, on December 30, 1494, the Florentine chronicler Luca Landucci records in his diary the following observation: "E a dì 30 detto, martedì, si fece inbasciadori a Pisa, che fu Piero Capponi e Francesco Valori, insieme con Franciosi, e lettere del Re, come ci fussi renduto Pisa. E in effetto se ne feciono beffe in modo, eh' el popolo stimò che 'l Re ci dondolassi e ingannassi; e stimossi trista novella come in effetto fu."⁴¹ Charles VIII's Tuscan politics was everything but honest. To get more money from Florence and their troops in case he needed them to support his new kingdom of Naples, the king often reminded the Florentines about the capitoli they concluded with him on November 26, 1494. However, at the same time, he did not want Pisa to return to Florentine rule because he needed a secure base in Tuscany for his safe return to France from Naples. The French king finally revealed his double-dealing in June 1495 when, on visiting Pisa on his return

⁴¹ Luca Landucci, *Diario fiorentino dal 1450 al 1516* (G. C. Sansoni, 1883), 94-95.

northwards, he declined to restore the city to Florence.⁴² Instead, the French commanders, on Charles' orders, treated the Florentines as enemies rather than allies.⁴³

It has been claimed that King Charles VIII tried to redeem himself later by ordering his captains to return to Florence the fortresses of Sarzana, Pietrasanta, Sarzanello, and Libbrafratta, as well as the towns of Pisa and Livorno that Piero de Medici handed over to him in 1494. But if any such orders ever existed, they were widely disobeyed.⁴⁴ Once it was clear that the French commanders would not give up Pisa, the Florentines organized their first expedition against the city. In September 1495, a force of approximately 3,000 Florentine soldiers besieged Pisa under the command of the Duke of Urbino, Captain Ercole Bentivoglio, Ranuccio di Marciano, and the brothers Paolo and Vitellozzo Vitelli.⁴⁵ The Florentine army came very close to capturing the city but Pisa was rescued by the French commander d'Enragues who opened fire from the Pisan citadel.⁴⁶ This campaign marked the culmination of the open hostility between Florence and the French. Subsequently, the French sold off the lost Florentine fortresses. Pietrasanta was sold to

⁴² According to Portovenieri, on June 20, 1495, on his way back to France, the French king re-entered Pisa with pomp and splendor provided by the citizens who decorated their city in French colours. The next day, the council took place where the question of returning Pisa to Florence was discussed. The French cardinal Briconet, and generals Philip Communes and Marshal Di Gie, supported the Florentine cause, arguing that France should maintain its promise to Florence. On the contrary, the *lieutenant général* Ligny, general of Languedoc, said that the will of French soldiers in Pisa is that the city remains free or under king's protection. Ultimately, the king left captain d'Enragues with 150 soldiers to defend Pisa from Florence. See Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 306; Gentile, *Pisa, Firenze, e Carlo VIII*, 53, cit. 3 and 4.

⁴³ Even before refusing to restore Pisa to Florence, the French king started to help Pisans openly. For example, thanks to 600 French, Gascon and Swiss soldiers he sent, the Pisans recovered Riprafratta from Florence in May 1495. As retaliation, on July 31, 1495, the Florentines killed 150 French soldiers in Ponsacco. See Delaborde, *L'expédition de Charles VIII*, 677; Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, II, xii, 190.

⁴⁴ Guicciardini tells us that d'Enragues was in love with a Pisan girl named Camilla del Lante, a daughter of the rich Pisan citizen named Luca Del Lante. Similarly, Portovenieri claims that the captain was in love with the city and that he could not give it to the Florentines. While the money was certainly a motive to sell the fortress, it seems more likely that the French king gave secret orders to his captains in Tuscany to keep the fortresses in order to use them as leverage in future dealings with Florence. That this theory makes sense shows a case of the French captain d'Enragues who, once in France in 1496, did not face any consequence for his "disobedience." It is less plausible that the captain publicly disobeyed the king and returned to France like nothing happened. On Camilla del Lante, see Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, 99; Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 320; Michele da Caprile, "Camilla del Lante, eroina dell'immaginario," *La torre*, 1/2006, 1-4.

⁴⁵ Gentile, *Pisa, Firenze, e Carlo VIII*, 74, cit. 4.

⁴⁶ Landucci, *Diario*, 122; Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 324.

Lucca, and Sarzana and Sarzanella to Genoa, while the citadel of Pisa was handed over to the Pisans by Entragues on January 1st, 1496 in exchange for 20,000 ducats.⁴⁷ The Florentines were devastated by this act of treachery. Their French “allies” had cost them not only Pisa and several fortresses, but had left them in almost complete diplomatic isolation.⁴⁸ In the text that follows, we will see how the local Tuscan conflict became an international one.

1.5. Internationalization of the Pisan Conflict

In contrast to Florence’s disastrous diplomatic position at the beginning of 1496, Pisa’s position had solidified, thanks to support for their cause from not only France, but also Venice, Milan, the Pope, the emperor, Spain, and such traditionally anti-Florentine republics as Siena and Lucca.⁴⁹ The Pisan question thus became not only a local, Tuscan issue, but an international one as well. Given its highly unfavorable diplomatic situation, Florence’s chances of retaking Pisa through any sort of negotiations were very low. Similarly, Florence’s military might was not sufficient to overcome the combined forces of Pisa and its supporters. Following the French

⁴⁷ The Florentines were furious when they heard about what d’Entragues did. In one of the letters from the *Dieci* to the French king, of January 3, 1496, it says the following about d’Entragues’ decision to sell Pisa: “Questo è finalmente il fructo et lo effecto che è seguito di tante promesse et obligationi factone la Maestà per più publici capitione del suo regio sacramento et di tante vane speranze di quante sino adhora siamo stati pasciuti. Della qual cosa questa città e populo universalmente ha preso tanta admiratione dispiacere et grave molestia che non si potrebbe facilmente esprimere.” See Gentile, *Pisa, Firenze, e Carlo VIII*, 132; The Florentine government asked the king to do something about it and to show publicly that he is not part of it. As he did nothing of the sort, Gentile claims that he was complicit in not handing over the city to the Florentines. See Gentile, *Pisa, Firenze, e Carlo VIII*, 94-95.

⁴⁸ On March 31, 1495, the members of the anti-French league invited Florence to join the league but after months of debates they refused and stayed loyal to the French. See Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia*, II, iv, 140. For this reason, Florence was diplomatically isolated for a few months in an anti-French Italy. Despite the isolation, the Second Florentine Republic could not break the alliance with the French for several reasons. According to Butters, “the French alliance was in the first instance an economic one: Florence had extensive interests in France, in particular those represented by the large colony of Florentines in Lyons. The Florentine business community was driven out from Lyons as a result of Piero’s stand against the French. The French, therefore, had an economic hold over the Florentines, but it was not necessarily a stranglehold.” See Butters, *Governors*, 30.

⁴⁹ Florence’s refusal to join the anti-French League, gave some of its members a good excuse to pose as protectors of Pisan liberty. In 1496 the emperor Maximilian I, and from 1496 to 1499 the Venetians, provided the Pisans with military assistance. The detachment of Pisa and its *contado* from Florence allowed Venice to enlarge its hegemony on the peninsula while by supporting Pisa Ludovico Sforza wanted to expand his influence in Tuscany and eventually incorporate the city as Visconti had done before him.

departure, the Pisan government decided to officially offer their city to any powerful state that could provide them with protection from Florence. To this end, the Pisan government dispatched diplomats first to Venice and then Milan, but both states officially refused Pisa's request, while at the same time doing everything in their power to support Pisa unofficially by sending money, food, and mercenaries to defend the city.⁵⁰ In August 1496, the Venetian *provveditore* Domenico Dolfin reinforced Pisa with his mercenary soldiers. In the battle that ensued shortly afterwards, the Florentine army received a heavy blow with the death of the Florentine commissioner, Piero Capponi.⁵¹ Coupled with the looming threat from the emperor Maximilian, whose army was ready to march into Tuscany to support Pisa, the Florentine cause seemed hopeless.⁵²

In October 1496, Maximilian I intervened in the Pisan War by sending a small army of 500 cavalry and 1,000 infantry to join the Venetian and Milanese forces. As they welcomed the French king a year before, the Pisans greeted Maximilian I as a savior and offered him their city. After a florid speech to the people, Maximilian promised his aid against Florence. From this point, the Pisan conflict became an international conflict, involving not only Italian but also foreign powers. For the moment, Pisa had become the center of international attention, and the Pisan conflict the focal point of Italian politics. However, the intervention of the emperor into Tuscan affairs did not work to Pisa's advantage.⁵³ It transpired, moreover, that the anti-French coalition was so poorly

⁵⁰ A. Bertelli, "Machiavelli e la politica estera fiorentina," in *Studies on Machiavelli*, a cura di Myron P. Gilmore, (Florence: Sansoni, 1972), 29-72.

⁵¹ Capponi's death was devastating for the Florentine morale as he was considered one of the most respected and celebrated republicans. He was Machiavelli's famous Florentine to whom he devoted a short sketch in his *Frammenti storici*. See Machiavelli, *Opere*, II, 81.

⁵² Before he came to Italy, Maximilian I had intended to go to Pisa to impose a solution in the conflict between Pisa and Florence. The emperor notified the Florentines that he would use his imperial authority to decide on their quarrel with the Pisans; their response was that they would not accept any judgement until they were back in possession of their rebellious subject city. See Mallett and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 39.

⁵³ Maximilian I expected Milan and Venice to subsidize him and help him raise some more men, but Venice refused, and Ludovico was unwilling to do it. See Mallett and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 39-40.

coordinated that they could not prevent six French ships from relieving Livorno from its siege.⁵⁴ After this embarrassment, Maximilian moved with his army to the Pisan army fortress in Cascina, and on November 21, 1496, he abandoned the campaign altogether.

Maximilian's withdrawal and the growing animosity between Venice and Milan revived Florence's hopes that Pisa could still be recovered. The rivalry between the Milanese and the Venetians over their influence in Pisa had weakened Pisa's defense. In the wake of Maximilian's departure, Ludovico Sforza began to withdraw his Milanese troops. According to Guicciardini, the Duke of Milan, afraid that the emperor's defeat would only benefit the Venetians, shifted sides and from 1497, he turned his allegiance to Florence while Venice remained a supporter of Pisa.⁵⁵ Fortunately for the Pisans, the Florentines were distracted from prosecuting the war with full vigor by their own internal divisions between the supporters and opponents of the friar Girolamo Savonarola.⁵⁶ There was in any case a lull in the fighting from April 1497, as Pisa (nominally an adherent of Spain) and Florence were obliged to respect the terms of a six-month truce between France and Spain. But it was not until the following summer, after the political turmoil in Florence came to a crisis with the arrest and execution of Savonarola, that the war entered a new phase. The removal of Savonarola from the Florentine political scene prompted Ludovico Sforza (who had been wary of the friar's influence over the Florentine government) to more openly lend support to

⁵⁴ In November 1496, the Florentine port of Livorno was attacked both on the land side and maritime by a fleet composed of imperial, Venetian and Genoese galleys and ships, as can be seen on the fresco painted by Giorgio Vasari. However, faced with the sinking of almost all of his fleet and losses in men and equipment due to poor weather conditions, the Emperor decided to lift the siege of Livorno, which Vasari represented in this fresco. See Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 40; Fig. 1, Giorgio Vasari and Giovanni Battista Naldini, *The Lifting of the Siege of Livorno by the Emperor of the Holy Empire Maximilian I of Austria, 1568-71*, (Hall of the Five Hundred in Palazzo Vecchio, Florence, Italy). <https://www.visit-florence-italy.com/museums/palazzo-vecchio/pisa-war-siege-livorno-maximilian-hall-five-hundred-palazzo-vecchio-florence-italy.html>

⁵⁵ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 129.

⁵⁶ For Savonarola's influence in Florence's political and religious life and his tragic end, see Donald Weinstein, *Savonarola: The Rise and Fall of a Renaissance Prophet* (Yale University Press, 2011).

Florence.⁵⁷ The Florentines, meanwhile, freed from the turmoil that had kept them from taking any initiative in the war, now began to organize a campaign against Pisa for May 1498.

Despite its diplomatic isolation, the lack of funds, and the internal crisis, the Second Republic remained fixed on regaining the port city for several reasons. First, the acquisition of Pisa in the fifteenth century had helped to transform Florence into one of the five great powers of Italy, giving her an outlet to the sea and a concomitant boost in trade income. If Pisa remained free, Florence would lose substantial economic assets and see its reputation in Italy diminished. Second, Pisa's example might prove irresistibly attractive to other cities subject to Florentine rule. From this perspective, Pisa's independence posed a threat to the security of the Florentine territorial state. Lastly, in addition to the interests of the state, a number of wealthy Florentine families, including the Ridolfi, Capponi, Rucellai, and Nerli, owned lands in the Pisan *contado*, which had been lost due to the war.⁵⁸ Thus, Machiavelli's political baptism in June 1498 was unquestionably tied to the resolution of the Pisan question as the primary objective of Florentine foreign politics.

1.6. Machiavelli and Florence's war with Venice (1498-1499)

On June 19, 1498, Machiavelli was elected to the Great Council as head of the Second Chancery, responsible for internal administration and correspondence, as well as the Republic's external relations.⁵⁹ Shortly thereafter, on July 14, Machiavelli and his Chancery were added to

⁵⁷ According to Guicciardini, when Savonarola, a staunch supporter of the French, died in May 1497, the Duke of Milan had a reasonable hope of drawing the Florentine Republic into the Italian League against the French. To have Florence on his side in a possible conflict with the French, the Duke provided the Republic with military assistance by sending some of his best *condottieri*. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 161.

⁵⁸ According to Luzzati, the rebellion of November 9, 1494, was fired up by the Pisan peasants from *contado* who were never entirely subjected to the new Florentine landowners. See Luzzati, *Una guerra di popolo*, 36.

⁵⁹ According to Rubinstein, The Second Chancery was created as a separate office in 1437, in order to relieve the head of the Chancery, who came to be called the First Chancellor; it was put in charge of the correspondence of the Signoria within the Florentine dominion. In December 1483, the Chancery was reorganised by placing nearly all its higher officials directly under the First Chancellor's control. See Rubinstein, "The beginnings," 77.

the service of the *Dieci di Libertà e Pace* or *Dieci di Balìa*.⁶⁰ It is probably fair to say that this was the least desirable moment for an inexperienced secretary to assume a position in the war ministry, for Florence, in July 1498, had just launched a new military campaign against the joint forces of Venice and Pisa. However, despite his “freshman” status in the chancery, Machiavelli’s response to the challenge was quite remarkable, as if he had been a senior official with years of experience. His letters and dispatches to various Florentine officials in the *contado* and *distretto* from July 1498 to April 1499 reveal his preoccupation with defending his *Patria*.⁶¹ In daily communications with the war commissioners and mercenary captains in the camp, Machiavelli tirelessly coordinated the action against the Venetians, whose incursion into Casentino posed a serious threat to the Republic’s northern border. It was a busy time for Machiavelli, as all the work of the Chancery of the Ten was transacted by him.

Until the summer of 1498, Machiavelli had little involvement in the Florentine political arena, devoting his intellect rather to literary pursuits. In March 1498, he had an opportunity to display his skills for the assessment of the friar Girolamo Savonarola, who needed a new Florentine ambassador for Rome.⁶² Scholars agree that Machiavelli was no supporter of the friar’s party and that his attitude towards Savonarola most likely cost him the appointment.⁶³ It was a moot point, however, for the victory in June 1498 of the anti-Savonarola party, which

⁶⁰ Much of Machiavelli’s work in the chancery and on foreign missions was, in fact, done for the *Dieci di Balìa*, after he had been delegated to that office. Similarly, in January, 1507, he was ordered by the Signoria to serve as chancellor of the newly created magistracy of the *Nove di Milizia*, which owed its existence largely to his initiative. See Black, “Machiavelli in the chancery,” 32-48.

⁶¹ How serious was the situation in the cCasentino is confirmed by the following dispatch from Machiavelli to the commissioner Andrea Pazzi, from November 22, 1498: “Siamo costretti non meno a dolerci de’ nostri casi, che sono pericolosissimi, che del non potere fare quello verso sua Signoria (Madonna Caterina Sforza) che si desidera, perché, come tu sai, li inimici, e’ quali sono entrati nel cuore delle terre nostre, non ci lasciono respirare.” See *Legazioni*, I, 133.

⁶² Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 8-10.

⁶³ Rubinstein, “The beginnings of Niccolò Machiavelli’s career in the Florentine Chancery,” 76.

opened the doors of office to Machiavelli, whose appointment came a month after the Florentine army had been humiliated by the Pisans at San Regolo on May 20th, 1498.⁶⁴

However, despite the defeat, the execution of Savonarola that had taken place immediately afterward ended a long civil strife in Florence and brought new hope among the citizens. Free from internal conflicts for the time being, the Florentine citizenry was united in their ardent desire to recover Pisa. To strengthen their army, the Florentines had acquired the services of one of the most promising *condottieri* of the day, Paolo Vitelli of Città di Castello, to serve as captain-general.⁶⁵ In early June of 1498, with great pomp and ceremony, Vitelli officially received the *condotta* and the *bastone* (command) of the Florentine forces from the First Chancellor, Marcello Adriani. There is little doubt that Machiavelli, Adriani's former student and a candidate for the new office of the Second Chancery, attended the ceremony and shared the enthusiasm of his fellow citizens for the coming military campaign. Shortly after assuming his office, Machiavelli penned his first dispatches regarding the Pisan campaign. In the following text, we will identify and explore some of the most frequent topics that appear in Machiavelli's chancery writings during the war against Venice and Pisa.

One of Machiavelli's principal duties in the office was the preparation of written documents, consisting mainly of letters on behalf of the Signoria or the *Dieci* to the cities and territories under Florentine jurisdiction, to foreign individuals and states, and to military captains

⁶⁴ Around the same time Savonarola's trial and execution were taking place in Florence, on May 20th, 1498, the combined Pisan and Venetian army defeated the Florentines at San Regolo. More than 500 men were killed or captured in battle, while the Florentine captain Ranuccio Marciano and the war commissioner Guglielmo de Pazzi barely saved their lives. According to Guicciardini, this defeat caused great disorders in the Florentine dominion, which was raided and plundered daily by the Albanian Stradioti. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 162.

⁶⁵ According to the contemporary sources, Vitelli "ritenevano la più bella e franca compagnia di gente d'arme e meglio ad ordine che al presente si trovi in Italia" See Giorgio Nicasi, *La famiglia Vitelli*, 291, cit.3; See also Buonaccorsi, *Diario*, 2; Sanudo, *Diarii*, I, 1002-1004.

and the commissioners in the camp.⁶⁶ Machiavelli's official documents contain hundreds of official dispatches in which the Florentine secretary transmitted instructions and gave information to the officials in the dominion, advised all manner of provisions for the preservation of the army and the maintenance of the camp against Pisa, and expressed his point of view on such varied topics as citizenship, patriotism, and mercenaries.⁶⁷ One of the first themes that emerges from Machiavelli's chancery writings is the opposition between the private and public interest in a republic, and how the former should always be subordinated to the latter. In his early dispatches, Machiavelli often reminds his fellow colleagues and officials that being a good citizen and public servant means loving your *Patria* unconditionally and sacrificing your happiness to protect it from enemies.⁶⁸ For example, in a letter of July 26, 1498, to Stefano Parenti, *podestà* of Empoli, Machiavelli writes the following:

La tua partita da Empoli, per cagione del morbo o per qual ti vuogli altra cagione, merita riprensione grande nel cospetto di tutti quegli che, come buoni cittadini, propongono al bene della patria loro al proprio comodo, e di coloro che non si curano, per salvare la Repubblica, sottomettersi a ogni pericolo benché gravissimo...è ufficio adunque di buono cittadino, come debbe desiderare ciascuno essere e essere considerato, quando egli è in qualche missione pubblica, avere sommamente caro che qualche avversità gli sopravvenga per mostrare insieme e quanto è vaglia e quanta affezione è porti alla patria sua.⁶⁹

Written only a week after starting his employment, this letter outlines Machiavelli's understanding of the duties of a government official towards his *Patria*, whether he serves in Florence or elsewhere in the dominion. Similarly, in a letter to the *podestà* of Buggiano written less than a year after the dispatch to the *podestà* of Empoli, Machiavelli outlines the following

⁶⁶ According to Black, while there was a continuity between the humanist chancellors at the end of the 14th and the first half of the 15th century, that was not the case with Machiavelli. His *scritti di governo* are far less independent because he wrote them from *Palazzo Vecchio*, where he was censured. However, for his *Legazioni*, sent from France or Borgia's court, on the contrary, he had more autonomy as an author. Sometimes he went too far with his input so that his friends from the Chancery had to warn him about this. See Black, "Machiavelli in the chancery," 32.

⁶⁷ According to Black, Machiavelli's early writings reveal a tension to unite the periphery with the center, in which the Florentine chancery played a crucial role. See Black, "Machiavelli in the chancery," 37.

⁶⁸ The sacrifice for the *Patria* was a classical Roman trope, not invented by Machiavelli but amplified and used by him. After all, the very term invites tropes of sacrifice. "Mori pro patria dulce..." See "Q. Horatius Flaccus (Horace), *Odes*, Book 3, Poem 2" www.perseus.tufts.edu. (Retrieved on April 25, 2023.)

⁶⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 23.

thought: “Buoni cittadini si hanno a spogliare sempre d’ogni privata passione e ragguardare solo al bene e utile pubblico, altrimenti la città ne patisce e li omini meritamente ne ricevano disonore e carico.”⁷⁰

Machiavelli’s “lectures” on citizenship and patriotism increased in number when the war in Casentino broke out in September 1498. The conflict represented a serious threat to the Florentine republic. Vitelli’s successful summer campaign against Pisa had led to the conquest of Buti, Calci, Vicopisano, Riprafratta, and Torre di Foce, located about 15-20 kilometers east of Pisa.⁷¹ The offensive put great pressure on Pisa, which urged the Venetians to open another front against Florence with the aid of Piero and Giuliano de’ Medici.⁷² Initially, the Venetians wanted to enter Sienese territory via Romagna and the Mugello, where the Medici had supporters, but Florentine diplomacy effectively prevented this by concluding a pact with Siena. Undiscouraged, the Venetian mercenary army led by Piero and Giuliano de’ Medici, the Duke of Urbino, the *condottiere* Bartolomeo d’Alviano, and the Orsini entered Tuscany on September 10th, 1498, taking possession of Marradi, located some 50 km kilometers northeast of Florence.⁷³ Exhausted by the war expenses, the Florentines attempted to initiate peace negotiations, sending an embassy to Venice, but the overture was in vain, and the fighting continued in the Casentino in October 1498.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 217.

⁷¹ For Vitelli’s campaign of 1498, see Guicciardini, *Storie*, 164-175.

⁷² In early August 1498, the Venetian government discussed making Piero a captain of their army for the campaign in Romagna and the Casentino, which was planned to divert the Florentines from their campaign to recover Pisa. Piero received money from Venice for this adventure and general Bartolomeo d’Alviano, Carlo Orsini, Astore Baglioni and the Duke of Urbino. See Sanudo, *I Diarii*, I, 1030-1, for August 8, 1498; Alison Brown, *Piero de’ Medici*, 273-274.

⁷³ On September 24, 1498, Giuliano de’ Medici had entered the Florentine frontier fortress of Marradi in the Mugello, where people welcomed him shouting “Marco, Marco, Palle, Palle!” See Parenti, *Storia*, II, 192-202; Fachard, *Consulte 1498-1505*, 100-2.

⁷⁴ In mid-October Piero visited the Doge in Venice and over two days secretly addressed the council and the Ten in order to win support for the campaign. As a result, Venice decided to capture Bibbiena rather than Forlì because that was what the Medici wanted. Bibbiena was captured on October 24, 1498. According to Marin Sanudo, in

Now, concerning their official character, some may question whether Machiavelli's early dispatches truly reflect his attitudes, or if he merely wrote what was dictated to him. While it is impossible to know the answer with absolute certainty, I find it difficult to accept the latter possibility for several reasons. The sense of urgency expressed in the dispatches would not make sense if someone were simply dictating to Machiavelli. If Machiavelli was hired only for his knowledge of Latin and his ability to write, then his sharp mind and critical thinking would not have been necessary. What seems probable is that Machiavelli had far greater input into these dispatches than scholars care to admit. Every morning, Machiavelli would have had on his desk any number of reports arriving from various parts of the dominion. These he had to read, process, and respond to quickly and efficiently. While he might have consulted his superior, Adriani, over some matters, it seems hardly likely that there would be time for consultation over each dispatch. In the case of the irresponsible *podestà* from Empoli, for instance, Machiavelli most likely received a report about his decision to abandon the province and penned a letter in the manner that seemed to him the most convenient and effective at the moment, reminding him of his duties under the threat of punishment. For that, Machiavelli should not have had to consult his superiors; it would be assumed that he knew what his duties entailed. Only when he was on a mission would he have received specific instructions on what to do and say, although in these situations too he was allowed a certain space for his own contributions, as we will discuss later.

Lastly, as opposed to earlier humanist secretaries who wrote in Latin, Machiavelli and his contemporaries employed a vernacular Tuscan dialect. As a result, Machiavelli's early dispatches are characterized by their semi-formal tone, their sense of urgency, and a language that is vivid, and rather personal than formal. After reading almost 3,000 dispatches printed in six

December 1498, there were 11,000 Venetian soldiers in Pisa that cost Venice almost 17,000 ducats per month. See Sanudo, *I Diarii*, II, 166.

large tomes of Machiavelli's *Legazioni*, I came across the words, expressions, and maxims that are undoubtedly Machiavelli's. Scholars familiar with Machiavelli's post-1512 opus would quickly recognize in his dispatches expressions that are characteristic to him and that stand out in his later works: "per amore o forza, privato e pubblico, simulazione e dissimulazione, apri Marte," etc. As a result, Machiavelli's official documents testify to his emerging political theories and arguments that will re-emerge later in his major works.⁷⁵ Thus, it is safe to argue here that what we read in the letters to the *podestà* of Empoli and Buggiano represents Machiavelli's original thought on the nature of the good and loyal citizen and servant of the republic.

1.6.1. Friendship in the time of war: Machiavelli's letters to degli Albizzi

Machiavelli's early lesson on citizenship often emerged from his early correspondence with his colleagues in the *Dieci*. Thanks to John Najemy's study of the Machiavelli-Vettori correspondence between 1513 and 1515, we have better insights into Machiavelli's epistolary experience and the exchange of ideas between him and his intellectual counterpart Vettori.⁷⁶ However, Machiavelli's earlier correspondence, both official and private, with his senior colleague and friend Luca degli Albizzi has not attracted enough attention in historiography. The correspondence started as early as August 1498, and it merits our scrutiny for several reasons; first, it reveals a personal rather than an official communication between the First Secretary and the camp commissioner and *Dieci* colleague. The letters portray public officials who worked for

⁷⁵ One characteristic of Machiavelli's earliest letters and dispatches, for example, is his assuming the role of the good *medico* or doctor for the "sick" Florentine state. His *linguaggio della medicina* features in his later works as well, notably chapter three of *The Prince* where Machiavelli says the following: "Il fatto è che abitando si nota subito la nascita di disordini e subito vi si pone rimedio; mentre, se si abita altrove, si scoprono solo quando sono già grandi ed è troppo tardi per rimediare." See Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, trans. by Edoardo Mori (Bolzano, 2020), iii, 9.

⁷⁶ John Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

the *Dieci* as human beings who faced challenges as they attempted to balance public and private needs: their duties and their families; second, they summarize Machiavelli's early comments and observations on citizenship, patriotism, mercenary soldiers, and God; lastly, they capture Machiavelli's first recorded references to the lessons of Roman and Florentine history.

To better understand the content of Machiavelli's dispatches to degli Albizzi, it is important to contextualize them. The Venetian army's incursion into the Casentino in the fall of 1498 had taken the Florentine government off-guard. Although Caterina Sforza had warned the Signoria earlier in the summer of the Venetian army gathering near her borders, her cautions were ignored.⁷⁷ Now, with the imminent danger of an invasion of Florence's territorial possessions, the Signoria urgently needed to dispatch a war commissioner with the skills and experience required to put out the rapidly spreading fire. They found such a man in Luca degli Albizzi. The grandson of Maso degli Albizzi, who had been Cosimo il Vecchio's opponent, Luca was a senior official with an impeccable record as a Florentine citizen and plenty of experience in the field as a war commissioner.⁷⁸ The Signoria sent him to the Casentino to assemble an *ad hoc* force composed of both prominent and petty *condottieri* and the local population.⁷⁹ The following excerpts from Machiavelli's letters to degli Albizzi in December 1498 reveal the

⁷⁷ Count Pier Desiderio Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, trans. by Paul Sylvester (London, 1898), 231.

⁷⁸ Machiavelli's friend from the office, Buonaccorsi, devoted one of his writings to Luca degli Albizzi's son Anton Francesco in which he glorified the Albizzi senior's republican virtue: "Ancora che le virtù di Luca tuo padre, e l'opere sue egregie verso la Repubblica Fiorentina sieno state assai e da ogni parte laudabili, e che fosse meglio tacere, che scrivendo narrare una minima parte; tamen, vinto dagli infiniti obblighi che ho con la sua felice memoria, ho volsuto più tosto esser giudicato prosuntuoso, che ingrato: e però, ho brevissimamente descritto l'espedizione fatta dal popolo fiorentino contro a' Pisani con l'arme francesi, l'anno 1500; nella quale lui fu dal senato meritamente eletto Commissario. E se mai in cosa alcuna apparse la prudenza e grandezza dell'animo suo, in questa si dimostrò più chiaramente che in alcun' altra, sendo da ogni parte ripiena d'azioni importantissime alla Repubblica, e di pericoli imminenti alla persona sua: le quali cose tutte furono da lui, per quanto era in suo potere, egregiamente vinte e superate." See Biagio Buonaccorsi, "Impresa fatta dai Signori Fiorentini l'anno 1500 con le genti francesi, per espugnare la città di Pisa, capitano Monsignor di Belmonte, *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1853): 401-421.

⁷⁹ Amongst numerous *condottieri* that Florence hired in this campaign, count Gaspare San Severino and his brother count Caiazzo stand out. The less famous *condottieri* that were praised by Machiavelli for their devotion and professionalism during the war in Casentino were Ciriaco dal Borgo and Paolo da Parano.

tension that existed between private and public good in the republic, where devotion to public service functioned as the measure of patriotism.

In a letter to degli Albizzi sent on December 1st, 1498, Machiavelli begs his senior colleague to reconsider his hasty decision to leave the post in Casentino and return to Florence without the government's approval.⁸⁰ He reminds him in a friendly manner of the legal consequences of such action and expresses his understanding of the situation in which degli Albizzi finds himself. Three days later, to confirm the government's opposition to Albizzi's request for leave, Machiavelli offers the following advice: "Per essere tu uomo prudentissimo e nostro collega, ci pare da scopirti interamente l'animo nostro, dove noi ci troviamo e in quale necessità, che tu prudentemente possa esaminare tutto...e benché noi siamo desiderosissimi compiacerti della ritornata, veggiendo come la desideri, tamen la pubblica necessità ci sforza tanto che non possiamo fare non ti constringamo a questo."⁸¹

The subsequent correspondence implies that degli Albizzi has consented to remain in Casentino, albeit unwillingly. For this reason, Machiavelli pens another letter on December 14, 1498, in which he says the following:

Quello che si conteneva nella nostra lettera de' XII, a quale tu, Luca, mostri, per non la avere àuta, non potere rispondere, era questo: che tu rimanessi ancora costi 8 o 10 giorni a requisizione di cotesti signori e ad utile di cotesta impresa, benché con dispiacere nostro e tuo per non desiderare noi meno la tua tornata che tu medesimo: a la quale cosa sarai contento acquiescere come buono e amorevole cittadino verso la Repubblica sua.⁸²

Ultimately, in a letter to degli Albizzi from December 18, 1498, Machiavelli imparts a rather personal message:

⁸⁰ "Tu ci accenni per le tue lettere parerti mille anni di condurre coteste genti in Casentino e partiti da loro; la quale cosa interpretiamo volertene venire: il che non ci pare a nessuno modo utile a la Repubblica nostra né a te necessario. Quanto al fatto che non sia necessario e che non ti corra pregiudizio addosso come a transgressore delle leggi." See *Legazioni*, I, 145.

⁸¹ *Legazioni*, I, 152.

⁸² *Legazioni*, I, 168.

Noi conosciamo el desiderio che tu, Luca, hai del ritornartene: e da l'uno canto desidereremo compiacerti, dall'altro veggiamo la opera tua costi essere necessaria pe' buoni effetti che ciascuno di appariscono. E circa a la indisposizione della famiglia tua, ci è stato riportato stamane, la tua donna e il tuo figliolo è in buono termine. Ti concludiamo che lo stare tuo costi ancora qualche giorno non potrebbe essere più desiderato e da noi e da tutto questo popolo; però come prudente e amorevole della tua patria, andrai bilanciando e bisogni pubblici che di presente ne soprastanno e li tuoi casi privati.⁸³

What conclusions can we draw from Machiavelli's dispatches to degli Albizzi? What lessons on citizenship and patriotism come from Machiavelli's pen? We have seen earlier in the case of the *podestà* of Empoli and Buggiano that the government strongly condemned the disobedience of officials who put private interests above the public. Thus, it is not surprising that although degli Albizzi wanted to return to Florence from his arduous service in the Casentino, he was not allowed to, even when his family was indisposed.⁸⁴ For the Signoria, the commissioner's continued presence in the war-torn province, even with insufficient provisions and soldiers, was necessary to the interests of the state, whose needs took precedence over any private interests. To remind degli Albizzi of his duties to the state, though in a gentler manner than he used with the *podestà*, Machiavelli identifies the three pillars that support his early notions of patriotism and civic duties in a republic: the public, the republic, and the *Patria*. This early and Roman-sounding view on citizenship and civic duties represents the infancy of the ideas that would grow over time into the formulated political theory expressed in *The Prince* and *The Discourses* respectively. Thus, when we analyze Machiavelli's post-1512 *opere*, we cannot ignore his early correspondence.

1.6.2. Machiavelli and Mercenaries

Machiavelli's dispatches to degli Albizzi and other officials during the war in Casentino reveal several problems that would plague the Republic in the years to come, most notably the

⁸³ *Legazioni*, I, 172-3.

⁸⁴ Only a year later, while on his mission to France, Machiavelli found himself in a similar situation as degli Albizzi in the Casentino.

problem of mercenaries. Machiavelli's view on degli Albizzi's problem with *condottieri* reveals aspects of his early intellectual formation. His harsh assessment of mercenaries in his post-1512 opus is well-known to scholars. He depicts them as a disloyal, corrupt, fickle, and worthless bunch who pose a threat to any regime that relies on their services.⁸⁵ But in his early dispatches, Machiavelli sees the issues with *condottieri* as more an anthropological than a political problem. For example, one of the reasons for degli Albizzi's sudden request for leave from Casentino was the behavior of the *condottieri* hired by Florence. Concerning his previous leave request, one would wonder if "the family reasons" were used as a smoke-screen to avoid dealing with *condottieri*'s arrogant behaviour. Some of them, including Count Fracassa, had been enemies of Florence for years and had no intrinsic desire to fight for the Republic, which made any cooperation with them rather difficult.⁸⁶

In his dispatches, Machiavelli understood and explained the actions and behavior of the mercenaries through the lens of their human nature and not through their politically motivated actions, as in *The Prince*. During his first year in public office, Machiavelli made several references to mercenaries and their behavior.⁸⁷ For example, in a letter of July 20, 1498, to Simon Guiducci, the Vicar and Commissioner of Lari, Machiavelli writes the following: "Noi crediamo certamente ch'è fanti di Ciriaco del Borgo si portino come tu ci avvisi: pur nondimanco è si vuole considerare che sono soldati, e che tutti è soldati son più tosto volti al far male che ad altra buona operazione; si che è bisogna, usare prudenzia grandissima e molte cose

⁸⁵ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, xii, 45.

⁸⁶ From Machiavelli's dispatches we find out that although Fracassa and degli Albizzi did not get along. Caterina Sforza in her letters constantly complained to Sforza about Fracassa's behavior. From her description, he was a very arrogant and unsophisticated warrior who despised Florence and the fact that he had to fight for them. See Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 232.

⁸⁷ The very first dispatch he penned on his first day in the office of the *Dieci* on July 14, 1498, concerns mercenary soldiers and their mistreatment of the Florentine subjects in the *distretto*. Some of the dispatches in which the mercenaries were mentioned can be found in Machiavelli's *Legazioni*, I, 15, 17, 24, 26, 183, and 189.

dissimulare, molte severamente gastigare, secondo che el tempo richiede. Discorriamoti per ricordarti che tutti è soldati son fatti ad uno modo.”⁸⁸ Likewise, in a letter to degli Albizzi on November 28, 1498, Machiavelli touches upon the soldier’s human nature when he reminds his friend that his leave of absence was not welcomed by the Signoria because he is the most prudent to handle those captains: “E considerato quanta incomodità abbi generato el tuo partirti di costi, sia necessario che tu non ti allontani da coteste gente duchesche perché, considerata la varia e diversa natura di cotesti signori e quanta arte e industria bisogni usare a condurli e disporli a’ propositi nostri, pensiamo, che tu e prudentissimo per averli maneggiati...”⁸⁹

Ultimately, Machiavelli sees mercenary soldiers as human beings led more by basic needs such as food and wine than by intellect. In a letter to Piero Guicciardini, commissioner in camp against Pisa, from January 8, 1499, Machiavelli outlines some of the problems caused by the Lord of Piombino’s soldiers, such as excessive desire for food, howling up to the sky, and suggests that the commissioner appease them with some false promises.⁹⁰ Portrayed as servants of their masters led by basic instincts, *condottieri* were not condemned in Machiavelli’s dispatches as they were in *The Prince*. As the republic stood in a constant state of military crisis, their service was necessary. What differentiates Machiavelli’s early chancery writings on mercenaries and his post-1512 writings is his counsel on how best to deal with them. The early dispatches advocate for tighter government control and better management of these brutes who “possess force but not intelligence,” meaning that as long as those soldiers serve the regime faithfully, the commissioners can keep them in check with promises of money and fame, along

⁸⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 20.

⁸⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 140.

⁹⁰ “Siamo informati quelli sua soldati avere consumato tutti e’ loro osti e ciascuno di ce ne véne infiniti rammarichii e la grida ne vanno insino al cielo. E pensiamo che sia bene calmare dette genti, fatto e a quello per lo venire potessino fare, con quelli cauzioni e rimedii.” See *Legazioni*, I, 183.

with occasional praise for their service. This stands in contrast to Machiavelli's later view of the mercenaries as power-greedy and fickle soldiers who can threaten the very existence of a regime if not removed pre-emptively as we will see in chapter two.

1.6.3. Machiavelli and God

As most Machiavelli scholars agree, the Florentine thinker had an ambivalent attitude towards religion.⁹¹ In his works, Machiavelli criticized the abuse of power by the Church while at the same time arguing for religion as an important civic instrument for governing behavior and teaching morals.⁹² Machiavelli also frequently attributed the power of deciding human affairs to *fortuna* rather than God, leading many to suspect Machiavelli of irreligion. As this question deserves a separate study, my intention is not here to explore Machiavelli's religious beliefs but merely to single out some of his remarks regarding God from his early dispatches. As the numerous references to God in his early dispatches have not served as a subject of discussion in historiography, I intend to bring a new perspective to bear on Machiavelli's views on religion and thus make a meaningful contribution to the existing historiography on this topic.

While in his post-1512 work Machiavelli rarely mentions God, his early dispatches are full of such references, which requires explanation. Based on selected excerpts from the dispatches below, one may suggest that Machiavelli was more conventionally Christian in these years. For example, a dispatch that stands out from the others in this regard is one he penned to degli Albizzi on December 18, 1498. Here, Machiavelli writes:

⁹¹ For Machiavelli's use of religion in his work see Maurizio Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, trans. Antony Shugaar (Princeton University Press, 2010); Nathan Tarcov, "Machiavelli's Critique of Religion," *An International Quarterly Johns Hopkins University Press*, Volume 81, Number 1, (Spring 2014): 193-216; Benedetto Fontana "Love of Country and Love of God: The Political Uses of Religion in Machiavelli," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 639-658; John Najemy, "Papirius and the Chickens, Or Machiavelli on the Necessity of Interpreting Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 60, no. 4 (1999): 659-681; Victoria Johnston, "Machiavelli's Conception of Religion and its Relevance to his Political Philosophy in The Prince," *Ipsa Facto: The Carleton Journal of Interdisciplinary Humanities*, Vol. 1 (2022): 51-58.

⁹² Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio* (Einaudi, 2000), I, xi-xv, 40-53.

Abbiamo vostre lettere de' 15 e 16 di che sommamente ne ringraziamo Iddio e ne lodiamo la virtù di cotesti capitani...della quale cosa Iddio, amatore della iustizia, ce ne doverrà favorire come d'impresa tanto dal canto nostro iusta, quanto dalla parte de' nimici tirannica e iniusta...e circa a la indisposizione della famiglia tua, per lo Iddio grande, la tua donna e il tuo figliolo è in buono termine.⁹³

In the dispatch above, Machiavelli mentions God three times in three different contexts: as the bringer of victory at Marciano; as the symbol of justice; and as the guardian of the degli Albizzi family's well-being. Judging by this dispatch alone, one may conclude that Machiavelli subscribed to the medieval conception of a world in which God decides people's fate, brings justice to the world, and gives succor to those who worship him. The idea that Machiavelli praised God's justice is reaffirmed in the following dispatch to degli Albizzi from December 18, 1498: "Quanto più si succedeno le nuove de' vostri progressi, tanto più cresce lo animo a noi e a tutto questo popolo; e d'ogni cosa si lauda, e esalta la potenza e iustizia di Dio, e ammira la esimia virtù di cotesti Eccellentissimi Signori Capitani."⁹⁴ In numerous dispatches that followed, Machiavelli continued to thank and praise God suggesting to the people, among other things, to be "cauti e prudenti, confidando nello Altissimo, el quale non permetterà che chi la iustizia per tutrice perisca."⁹⁵ Finally, in a letter to Pietro Corsini from February 1st, 1499, Machiavelli gives the following advice: "Al morbo seguirai di fare è rimedi che si possono fare, come per insino ad ora hai con sollecitudine fatto, e del resto con pazienza te ne rimetterai ad Dio, primo conoscitore de' bisogni nostri."⁹⁶ Does Machiavelli's frequent invocation of God in his early dispatches complicate the alleged atheism or anticlericalism of his formal writings? What can we say about *fortuna*, who seems to replace God in his post-1512 writings?

⁹³ Legazioni, I, 173.

⁹⁴ Legazioni, I, 173.

⁹⁵ Legazioni, I, 188.

⁹⁶ Legazioni, I, 207.

The word *fortuna* appears rarely in Machiavelli's early dispatches. When it does, it is sometimes coupled with mention of God and sometimes stands alone, which creates further ambiguity. For example, in a dispatch to degli Albizzi from December 7, 1498, Machiavelli remarks that where men (soldiers) are missing "abbonda Iddio e la fortuna."⁹⁷ This stands at odds with Machiavelli's later statements in *The Prince*, for example, where half of the human affairs is said to lie in the hands of *fortuna*, while the rest is in our own hands with no mention of God. We might note that in another dispatch from 1498, *fortuna* is recognized as the one who offers opportunities to men, while God is absent.⁹⁸ Does this mean that while it is the traditional God who features in Machiavelli's early dispatches, fortune slowly supplants him? If that is the case, then how to explain the absence of human ingenuity, ambition, action, and virtue from the dispatches, the human characteristics Machiavelli praised so much in his later work? To solve this apparent inconsistency in Machiavelli's views on God, I propose the idea of reading his early dispatches in the context in which Machiavelli wrote them, ignoring for the moment his later writings, especially *The Prince*.

Although Machiavelli's mind was already sharp and observant at the time he wrote his first dispatches, he was still a freshman in the political arena, where the power and unpredictable actions of humans defied God and dallied with *fortuna*. As he spent more time in the office and on his missions abroad, especially during his mission to France in 1500, Machiavelli started to understand who truly held the reins of power. His political education continued in Romagna at the court of the Borgias court and later in Rome observing the stratagems of the pope. Ultimately, perhaps, the failures of his beloved republic, the indecisiveness of his friend and

⁹⁷ *Legazioni*, I, 157.

⁹⁸ "Confortiamoti nondimanco a non omettere alcuna occasione che ti fussi preparata da la Fortuna." See *Legazioni*, I, 196.

superior, Gonfalonier Piero Soderini in 1512, and his own personal tragedy, convinced Machiavelli that God was not the harbinger of justice, and bringer of victories that he seemed to be in 1498. It seems that God disappeared from the equation in *The Prince*, leaving only *fortuna* and the will and actions of individuals who could control and accomplish things with their own power. With this in mind, I suggest here the idea that Machiavelli's dispatches of 1498 reveal a Florentine thinker hitherto unknown to historiography, with a character far more optimistic and a world view less dark than that of the Machiavelli of 1512. In 1498, Machiavelli might have had high hopes for God's intervention in human affairs and believed in his justice.

However, the ensuing years, full of Florence's political and military failures and disappointments, most likely shattered this rosy perspective of the world and forged the Machiavelli we know today. Still, to explore this idea further and determine if the character of Machiavelli's references to God changed progressively over the course of the years in the *Legazioni*, a separate study would be required. While comparing linguistic usage in documents he prepared in 1498 to *The Prince* is suggestive, we need to keep in mind that they are different "genres" with different intended readers. In other words, the study in question would have to deal with Machiavelli's rhetoric and the more intractable question of his irony.

1.6.4. Machiavelli and the first lessons from the Roman and Florentine history

One of the strongest pieces of evidence to confirm that Machiavelli's early dispatches contain many of his personal and unofficial observations is the lessons on Roman and Florentine history that occasionally make an appearance. Although they are casual and short remarks amongst hundreds of dispatches, they represent the earliest testimonies of Machiavelli's interest in history in general, and Roman and Florentine history in particular. They demonstrate that before his career, he had spent much time reading his father's history books. That he read those

books not casually, but in the hope of learning something from them, is shown by the fact that he used what he read for examples or lessons to prove his points. Ultimately, Machiavelli's history lessons indicate that even before Vettori, he exchanged his ideas on Roman and Florentine history with his colleagues in the office, though these conversations were never recorded.

The first recorded dispatch in which Machiavelli makes reference to Florentine history is from August 1498, sent to the commissioner in the camp near Pisa.⁹⁹ In it, as often in his dispatches, Machiavelli condemns temporizing. Contrary to common practice amongst Florentine officials, the Secretary demanded swift action from the commissioner, he used the example of a *condottiere* from Perugia, Niccolò Piccinino (1380-1444), who because of his inaction during the siege of Castel San Niccolò lost the battle of Anghiari against Florence. In another letter, this time to degli Albizzi, from November 15, 1498, Machiavelli refers again to *condottiere* Piccinino and his infamous tardiness, but coupled now with an example from Roman history. In 219 BC, the Roman army besieged a city on the Iberian Peninsula named Saguntum, which enjoyed the protection of the Carthaginian empire.¹⁰⁰ Like Piccinino, the Carthaginian king Hannibal spent excessive time besieging Saguntum, which cost him time and soldiers. But what is to be noted here is Machiavelli's remark to the reader of the dispatch that says “e perché voi ci ricordate Sagunto.” Evidently, Machiavelli and his colleagues had discussed this topic previously. Interestingly, Machiavelli refers often to the battle of Anghiari, a glorious victory of the Florentine Republican army. As we will see in chapter four, clues exist suggesting

⁹⁹ “...e che voi vi ricordiate che se Niccolò Piccino non consumava 40 di a Castello San Niccolò, noi non aremo auto tempo a ripigliare le forze e non aremo possuto dipoi romperlo ad Anghiari.” See *Legazioni*, I, 36.

¹⁰⁰ “E perché voi ci ricordate Sagunto, noi vi ricordiano Castello San Niccolò, che si tenne ossediato Niccolò Piccino 40 di...” See *Legazioni*, I, 124; See also Livy, *History of Rome*, xxi, 13-14 (Penguin Classics: Revised edition, 2002).

Machiavelli's involvement in the choice of the battle of Anghiari as the subject for Leonardo da Vinci's mural in the refurbished Palazzo Vecchio.

1.7. *Per amore o per forza*

Another important theme that appears in Machiavelli's early dispatches deals with the treatment of the Florentine subjects in the *contado* and the Pisans. The French invasion of Italy and the Pisan conflict had a negative effect on the extra-urban Florentine subjects who had often been victims of ravaging armies, bad crops, and forceful recruitment. When war arrived in the Casentino and the city of Florence itself was menaced by the invading Venetian army, the importance of the Florentine subjects in those territories came to the fore, as they were the first line of defense against the enemy. To motivate them to fight for the republic, Machiavelli realized that the Florentine state had to ensure their safety and well-being in the first place. Thus, it is not surprising that Machiavelli's early dispatches contain numerous references and proposed solutions to this concern. However, those solutions, as we will see in the following text, differ depending on the subject involved: For example, Machiavelli's approach towards the Florentine subjects in the Casentino and other regions in Tuscany assumes love and care; on the contrary, against the Florentine subjects in Pisa, Machiavelli advocated the use of force as the only way to subdue them.

As mentioned before, the secession of Pisa established a precedent that seriously undermined the authority and reputation of the Florentine state. While working on the recapture of Pisa, the Second Republic had to be vigilant regarding the mood and contentment of its subjects in the *contado* and *distretto*. Machiavelli's letter to the community of Poppi in the Casentino provides a good example, because it is addressed to the whole community:

La fede et affezione vostra verso di questa città è stata tale et di tanta forza che non solamente ha salvato cotesta terra a la iurisdictione nostra, ma anchora tutto cotesto paese, tale che noi non dubiteremo mai nello

amore et sincerità dello animo vostro riconoscere la possessione di quello e mostrarci paratissimi a conveniente compensazione.¹⁰¹

Machiavelli's letter goes beyond the everyday correspondence of government, exhorting a community of subjects to the state to fight not only for their freedom, but for the freedom of the city of Florence.

In another letter, to the commissioner in Empoli, Antonio Vigna, Machiavelli outlines the importance of the well-being of the Florentine subjects:

Tu sai quanto in queste occorrentiae et qualità di tempi importi farsi amare da' subditi nostri, però che se tu examinerai tutte le guerre che sono state dal novantaquattro in qua, vedrai quelle essere precedute dalla mala contentezza e disposizione di quelli. Onde ci pare che sia lo officio nostro ricordare e qualunque è in alcuna amministrazione si porti in modo tutte le actioni sue, che chi è sotto suo governo si innanimisca a serbare la fede e non si iriti a mancarne¹⁰²

Here Machiavelli clearly defines two reasons for disorders: the “mala contentezza” and “disposizione” of the Florentine subjects. Although it was the Florentine subjects who paid the heaviest toll in the war between Florence and Pisa, the government did little to shield them, resulting in their discontent. It was essential for the survival of the Second Republic, according to Machiavelli, “not to irritate our subjects” but to treat them with love by befriending them. In this way, Florence could learn from its mistakes and avoid the further deterioration of the empire.

Indeed, Machiavelli's dispatch to Bartolomeo del Tovaglia, *podestà* of San Nicolò, of January 14, 1499, reinforces the notion that Florentine liberty was defended not in Florence but at the borders of its empire. Machiavelli concludes the dispatch with this recommendation to del Tovaglia: “Questi tempi ricercano che noi ci preserviamo lo amore de' sudditi nostri, poiché in effetti ci bisogna, per salvare la libertà nostra, di continuo affaticarli.”¹⁰³ Once again Machiavelli

¹⁰¹ *Legazioni*, I, 176.

¹⁰² *Legazioni*, I, 174.

¹⁰³ *Legazioni*, I, 187.

uses the word “love” regarding the treatment of the Florentine subjects, and employs the phrase “questi tempi” as a way to draw a clear line between the discontents of the Florentine subjects since 1494 against the peace they had enjoyed under the Medici government. Machiavelli strikes a similar tone in a letter of November 28, 1498, to the *podestà* of Castiglione Aretino, when he tells him “Vogliamo che a cotesti nostri fedeli usi ogni termine amorevole.”¹⁰⁴ Machiavelli’s exhortation to the Florentine officials to use friendly manners in their dealings with the Florentine subjects in those territories confirms the sense that the Florentine dominion was fragile and that the government’s customary treatment of the *distretto* was rapacious. Machiavelli issued a warning that this exploitative attitude could ultimately prove disastrous. The passage also illustrates Machiavelli’s Roman concept of shielding their subjects, in which Rome had an obligation to protect them in times of war.

Nevertheless, Machiavelli’s strong support for the new approach in treating the Florentine subjects did not show any results in the case of Pisan rebels. By the winter of 1499, the situation in the Casentino had become desperate for the Venetians, as the Florentine captain, Paolo Vitelli, virtually imprisoned Giuliano de’ Medici and his mercenary army in Bibbiena.¹⁰⁵ With a new French invasion of Italy looming, the Venetians wanted only to opt out of the costly war in Casentino. On March 25, 1499, they concluded a deal with the French king Louis XII and then sought an agreement with Florence. The treaty between Florence and Venice, known as the *Lodo*, was concluded in April 1499 through the mediation of the Duke of Ferrara.¹⁰⁶ According to the *Lodo*, Florence would retain Pisa as well as the right to collect taxes and sell goods. Pisa,

¹⁰⁴ *Legazioni*, I, 187.

¹⁰⁵ *Legazioni*, I, 214.

¹⁰⁶ The Duke of Ferrara proclaimed his *Lodo* on April 6, 1499 and two days later Florence and Venice accepted it. The Venetians had consented to it because they were afraid that the Turks were making plans to attack them at that time. In Florence, after a long discussion, it was also decided to accept the chapters of the agreement, which was definitively signed by the two parties on April 16, 1499; See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 172-173.

in return, would retain the fortresses in Pisa and Cascina and accept a captain sent from Florence to administer justice. In addition, Florence would pay 180,000 ducats to Venice over the following twelve years. In summary, Florence would be authorized to retake Pisa, but with the city afforded a degree of autonomy.

The Pisan response was unequivocal. Despite their diplomatic isolation, they refused any deal with Florence and stated that they would burn their city to the ground rather than return it to Florentine rule.¹⁰⁷ The Pisan *Anziani* elected 10 representatives with the authority to deliver the city to any lord or Signoria but that of Florence, but none accepted the offer. On April 24, the Venetians withdrew entirely from Pisa, the adjoining countryside, and the whole of the Casentino. In Florence, it was hoped that Pisa on its own could not resist a Florence offensive. There was a popular desire to make every effort to win it back immediately. To this end, the Florentine government hired Paolo Vitelli to act as captain-general. It was now up to the *Dieci* to organize the campaign. However, the high cost of the war in Casentino meant that new sacrifices were required before war could be waged against Pisa. The *Dieci* fell under severe criticism due to their excessive spending and corruption,¹⁰⁸ and the Great Council, displeased with the *Dieci*'s mismanagement of the war and finances, dissolved the institution. In June 1499, the Signoria took over the war initiative, requesting an opinion from the citizens in the *Consulte* about the continuation of the campaign against Pisa.¹⁰⁹ Surprisingly, one opinion, in the form of a draft for speech, came not from a member of the *Consulte*, but from Machiavelli. Today it is

¹⁰⁷ Chiaverini, *Onore e Gloria*, 126; Sanudo, *I Diarii*, II, 632, 648.

¹⁰⁸ According to Guicciardini, the *Consiglio Maggiore* refused to elect the *Dieci* for the second semester of 1499 because of their alleged corruption, leaving the Signoria alone in facing numerous internal and external challenges. To get the consensus from the influential citizens and to hear their opinion on important issues, they often gathered in the *Consultae*. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 174-75.

¹⁰⁹ Leading citizens were summoned to *Pratiche* by the government of the day to advise on important questions. Almost invariably the advice of the *Pratiche* was followed, and incoming Signorie were instructed to summon a *Pratica* on all important questions and to follow the advice given to them. See Robert Black, "Florentine Political Traditions and Machiavelli's Election to the Chancery," *Italian Studies* 40 (1985): 1-16.

known as the *Discorso Sopra Pisa*.¹¹⁰ The following text will deconstruct this valuable document and outline its importance for Machiavelli's early political thought.

1.7.1. *Discorso sopra Pisa*

The first proof of the prominent part taken by Machiavelli in all affairs relating to the Pisan summer campaign of 1499 is to be found in the *Discorso Sopra Pisa*.¹¹¹ It is his first well-formed politico-military writing. In it, after proving through a series of arguments the folly of hoping to defeat Pisa without the use of force, Machiavelli gives details and various opinions expressed by the captains on how to proceed with the war operations. As the author of the document, Machiavelli displays an apparent imperial outlook regarding Pisa's liberty. Ignoring their long republican tradition and established identity, Machiavelli regarded Pisan citizens as rebels who should yield to the metropolis. His ensuing arguments on the necessity of striking immediately while Pisa is weak and isolated only support such a claim. Therefore, this document shows that Machiavelli's intellect was even then dedicated to the art of war, the essential element of his political thought.

The First Chancellor of the Florentine Republic or his assistant sometimes attended meetings of the *Consulte* to minute the debates, but according to its records, until the end of the fifteenth century, chancery staff did not offer advice in their official capacities.¹¹² They served as permanent administrative officials, which supposedly prevented them from taking part in official political consultations.¹¹³ In addition, Machiavelli had no title to participate in these discussions

¹¹⁰ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 422-424.

¹¹¹ Niccolò Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, a cura di Mario Martelli (Sansoni: Florence, 1971), 234.

¹¹² Black, "Machiavelli in the office," 32.

¹¹³ According to Black, "communal legislation never gave the chancery authority to advise on, much less decide, political questions; their statutory powers were entirely administrative. Far from giving chancery staff political power, their permanent tenure of office rendered them ineligible to take part in the discussions preceding important political decisions. This was an established feature of the Florentine constitution, as is made clear by the career of Paolo Fortini, who served as Chancellor from 1411 to 1427." See Black, "Machiavelli in the office," 39.

as that privilege was reserved for two groups: members of bodies such as the Signoria, the *Dieci*, the *Dodici buonomini*, and rich and influential citizens. Machiavelli attended the meetings of the *Pratica* to minute the debates, but in the records of the *Consulte e Pratiche*, he is not recorded as having offered advice in his capacity as Chancellor.¹¹⁴ However, as the author of the *verballi* for some of the discussions, Machiavelli had the opportunity to ponder the political and military questions discussed in those meetings, including the Pisan War. Eventually, he managed to produce occasional drafts or memoranda to his government on political and military topics, and reports following the conclusion of the meetings. While those writings are occasional and highly contextual, they offer Machiavelli's genuine insights on some of the most important decisions his government had to make. One of these jottings is the above-mentioned *Discorso sopra Pisa*.¹¹⁵

According to Marchand, the *minuta* or draft of the speech outlines the political and military situation Florence found itself in following the acceptance of the *Lodo* on April 25, 1499, and the new campaign against Pisa, initiated on June 10th, 1499. It was most likely drafted for the *Consulta* of June 10th that confirmed the new Pisan campaign.¹¹⁶ Previously, Machiavelli had written in the *verballi* of the *Consulta* of June 2nd, 1499, the following: "che noi stiamo in grande speranza di riavere Pisa, o per accordo o per Forza; e seguendo il primo ne seguirono, etc; et havendo a usare la Forza, che noi pensiamo sia necessario usare la Forza per quanto tempo sia necessario per la incertitudine della cosa; perché non riavendo Pisa, saremo nei medesimi

¹¹⁴ Black, *Benedetto Avvolto and the Florentine Renaissance*, 125-6.

¹¹⁵ This autograph is preserved in Florence's National Library under the signature: *Carte Machiavelli*, I, 75. Everything indicates that an autograph is *una minuta* and not a fragment of a definite work.

¹¹⁶ First, on June 4th, 1499, all citizens consulted decided to start the "guasto" campaign against Pisa and their allies. See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 16; Ten days later, during the *Consulta* held on the question of conquering Cascina and how to find money for the campaign. See Fachard, *Consulte e pratiche (1498-1505)*, 98.

termini inabili ad aiutarli, et non li potremo osservare.”¹¹⁷ It is clear from the text that there is a strong connection between Machiavelli’s first politico-military draft and the consensus on the Pisan question amongst the Florentine citizens during *Consulte* debates that Machiavelli was following.

Having established that Machiavelli was familiar with the topics discussed during *Consulte* debates but did not have the authority to speak, one may ask for whom he composed the *Discorso*. What was its purpose? As many scenarios are possible, it is impossible to provide a precise answer. It is the opinion of Francesco Nitti and Pasquale Villari that the speech was sent to the *Dieci* or Signoria by Machiavelli.¹¹⁸ However, it is very unlikely that the second chancellor would advise the political authorities in Florence. As the *Dieci* office was under suspension at the time and the style of the draft is too informal to be an official document, it is more likely that this draft was written for a member of the *Consulte*. Marchand concludes that the most probable hypothesis is that a member of the *Consulte*, sometime between June 1 and 4, asked Machiavelli to pen a speech in favor of taking military action against Pisa in June 1499.¹¹⁹ Whether Machiavelli felt a need to formulate his ideas about this subject in writing or he was asked to express his opinion by a member of the *Consulte*, this is certainly his first political analysis and reflection referring to the recovery of Pisa. It not only deals with the military intervention against Pisa but also considers all the options available to resolve this problem.

As we have considered the approximate time the draft was written and its purpose, we will closely examine the document itself and identify the themes that are most relevant to the

¹¹⁷ We see here the similarity between what was discussed at the meeting and what Machiavelli’s remark in the *Discorso* where he says “o per accordo o per forza pensiamo sia necessario usare la forza.” See Fachard, *Consulte e pratiche*, 163; Marchand, *I primi scritti politici*, 421, cit.7.

¹¹⁸ Nitti, *Machiavelli nella vita e nelle dottrine*, 49; Villari, *The Life and Times*, 345.

¹¹⁹ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 421.

development of Machiavelli's later political thought. It seems that Machiavelli structured his draft around three key points: first, that the conquest of Pisa was indispensable for the preservation of the Florentine Dominion; second, that the attack on Pisa must start immediately, without further delays and temporizations; third, that the submission of Pisa could not be secured by love, but only by force. It could be argued that these three points combined summarize Machiavelli's imperial outlook, thus making the *Discorso* in a sense his Florentine Imperial Manifesto. The following analysis will prove this claim.

In the first sentence of the draft, Machiavelli uses the retention of liberty as a reason to justify the conquest of Pisa: "Che riavere Pisa sia necessario a volere mantenere la libertà, perché nessuno ne dubita, non mi pare da mostrarlo con altre ragioni che quelle, le quali per voi medesimi intendete."¹²⁰ One of Machiavelli's intentions in using the word *libertà* here was to convince the Florentine people that the conquest of Pisa was necessary for the survival of the Republic, based upon economic and financial realities. Without Pisa to lay its golden eggs, Florence would soon decline and lose its freedom to one of the more powerful states that had emerged in the post-1494 political reality. By targeting liberty as undoubtedly the most important republican value amongst Florentine citizens, Machiavelli skillfully justifies the conquest of Pisa as a purely defensive measure. But was it indeed? While it is true that the Florentine economy and prestige suffered because of Pisa's independence, the Republic in 1499 stood independent and without a serious threat. It was Pisa, in truth, that stood to lose its liberty should it become again a Florentine subject. In this constellation of facts, the *Discorso sopra Pisa* can only be understood as an imperial manifesto that sets up the imperial goals of the power-hungry Florentine state.

¹²⁰ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 422.

A striking characteristic of Machiavelli's writings of this period is his argument for constant action against Florence's enemies. In his first few months in the chancery, Machiavelli interrogated military commanders and urged them to accelerate their campaigns.¹²¹ What resonates from his first dispatches and writings is an insistence on efficacy and speed in military actions, a contrast to the customary Florentine approach, which favored temporizing and waiting for the most favorable moment.¹²² In the *Discorso sopra Pisa*, Machiavelli, knowing the tendencies of Florentine politics, condemned the indecision and ineptness of his government and argued for "azione immediata contro i Pisani."¹²³ He justified his arguments with the fact that Pisa, abandoned militarily and diplomatically, could only rely on "la debolezza et disunione vostra." With this remark, Machiavelli targets not only Florence's military weakness ("la debolezza") but also the city's temporizing, its passivity in decision-making, and its divisions ("la disunione").¹²⁴ To further increase the effects of his arguments, Machiavelli points dramatically to Pisa's weakness, isolation, and misery, once again to persuade the decision-makers to attack the city immediately: "Destituiti da ogni presidio, rimasti piccoli e debolissimi, suti non accettati da Milano, discacciati dai Genovesi, non ben viste dal pontefice..."¹²⁵ Ironically, the Florentine secretary who regretted the decline of every military and citizen virtue in his own city perceived the admirable and obstinate defense of the Pisans as folly.

¹²¹ For example, on August 22, 1498, only a month after his appointment in the Chancery, he wrote to the Commissioner in camp against Pisa: "Hier et stamani vi habbiamo scripto che non è tempo né da dormire né da fare impresa che sia di poco fructo et d'essai consumatore di tempo." See, Machiavelli, *Legazioni*, I, 35.

¹²² According to Felix Gilbert, who wrote extensively on Machiavelli and Guicciardini, extreme caution characterized the way the Florentines conducted their foreign policy. Their strategy was to gain time and avoid decisions made out of fear because they could not influence nor change international developments. See F. Gilbert, *Niccolò Machiavelli e la vita culturale del suo tempo* (Il Mulino, 1964), 81.

¹²³ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 422; According to Gentile, the Pisans were planning to hand their city to the Pope and his son Cesare Borgia as the last solution if they found themselves in a desperate situation. See Lupo Gentile, "La Repubblica di Pisa nel 1500 e le sue relazioni con Luigi XII," *Bollettino Storico Pisano*, xix (1950): 125-46.

¹²⁴ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 423.

¹²⁵ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 423.

After examining the ways to regain Pisa, “per la forza o lo amore,” and “per azione immediata o temporeggiare,” Machiavelli concludes that only a military solution is possible and it should be put into motion immediately. However, his reasoning in the document is somewhat paradoxical. In the first part, he claims that cities can be taken either by force or love. But then he proceeds to eliminate the option of love. Machiavelli does not say “with love and force” but “either with love or force.” According to Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, the *Discorso sopra Pisa* is therefore a typical alternative discourse of Machiavelli, proceeding by radical oppositions of choices, where the reader is not provided with any median possibility or any complication of the extreme terms of the alternatives.¹²⁶ This is both a simplifying and, at the same time, a strongly constricting scheme of discourse and reasoning which concludes with an absolute, definitive necessity.

Although there is no official record that Machiavelli’s speech was read in the *Consulte*, the importance of this document should not be measured by its possible effect on the members, but by the ideas Machiavelli expressed in the document. Those ideas reveal Machiavelli’s thinking after a year in office and represent a compilation of his most important official observations and experiences. The most interesting feature of Machiavelli’s first political draft is the way he reasons about Florence’s politico-military situation. The text above anticipates the political thinker who emerged in the major works, especially *The Prince*. For example, in the passage on using force or love, we seem to read *The Prince* fourteen years before its writing. In his *Discorso sopra Pisa* Machiavelli sets alternatives one against the other without a middle way or compromise, anticipating the method of his later writings. Lastly, in his earliest political draft, Machiavelli levies a harsh judgment against the passivity and disunity of the Florentine ruling class. Again, *The Prince* is rich in references to historical characters whose success stems from

¹²⁶ Giorgio Bàrberi Squarotti, “Progetto e prassi: Le ‘Operette’ del Machiavelli,” *MLN*, Vol. 92, No. 1, (Jan., 1977): 17-37.

the speed of their decision-making, their resolute character, and their impetuosity.¹²⁷ Thus, we can conclude here that the *Discorso sopra Pisa* not only presents Machiavelli's imperial outlook but also foreshadows his later preoccupations with force as the sole measure of power in post-1494 Italy, where careful calculation and diplomacy have failed. As we will see in the following text, Machiavelli's first diplomatic missions will confirm and deepen his views on the use of force in politics.

1.8. Machiavelli's first *Legazioni e Commissarie* and the Pisan War

To complete the survey of Machiavelli's first year in office and his engagement in Florence's efforts to conquer Pisa, it remains to examine his first diplomatic missions or *Legazioni* in Piombino and Forlì in the spring and summer of 1499. Due to its short duration, minor significance, and general success, Machiavelli's diplomatic mission to Piombino has not aroused the interest in historiography. However, Machiavelli's *Legazioni*, in combination with other contemporary sources, tell us a different story: first, they testify to high corruption in the Florentine government concerning the *condotta* for the lord of Piombino; second, they reveal that even a less powerful *condottiere* could condition and practice extortion against a regime at the negotiating table. With this in mind, Machiavelli's mission to Piombino was truly instructive for him as he drew his own conclusions on the corrupt nature of the *condottieri* and the financial strain they placed on the republic over the long term. To a certain extent, this mission helped Machiavelli to nuance his views on the mercenary soldiers and pledged his strong support for recruiting local militia.

¹²⁷ The most notable examples are Cesare Borgia and Pope Julius II.

As the conflict with Venice in the Casentino neared its end and the peace talks initiated by the Duke of Ferrara were concluded in March 1499, the Florentines were considering renewing the operations against Pisa. But the government had first to consolidate their finances and solve the problems concerning the *condottieri* in their service. Atop the agenda was Jacopo IV d'Appiano, the Lord of Piombino and loyal servant of the Republic. The Lord of Piombino, aware of Florence's growing need for soldiers and the fact that his friend and fellow *condottiero* Ranuccio da Marciano had already signed a *condotta* with the republic, was seeking better remuneration for himself. Thus, the Signoria sent Machiavelli to Pontedera on March 24, 1499, to negotiate a new *condotta*. According to the instructions that the *Dieci* had prepared for Machiavelli, we see that the lord of Piombino demanded a greater number of men as well as pay equal to that received by Count Ranuccio.¹²⁸ We also see that Machiavelli had been instructed to assure Jacopo IV d'Appiano of the good disposition the Republic had towards him and to confirm the government's willingness to increase the *condotta* and keep him in their service. The negotiations went without difficulty, as Machiavelli accepted the Lord of Piombino's demands, and then returned to Florence.

While the mission itself did not pose a serious challenge for Machiavelli, the *condotta* granted to the lord of Piombino provoked a serious debate in Florence because not everyone was convinced in its necessity. This shows that the accusations against the *Dieci* of excessive war expenses and corruption were not unfounded. As Machiavelli's early dispatches confirm that d'Appiano's military contributions to the war in the Casentino were marginal, the lord of

¹²⁸ The purpose of the visit was to increase the Lord of Piombino's salary to 5,000 ducats so that it is not to be inferior to that of the Count Ranuccio: "Andrai al Ponte ad Era, dove, transferitoti, alla presenza dello Illustre Signore di Piombino che, avendo inteso per mezzo del cancelliere suo, certo desiderio di sua Signoria di avere da noi, oltre a quella somma ch'è stipulata nella condotta sua, aumento infino in cinque migliaia, allegando essergli stato promesso così e convenirsi per non essere sua Signoria in cosa alcuna inferiore al Conte Ranuccio. Il che in effetto è che noi siamo desiderosi assai di soddisfare a sua Signoria generalmente in ogni cosa per la fede e affezione che ha mostro inverso questa Repubblica." See *Legazioni*, I, 237.

Piombino certainly did not merit a large *condotta* worthy of a captain general, nor did the Republic need more soldiers from him. His participation in the war in the Casentino was insignificant in comparison to other *condottieri*, notably the captain-general Paolo Vitelli, Count Fracassa, Count Checco, and lesser-known *condottieri* such as Ciriaco dal Borgo. Moreover, the Lord of Piombino's *condotta* was increased at a time when the peace treaty with Venice was imminent and his services were not required. Lastly, Guicciardini claims that the Lord of Piombino had friends in the *Dieci* who apparently had an interest in helping him.¹²⁹ The approval of the new and lucrative *condotta* to the Lord of Piombino placed a heavy strain on Florence's finances and prompted the financial crisis that threatened the cancellation of the *Dieci*. With all this in mind, it is not surprising that due to the exorbitant amount of money expended on the war in the time of peace the *Dieci* were nicknamed "the ten spenders." When in May 1499 the time came for the new elections, the cry of the Florentine *popolo* was: "Down with the Ten and the taxes" ("Né Dieci né danari non fanno per i nostri pari").¹³⁰ Ultimately, the *Dieci di Balìa*, accused of overspending and deliberately prolonging the war to sabotage the popular government, was eventually dissolved.¹³¹

As a member of that body, Machiavelli must have been aware of the nature of the accusations made against it. The *Dieci*'s instructions to Machiavelli while on the mission to the lord of Piombino "a soddisfare la sua Signoria generalmente in ogni cosa...per non essere sua Signoria in cosa alcuna inferiore al conte Rinuccio," demonstrated the corruption and military weakness (*la debolezza*) of the Republic.¹³² Though he was himself above corruption, we can

¹²⁹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 175.

¹³⁰ Nardi, *Storia*, I, 188.

¹³¹ From May 1499 to September 1500 the Great Council refused to elect a new *Dieci*. When a new *Dieci* was finally elected, its powers to spend money, hire *condottieri*, and negotiate with foreign powers were greatly reduced.

¹³² "E di quello che appartenessi a noi per la parte che ci tocca, offrirai a sua Signoria, in nome nostro, che ci ingegneremo a ogni modo soddisfare al desiderio suo..." See *Legazioni*, I, 238.

assume that he did not enjoy the public outrage against his employers, and indirectly against himself as their colleague. While he could not openly criticize his direct superiors, as he had done subtly in regard to the Florentine government in general, Machiavelli certainly understood the reasons behind the public outcry against greed and corruption in the government. Based on this experience, Machiavelli's future plan for the Florentine militia minimized the use of the mercenary soldiers and significantly eased the financial constraints on the city's finances.

As for Machiavelli's subsequent mission to "the Tigress of Forlì" in July of 1499, its purpose differs from his first mission, but the context remains the same: the Pisan War. It is mainly the faceoff between the two Renaissance giants in Forlì, however, that has captured the attention of the many historians who approach this topic from gender and diplomatic perspectives.¹³³ This paper intends to focus not on the negotiations but on other parts of Machiavelli's mission to Forlì that have gone unremarked due to the personalities involved in the negotiations. There are several important facts to consider here: first, by all standards of the time Machiavelli appears to be an unconventional government official, employing various methods to obtain information for his mission; second, the *condotta* with Caterina's son was only a pretext for Machiavelli's visit; third, that Machiavelli was sent to Forlì for more reason than his sharp intellect and good negotiating skills; fourth, that his dispatches contain subtle criticism of the Florentine government and its lack of care for the Florentine subjects at the fringes of the state. In the following text, we will explore these claims in more detail.

As we have seen already, under the title *Legazioni e Commissarie* fall all the letters from Machiavelli with Florentine authority, that is, the letters sent and received by him while on

¹³³ For the literature on this topic see Joyce De Vries, "Caterina Sforza: the shifting representation of a woman ruler in early Modern Italy," *Lo Sguardo - Rivista di Filosofia*, n.13 (2013): 165-181; Francesco Bausi, "Machiavelli e Caterina Sforza," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Vol. 149, No. 4 (550) (ottobre-dicembre 1991): 887-892.

mission as a *mandatario*, or representative of the city's authority. After he had been several months in his office, the Florentine government required Machiavelli to operate *in situ*. As a *mandatario* or envoy, his principal goal was to deliver letters and messages from the Signoria, negotiate agreements within the instructions and authorities received from Florence, and gather, evaluate, and transmit information back to Florence in the form of dispatches. Based on his reports, political authorities in Florence determined their choices and decisions.¹³⁴

However, it is important to emphasize here that during his missions Machiavelli did not act solely as a regular diplomat or messenger, but also as a secret agent and spy. His tasks included gathering information from unconventional sources, such as ordinary people on the street or at the local inn, and uncovering the secrets and true intentions of the leaders he was meeting. He often employed the metaphor: “avere gli occhi alle mani,” meaning to judge without being deceived by appearances or to verify with hard evidence what might not be obvious from simple observation. The first missions led Machiavelli to develop an innovative approach to political and diplomatic analysis. According to Jean-Louis Fournel, the correspondence between Machiavelli and the Signoria during his mission in Forlì followed a logical sequence: 1) to obtain information; 2) to describe the situation; 3) to analyze and judge; 4) to act in an independent matter only in the case of urgency; 5) to send the information obtained back to Florence; 6) to receive and execute the order based on the previously obtained information; 7) to report back on the execution of the order and return to Florence if necessary.¹³⁵ Written through this prism, Machiavelli's reports not only reveal facts about the people he met and the conversations he had,

¹³⁴ Giorgio Inglese, *Per Machiavelli: L'Arte dello stato, la cognizione delle Storie* (Carocci, 2006), 12.

¹³⁵ Jean-Louis Fournel and Jean-Claude Zancarini, *Machiavel: Une vie en guerres* (Passés composés, 2020), 37-38.

but also offer a glimpse into the political, social, and economic situation of the state under observation.

Now, concerning his mission to Forlì, the accepted version of the story goes that on July 12, 1499, the Florentine government sent Machiavelli to Madonna with instructions to purchase ammunition for the ongoing Pisan campaign, hire more soldiers for the upcoming siege of Pisa, and negotiate the continued service of her son Ottaviano Riario as a mercenary.¹³⁶ However, shortly before setting foot in Forlì, Machiavelli was engaged in a delicate mission to Castrocaro, a place at the border between the Florentine state and Romagna. One of the reasons for his presence there was the insecurity of the Florentine subjects in this area due to recent harassment from the Romagnol *condottiero* Dionigi Naldo. To get to the roots of the problem, Machiavelli used rather unconventional methods for a *mandatario*, unsaddling his horse and mixing with the locals to glean information about recent events. This method is the one Machiavelli explained later to Vettori in the famous letter of December 10, 1513, where he said the following: “Transferiscomi poi in sulla strada, nell’osteria; parlo con quelli che passano, dimando delle nuove de’ paesi Loro; intendo varie cose, e noto varii gusti e diverse fantasie d’huomini.”¹³⁷ This excerpt reveals how Machiavelli approached new lands and people when he traveled. His observations were not only political and diplomatic but also ethnographic. His low status in the government and his modest origins enabled him to easily infiltrate himself amongst the locals and obtain the sort of information to which the Florentine ambassadors of higher status did not have ready access.

¹³⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 268-270.

¹³⁷ William J. Connell, “La lettera di Machiavelli a Vettori del 10 dicembre 1513,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Vol. 171, No. 4 (638) (ottobre-dicembre 2013): 665-724.

Next, Machiavelli applied curiosity and analytical thinking during his mission in Castrocaro. As well as investigating and reporting back to the Signoria on the claims of Dionigi di Naldo's misbehavior, he used the opportunity to express subtle criticism towards his superiors for their neglect of their border subjects. During his brief visit, he found time to listen to and record the complaints of the common people, measure the mood of the country, and learn of local troubles. Many peasants complained that the Republic did not protect them sufficiently from the raids of the neighbors: "E pure ieri 15 o 20 balestrieri di Madonna andorno ad un luogo qui presso ad un miglio, chiamato Salutare, che è luogo di vostre Signorie; e ferieno omini e uno ne menorno preso; e robororngli la casa; e che ieri da molti contadini del paese piagnendo mi fu detto queste formali parole: "Quelli nostri Signori per avere troppo da fare ci hanno abbandonati"¹³⁸ In his his report, Machiavelli urged the Signoria to consider these complaints on the ground that "vostre Signorie sono prudentissime, prenderanno quello espediente a questo che sia con onore della città e sadisfazione de' fedelissimi sudditi suoi, come sono questi."¹³⁹

After a short stay in Castrocaro, Machiavelli headed to Forlì to meet Caterina Sforza. One of the main reasons for Machiavelli's visit is the extension of Ottaviano's *condotta* for another year.¹⁴⁰ However, it seems to me that the real object of the mission was not to hire Ottaviano but to retain the countess' friendship without committing to any written bond or obligation. For example, a detail ignored by Machiavelli historiography is the fact that Ottaviano was anything but a warrior. Slovenly, lazy, timid, and in the shadow of his powerful mother, Ottaviano's

¹³⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 276.

¹³⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 276.

¹⁴⁰ Among the mercenaries hired for the war against Pisa in 1498 was Ottaviano Riario with 100 men at arms and 50 balestrieri. The contract was stipulated in Florence on June 9, 1498, for one year but it also allowed an option to extend it for another year. As the conflict against Venice in Romagna required Riario's services, the commissioner in Romagna, Andrea de Pazzi, requested the extension in January 1499 but Riario refused. He complained that he did not get the money eight months after he was hired. See Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 251.

military achievements were few.¹⁴¹ Surrounded by experienced commanders his mother had hired to guide him, Ottaviano played the part of *condottiere* in public, but the reality was something different. As it seems impossible that the well-informed Signoria did not know the true nature of Ottaviano's "military exploits" it is hard to believe they would have felt any compulsion to retain his services.¹⁴² It is not surprising, then, that Machiavelli was in no rush to hire soldiers from Caterina. It is more probable that the Signoria was employing Ottaviano as a pretext to approach Caterina, test her mood, and retain her friendship. The reasons for this lay in the complicated relationship the Republic had maintained with her since the death of her Florentine husband Giovanni di Pier Francesco de' Medici, known as *Il Popolano*, in September 1498.¹⁴³ If anyone was aware of this long and complicated history between Florence and Madonna, it was Machiavelli. The following text will show that this was also one of the reasons why Machiavelli in particular was chosen for this mission.

Machiavelli's dispatches from September 1498 to June 1499 are full of references to Caterina Sforza. We must emphasize this here because the historiography has ignored these in examining Machiavelli's mission to Forlì. Some Machiavelli biographers proposed that Machiavelli came to Caterina as a lamb to deal with a wolf; this is not true.¹⁴⁴ During the year before his mission, Machiavelli had dealt with issues regarding Romagna and the territories

¹⁴¹ Sergio Mantovani, "*Ad honore del signore vostro patre et satisfactione nostra.*" *Ferrante d'Este condottiero di Venezia* (Ferrara-Modena, 2005).

¹⁴² On July 12, 1499, Madonna asked for the renewal of Ottaviano's *condotta*. As Vitelli already conquered Cascina on June 26, Madonna's offer came late because Ottaviano's soldiers would have hardly arrived on time for the general assault on Pisa.

¹⁴³ Through her marriage with Pier Francesco de' Medici from 1497, Madonna was already a Florentine citizen when she instructed her ambassador in Florence, Francesco Fortunati, to offer alliance to Florence.

¹⁴⁴ For example, according to Villari, "the failure of Machiavelli's mission to Forlì seems to show that the countess was more cunning than Machiavelli, who allowed himself to be outwitted by a woman." To explain this further, Villari states that "Caterina Sforza was a woman of masculine intellect, long sole ruler of her State, whereas the Florentine secretary was only a man of letters making his first campaign in diplomacy." See Villari, *The Life and Times*, 238.

under Caterina's control. He knew that his government had not acted in good faith towards her during the war in the Casentino, and more, that they had never repaid her services. Caterina for her part had not forgotten her mistreatment at the hands of the Florentines, who after the death of her husband had lost interest in retaining her friendship. This situation changed abruptly, however, in the summer of 1499 when it became clear that the French, allied with the Pope and the Venetians, were preparing for another invasion of Italy, with Milan as its target. As Ludovico Sforza was the protector of Forlì, Caterina found herself in a dangerous position. For this reason, she was ready to set aside her mistreatment at Florentine hands and accept a *condotta* of 10,000 ducats for another year of Ottaviano's service. The most obvious candidate for these delicate negotiations was someone deeply familiar with the history of the relationship between Florence and Madonna; the choice of Machiavelli was anything but a coincidence.

Ultimately, in fear of France and in accord with her obligations towards the Duke of Milan, Caterina let Machiavelli know on July 23 that she could not accept the terms without a Florentine pledge to defend her state. As Machiavelli did not have the authority to negotiate such a deal, the mission ended there. It is not fair, however, to conclude that the mission had failed or that Caterina had outsmarted Machiavelli in any way. On the contrary, the mission was completed successfully, as negotiations were not broken but continued later in Florence. The fruits of the mission were the confirmation of the *condotta* for Riario, which meant in reality the friendship of Caterina, the promise from the countess of a certain amount of gunpowder, the avoidance of any obligation to defend her state, and her assistance in relieving Valle del Lamone in Romagna from the predations of Dionigi Naldo, who was recalled to Milan. The skills Machiavelli displayed during this mission were rightly appreciated by his friends and colleagues. Biagio Buonaccorsi, for one, friend and coadjutor with Machiavelli in the second chancery,

wrote to him from Florence in the aforementioned letters of July 19, congratulating him on the way he had carried out his mission and on the honor he brought to himself and friends: “In my opinion, you have acquitted yourself so far with much honour of the mission imposed upon you; go on as you have begun, for hitherto you have done us great honor.”¹⁴⁵ In addition, he asked Machiavelli to bring Madonna’s portrait, clearly showing admiration for the “Tigress of Forlì.”¹⁴⁶ These letters confirm the success of Machiavelli’s mission.

At that point in time, everything looked promising for Machiavelli and Florence. In a subsequent letter to Machiavelli from July 27, 1499, Buonaccorsi reports the following: “Our campaign in Pisa is going better and better, and Their Excellencies of the Signoria do not leave off day or night making the necessary provisions both of money and of everything else. They already have almost all the infantry ready, so that it is considered certain that Pisa is almost in the power of Their Excellencies of the Signoria.”¹⁴⁷ If we are to believe Buonaccorsi, the fall of Pisa was imminent. Unfortunately for both, *fortuna* had other plans.

1.9. Conclusion

Based on the texts we have considered in chapter one, we can safely argue that Machiavelli had, politically and diplomatically, a very rich, engaging, and eventful first year in office. As for Florence, after several years of misfortunes and disappointments, including the loss of Pisa, the duplicity of King Charles VIII, diplomatic isolation, and the internal crisis caused by Savonarola, the Florentines at large shared a hope of better days to come. From the outset, the new Florentine government considered the conquest of Pisa as their top priority and for that

¹⁴⁵ Villari, *The Life and Times*, 239; Atkinson and Sices, 19.

¹⁴⁶ “I would like you to send me by return mail a portrait on a sheet of paper of Her Majesty’s head, many of which have been done over there; and if you send it, roll it up so that the folds do not spoil.” See Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 20.

¹⁴⁷ Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 21.

purpose it had put in place an accomplished military commander and a number of young and talented officials in the Second Chancery. One of these was Machiavelli, who accepted the new assignment with vigor, enthusiasm, and an ardent desire to put his skills to work for the benefit of his beloved republic. From his first day in office, he capably managed his numerous responsibilities, including reading, processing, and reporting on a myriad of daily communications. More in the manner of a senior official than a novice, he organized, guided, criticized, and praised the Florentine officials in the dominion, determined that they should do their duty or face sanctions. The war in the Casentino proved to be a perfect opportunity for him to express his first political observations and the theories that served as the backbone for his later works.

During the war in the Casentino, Machiavelli showed exceptional skills in coordinating the cooperation between state officials and the mercenary soldiers in Florentine service. The end of the war in March 1499 saw Florence, against all odds, defeat the Venetians and keep a tight grip on Pisa. Clearly, Machiavelli's efforts did not go unnoticed. The Signoria, recognizing his qualities, sent him on two important missions for the state in March and July 1499, which he completed successfully. On his return from Forlì at the end of July 1499, Machiavelli had every reason to be confident. His role in Florence's efforts to conquer Pisa was publicly acknowledged, and the city seemed to stand on the brink of long-awaited success with the fall of Pisa expected imminently. However, the following text will show that exactly at this moment, a new chapter in Machiavelli's career begins, one significantly more challenging and darker than what came before.

CHAPTER 2

THE VITELLI AFFAIR

2.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses Niccolò Machiavelli's role in a five-century-long controversy surrounding the execution of the Florentine captain-general Paolo Vitelli in October 1499. The official letters and dispatches Machiavelli wrote shortly before and after the event portrayed Vitelli as a traitor and thus defended the Signoria's decision to execute the captain. Nevertheless, in *The Prince*, chapter 12, Machiavelli changed his tone, implying that it was not the alleged treason but the captain's fame and Florentine insecurity that led to his death.¹⁴⁸ Given that many contemporaries praised Vitelli and seriously doubted his guilt, Machiavelli's ambivalent positioning seems all the more puzzling. By way of the first sustained analysis of the Vitelli affair, this chapter will shed new light on Machiavelli's early involvement in Florence's political machinations. It will argue that Machiavelli, as a loyal servant to his beloved republic, coordinated, defended, and justified in his writings the course of action against Vitelli, not because he actually thought him guilty of treason, but because his execution was required for the maintenance of the public good and the state's security.

Most scholars have treated Vitelli's execution as a minor episode in military biographies of the famous *condottieri* or political biographies of Machiavelli.¹⁴⁹ My aim in this chapter is to

¹⁴⁸ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, xii, 45.

¹⁴⁹ For the nineteenth-century scholarship on Vitelli's execution see Ariodante Fabretti, "Paolo Vitelli da Città di Castello," in *Biografie dei capitani venturieri dell'Umbria*, 4 vols. (Montepulciano, 1844), III, 71-87; Canestrini, "Documenti," 92-95; Ercole Ricotti, *Storia Delle compagnie Italiane* (Turin, 1847), 308-16; For Machiavelli biographers who treated the Vitelli case see Tommasini, *La vita*, I, 149-163; Villari, *The Life and Times*, 240-6; In the following century, scholars focused on the question of Vitelli's alleged guilt. See Giuseppe Nicasi, "La Famiglia Vitelli di Città di Castello e la Repubblica fiorentina fino al 1504," in *Bollettino della Regia deputazione di Storia*

synthesize and critically examine the overlooked material on this topic for the first time. Using a multidisciplinary approach, I consider substantial and often conflicting primary material, including dispatches, letters, histories, chronicles, diaries, poems, and political treatises.¹⁵⁰ Likewise, I intend to contribute to the current scholarship on Machiavelli as a servant of the Florentine Republic and to the ongoing debate regarding his supposed neutrality while in the chancery. In the last few decades, much has been written on Machiavelli's role in Piero Soderini's regime (1502-1512).¹⁵¹ While the question of Machiavelli's political neutrality or

patria per l'Umbria, XVII, (1911): 1-231; Fredi Chiappelli, "Guicciardini, Machiavelli e il caso di Paolo," *Annali d'Italianistica* 2, (1984): 53-66; One of the recent works on this topic is Chiara Benzioni's unpublished doctoral dissertation on Paolo and Vitellozzo Vitelli's letters written between 1497 and 1499. Benzioni's monumental work in the Florentine archives deserves every praise. Thanks to the documents and letters she brought to life in her study, scholars are now able to better understand the dynamic between the Renaissance condottieri and their employers. Her findings on Vitelli's case prompted my research considerably as I wanted to complement it with my own findings on Machiavelli's role in the case. See Chiara Benzioni, "Lo studio e la catalogazione delle carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo Vitelli conservate all'Archivio di Stato di Firenze," (PhD diss. Università degli Studi di Firenze, 2011), 1-97. (<https://flore.unifi.it/retrieve/handle/2158/580097/16952/Benzioni-tesi-parte%20I.pdf>). Lastly, the 2014 and 2020 entry 'Vitelli, Paolo' by Michele Lodone in *Machiavelli. Enciclopedia machiavelliana* and the *Dizionario biografico degli italiani* should be a starting point for all scholars interested in this topic. See M. Lodone, V., P., in *Machiavelli. Enciclopedia machiavelliana*, II, (Rome, 2014), 694; Id., *Vitelli, Paolo* in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, vol. 99 (Roma 2020). (https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/paolo-vitelli_%28Dizionario-Biografico%29/).

¹⁵⁰ Machiavelli's dispatches and letters written shortly before and after Vitelli's execution, and the notes from debates in *Consulte e Pratiche* provide the Florentine government's perspective on the case. See *Legazioni*, I, 298-329; Fachard, *Consulte e Pratiche*, 240-60; For Florentine historians, chroniclers, and diarists see Nardi, *Storie*, III, 155-185; Filippo del Nerli, *Commentari dei fatti civili occorsi dentro la città di Firenze dall'anno 1215 all'anno 1537*, Libero 3 (Augusta: Mertz, 1728), 81-85; Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, 96, 261-264, 289, 310, 339 s., 352, 377 s., 384-386, 393-398, 417 s., 444-450, 453; Marco Parenti, *Storia Fiorentina*, vol. 2 (1496-1502), 280-306; Bartolomeo Cerretani, *Storia Fiorentina*, 256-280; Vaglianti, *Storia*, 81-90; For Pisan chroniclers see Portovenieri, "Memoriale," 281-360 (in particular pages 318 s., 323, 347-349); R. Roncioni, "La guerra del millecinqucento di scrittore anonimo", in *Archivio storico italiano*, VI, 2 (1845), 361-384.

¹⁵¹ Machiavelli's political adversaries, especially Alamanno Salviati, accused him of being the puppet (*mannerino*) of Piero Soderini who, as Gonfalonier of Justice, held the highest office in Florence. They also believed that with the appointment of the Spanish mercenary captain don Micheletto, Soderini wanted to impose one-man rule in Florence with Machiavelli's militia as his private army. This view was accepted by historians Carlo Dionisotti and Sergio Bertelli. See C. Dionisotti, "Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia, e don Micheletto," in C. Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie* (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 3-59; S. Bertelli, "Machiavelli and Soderini," *Renaissance Quarterly*, XXVIII (1975), 1-16; Andrea Guidi, *Un segretario militante. Politica, diplomazia e armi nel cancelliere Machiavelli* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2009), 40, and 139-159; Contrary to this view, most scholars accept that Machiavelli was a rather unconventional secretary whose role in politics was limited as the Florentines felt uncomfortable when chancery officials began to exercise political power. For his influence on political decisions there is hardly any evidence with the exception of military affairs, in his correspondence. Although Machiavelli occasionally pursued an independent line in diplomacy and expressed his opinion on political matters instead of simply reporting facts, he steered clear, however, of factional involvement. See H. C. Butters, *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence 1502-1519*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); Roslyn Pesman-Cooper, "Machiavelli, Piero Soderini, and the republic of 1494-1512" in *Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli*, ed. J. Najemy, (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 48-64; John Najemy, "The Controversy Surrounding Machiavelli's Service to the Republic," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*,

loyalty to the *gonfaloniere a vita* still attracts attention, the period that precedes Soderini's government has not been sufficiently considered. Building on the existing scholarship, I intend to look more closely into Machiavelli's role in the Vitelli affair and the Signoria's critical decisions before Soderini's election.¹⁵²

This chapter is organized into three parts, each addressing one crucial aspect of the case. In part one, I confront the conflicting portrayals of Vitelli and propose a resolution to the centuries-old controversy. I argue that Vitelli was not a traitor but a capable and trustworthy captain whose fame and political connections in Tuscany and France elicited fear and distrust in Florence, ultimately bringing about his death. I claim that Machiavelli's defense of Vitelli's execution at the time of the event most likely reflects the official and not his personal position. It was a defensive stance that served mainly to support the regime he faithfully served, the native city he loved, and his colleagues from the *Dieci* who were involved in the affair.

In part two, I examine Machiavelli's dispatches to the war commissioners in Cascina from September 1499 and trace how Florence's initial disappointment with Vitelli grew into a plan to arrest and execute him. The dispatches reveal the manipulative and deceitful measures employed by the Signoria to capture him. They also confirm that Machiavelli coordinated the

ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 101-117; Black, "Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic," in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. Gisela Bock, Quentin Skinner, and Maurizio Viroli (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 71-100; For general studies on Machiavelli's work in the chancery before 1502, see Davide Marzi, *La cancelleria della Repubblica Fiorentina* (Florence: Le Lettere, 1987); Nicolai Rubinstein, "The Beginnings," 72-91; Marchand, *I Primi Scritti Politici (1499-1512). Nascita di un pensiero e di uno stile* (Padua: Antenore, 1975); Id., "Scrittura diplomatica e scrittura cancelleresca di Machiavelli," in *Studi machiavelliani*, vol. I (Florence: Polistampa, 2018), 153-169; Black, "Machiavelli in the chancery," 31-48.

¹⁵² Tommasini was one of the first to point to Machiavelli's involvement in the capture of Paolo Vitelli in 1499. He claimed that Machiavelli unquestionably followed and executed the Government's instructions as the official spokesperson or "la lingua de suoi Signori." See Tommasini, *La Vita*, 148; Picking up on his argument, later Machiavelli biographer Roberto Ridolfi claimed that Machiavelli followed the official government's line in this period. See Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 47-8.

course of action against the captain, acting as the middleman between the Signoria issuing orders, and the war commissioners executing them. The last part follows the immediate reaction to Vitelli's death and the belated consequences for Florence, and exposes Signoria's unsuccessful attempts in diplomatic circles to conceal the lack of evidence against him. Although Vitelli's death was intended to secure Florence from possible internal and external threats, it left the republic defenseless and insecure, vulnerable to both internal rebellions and foreign menace.

2.2. Paolo Vitelli: A traitor?

In August 1497, the Florentine government executed five supporters of the Medici in the courtyard of the Bargello, the palace of the police official in Florence.¹⁵³ According to historian Nicolas Scott Baker, this event illustrates the increasing incidence of political executions in Florence, where most of the condemned died for state reasons.¹⁵⁴ While Umbrian *condottiere* Paolo Vitelli (1461-1499) was not a member of the Florentine office-holding class, his execution strikingly resembles the ones mentioned above. Vitelli was accused of plotting against Florence and, without a proper trial or chance to appeal, decapitated hastily, out of public sight.¹⁵⁵ Unlike the executed Florentines, however, Vitelli never admitted his guilt under torture, nor was any evidence found against him. Moreover, many contemporary accounts praised Vitelli, claiming

¹⁵³ Landucci, *Diario*, 156; Guicciardini, *Storie*, 142-145; Nicolas Scott Baker, "For Reasons of State: Political Executions, Republicanism, and the Medici in Florence, 1480–1560," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (Summer 2009): 444-478.

¹⁵⁴ In the registers kept by the *Compagnia de' Neri*, the confraternity that comforted condemned criminals and accompanied them to their deaths, Baker found that from 1480 to 1560, sixty-two men from the Florentine office-holding class were executed within the city and its territory for political reasons. In most cases the *Compagnia* recorded the reason for the sentence simply as *per lo stato* or for reasons of state. See Baker, "For Reasons of State," 447.

¹⁵⁵ "E a dì primo d'ottobre 1499, in martedì, fu tagliata la testa al Capitano, cioè Pagolo Vitegli, in Palagio de' Signori, su alto, in sul ballatoio; e fu alle 23 ore e tre quarti, ch'era la Piazza molto piena di popolo. Aspettavano lo gittassino giù a terra del Palagio; nollo gittorono, ma mostrarono la testa alle finestre del ballatoio, con un torchio acceso, mostrandolo al popolo in su'n una mazza. Allora el popolo si partì, giudicando che si fussi fatto giustizia e grande onore alla città." See Landucci, *Diario*, 202.

that it was he who was the victim of a plot, not the other way around.¹⁵⁶ This difference of opinion leads us to a series of questions that this chapter seeks to answer. For example, was Vitelli indeed a traitor or an innocent man who, like the Florentines mentioned above, died for *la raison d'État*? If so, then why was he executed without evidence or confession? Did the Signoria execute Vitelli because he conspired against the Republic, or was it because they feared the captain's fame and reputation? Lastly, what was Machiavelli's role in this controversy, and how can we reconcile his ambiguous representations of Vitelli?

Paolo Vitelli was born to an illustrious family of Città di Castello whose military exploits rank high in the history of Italian warfare.¹⁵⁷ His brothers Camillo and Vitellozzo were also prominent *condottieri*, who fought for the French king Charles VIII. In May 1498, the Florentine government appointed Vitelli as captain-general in the war against the joint forces of Pisa and Venice.¹⁵⁸ He proved himself to be a competent commander, his forces first conquering several key fortresses around Pisa and then, in August 1499, besieging the city. However, the good fortune that had accompanied Vitelli up to that point abandoned him as he failed to conquer Pisa. Shortly after the siege, the Florentine commissioners in the camp near Cascina arrested Vitelli and sent him to Florence, where the Signoria executed him. What had Vitelli allegedly done to deserve such punishment? While contemporary accounts disagree on this question, Machiavelli's view is contradictory and, as such, requires explanation.

According to historian Iacopo Nardi, a staunch republican, Vitelli's crime lay in artificially prolonging the siege of Pisa while maintaining secret communications against

¹⁵⁶ Paolo Giovio, *La prima parte dell'histoire del suo tempo* (Florence, 1551), 199-203; Id., *Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium* (Basileae, 1575), 181-184; Guicciardini, *Storie*, 183-188.

¹⁵⁷ For Paolo's father, ccondottiero Niccolò Vitelli (1414-1486), see the entry in *Treccani's* online enciclopedia (<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-vitelli/>).

¹⁵⁸ Parenti, *Storia*, II, 183; Landucci, *Diario*, 144.

Florence with the Duke of Milan, the king of France, the Medici, and the Lord of Siena, Pandolfo Petrucci. In letters discovered after Vitelli's death, Nardi found the "proof" that Signoria had used to justify the captain's execution.¹⁵⁹ Florentine chroniclers Filippo del Nerli and Luca Landucci confirm that similar allegations against Vitelli had circulated in Florence before his execution.¹⁶⁰ The news of Vitelli's alleged treason spread quickly to Venice.¹⁶¹ The Venetians had reason to corroborate the allegations, as the memory of their war against the Florentine forces led by Vitelli was still fresh. Given the number and the seriousness of the accusations against the captain in Florence and beyond, one might conclude that the Signoria was justified in executing the traitor.

Machiavelli also reports Vitelli's alleged collusion against the Florentine republic's interests in his dispatches and letters following the captain's arrest. Based on these writings alone, one may conclude that he genuinely believed in Vitelli's treachery and that his defense of the Signoria's harsh measures was sincere. That Machiavelli's view on Vitelli coincides with other contemporary opinions presented above, seems to make the case against the captain indisputable. For example, in a *minuta* sent to Anghiari a day after Vitelli's arrest on September 29, 1499, he reports the following: "Avendo inteso per varii riscontri Pagolo Vitelli, nostro Capitano, non avere con quella fede si conviene servito la Repubblica nostra, ma piuttosto cerco di ruinare le imprese nostre che di condurle a fine, ci è parso in recuperoazione dello onore nostro

¹⁵⁹ "Dipoi seguitando l'uno di ordine dopo l'altro, si cominciò à dubitare, che per occulta intelligenza, che havesse il Capitano col Duca di Milano, mandasse in lungo la spedizione della guerra. Le cagioni del sopetto erano molte, ma la principale, e la più vera, era che molto prima che oggi haveva cominciato il Duca à ricercare la Città della sua amicizia, e confederazione, col promettergli aperti, e savori per la ricuperazione di Pisa." See Nardi, *Storia*, III, 192.

¹⁶⁰ Historian Filippo del Nerli summarizes the accusations against Vitelli in the following statement: "dopo la ritirata dell'esercito erano insospettiti del Capitano, e di Vitellozzo suo fratello molti de' principali cittadini del governo, e mailimamente degli più reputati nella parte Fratesca, i quali fermamente credevano, i Vitelli ad istanza del Duca di Milano non aver fedelmente servito la città in quell'impresa." See Nerli, *Storia*, III, 84; Landucci, on his part, recorder in his diary that when people heard about the rumors, everyone was eager to take captain's life. See Landucci, *Diario*, 201.

¹⁶¹ Sanuto, *I Diarii*, I, 1020.

fare d'averlo nelle mani.”¹⁶² On October 1, 1499, Machiavelli informed the Florentine commissioner in Cascina that “Pagolo Vitelli giunse iersera qui; e esaminatolo diligentemente e trovatolo degno di morte, lo avviamo questo di condannato e fattolo decapitare: di che vi diamo notizia per ogni rispetto.”¹⁶³

While in the above dispatches Machiavelli merely reports on Vitelli's arrest and execution, in two letters from October 1499, he accuses the captain of various crimes against the state and adamantly defends the government's decision to kill him. These letters seem to demonstrate Machiavelli's loyalty to the office he represents and the regime he serves. The first, from October 5, 1499, is his response to a Lucchese diplomat who cites avarice as the Signoria's motive for executing Vitelli.¹⁶⁴ In a sharp and defensive voice, Machiavelli accuses the Lucchese diplomat of calumny: “Nè io mi sono mosso ad scrivere tanto per purghare le calunnie di che voi notate questa città, quanto per advertire voi, adciò per lo advenire siate più savio, il che mi pare essere tenuto ad fare, sendo noi sotto una medesima fortuna.”¹⁶⁵ Then, using rhetorical questions, Machiavelli justifies Vitelli's guilt:

Dipoi vi domando: come può stare insieme, che questa città habbi speso un tesoro da non poterlo estimare, e li pisani si sieno difesi senza fraude di Pagolo Vitelli, come voi volete inferire? perchè, se vi ricorderà bene, lo esercito fiorentino si adcostò ad Pisa si gagliardo e si bene pagato, e a tale progredi in pochi dì, come dimostrò la fuga di messer Pietro Gambacorti e la paura vostra, che se la fraude vitellesca non vi intercedeva, né nè noi ci dorremmo della perdita, nè voi ve ne rallegreresti.¹⁶⁶

Machiavelli concludes here the letter with the following remark on Vitelli's guilt: “donde ne nasce che, o per non havere voluto, sendo corrotto, o per non havere potuto, non havendo la compagnia, ne sono nati per sua colpa infiniti mali ad la nostra impresa. E merita l'uno o l'altro

¹⁶² *Legazioni*, I, 323.

¹⁶³ *Legazioni*, I, 323-4.

¹⁶⁴ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 158; Nitti, *Machiavelli nella vita e nelle dottrine*, I, 67; Villari, *Life and Times*, 338; Miles J. Unger, *Machiavelli: A Biography* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2011), 85.

¹⁶⁵ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 158.

¹⁶⁶ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 159.

errore o tucta due insieme, che possono stare, infinito castigo.”¹⁶⁷ Similarly, in a letter of October 27, 1499, to the commissioner in Cascina, Machiavelli categorically blames Vitelli for the failure at the Pisan walls, accusing him of “sinistri portamenti e opera,” “malivoli disegni,” and “la perfidia.”¹⁶⁸ Finally, in his *Il Primo Decennale*, written in 1504, Machiavelli reconfirms his stance on Vitelli by condemning the captain in a sarcastic verse, cynically remarking that the Florentines were well to eliminate someone “che fu cagion di tanto danno.”¹⁶⁹

Yet, for historians Francesco Guicciardini and Paolo Giovio, Vitelli was not a traitor but an honorable *condottiere* who fell victim to the conflict that arose between certain members of the *frateschi* and the *ottimati* factions in Florence after Girolamo Savonarola’s death in May of 1498. Caught in the middle of a power struggle between two factions in Florence, the captain served as a scapegoat to quiet the citizens’ anger and prevent tumults in the city.¹⁷⁰ By this interpretation, Vitelli’s death should be ascribed to Florence’s political and social instability, not treason. Indeed, both historians identify as the main instigator of Vitelli’s demise the Florentine *condottiero* and rival to Vitelli, Ranuccio da Marciano. After Savonarola’s execution, Guicciardini writes, Ranuccio had been replaced by Paolo Vitelli as the Captain General, which he had a hard time to accept.¹⁷¹ While Ranuccio eventually remained in the Florentine service as *governatore* subordinated to Vitelli, the rivalry between the two *condottieri* created a schism in

¹⁶⁷ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 160.

¹⁶⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 349.

¹⁶⁹ “Poco dipoi del ricevuto inganno vi vendicarsi assai, dando la morte a quel che fu cagion di tanto danno.” See Machiavelli, *Opere Letterarie*, a cura di Luigi Blasucci (Adelphi: Milan, 1964), 243, vv. 228-231.

¹⁷⁰ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 169.

¹⁷¹ “Fu condotto per nostro capitano generale Pagolo Vitelli dandogli di condotta, insieme con Vitellozzo suo minore fratello, credo trecento uomini di arme; così si rimesse in ordine el conte Rinuccio, riservatogli el titolo di governatore, benché con difficoltà si accordassi di rimanere a’ soldi nostri e volere e’ Vitelli per superiori.” See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 164.

the Florentine army, in which each leader had many supporters.¹⁷² Likewise, Giovio reports that, jealous of Vitelli's successes during the Pisan campaign, Ranuccio sent false reports to the Signoria about the captain's alleged flirtation with Milan.¹⁷³ As a *condottiero* and a petty lord under Vitelli's command, Ranuccio had a motive to subvert him, perceiving the captain as a serious threat to his profession and economic future, especially if he were to triumph over Pisa.¹⁷⁴

As the rivalry between Ranuccio and Vitelli profoundly affected the city, driving its citizens into rival factions, a debate amongst influential Florentine citizens recorded in a *Consulta* from June 9, 1499, intended to solve this problem.¹⁷⁵ From the report, one can conclude that Ranuccio had refused to obey his superior, Vitelli, which in turn threatened to subvert the ongoing campaign against Pisa. The eventual decision was to send a wise citizen to reason with Ranuccio so that the campaign could continue.¹⁷⁶ However, Guicciardini records that although Ranuccio eventually promised to obey the captain, he also "kept thwarting him and opposing whatever he undertook."¹⁷⁷ Moreover, Ranuccio attracted the support of some influential figures in Florentine political life, such as the wealthy patrician Bernardo Rucellai, and the Florentine

¹⁷² "E perché si intenda meglio, s'ha a sapere che fra e' Vitelli ed el conte era emulazione grandissima, perché el conte, sendo di una medesima età che Pagolo e stato molto più tempo di lui a' soldi nostri, aveva per male che lui gli fussi stato preposto in titolo. Nascevano ogni di fra loro contese e dispareri, che non solo generavano divisione nel campo e tra' soldati, ma ancora nella città, dove l'uno e l'altro aveva molti fautori, chi per amicizia, chi perchè giudicassino essere così el bene della città." See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 172.

¹⁷³ "Ma l'invidia tosto assalì il Vitello, dopo tante onorate prove, ch'egli aveva poco dianzi fatto, non havendo favorito dalla Fortuna a la sua animosa impresa; diede occasione à Ranuccio da Marciano suo perpetuo nemico, et maldicente d'accusarlo appresso Fiorentini facilmente sospettosi, tal che fu creduto, ch'egli si fosse ritirato, non per forza, ma con inganno, et di non haver voluto pigliar Pisa; per haver più tosto voluto ubidire le lettere di Lodovico Sforza, che per utile della Republica fare l'ultima prova di pigliar la città" See Giovio, *Historie*, 201.

¹⁷⁴ According to Filippo del Nerli, Ranuccio hated Vitelli because his *condotta* was more lucrative than the captain's. See Nerli, *Storia*, II, 81.

¹⁷⁵ *Legazioni*, I, 248-250.

¹⁷⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 249.

¹⁷⁷ "E nondimeno non sendo bene contento, più tosto intraversava ed opponevasi alle imprese di Paolo che altrimenti, e tutto di cercava di salire in più condotta e più condizione di lui." See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 172.

war commissioner and *frateschi* member, Luca degli Albizzi.¹⁷⁸ As Rucellai belonged to the *Dieci*, the office accused of excessive spending on the Pisan campaign, Vitelli's failure came as an opportunity to shift the blame from his office to the Captain General and appease the Florentines who had accused him of corruption.¹⁷⁹ As for degli Albizzi, a prominent *frateschi*, and former *Dieci* official, the removal of Vitelli served to weaken the *ottimati*.¹⁸⁰

In September 1499, armed with Ranuccio's false reports on Vitelli's treason, Rucellai and degli Albizzi approached the freshly appointed *gonfaloniere* of justice, Giovanchino Guasconi, and several other prominent members of the *grandi*, proposing to sacrifice the now unpopular captain as a means of securing peace in Florence.¹⁸¹ Guicciardini reports that the new *gonfaloniere* was a mediocre figure who did not want to start his term being confronted by angry masses.¹⁸² To avoid imminent civil unrest caused by the financial crisis and to "appease the angry mob," Gonfaloniere Guasconi accepted the proposal before him as favorable to both his office and the members of the *frateschi*. With his fame fading, an army decimated by pestilence, and a desperate desire to save his honor by conquering Pisa, Vitelli had become easy prey for his numerous enemies. In such a constellation of events, Vitelli can hardly pass as a traitor.

¹⁷⁸ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 173.

¹⁷⁹ After 1494, *Dieci di Libertà* became responsible, among other things, for financing the campaign against Pisa in the spring of 1495. For the war efforts against Pisa, the *Dieci* would receive funds directly from *Monte*, meaning that the Signoria did not directly control the use of this money during the war. Such a situation consequently paved the way for corruption among members of the *Dieci*. At the citizens' expense, they would often claim the need for exorbitant expenditures on the military, ambassadors, and foreign politics in general. This practice put significant strain on the Florentine economy and created an inevitable financial crisis. Suspicions of corruption were aroused among the citizens, culminating in June 1499 when the Great Council refused to vote on the renewal of the office of the *Dieci*. See Leonard Marks, "La crisi finanziaria a Firenze dal 1494 al 1502," *Archivio storico italiano*, 112 (1954): 40-72.

¹⁸⁰ Contemporary chronicler Marco Parenti's discretion about Vitelli, such as "amicissimo a'primatti," shows that the Florentines did not consider his alleged treachery as an individual act in which he was the only one responsible. See Marks, "La crisi finanziaria," 57, note 1.

¹⁸¹ According to Guicciardini, after the failure at the Pisan walls, Vitelli's unpopularity in the city increased infinitely among the ignorant masses and politically influential citizens. There is little doubt that the conspirators used such an atmosphere to sacrifice Vitelli and prevent a possible civil strife in Florence. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 183.

¹⁸² Guicciardini, *Storie*, 184.

Surprisingly, from June 1498, when Machiavelli started his career in the chancery, until Vitelli's arrest, the Florentine thinker praised the captain on several occasions in his writings. For instance, in a letter to Luca degli Albizzi, at the time the war commissioner in Cascina, Machiavelli reminds him to express gratitude from "noi e tutto questo populo" to Vitelli, who "ha operato e continuamente opera in beneficio di questa città."¹⁸³ While this letter is, on the one hand, ironic because it was addressed to Ranuccio's friend and presumably Vitelli's enemy (if we are to believe Guicciardini), it illustrates, on the other hand, Vitelli's loyalty and professionalism towards his employers in Florence. Considering his good reputation in Florence, one may find it hard to believe that Vitelli wanted to betray the city.

Furthermore, in *The Prince*, Machiavelli, like Guicciardini before and Giovio after him, portrays Vitelli as a capable and upright soldier whose power elicited fear in Florence and ultimately resulted in his death. After listing several examples of mercenary captains, from ancient history through Francesco Sforza, he turns to Paolo Vitelli and in a short but penetrating observation, he writes:

I fiorentini avevano preso per loro capitano Paolo Vitelli, un uomo pieno di capacità, e che, dallo stato di privato, aveva raggiunto una reputazione molto alta. Ora, se questo capitano fosse riuscito a farsi padrone di Pisa, dobbiamo riconoscere che i Fiorentini sarebbero stati costretti a stare dalla sua parte; perché se andava al soldo dei loro nemici, non avevano scampo; e se continuavano a tenerlo al loro servizio, dovevano obbedirgli.¹⁸⁴

Now, what conclusions can we draw from Machiavelli's observation? In contrast to Machiavelli's earlier accusation against Vitelli of treason and other misdeeds against the state, it is Florence's fear of Vitelli's power that comes to the fore in *The Prince*. The Paolo Vitelli of *The Prince* is an ambitious man who rises to power in his native city thanks to his military prowess and prestige. This alone is enough for Machiavelli to consider him a threat to Florence

¹⁸³ *Legazioni*, I, 171.

¹⁸⁴ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, xii, 49.

and its security in the deceitful world of Renaissance politics. More than this, Vitelli's failed campaign against Pisa had drained the republic's finances, leaving nothing to pay the *condottiere*. This threatened to produce two possible outcomes: first, Florence's enemies would seize this opportunity to offer the captain the money he needed to pay his soldiers, leaving Florence defenseless; second, to obtain the money promised to him in the *condotta*, Vitelli could have turned his forces against Florence, obliging Florence to submit to him. Hence, Vitelli's death as considered in *The Prince* has more to do with Florence's financial problems and insecurity than Vitelli's alleged treason.

To illustrate his point about the threat that successful commanders pose to the regime that employs them, Machiavelli links Vitelli's fate to that of Count Carmagnola, the *condottiere* who in 1432 had been betrayed and executed by the Venetians. According to Machiavelli,

All'inizio (i Veneziani) non avevano molto da temere dai loro capitani perché il loro territorio non era molto grande, anche se molto importante; ma non appena lo ampliarono, quando era al comando il Carmagnola, ebbero una prova del loro errore. Essi videro quale era il suo grande valore dopo che con il suo comando vinsero il duca di Milano, ma anche che il suo zelo si era raffreddato e che non c'erano da aspettarsi altre vittorie da lui. Però non potevano congedarlo per non perdere ciò che avevano conquistato; così per mettersi al sicuro da lui, lo fecero ammazzare.¹⁸⁵

The connection Machiavelli makes between the two *condottieri* is intended to imply the following: first, that the Florentines, like the Venetians, had killed their captain to secure their Republic against him; second, that for Vitelli's execution, as for Carmagnola's, treason had only served as a cover.

Now that we have examined contrasting source views on Vitelli, we need to answer two critical questions to resolve the controversy: first, was Vitelli killed for state reasons or because of disloyalty? Second, how are we to read and understand the apparently conflicting views of Vitelli set forward at different times by Machiavelli? Most contemporary accounts agree that the

¹⁸⁵ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, xii, 50.

Vitelli was a competent and trusted mercenary who earned praise and attention from his contemporaries, including the Florentine Signoria. Vitelli fought for Florence (primarily in service of the French, whose return to Italy they expected) to enhance his reputation, fame, and glory.¹⁸⁶ Also, he aimed to elevate his status relative to more illustrious and established *condottiere* families such as the Montefeltro, Colonna, and Orsini. Their next goal was to bring high culture to their center of power - Città di Castello.¹⁸⁷ With such ambitions, Vitelli would have had no desire to tarnish his hard-earned reputation by participating in a plot against Florence.¹⁸⁸ All of these circumstances argue against the “treason theory.”

Sources confirm, moreover, that Vitelli had established a firm grip on power in his city of origin, transforming himself in the process into the lord of a territorial state, albeit a small one.¹⁸⁹ He and his brothers owned significant property in the Florentine dominion, with holdings in Castiglione Fiorentino, Borgo San Sepolcro, and Anghiari. They also had connections in Pistoia, where Paolo’s sister Lisa had married Francesco Bracciolini, a Panciatichi clan leader. Pistoia

¹⁸⁶ “Sendo lui nel mestiere del soldo, lo stato e lo essere suo era in essere riputato uomo valente e fedele, le quali cose tanto gli dava lo acquisto di Pisa e gli toglieva el non l’avere, che si può dire fussi fondata in quella impresa la gloria e riputazione sua.” See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 185.

¹⁸⁷ That Vitelli indeed enjoyed great prestige in Italy, as Machiavelli claimed in *The Prince*, confirms the cultural atmosphere in Città di Castello at the time. The Vitelli brothers’ private correspondence, explored by historian Carla Benzoni, shows a high level of cultural activity the brothers had developed in Umbria. The work of patronage and the city’s control, undertaken by the Vitelli dynasty between the 15th and 16th centuries, is evident from the large number of buildings that bear this family’s name. For example, Palazzo Vitelli alla Cannoniera has housed the Pinacoteca Comunale gallery, which includes, among others, works by Luca Signorelli and Raphael. See Benzoni, “Politica e mecenatismo a Città di Castello: Paolo Vitelli, Luca Signorelli, Lucio Bellanti,” *Archivum mentis. Studi di filologia e letteratura umanistica* 2, (2013): 223-53; Benzoni, *Carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo Vitelli*, 37-55; Tom Henry, *The Life and Art of Luca Signorelli* (New Haven and London, 2012), 316.

¹⁸⁸ According to Guicciardini, “Non è da credere che Pagolo l’avessi stimato, vedendolo in tanto pericolo col re di Francia che non ne poteva più sperare cosa alcuna. In modo che tengo certissimo che Pagolo andassi dirittamente colla città, e dessiderassi per lo interesse ed onore suo sopra ogni altra cosa la vittoria di Pisa.” See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 185.

¹⁸⁹ To illustrate their power in the city, Benzoni shows how the Vitelli subjects celebrated their lords with parades and feasts. The ceremony in Città di Castello in April 1499 shows the extent of their popularity. While the Venetians and Florentines were negotiating peace, the citizens of Città di Castello were decorating the streets and escorting their *signori* into a new campaign against Pisa to bring glory to their *patria*. See Benzoni, *Carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo*, 44.

was the production center of weapons in Italy and the source from which the Vitelli supplied their army.¹⁹⁰ Ultimately, Vitelli's connections with the Orsini, and indirectly with their in-laws the Medici, meant that they were closely allied to a Roman family that was opposed to the Florentine Republic. According to Guicciardini, although the Vitelli brothers had no territorial aspirations in Tuscany, their influence impinged upon the southern Tuscan border, raising the alarm amongst the republican Florentines.¹⁹¹ The latter watched with apprehension the rise of a *signorotto* near their borders, a situation that enemies might easily exploit. *The Prince* implies that to prevent this the Florentines opted for pre-emptive action against Vitelli, just as Venice had with the Count of Carmagnola. Clearly, Vitelli's military prowess and political connections in Tuscany threatened the balance of power between patron and *condottiere*.¹⁹² It was this, rather than any act of disloyalty, that made him suspect to the Republic and led to his demise.

As for Machiavelli's ambiguous view on Vitelli, I believe that his reaction to the captain's arrest and execution while in the chancery reflects his government's, and not his personal position. According to Robert Black, "It is not that Machiavelli did not have an opinion or feelings about the political matters in Florence between 1498 and 1512 – it is rather that he

¹⁹⁰ The production of weapons was the main economic activity for the Bracciolini family. See Fabrizio Ansani, "The life of a Renaissance gunmaker. Bonaccorso Ghiberti and the development of Florentine artillery in the late fifteenth century," *Technology and Culture* 58(3), (2017): 749-789.

¹⁹¹ "He had many connections and friends in Pistoia, in Borgo San Sepolcro, and in many of our other principal towns, leading a few wise men to fear that he might be aiming at power and lordship within our dominion." See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 171.

¹⁹² In his influential article "A War of One's Own: Mercenaries and the Theme of *Arma Aliena* in Machiavelli's *Il Principe*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 18 (4), (2010): 541-574, Séan Erwin came to the similar conclusion. According to Erwin, "if considered with care, the references made to the mercenary captain, Paolo Vitelli, in this chapter not only describe the risk the Florentines took in employing the *condottieri*; they also suggest, what is not said about Vitelli's employment by the Florentines, another stratagem employers of mercenaries could employ against *condottieri* on those occasions when the decisive success of the captains in their engagements threatened the proportion of power between patron and *condottiero*. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes both the Florentines and Venetians making use of the art of conspiracy as a way of securing themselves against the potentially negative consequences of their use of mercenary arms. Effective mercenary captains in this climate thus had most to fear from their own employers." See Erwin, "A War of One's Own," 567-8.

recognized the need to mask those feelings in order to do the job well and keep it.”¹⁹³ Thus, Machiavelli’s defensive posture before anyone who questioned Signoria’s decision to kill the captain served only to support the regime he loyally served.¹⁹⁴ He did not depart from the line of conduct that his official status determined. With this in mind, we can argue that Machiavelli’s altered perspective on Vitelli after 1512 stemmed from the regime change in Florence and Machiavelli’s role in it. Divorced from the political struggles of his city while working on *The Prince*, Machiavelli in 1512 was at greater liberty to express his personal views on Vitelli than he had been in 1499.¹⁹⁵ No longer obliged to foster the republic’s unjust treatment of its military captain, Machiavelli focused instead on what he thought was most important for a new prince to know in order to secure his regime.

Furthermore, Machiavelli’s commitment to Florence and its security influenced his moral stance on Vitelli’s execution. *The Discourses* concludes with the notorious call for the safety of the fatherland on the ground that any action either just or unjust, merciful or cruel, praiseworthy or ignominious is justified to ensure the continued existence of the state.¹⁹⁶ As expressed in his declaration that he cared more for his *patria* than his soul, Machiavelli’s love for his city holds

¹⁹³ Black, “Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic,” 74.

¹⁹⁴ Machiavelli discharged his duties with impeccable honesty. “My poverty,” he proudly proclaimed, “is a witness to my loyalty and honesty.” No one, not even his political enemies or his most severe critics, has been able to refute this assertion. We might add that his loyalty to the Republic was the main cause of his political downfall. See Viroli, *Machiavelli’s God*, xi.

¹⁹⁵ According to Rubinstein, as far as the government and politics of Florence was concerned, “the years between 1498 and 1512 during which Machiavelli held office, were years of silence. It was not until after the fall of the republic and dismissal from the office that this silence was broken – as if he were now at last free to speak his mind on matters his position as “civil servant” had previously prevented him from discussing.” See Rubinstein, “Machiavelli and the World of Florentine Politics,” 14.

¹⁹⁶ “Lucio Lentolo, legato romano, disse che non gli pareva che fosse da fuggire qualunque partito per salvare la patria: perché, consistendo la vita di Roma nella vita di quello esercito, gli pareva da salvarlo in ogni modo; e che la patria è bene difesa in qualunque modo la si difende, o con ignominia o con gloria.” See Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, 41, 495; W. Hanasz, “The Common Good in Machiavelli,” *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Spring 2010): 67.

an essential place in his thought.¹⁹⁷ Viroli argued that in Machiavelli's mind, love of politics and country were one and the same, and so "he interpreted and practiced politics as service to his country because he loved it."¹⁹⁸ Thus, one can argue that Machiavelli's differentiation between the morally good and the politically good does not require a divorce of politics from morality. According to historian Dan Eldar, "Machiavelli wished to make rulers aware of the nature and the extent of prudent and necessary deviations from private morality for the sake of attaining political goals such as glory, security, and governability."¹⁹⁹ In other words, what is politically virtuous for Machiavelli will first of all answer to the needs of security, stability, and duration, while political morality is whatever is necessary to create or preserve society or order.²⁰⁰

Lastly, if we are to believe Guicciardini, the main conspirators against Vitelli were Rucellai and degli Albizzi, both Machiavelli's colleagues in the *Dieci*. One may wonder if Machiavelli wrote in support not only of the regime, but of his friends and colleagues. While the sources do not explicitly name Rucellai as a friend of Machiavelli, the Rucellai family was a prominent patron of his later intellectual output. In the post-1512 period, Machiavelli maintained a friendship with Bernardo's son Giovanni through his famous gatherings in the Orti Oricellari.²⁰¹ The Rucellai family also offered their hand to Machiavelli when many, including his friend Vettori, hesitated. For many reasons, we might assume Machiavelli's loyalty to and

¹⁹⁷ In a letter written on April 16, 1527, two months before he died, Machiavelli confessed to his friend Francesco Vettori: "I love my country, more than my soul." See Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and His Friends*, 416.

¹⁹⁸ In 1521, when Machiavelli was in Carpi to discharge a quite inglorious mission on behalf of the Wool Guild of Florence, he did not hesitate to explain flatly to Francesco Guicciardini, that he took his duty seriously because he never disappointed the republic whenever he was able to help her out with deeds and words. See Viroli, *Machiavelli's God*, xiv.

¹⁹⁹ Dan Eldar, "Glory and the boundaries of public morality in Machiavelli's thought," *History of Political Thought*, Vol. 7, No. 3 (Winter 1986): 437.

²⁰⁰ Eldar also argues that "true political morality is simply the ability to understand what is necessary to succeed in the circumstances and to act on that understanding." See Eldar, "Glory and the boundaries of public morality," 439.

²⁰¹ Felix Gilbert, "Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari: A Study on the Origin of Modern Political Thought," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 12 (1949): 101-131.

support of the Rucellai. As for degli Albizzi, sources confirm that he was a close friend of Machiavelli. As we have seen in chapter one, in a series of dispatches Machiavelli sent to degli Albizzi in December 1498, the Florentine thinker comforted, advised, supported, and praised his friend.²⁰² In the summer of 1500, Machiavelli and degli Albizzi together conducted a challenging mission involving French soldiers in the Pisan camp, on which Buonaccorsi wrote a short paper.²⁰³ Considering their friendship before and after Vitelli's death, it is fair to assume that Machiavelli would have stood by degli Albizzi during the affair. As the line between the personal and the professional for Machiavelli was ill-defined, his choice to uphold his government's and his friend's decision to execute Vitelli would not be surprising.

2.3. The Conspiracy

The government's decision to punish Vitelli's disobedience did not arrive overnight; the Signoria had to devise a suitable plan, act with caution, and wait for Vitelli to make a misstep. A close reading of a series of letters Machiavelli wrote to the commissioners in Cascina in September 1499 reveals hints of the government's strategy against Vitelli. As the middleman between the Signoria's instructions from Florence and the commissioners' actions in the camp, Machiavelli was familiar with the government's plans from the outset. However, as a man of government, he was cautious not to communicate them openly.²⁰⁴ In the following text, we will see how the government's rhetoric towards Vitelli changed over time from open expression of displeasure to hidden manipulation and deception. Machiavelli's dispatches will confirm that

²⁰² *Legazioni*, I, 144-47, 166-68, 170-4.

²⁰³ Biagio Buonaccorsi, "Impresa contro Pisa," *Archivio Storico Italiano*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1853): 401-421.

²⁰⁴ In his *Discorsi*, Machiavelli claimed that conspiracies should never be divulged in writing, "debbesi, adunque, non comunicare mai la cosa se non necessitato ed in sul fatto; e dallo scrivere ciascuno debbe guardarsi come da uno scoglio, perché non è cosa che più facilmente ti convinca, che lo scritto di tua mano." See Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, vi, 281.

over a matter of weeks, the Signoria acted decisively to weaken, pamper, and then seize the captain-general.

Vitelli's failure to seize the city on August 10, 1499, seems to be a turning point in Florence's war against Pisa.²⁰⁵ Not aware of the widespread panic and desperation in Pisa, Vitelli halted the final assault seeking not to expose his soldiers to unnecessary danger, which ultimately led to his defeat.²⁰⁶ But, despite the initial failure to conquer Pisa on August 10, 1499, Vitelli did not give up. Furthermore, the Florentine government put extra pressure on the Captain, urging him in a letter of August 15 to take Pisa by storm.²⁰⁷ Vitelli planned a final attack for August 24. However, due to the high number of sick and deserted soldiers, he called off the operation. While the Signoria still expected him to launch the attack on Pisa once the sick had recovered and new recruits had arrived, Vitelli was resolute in stalling, hoping to preserve and reorganize his diminished and demoralized troops. His inaction was received with dismay by both the Florentine government and the people. The power of the people to sway the decisions of government is shown in Machiavelli's letter of August 25, 1499: "Ma sendosi consumata tanta fanteria, et preparata con tanti danni, in otio et senza farne alcuno experimento in favore della nostra città non sappiamo né che i dire né con qual ragioni exscusarci in cospecto di tutto questo popolo, el quale ci pare havere pasciuto di favole, tenendolo di di in di con vana promessa di certa victoria."²⁰⁸ From this dispatch, it seems that the government needed to take some action in response to Vitelli's defiance of the official orders.

²⁰⁵ Despite the failure to conquer the city that day, Giorgio Vasari immortalize the siege with in famous painting named "Taking of the Fortress of Stampace in Pisa." See <https://www.visit-florence-italy.com/museums/palazzo-vecchio/pisa-war-taking-stampace-hall-five-hundred-palazzo-vecchio-florence-italy.html>

²⁰⁶ Vitellozzo Vitelli later claimed that before the final assault on Pisa, Paolo had wanted first to place the artillery against *Stampace* fortress to secure the victory. However, the sickness in the camp forced him to retreat.

²⁰⁷ Villari, *The Life and Times*, I, 534, doc. ii.

²⁰⁸ Villari, *The Life and Times*, I, 536, doc. iv.

Little did Vitelli know that his dispute with the Signoria would cost him his life. At the beginning of September 1499, Vitelli decided to abandon the camp near Pisa and head to Cascina due to his belief that deadly air infested with malaria was emanating from the marshes around the city, claiming numerous victims amongst soldiers and commissioners. As he could not transport his heavy artillery over the hilly roads near Cascina, Vitelli sent it down the Arno River towards Livorno. Unfortunately for him, the boats could not sustain the weight of the cannons and some of them sank into the river, causing consternation in Florence. Machiavelli's letter of September 4 to the Florentine war commissioner in the camp near Pisa expresses Signoria's extreme dissatisfaction with Vitelli's decision to raise the camp despite their instructions that he remain there and wait for reinforcements.²⁰⁹ The Signoria, moreover, was adamant that Vitelli should not abandon the *Stampace* tower on the left bank of the Arno, as its capture had come at great expense and its loss would boost the enemy's morale.²¹⁰ This letter is very important for our understanding of the upcoming conspiracy against Vitelli because it tells us that the Signoria's rift with the captain originated with his disobedience rather than any act of treason. Evidently, there must have been Florentines who believed that keeping Vitelli in command after such behavior would be perceived as weakness. The interests and reputation of the Republic were at risk if its military decisions were exercised at the discretion of an unpredictable officer. Thus, it is not surprising that after September 5, it was decided to take measures against Vitelli.

The following letter from Machiavelli to the war commissioner near Pisa, sent

²⁰⁹ "Quanto più noi desideriamo che cotesta impresa si tiri avanti, tanto più ci dispiace e offenderci intendere per le vostre lettere di oggi cotesti signori essere come resoluti fra dua di partirsi: il che non possiamo credere facciano poiché vi abbiamo scritto per doppie e' provvedimenti avviamo mandati e continuo mandiamo...non sappiamo vedere la cagione perché voi non possiate temporeggiare tanto che maggiore forza vi si avvenga..." See *Legazioni*, I, 299.

²¹⁰ "E però non vorremmo a nessun modo vi ritraessi di Stampace o vi discostarsi altrimenti col campo, per non dare animo al nemico e torlo a' nostri...ma del ritirarvi da Stampace a verun modo ce ne accorgiamo, perché non dare essendosi speso 70 mila ducati per mettere un pie' in Pisa, non voliamo a alcun modo ritrarlo, non ci sforzando la necessità." See *Legazioni*, I, 300.

September 5, indicates that the Signoria had taken a first step towards Vitelli's dismissal. In the letter, Machiavelli accuses Vitelli of disobedience and lack of honor and instructs the war commissioner to send all Cascinesi aged fourteen and over to Florence within three days of the announcement.²¹¹ Any not presenting themselves to the Florentine magistrate would be declared rebels, and their assets confiscated.²¹² As most of the Cascinesi had joined Vitelli in June 1499 and were paid by him, it is obvious that the Signoria intended to remove the garrison around the captain, depriving him of soldiers. It was a plan meant to weaken Vitelli militarily in case he turned against Florence.

In a follow up letter of September 6, 1499, Machiavelli informs the commissioners in Cascina that “fra 2 o 3 di manderemo costi nuovi commissari bene istruiti e informati di nostra intenzione, acciò possino disporre tutto secondo la nostra volontà.”²¹³ This letter indicates that sometime before September 6, the Signoria had decided to send out commissioners in response to Vitelli's unwillingness to follow orders. The letter does not specify, however, precisely how the commissioners were to proceed. According to historian Filippo del Nerli, their role was to investigate the rumors about Vitelli (*per purgare i sospetti*) and reorganize the soldiers who returned to Cascina.²¹⁴ Their mission confirms that at this point, the Signoria only possessed certain doubts about the rumors circulating against Vitelli. The decision to arrest him came later. The following letters reveal exactly when that decision could have been made.

In the letter sent on September 16 to the recently arrived war commissioners, Antonio Canigiani and Braccio Martelli, Machiavelli insists on maintaining the war camp against Pisa at

²¹¹ *Legazioni*, I, 302.

²¹² *Legazioni*, I, 302.

²¹³ *Legazioni*, I, 310.

²¹⁴ “Gonfaloniere di giustizia Giovacchino Guasconi, per purgare i sospetti, mandò Anton Canigiani e Braccio Martelli, che eran Commissari in Cascina, per riordinare le genti loro dopo la ritirata del campo.” See Nerli, *Storia*, III, 84.

the nearby Cascina, from where Florence could keep the Pisans in check and secure other possessions.²¹⁵ After explaining the reasons for this decision, Machiavelli expresses exasperation at the captain's defiance of the Signoria's orders, then issues the following warning to Vitelli: "Pure, quando la vedessi resistente, fareteli intendere che questo porta tanto alla nostra città, che quando sua Signoria o non possa o si diffidi poterlo fare, che vorremmo conseguire questo nostro desiderio ad omni modo e prendere omni mezzo per non avere questa ultima vergogna: la quale sua Signoria dovrebbe più avere a cuore che noi propria."²¹⁶ It is clear from the letter that the Signoria was ready to do anything to maintain the camp. As Vitelli's departure would have depleted its numbers and ultimately led to its dissolution, the Florentine government was compelled to choose between letting Vitelli go or detaining him as a rebel while keeping his soldiers on their payroll. The fall of Milan to the French king on the following day forced the Florentines' hand.

On September 17, 1499, the French king Louis XII conquered Milan. His alliance with Venice, the pope, and Cesare Borgia created insecurity in Florence. The Florentines, though allies of the French since 1494, worried about the king's intentions regarding their conflict with Pisa. The possibility that Paolo Vitelli might join the king after decamping from Cascina only amplified anxieties in Florence. While the Pisan campaign could wait for another year and more favorable circumstances, the Vitelli dilemma could not. With an angry populace demanding a scapegoat for the failure at the walls of Pisa, Vitelli's continuation in his position would only aggravate the situation and create problems for Guasconi, the new *gonfaloniere*. At the same

²¹⁵ "Noi veggiamo addunche, avendo discusso e esaminato bene ogni cosa, e trovato nel campeggiare più sicurezza, più onore e manco spesa" See *Legazioni*, I, 313.

²¹⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 313.

time, a break with the captain would most probably send him into the arms of the French, or worse, turn him against Florence. The Signoria had to make a quick decision.

Machiavelli's letter to the war commissioners in Cascina of September 19 suggests that the decision was made either on the day that Milan fell or the following. In this letter, Machiavelli first confirms that the war commissioners had communicated with Paolo's brother Vitellozzo on September 18, and the Vitelli were ready to leave the camp and send their soldiers to their lodgings in eight days (on September 26, 1499).²¹⁷ Next, Machiavelli instructs the war commissioners to praise Vitelli for informing the Signoria that his secretary intends to visit the French king in Milan, and to convince the captain that the Signoria is pleased with this gesture, wishing Vitelli every honor and a good reputation with the French king.²¹⁸ It is clear that the lavish praise of Vitelli in this letter served only to falsely assure him of Signoria's good intentions.

Knowing as we do how dissatisfied the Signoria had been with Vitelli, it seems incredible that they would have tolerated the *condottiero*'s close contacts with the French king. The remainder of the letter confirms that hypothesis. Machiavelli states to Canigiani and Martelli that the Signoria does not want Vitelli to send Messer Currado or any other diplomat before Florence has sent its own.²¹⁹ Seemingly, the Florentine government wanted to forestall any contact between the French king and the Umbrian *condottiero*. The latent fear of King Louis XII's presence in Milan and the benefits that Vitelli might receive from him prompted the government to react without delay.²²⁰

²¹⁷ "Vitellozzo vi fu riferito circa il volere ire alle stanze per otto di." See *Legazioni*, I, 314.

²¹⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 315.

²¹⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 315; Tommasini, *La Vita*, 152.

²²⁰ As historian Iacopo Pitti claimed, Vitelli was killed "per timore che il Re di Francia non lo chiedesse, come da tutta la corte sua era ardentemente desiderato." See Iacopo Pitti, *Istoria fiorentina*, a cura di L.F. Polidori (Florence, 1842), I, 67.

That the Florentines, moreover, feared an international conspiracy against them, organized by Venice, the Pope, Cesare Borgia, and the Medici is revealed in letters to the Signoria from the diplomat, Ridolfo Ridolfi.²²¹ Concerning this, on September 26, 1499, (the day Vitelli was supposed to leave the camp), Machiavelli's coadjutor wrote in the name of the *Dieci*: "Noi desideriamo più che la vita che si rechi a fine quello che si ragionò con Girolamo Pilli,²²² de capiendo capitaneo generali..." adding in the margins, "e però vi confortiamo ed esortiamo a non perdere alcuna occasione per riavere l'onore della patria nel cospetto di tutta Italia; e però fate presto, presto, presto quello dovete fare."²²³ Villari found in the letter of September 27, 1499, edited by Canestrini, that the Florentines, while urging the immediate capture of Vitelli, wanted to make it known, especially to the French king, that they could take care of themselves and deserved to be held in the same esteem as other powers.²²⁴ Not surprisingly, the daring resolution of the Republic to take Vitelli into custody was taken against the backdrop of the French military success in Lombardy and the entry of Louis XII into Milan. Simultaneously with the arrival of the princes and ambassadors of almost all the States of Italy, the news of the capture and condemnation of Captain-General Paolo Vitelli duly arrived, together with the Florentine ambassadors. We might argue that Machiavelli's dispatch of September 27, 1499, suggests one more motive for the Signoria's removal of Vitelli: to salvage whatever was left of

²²¹ Ridolfi's letter of September 24 informs Signoria about the pope's diplomatic mission to the Venetians, who agreed to give Cesare Borgia a state that included Forlì, Faenza, Pesaro, Pisa, and Siena. See Benzoni, *Carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo Vitelli*, 70.

²²² The Florentine war commissioner.

²²³ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 152-3; Likewise, Nerli reminds us that Vitelli was executed "col molta prestezza" and with "popular desiderio." See Nerli, *Storia*, III, 84.

²²⁴ "Resta ora che per voi non manchi di fare che si rechi a fine quanto si desidera comunemente in recuperazione dello onore della città e in distruzione de' ribelli e nemici nostri, acciò che noi appresso a qualunque potenza, e massime la cristianissima maestà, appresso la quale è la somma delle cose d'Italia. A noi ci vogliamo di qualche reputazione per avere e' soldati nostri insieme, e nemici stretti; e che l'intenda che noi ci vogliamo aiutare ad ogni modo, e che noi non siamo da essere manco stimati che gli altri potentati d'Italia." See Canestrini, *Scritti inediti*, 95; Villari, *The Life and Times*, 243.

their besmirched reputation and prestige. With this move, they hoped to demonstrate to everyone, and especially the French king with whom they were about to sign a new pact, that they were worthy of being his allies. Seen this way, Vitelli's execution is no more than a diplomatic maneuver.

The last two letters Machiavelli wrote before Vitelli's capture demonstrate both the existence of a plot against the captain and Machiavelli's familiarity with it. In another letter of September 27, 1499, Machiavelli informs the commissioners of the following:

Questo dì è stato qui uno cancelliere del capitano, e detto, che se al capitano non è dato danari, che vuol vendere certi poderi ha in sul dominio nostro; sì che ci pare che la medicina nostra comincia ad operare, e giudichiamo sia debole di gente tra li malati e quelli se ne sono iti per non avere danari, e però ci fia più facile recare a fine il disegno nostro; sì che fate presto, e, quando l'occasione viene, usatela. Nè vi manchi l'animo a riavere l'onore della patria nostra.²²⁵

Now, this dispatch is very important for our understanding of the Signoria's decision to eliminate Vitelli. What stands out here is the alleged threat to the Signoria from one of Vitelli's representatives in Florence. We know from the sources that Vitelli did have several possessions within the Florentine dominion, mostly around Borgo San Sepolcro, Anghiari, and Cortona. Those territories were inhabited by loosely integrated Florentine subjects, whose loyalty to the republic was predicated on the power of the metropolis to protect them. We will see further along in the text that these were exactly the territories Vitellozzo Vitelli would attack later in order to harm the republic. With that in mind, and if we are to believe Machiavelli's account of the threat, then the Signoria's decision to strike first would make sense. While it is not clear what Machiavelli means when he says, "It seems to us that our medicine is beginning to work," I suggest that the Signoria's decision to starve out Vitelli's sick troops by delaying their pay had the precise purpose of provoking the captain to threaten the republic if he did not get the pay that was owed him according to the *condotta*. Machiavelli's comment that such threats "will make it

²²⁵ Canestrini, *Scritti inediti*, 100, cit.1.

easier for us to bring our plan to its goal” confirms that the Signoria already had a plan to remove Vitelli long before any such threats were issued. Lastly, as this dispatch has more of a private than an official tone, Machiavelli’s use of the phrases “la medicina nostra” and “nostro disegno” could indicate that he too was involved in the discussions over the capture of Vitelli. After all, considering Machiavelli’s familiarity with the plan from the outset, and his sharp mind and talents, it seems unlikely that he was not involved in the discussions on how the plan should be executed.

Machiavelli sent one more dispatch from Florence on the very day Vitelli was captured in which he encouraged the commissioners to proceed with the plan rather than to wait. As a reason, he cites Florence’s distrust of the captain, his low prestige, and the uncertainty regarding his future intentions, especially if he should decide to join the Pisans:

Parci, per lo avviso che tu Braccio (Martelli) ci dai, piuttosto da accelerare la cosa che sopirla o differirla; perchè noi siamo in su questo articolo di non ci potere mai fidare di lui, e giudichiamo che avendo inteso per più vie in quanta infamia egli è cascato, venisse a termini e usasse quelle parole per vedere se voi volevi la giustificazione sua, e volendola voi credere per fermo che voi e noi dubitassimo di lui per potere chiaritosi provvedere alla salute sua con danno nostro.²²⁶

If the first letter to the commissioners discussed Vitelli’s capture in general terms, that of September 28 is very specific in suggesting prompt action. We do not know whether the commissioners arrested Vitelli upon receiving this letter or if they had done it sooner, but we can conclude from Machiavelli’s words that the mission was very delicate, for the two senior officials needed encouragement from the office and assistance from Count Ranuccio. We also see that the trust between Vitelli and Florence has been compromised earlier and that neither party could continue like this for much longer. Using the same patriotic language to motivate his colleagues as he had many times in his earlier dispatches, Machiavelli presents Vitelli’s capture as a patriotic and honorable act in defense of the homeland. At this point, there is no doubt that

²²⁶ Canestrini, *Scritti inediti*, 100, n.1.

the secret of Vitelli's arrest was known to Machiavelli.

The final act of deception to which Machiavelli referred in the dispatches mentioned above, occurred in the last week of September 1499, when most of Vitelli's soldiers had already left the camp in Cascina. The war commissioners tasked with arresting Vitelli had invited the captain to discuss further plans for the attack on Pisa. To assuage any doubts that Vitelli might have harbored, the meeting was held at Ranuccio da Marciano's villa in Cascina. Parenti tells us that Ranuccio knew about the plot and had no qualms about betraying his fellow *condottiere*;²²⁷ given Ranuccio's hatred for Vitelli, his decisive role in the plot is not surprising. On the day, Vitelli went expecting to dine with the Florentine commissioners and discuss the future prosecution of the war. But on entering the room where the commissioners waited, Vitelli was seized by Braccio Martelli and imprisoned.²²⁸

Paolo's brother, Vitellozzo Vitelli, had also been invited to the meeting. As he did not attend due to illness, the commissioners instructed Piero dal Monte and Count Pirro da Marciano, Ranuccio's brother, to bring him in person from his tent. Vitellozzo, according to the sources, asked for time to get dressed and then fled to Pisa, where he was greeted with enthusiasm.²²⁹ Vitellozzo's escape was disastrous for the Signoria. It created a mortal enemy, sworn to avenge his brother by injuring those who had participated in his capture. This unexpected outcome that Machiavelli had so feared, provided a valuable lesson for the young secretary and informed his later views on conspiracies in *The Discourses*.

²²⁷ "Il conte Rinuccio si teneva malato a Cascina, e Paolo Vitelli chiamato artificiosamente a consulta, senza dubitare d'insidie, va a Cascina, e per gentilezza a visitare il Marciano. Il conte era consapevole della trama e non gli freme l'animo di perdere a tradimento un collega, un guerriero." See Parenti, *Storia*, II, 232.

²²⁸ "I nostri commissari chiamarono una mattina a desinare seco Pagolo Vitelli per consultare e ragionare con lui dei fatti della guerra. E così dopo desinare, essendosi ritirati con esso in una stanza più segreta, fu da loro ritenuto e fatto prigioniero." See Nardi, *Storia*, III, 190.

²²⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 323.

Chapter vi of *The Discourses*' book III attests to Machiavelli's familiarity with and distaste for conspiracies. From the outset, Machiavelli claims the following: "E i non mi è parso da lasciare indietro il ragionare delle congiure, essendo cosa tanto pericolosa ai principi ed ai privati; perché si vede per quelle molti più principi avere perduta la vita e lo stato, che per guerra aperta."²³⁰ He argues, further, that conspiring against two princes at once is altogether foolish, and ultimately to the benefit of no one.²³¹ Later in the text, he adds that even when a conspiracy is successful, there are still dangers that may occur after its completion, if someone may be left alive, who will avenge the prince's death, such as his remaining brothers or sons.²³² The text above clearly shows how the secret plot against Vitelli and its less-than-desirable outcome contributed significantly to these views. The Vitelli affair taught Machiavelli that the use of fraud, although not glorious, is justifiable in the conduct of war to defeat the enemy completely, with no remaining family members left alive.²³³

2.4. The Execution

Arresting the most prominent *condottiero* in Italy away from his soldiers and bodyguards seems almost impossible to imagine and even harder to undertake. However, the manner in

²³⁰ Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, vi, 271; Alessandro Campi, *Machiavelli and Political Conspiracies: The Struggle for Power in the Italian Renaissance* (Routledge, 2019), 14; Indeed, Machiavelli's experience with conspiracies proves his point. He never mentioned his role in the two conspiracies he was involved, most likely due to their less-than-desirable outcome. First, Machiavelli never noted the conspiracy against Vitelli in his writings, possibly because Paolo's brother Vitellozzo escaped the capture and consequently caused significant damage to the Florentines. Second, Jean-Jacques Marchand revealed Machiavelli's active involvement in Gonfaloniere Piero Soderini's plot against the Pisans in 1509, which ended in disaster and, as a result, was never mentioned by Machiavelli. See Marchand, *Studi machiavelliani*, 273-295.

²³¹ "Ma facilmente non se le dà perfezione quando si congiura contro a due capi, anzi è tanto difficile, che gli è quasi impossibile che la riesca. Perché fare una simile azione in uno medesimo tempo in diversi luoghi, è quasi impossibile." See Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, vi, 286.

²³² "Restaci al presente, solo a disputare de' pericoli che si corrono dopo la esecuzione: i quali sono solamente uno; e questo è, quando e' rimane alcuno che vendichi il principe morto. Possono, adunque, rimanere suoi frategli, o suoi figliuoli, o altri aderenti, a chi si aspetti il principato; e possono rimanere o per tua negligenza o per le cagioni dette di sopra, che facciano questa vendetta." See Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, vi, 288.

²³³ "Ancora che lo usare la fraude in ogni azione sia detestabile, nondimanco nel maneggiare la guerra è cosa laudabile e gloriosa; e, parimente è laudato colui che con fraude supera il nimico, come quello che lo supera con le forze." See Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, xxx, 374.

which the Signoria captured Vitelli had been seen before in Renaissance Italy and would be seen again. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli describes how the Venetians practiced the art of deception against one of their own mercenaries. In 1432, the mercenary captain Count Carmagnola was tricked, lured into a trap, then publicly executed by the Venetians. Although the affair was utterly dishonorable, Machiavelli praised it in *The Prince*. Considering the similarities between the two cases, one may suspect that Count Carmagnola's case served as a blueprint for the conspirators against Vitelli. If this is true, we might speculate on who suggested Carmagnola's death as an example from history to be applied to Vitelli. Was it Machiavelli? While we will never know for certain, there are reasons to believe that it may have been.

The reasons why Machiavelli's name comes forward are the following: first, Machiavelli was most likely familiar with Carmagnola's story, as it appears in Flavio Biondo's history, one of the books owned by Machiavelli's father, Ser Bernardo;²³⁴ second, in chapter xii of *The Prince*, Machiavelli mentioned both Vitelli and the Count of Carmagnola in the same context and on the same page in order to drive home his point about the handling of powerful mercenary captains; third, Machiavelli was well-known for mining examples from history in search of solutions to the problems of his own time, as we have seen in chapter one. With this in mind, we can consider Machiavelli a candidate for suggesting Carmagnola's story to the conspirators.

It is worth mentioning that among Machiavelli's papers found in the Nation Library in Florence, there is a letter from Paolo Vitelli to his secretary Cerbone in Florence written immediately after his capture.²³⁵ Machiavelli wrote on the back of the letter: "Letter from Paolo Vitelli when he was taken." How did this letter come into Machiavelli's possession? As Cerbone, too, was arrested shortly after Vitelli, all letters from the captain to his officials in Florence

²³⁴ Capponi, *An Unlikely Prince*, 85.

²³⁵ Canestrini, *Scritti inediti*, 101.

would have come into the Signoria's possession; thus giving Machiavelli access to them. In this very short letter, Vitelli tells us the following:

Questa sera questi signori commissarii essendo in casa del governatore mi ritennero ed hannomi messo a petizione di cotesta Signoria nella rocca di Cascina. Io ve ne do notizia acciochè siate con cotesti Signori e con cotesti cittadini e facciateli intendere come, se non mi è fatto torto, in me non troveranno opera di natura che meriti minima penitenzia. Voi sarete prudente pigliare in questa cosa quello riparo che vi pare espediente a giustificare la innocenza mia.²³⁶

What stands out from the letter is Vitelli's collected tone deriving perhaps from the hope that this was all a mistake which could still be righted when it was shown there was no evidence against him. Another reading is that the letter is very cautious as Vitelli was afraid for his life and thus put on the tone of baffled innocence.²³⁷

Two days after Vitelli's capture, the war commissioners Luca degli Albizzi and Filippo Buondelmonti had him brought to Florence,²³⁸ where he was first tortured and then summarily tried for treason.²³⁹ Because the captain would not confess to his alleged crimes, there arose disputes over the sentence.²⁴⁰ The risks of releasing him after such a humiliation, however, outweighed any moral objections. Those who doubted Vitelli's guilt most likely muted their opinion for fear of being associated with him. Parenti and Machiavelli provided in their writings other viable reasons. According to Parenti's comment "Si consigliò che chi non era da pigliare non era da lasciare," one may understand that by seizing Vitelli any option to let him go later was canceled at that point."²⁴¹ Machiavelli, for his part, argued in *The Prince* that "È bene quindi ricordare che gli uomini vanno o vezzeggiati o schiacciati perché chi è stato offeso in modo modesto può vendicarsi, ma chi è stato schiacciato non può più vendicarsi; l'offesa che si arreca

²³⁶ Nitti, *La Vita*, 67, n. 2.

²³⁷ Nitti, *La Vita*, 68.

²³⁸ Sending degli Albizzi to bring Vitelli to Florence was not a coincidence in my opinion. As a main conspirator against Vitelli, there was no danger for the Signoria that he could release the captain.

²³⁹ Nardi, *Storia*, III, 197.

²⁴⁰ Cerretani, *Storia*, 265.

²⁴¹ Parenti, *Storia*, 304.

deve essere tale da non dover poi temere la vendetta.”²⁴² As Vitelli was known for his vengeful nature, the state’s security and those who participated in Vitelli’s arrest and torture prevailed.²⁴³ Ultimately, the Ten, despite the lack of evidence, voted for the death penalty. In this way, Vitelli’s murder was a judicial action intended to find a scapegoat whose sacrifice would placate the *malcontenti* over the inconclusive course of the war. If this assessment is accurate, the government’s decision makes perfect sense. There is no need to explain it further.

On October 1, 1499, in a *Pratica* in which 300 citizens participated, the decision was made to behead the captain.²⁴⁴ Public beheadings were not uncommon in republican Florence, as witnessed by the execution of the alleged Medici supporters in 1497. The general intention of the display was to instill fear in citizens who dared support the enemies of the regime. However, Vitelli’s execution seemed more intended to provide a spectacle that would purge public anger and render the false impression that justice had been administered by their own hand.²⁴⁵ Landucci’s vivid description of the execution supports this view. Among other details, it stands out that Vitelli’s head was not thrown down into the Piazza, as was the custom, but rather stuck on a spear and shown at the windows of the *ballatoio*, with a lighted torch beside it so that everyone could see it. Only after that scene, the people dispersed, considering that justice had

²⁴² Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, iii, 12.

²⁴³ During the *Consulte* debate on October 1, 1499, of the members, Niccolò Di Simone Altoviti, justified the Vitelli’s death penalty as reasonable decision in state’s interests with the following remark: “che in nessun modo non sia da perdonare la vita a Pagolo Vitelli...iudicio anchora non si proceda secondo e’ termini di ragione, che cosi non si suole *nelle cose delli stati*.” See Fachard, *Consulte* (1993), 229; Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History In Sixteenth Century Florence* (W. W. Norton & Company; Revised ed. edition, 1984), 96.

²⁴⁴ Fachard, *Consulte*, 258-260.

²⁴⁵ According to Parenti, “la turba del popolo, accalcata sulla bocca di palazzo, gridava fiera e forte: impicca!” See Parenti, II, 305; Guicciardini also emphasizes the *popolo*’s hatred towards Vitelli: “la sera poi che era stato condotto a Firenze, a ore ventitré, tagliare el capo, con grandissimo gaudio di tutto el popolo che lo riputava nocente, stando cheti e’ cittadini di riputazione, a chi dispiaceva, per non venire in sospetto d’aver tenuto queste pratiche con lui.” See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 184.

been done.²⁴⁶

That the fear of a popular uprising weighed on the Signoria's mind as they deliberated on the fate of Vitelli is shown by Machiavelli's letter of August 25, 1499, mentioned earlier. Likewise, his claims in *The Discourses* suggest that he would have approved of Signoria's handling of the execution. There, Machiavelli strongly endorsed episodes of public violence through which the masses could channel their dissatisfaction, deeming violent confrontation necessary and useful as long as it was not committed against the people but in their name.²⁴⁷ As such episodes also serve to secure *lo stato* from potential rebellions, it is reasonable to think that Machiavelli would have supported Vitelli's public execution. Even in the absence of proof that Machiavelli favored the condemnation of Vitelli, one cannot reasonably doubt his true sentiment at the time. With his proven love of *Patria*, and loyalty to his *stato*, Machiavelli most certainly did not object to this popular but unjust sentence. The *raison d'état* required it.

To conclude this section, it is important to emphasize that the idea of preserving the state by way of actions that contravene ethical norms did not originate with Machiavelli, even if his name has come to be uniquely associated with it.²⁴⁸ In their article "Wrestling with Machiavelli," Ioannis D. Evrigenis and Mark Somos produce examples of the principle of Reason of State in Socrates' dialogues. The authors found that in Book III of Plato's *Republic*, for instance, before

²⁴⁶ "Aspettavano lo gittassino giù a terra del Palagio; nollo gittorono, ma mostrorono la testa alle finestre del ballatoio, con un torchio acceso, mostrandolo al popolo in su'n una mazza. Allora el popolo si partì, giudicando che si fussi fatto giustizia e grande onore alla città." See Landucci, *Diario*, 202.

²⁴⁷ Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, I, vi, 22-23; Gabriele Pedullà, *Machiavelli in Tumult: The Discourses on Livy and the Origins of Political Conflictualism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 48-53; Y. Winter, *Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence* (Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁴⁸ The Oxford English Dictionary defines the noun "Machiavellian" as "A follower of Machiavelli; a person who adopts the principles recommended, or supposed to have been recommended, by Machiavelli in his treatise on statecraft; a person who practises expediency in preference to morality; an intriguer or schemer," noting that the term is usually derogatory. It defines the adjective as "Of, relating to, or characteristic of Machiavelli, or of his principles or alleged principles; practising, or characterized by, (esp. political) expediency; unscrupulous, duplicitous; astute, cunning, scheming."

the interlocutors have distinguished between guardians and auxiliaries, Socrates and Adeimantus consider the kinds of things that should be permitted or banned from their city if its guardians are to be both courageous and moderate. The two men come to the following conclusions regarding truth and lies: [Socrates:] ‘‘Then, it’s appropriate for the rulers if for anyone at all, to lie for the benefit of the city in cases involving enemies or citizens, while all the rest must not put their hands to anything of the sort...’’²⁴⁹ In other words, Socrates argues that when the regime feels threatened by foreign or domestic enemies, it must do whatever is necessary to preserve the health and strength of the state. In the case of the Second Florentine Republic, we have seen two examples of this theory in action: the execution of the Medici supporters (domestic), and Vitelli’s beheading (foreign). But how far can one regime go with their cover-ups in order to protect the state?

2.5. Aftermath

The following text will show that while in office, Machiavelli did everything in his power to defend his government’s decision to execute Vitelli, using the *raison d’etat* as his argument. Machiavelli considered himself part of the circle of information, both public and confidential, which protected the state and its reputation. His letters and dispatches written shortly after Vitelli’s death confirm that he acted as the government’s spokesperson, and at the same time as a filter and disseminator of news, which does not make him necessarily the believer of what he writes. However, indirectly, he coordinated Vitelli’s arrest and later attempted to cover up his government’s inability to find or manufacture evidence against him.

The Vitelli affair did not end with Paolo’s death. In the first few weeks after the execution, the Florentine government was under constant diplomatic pressure. Various voices,

²⁴⁹ Eric Brown, ‘‘Plato’s Ethics and Politics in The Republic’’, in Zalta, Edward N. (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Metaphysics Research Lab: Stanford University, 2017).

including the French, the pope, Lucca, and Pisa, clamored to condemn the Republic's misadministration of justice.²⁵⁰ It is not surprising that Vitelli's execution provoked consternation at the French court in Milan. Even before the incident, the Florentines had not enjoyed favor with the French, as they had been tardy in pledging their loyalty to the French king during his campaign against Milan. Now they had executed Vitelli, a former soldier of Charles VIII, who had many friends in the French court. In their professional circles, Florentine diplomats were embarrassed that their government had not provided any evidence against the Captain.²⁵¹ Their audience at the court in Pavia with the Cardinal of Rouen inspired criticism and insults from him and French nobles. The conclusion of the French was that the Florentines had rid themselves of their captain as quickly as possible to prevent King Louis XII from intervening in the matter.²⁵²

While the open, verbal accusations of the French were to be expected given Vitelli's service to the king, the attack in the form of a letter from Lucca and Pisa came as a surprise. On October 5, 1499, Machiavelli penned a sharp and offensive epistle to a Lucchese official who accused the Florentines of removing Vitelli out of avarice, so as not to give him the money they owe him for his service.²⁵³ Surprisingly, although authentic and lengthy, Machiavelli's letter of response has received little critical notice. Several aspects of it deserve our attention. First, it is hard to find another instance in Machiavelli's writing where his tone and mood are so bitter.

²⁵⁰ Thanks to Benzoni's archival research, we know that the dispatches from Florentine diplomats in Rome and Milan sent shortly after Vitelli's death caused great surprise in diplomatic circles. For example, the Florentine ambassador in Rome, Antonio Malegonelle, reminded Signoria in his letter from October 10, 1499, that rumors were spreading in Rome about Vitelli's unjust punishment. He also added that the Borgia pope grew impatient with his request that the Signoria explain the execution. See Benzoni, *Carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo Vitelli*, 82-3.

²⁵¹ In a letter to the Signoria from the ambassadors in Milan we learn that the Florentine delegation met the French king near Pavia. Their inability to provide more details about the case displeased the king. See Benzoni, *Carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo Vitelli*, 83.

²⁵² Benzoni, *Carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo Vitelli*, 83.

²⁵³ This letter was published first by F. Nitti, *La Vita*, I, 67, in note., and Villari, *The Life and Times*, 338. According to Nitti, this letter was the only proof that Machiavelli was in favor of the condemnation of Paolo Vitelli.

From the outset, Machiavelli attacks the integrity of the Luchesse official by accusing him of slander and ignorance that is not worthy of their shared profession.²⁵⁴ In defending his government from the accusations, Machiavelli employed some harsh words towards the Luchesse official: “Appresso vi domando: quale sana mente e quale bene edificato ingegno si persuaderà che Paolo Vitelli ci abbia prestati denari, o che la cagione del l’averlo preso sia il non pagarlo? Nè vi avvedete, pover’uomo, che questo totalmente escusa la città nostra ed accusa Paolo?”²⁵⁵ According to Landi, Machiavelli’s pain and that of the great majority of the city was still raw after the recent Pisan campaign and thus his defensive stance brimmed with emotions.²⁵⁶

Second, Machiavelli, offended by his counterpart’s insinuations, writes back to him claiming that Vitelli was guilty of all accusations against him: “Donde ne nasce che, o per non avere voluto essendo corrotto, o per non avere potuto non avendo la compagnia, ne sono nati per sua colpa infiniti mali alla nostra città. Che se la fraude Vitellesca non v’intercedeva nè noi ci dorremo della perdita, nè voi ve ne rallegretereste.” Then, Machiavelli concludes the letter saying that concerning all “baseless” accusations against his government, he does not have to answer them or justify the capture; even if it falls to him to do so, he would not expect the Luchesse official to understand it.²⁵⁷ While one may think that this letter is the ultimate proof of Machiavelli’s position regarding the Vitelli case, we should not forget that his official response in defending the regime did not necessarily reflect his inner feelings about it.

²⁵⁴ “Nè io mi sono mosso a scrivere tanto per purgare le calunnie di che voi notate questa città, quanto per avvertire voi acciò per l’avvenire siate più savio. Tra le molte cose che dimostrano l’uomo quale ei sia, non è di poco momento il vedere, o com’ egli è facile a credere quello che gli è detto, o pronto a fingere quello che vuol persuadere ad altri: in modo che ogni volta che uno crede quello che non debbe, o male finge quello che vuole persuadere, si può chiamare e leggiero e di nessuna prudenza.” See Nitti, *La Vita*, 70.

²⁵⁵ Nitti, *La Vita*, 70.

²⁵⁶ Sandro Landi, *Lo sguardo di Machiavelli: una nuova storia intellettuale* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2017), 71.

²⁵⁷ “...non mi occorre rispondere, e nè mi accade etiam giustificarvi la cattura come cosa che non mi si aspetta a farla; e quando mi spettasse, a voi non si richiede lo intenderla.” See Nitti, *La Vita*, 70.

Despite Machiavelli's defensive stance against Lucca, strong accusations against the Florentine government regarding Vitelli's death kept coming. Now, the Pisans, who had every reason to dislike Vitelli, praised the captain after his death. A Pisan author who lived through the siege of 1499 issued this warning to all the soldiers and commanders in Italy: "Voi, illustrissimi Signori Taliani che per le virtù militari meritate il bastone, considerar possete che merito e gloria da' Fiorentini aspettar devote. Specchiatevi nello exceliente signor Paulo Vitelli, e di poi, parendovi, militate sotto loro ingrattissimo vesillo."²⁵⁸ In a period when honor, upon which states' reputations depended, was still highly valued and respected, the Signoria was accused of acting dishonorably in the eyes of many. As a result, for years after Vitelli's execution, Florence struggled to hire capable *condottieri*.

To answer the criticism that it had executed Vitelli without evidence, the Signoria rushed to find or if necessary fabricate some.²⁵⁹ The first evidence of this effort is found in Machiavelli's letter of October 8, 1499, to the commissioner in Cascina. In it, Machiavelli asks Count Ranuccio to provide an "authentic testimony" of all that Vitelli had confided in him.²⁶⁰ Given everything we know about Ranuccio's animosity towards Vitelli, it is difficult to have much faith in his testimony. It is also hard to imagine that Vitelli would willingly have entrusted his secrets to his rival. As Machiavelli knew well the animosity that existed between the two *condottieri*, his request to Ranuccio requires some explanation. Considering Machiavelli's duty to satisfy the state's critics concerning Vitelli's guilt, it is reasonable to believe that he would not question Ranuccio's statement.

²⁵⁸ Lo scrittore anonimo, "La guerra del Millecinquecento," 383.

²⁵⁹ According to Benzoni, the official records of Vitelli's trial are not known. In ASF, the decision to sentence Vitelli to death is preserved with the summary of the main charges. It is signed by notary Giovanni Battista di Albizo di Luca degli Albizi. See Benzoni, *Carte di Paolo e Vitellozzo Vitelli*, 86.

²⁶⁰ "Potrete mandare per lui, bisognandovi, e graverrete, come sopra vi se dice el Conte a fare fede delle parole gli aveva detto Paolo e Vitellozzo." See *Legazioni*, I, 329.

In the end, the purported proof of Vitelli's treason was found in the letter of Currado de Tarlatini, his secretary.²⁶¹ In one of the letters in Tarlatini's possession from March 1499, when the Venetians and Florentines were negotiating peace, Iacopo Nardi found evidence that Vitelli wished to work with Pandolfo Petrucci, the Lord of Siena, to restore the Medici in Florence.²⁶² However, this letter has a precise historical and political context that justifies its content. Namely, that as the Vitelli brothers knew that peace was close between the Venetians - supporters of Pisa - and Florence, they had to maintain open contact with other Italian powers.²⁶³ When Currado's letter ended up in the Signoria's hands after Vitelli's execution, however, the context was disregarded and it was used as retrospective evidence to justify the captain's execution.

The letter that "proved" Vitelli's guilt seemed to close the case in Florence and in diplomatic circles for some time. As the peninsula had been plunged again into a state of war by the second French descent on Italy, the Vitelli case receded in importance for most. For Paolo's brother Vitellozzo, however, the case never closed. After escaping from the conspirators' trap in Cascina in September 1499, Vitellozzo launched a relentless campaign to avenge his brother. His crusade against the Florentines and the conspirators, immortalized in an emotional verse dedicated to his brother, cost Florence dearly.²⁶⁴ Vitellozzo joined with the Pisans, the Medici, and Cesare Borgia to plunder the Republic whenever the chance arose.

²⁶¹ "...perché Pagolo, in certi suoi disegni fatti di insignorirsi di Piombino, mostrava desiderare la ruina del Conte e di tutti e' suoi, Il che apparisce in una lettera di messer Currado." See *Legazioni*, I, 329.

²⁶² Nardi, *Storia*, III, 166.

²⁶³ Indeed, when the peace negotiations with Venice and Pisa failed at the end of April 1499, the Florentine commissioner Piero Corsini was sent to Città di Castello to engage Vitelli again against Pisa. The Vitelli brothers accepted the increase in their *condotta* and, on June 3, departed for Cascina. See Cerretani, *Storia*, II, 260.

²⁶⁴ "De cetero, mortal non me ne parli, nè me ne lacrimi davanti; ad me se ne aspetta il dolore, e a Dio la vendetta." See Lo Scrittore anonimo, *La guerra del millecinquecento*, 383.

In one skirmish against the Pisans and Vitellozzo in June 1501, the Florentines captured Piero Gambacorta, a former diplomat and citizen of Pisa.²⁶⁵ In a letter to Piero Vespucci from June 2, 1501, Machiavelli rejoiced upon hearing this news and asked that Gambacorta be sent to his office for questioning as soon as possible.²⁶⁶ The Vitelli case was reopened. As one of the two witnesses during the examination, Machiavelli recorded the transcripts from Gambacorta's interrogation.²⁶⁷ While many interrogations performed by the *Dieci* were not recorded or are lost to us, the survival of Gambacorta's confession points to its importance. Gambacorta, as a Pisan high official and eyewitness of the siege of Pisa in 1499, would have known if Vitelli had had any secret dealings with the Pisan government and its allies. Thus, information from him incriminating Vitelli could be used to clear the air around Vitelli's alleged treason once and for all.

However, disappointingly for the Florentines, Gambacorta's testimony did nothing to confirm the allegations against Vitelli. When asked whether the captain had used fraud or had entered a secret agreement with the Pisans, Gambacorta claimed he knew nothing about it. He could not say that Vitelli was a traitor, but neither could he absolve him of the charge. He could only confirm that Pisa would have been Vitelli's for the taking a day and a half after the fall of the Stampace fortress. According to Gambacorta, when he had mentioned this missed opportunity to Paolo's brother Vitellozzo in Faenza, a year after the siege, Vitellozzo had excused Paolo by saying that he did not realize the conditions in Pisa were so bad.²⁶⁸ He added that Paolo was cautious by nature when it came to his soldiers, seeking not to expose them to

²⁶⁵ The Gambacorta family was very influential in the Pisan government at the end of the 14th century, and in friendly terms with Florence.

²⁶⁶ *Legazioni*, II, 107.

²⁶⁷ *Legazioni*, II, 108.

²⁶⁸ *Legazioni*, II, 108.

unnecessary danger. Vitellozzo claimed that before the final assault on Pisa, Paolo had wanted first to place the artillery against *Stampace* fortress to secure the victory. However, the sickness in the camp forced him to retreat.²⁶⁹ If we are to believe Gambacorta's account, Vitelli failed as a commander but did not betray Florence. In the end, the Florentine investigation only served to confirm the lack of evidence against Vitelli.

At the time of Gambacorta's interrogation, Vitellozzo was still administering his own justice towards those involved in the death of his brother. In the summer of 1501, while with Borgia in Romagna, Vitellozzo captured the three Marciano brothers. To avenge Paolo, Vitellozzo personally killed Ranuccio and Pirro, sparing only the youngest brother.²⁷⁰ On another occasion, in June 1502, while plundering Arezzo with the Medici, Vitellozzo killed Ranuccio's secretary, Bernardino Tondinelli, along with his entire family, the Florentine bishop Giacomo dei Pazzi, and numerous soldiers and citizens who opposed him.²⁷¹ During a short campaign in the following month, he plundered Florentine territories in the southeast near his home base in Umbria, and only the intervention of the French prevented further predations. With no army or money to oppose Vitellozzo in any way, the Signoria was helpless. The material and human damage that Vitellozzo inflicted upon the Florentines was immeasurable.

However, in October 1502, Vitellozzo attended a meeting at Magione, where he joined the Orsini, Giampaolo Baglioni, and Oliverotto da Fermo in a conspiracy against Cesare Borgia.²⁷² Once Vitellozzo had become Borgia's enemy, the Florentines finally had a hope of seeing the end of their enemy. They could use Borgia instead of their ineffective army to finally

²⁶⁹ *Legazioni*, II, 109.

²⁷⁰ Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani - Volume 99 (2020) [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vitellozzo-vitelli_res-8fe0d57c-2816-11eb-aba9-00271042e8d9_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/vitellozzo-vitelli_res-8fe0d57c-2816-11eb-aba9-00271042e8d9_(Dizionario-Biografico)/)

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*

²⁷² Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 425.

settle scores. As soon as it became known that Vitellozzo had joined the conspiracy, the Signoria dispatched Machiavelli to Borgia's court in Urbino to offer his aid. As someone who had dealt with Vitellozzo's vendetta against Florence for three years (1499-1502), Machiavelli was a valuable asset to Borgia.

According to Machiavelli's reports, three days before Christmas, to lull the rebellious generals into a false sense of security, Cesare sent away most of his French reinforcements. He ordered the conspirators to take Senigallia on the Adriatic coast and wait for his arrival. Recalling what had happened to his brother, Vitellozzo was hesitant to meet Borgia but eventually accepted. Under the pretext of the peace negotiations and with apparent good faith, Borgia gathered his generals together in one room, where Vitellozzo and Oliverotto da Fermo were seized by Borgia's soldiers. They were strangled the next day.²⁷³

It is hard not to see parallels between the plot at Senigallia and the one at Cascina in which Paolo Vitelli was captured. Both Vitelli and the rebellious generals were lulled into a false sense of security before the plot's execution. Both victims were lured into a room on the pretext of negotiations. As Machiavelli spent considerable time at Borgia's court as Vitellozzo's enemy and Borgia's ally, one may see the hand of the Florentine secretary in the Senigallia massacre of commanders. While there is no evidence for such a theory, it is not impossible either. Whoever was the mastermind behind the scheme to capture Vitellozzo, so vividly described by Machiavelli, was more successful than the Signoria's attempt to capture both brothers in 1499 because action was taken only when all the generals were together in one location. As Vitellozzo spent three years in Borgia's service, he would have had plenty of occasion to discuss with

²⁷³ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 77-97, 420-26.

Borgia his escape from the Signoria in 1499. Perhaps this critical piece of information cost him his life. With Vitellozzo's death, the Vitelli case was finally closed.

2.6. Conclusion

Florence's *l'arte dell'inganno* reminds us that political dissembling and conspiracies are not the products of modern states or totalitarian regimes. When they lacked military means, Renaissance regimes often used deceit as a weapon against their enemies, taking advantage, for example, of those mercenary soldiers who held honor, reputation, and glory as their highest ideals. In such a world, Vitelli as a man of arms and not politics stood no chance against the apparatus of the Florentine state. Both Vitelli brothers tragically lost their lives because they did not adapt to the modern and ruthless political approach practiced by such as the Florentine state and Cesare Borgia. Machiavelli's acceptance of *l'arte dell'inganno* also reveals that his first and foremost concern was his beloved Florence and the stability of its regime in a time of political crisis and constant insecurity on its borders. Regardless of what he actually thought about Vitelli's alleged treason, Machiavelli condemned Vitelli when his job and his love for his city required him to do so. In the post-1512 period, Machiavelli was an independent thinker, free to focus his writings on what he thought was necessary for a prince to know: how to acquire and maintain *lo stato*. His revised view on Vitelli should be understood through this prism.

CHAPTER 3

MESSER NIHILO

3.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to explore Machiavelli's role in Florence's failed attempt to retake Pisa in July 1500, and his subsequent mission to France at the court of Louis XII. I find those events to be very important for the formation of Machiavelli's early political thought as he reflected on them several times in his major political works. Machiavelli's dispatches confirm that was fully engaged in the Pisan campaign from the first day, both in the office and on the field. His task was to inform the commissioners in the camp near Pisa of the whereabouts of the French mercenary troops who were heading in their direction, and to accompany as a scribe the commissioners degli Albizzi and Giovanni Ridolfi. Machiavelli's personal experience with the Swiss and Gascon soldiers in the camp strongly influenced his later views on mercenary troops and Florentine militia. Likewise, the Florentine Secretary's dealing with the French king and his ministers changed forever his perception of the French as "allies" of the Republic and convinced him that in post-1494 Italy loyalty, reason, and justice were worth very little in comparison to sheer military power.

3.2. Preparations for the Siege of Pisa of 1500

Considering the amount of money spent, the number of soldiers mobilized, and the effort mustered to conquer Pisa in the summer of 1499, the Florentine government's failure to subdue the rebellious city was truly disastrous.²⁷⁴ However, while many states would have been

²⁷⁴ In a letter to the commissioner in camp near Pisa from October 27, 1499, Machiavelli claims that Florence spent 200,000 pounds of gunpowder, which is an extraordinary amount for that time. See *Legazioni*, I, 348-349.

demoralized after such a failure, Florence quickly rebounded. The government was able to paper over the city's failures and convince Florentines that there was still hope of winning Pisa by capitalizing on two events. First, as we have seen from the previous chapter, the Signoria used Vitelli as a scapegoat to pacify the angry public. Second, it concluded an agreement with King Louis XII of France.

After witnessing his effortless victory over Sforza, many Italian states which had not previously troubled themselves over the king of France, sent ambassadors to Milan to sue for his friendship and protection. The Florentines, fearing that they would arrive too late, urgently sent the ambassadors Francesco Gualterotti, Lorenzo Lenzi, and Alamanno Salviati to the French king, to congratulate him on the acquisition of Milan and to conclude an agreement with him.²⁷⁵ The pact, of October 15, 1499, assumed the following conditions: that the French king would receive the Florentine Republic under his protection; that the mutual faith and alliance between the king and the Florentine Republic were confirmed; and that the two parties promised each other forces for the mutual defense of their States of Italy. The king of France promised to lend 5,000 Swiss, 2,000 Gascons, and 500 lances to the Florentines to use for the campaign against Pisa and the return of the Tuscan fortresses. Once Pisa had been recovered, the Florentines were obliged to provide the king with 500 men-at-arms and 50,000 ducats, over the 36,000 already lent to them by Ludovico Sforza.²⁷⁶

How confident and satisfied the Florentines were with this agreement can be seen in this dispatch from Machiavelli to the commissioner of the camp near Cascina dated October 22, 1499: “Questo di aviamo lettere da li oratori nostri appresso la Maestà, fatta per noi sotto di 15

²⁷⁵ Machiavelli reports in a letter to the war commissioner of October 15, 1499, the following: “Iersera avemo lettere da li oratori nostri appreso el Re di Francia come a’ di dodici del presente avevamo fermo stipulato e’ capituli con quella Maestà, e’ quali, sendo onorevoli per questa Repubblica, ratifichereno oggi.” See *Legazioni*, I, 334.

²⁷⁶ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 192.

del presente, delli capituli, de' quali più di fa vi mandamo copia: el tenore delle quali è con tanta soddisfazione nostra con quanta non vi si potrebbe significare. Da la quale speriamo, omni bene e omni felicità alla nostra città.”²⁷⁷ From the next dispatch, sent on October 26, 1499, we learn that the Florentines have ceased to recruit soldiers, trusting that the ones promised by the French will be sufficient to achieve victory over Pisa.²⁷⁸ In his *Storie Fiorentine*, Guicciardini writes the following:

Cominciò di poi l'anno 1500, con grandissima speranza di reintegrarsi delle cose nostre. Erasi la città molto rallegata della vittoria del re, perché, sendo lui espedito, pareva potessi attendere a mandarci la gente alla impresa di Pisa, come era obligato pe' capitoli fatti a Milano; e si presupponeva che, mandandoci le gente, la riputazione e forze loro fussino tali che assolutamente ci avessino a insignorire delle cose nostre.²⁷⁹

It is clear that the Florentines firmly believed their pact with the king had sealed Pisa's fate. The following text will show how misguided the Florentines were in their optimism.

According to the *capituli* from October 1499, the new Pisan campaign under the leadership of France was scheduled to start in May 1500. In April of that year, the Florentine government sent an ambassador, Piero di Tommaso Soderini, to the Cardinal of Rouen in Milan, with a commission to confirm the agreement.²⁸⁰ There were no difficulties over Soderini's request for aid for the Pisa campaign. The king and his minister were pleased to keep their army on its feet, especially at the expense of another state. By the terms agreed upon, the Republic would pay the Swiss 24,000 ducats a month starting in May, 1500. When the city no longer required their service, it would be obliged to pay for their return home, as was the custom. At the request of the Florentines, Captain Beaumont was appointed as the captain-general.²⁸¹ He wrote to the Signoria from Milan expressing thanks for the faith the city had in him and stating that he

²⁷⁷ *Legazioni*, I, 344-345.

²⁷⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 345-346.

²⁷⁹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 198.

²⁸⁰ Landucci, *Diario*, 209.

²⁸¹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 199.

was ready to set out with his forces. However, although the French troops departed for Pisa on April 26, 1500, they wasted nearly the whole month of May because they had other affairs to deal with first, paying visits along the way to the lords of Mirandola, Correggio, Carpi, and Bologna, and ousting a Florentine ally, Alberigo Malaspina, the Lord of Massa and Carrara, in favor of his uncle Gabriello.²⁸² Hence it was the end of June before the French mercenaries finally reached Tuscany. From the outset, nothing augured well for this campaign.

While the mercenary army was still on the march towards Pisa, on June 6, 1500, Machiavelli sent one of his first reports to the commissioner in Cascina, Antonio Giacomini, letting him know that the French were coming “a la espugnazione di cotesti nostri rebelli,” so that they might prepare for the impending attack.²⁸³ In his usual manner, Machiavelli closes the dispatch with the following advice to Giacomini: “E non ci perderai un punto di tempo, perché ogni ora attendiamo e’ Franzesi si sieno levati per venire a cotesta volta.”²⁸⁴ From further communication between Machiavelli and the commissioner in the field, we can see that Florence had done everything possible to ensure that this campaign would run smoothly and successfully. For example, in a letter to the commissioner in the camp on June 10, 1500, Machiavelli highlights the following:

Parci, per lo avviso che tu Braccio (Martelli) ci dai, piuttosto da accelerare la cosa che sopirla o differirla; perchè noi siamo in su questo articolo di non ci potere mai fidare di lui, e giudichiamo che avendo inteso per più vie in quanta infamia egli è cascato, venisse a termini e usasse quelle parole per vedere se voi volevi la giustificazione sua, e volendola voi credere per fermo che voi e noi dubitassimo di lui per potere chiaritosi provvedere alla salute sua con danno nostro.²⁸⁵

²⁸² Guicciardini, *Storie*, 199.

²⁸³ *Legazioni*, I, 370.

²⁸⁴ *Legazioni*, I, 370.

²⁸⁵ *Legazioni*, I, 371-72.

A day later, Machiavelli pens one more letter regarding the importance of providing the French army with whatever they need.²⁸⁶ From these examples, we can conclude that Florence indeed did their best to supply the French army on their way to Pisa. This fact will be very important for the later development of this campaign and Machiavelli's first mission to France.

However, despite Florentine optimism and their advanced state of preparation, problems with unruly French mercenaries soon put paid to any hope of conquering Pisa. As mentioned, the issues with the mercenary troops started long before they laid siege to the city of Pisa and only intensified upon their arrival at the camp.²⁸⁷ On June 23rd, 1500, a week before they arrived at the Pisan camp, Machiavelli reported on the French troops' lack of discipline during the attack on Alberico Malaspina, Marchese di Massa.²⁸⁸ To complicate matters, when the Florentine commissioners, Ridolfi and degli Albizi, finally met the army, they found two thousand more Swiss than had been agreed upon, and whom Florence was obliged to pay, with two months' wages in advance. Almost immediately upon their arrival, the mercenaries started complaining about the lack of food and wine. On June 28, 1500, degli Albizzi wrote an urgent dispatch to the Signoria, summarizing the problems with the new troops. He started the dispatch with the words "presto, presto, presto," then added the following:

Siamo ad ore 21 e due ore sono vi si scrisse. E dipoi è tanto multiplicato el disordine del vitto, che dove questa gente ha continuamente patito di vino, al presente patisce di vino e pane. In modo ch'io non so io medesimo giudicare el fine nostro, procedendo in tanto disordine senza remediare a parte alcuna. Il che mi pesa tanto più quanto più importa, veggendo uno pericolo e una ruina da non ci potere rimediare senza

²⁸⁶ In a letter to Ludovico Morelli, the Commissioner for the provisions, of June 11, 1500, Machiavelli demands the following: "E benché noi ti conosciamo e prudente e diligentissimo, nondimanco, per lo officio nostro e per la importanza che reca seco el provvedimento delle vettovaglie, ti confortiamo con ogni efficacia a sollecitare el provvedimento, e sopra tutto di biade." See *Legazioni*, I, 373.

²⁸⁷ French mercenaries caused more damage than the territories they had occupied for the benefit of the Republic. On the way to Pisa, they took possession of Pietrasanta; but instead of returning it, as they were obliged by the treaty with the Republic, they retained it in the name of the King. According to Buonaccorsi, Cardinal Rouen had already, contrary to the agreements with the Florentines, graciously agreed with the Lucchesi not to return that city to the Republic of Florence. See Buonaccorsi, *Impresa*, 12.

²⁸⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 374.

presta e rapida provisione. Da questo provvedimento dipende la vittoria, e facendo in contrario, oltre al perdere Pisa ci mette in pericolo.²⁸⁹

The extreme urgency of the situation can be sensed from the following two dispatches, of June 30th and July 1st, 1500, to Commissioner Bartolini in nearby Cascina. In the first, degli Albizzi begs for more bread “perché egli è una miseria vedere questo campo affamato...di nuovo vi si ricorda che bisogna ci provvediate di pane e di vino; altrimenti questa impresa rovina e non per altra cagione che per il vitto.”²⁹⁰ In the subsequent dispatch, we see for the first time that the lives of the commissioners were in danger due to this food shortage. In the name of degli Albizzi, Machiavelli writes to the *Dieci*:

E' vi scrisse iersera che la vettovaglia vi trovavi costi voi la inviassi ad ora che la fussi qui avanti giorno, accio la mattina di buona ora el campo se ne potessi servire e la non andassi a sacco: voi non lo facesti. La maggiore parte del campo si truova sfornito. E siamo in condizioni tale che dove noi credevamo sottomettere altri, e' ci si perdera la vita e lo onore. E queste parole non sono dette per muovere, ma perché cosi è la verità.²⁹¹

These last few dispatches deserve to be analyzed in more detail. It is clear from them that even before the siege started, the French troops displayed disdain for the Florentines and the task ahead, treating it as though it were a mere formality. In his initial communications, Albizzi complains of the complete lack of control over food distribution. While the French king later blamed Florence's inefficiency for the failure to provision this large group of soldiers, I find it hard to accept this accusation as true for several reasons. First, from the campaign in Casentino in October 1498 until Vitelli's retreat in October 1499, the Florentine state had managed to gather, organize, supply, and maintain a mercenary force of approximately 10,000 soldiers, considerably more than the French brought in the summer of 1500. Second, Machiavelli's earlier dispatches show the attention to detail the Florentine officials demonstrated in preparing for the

²⁸⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 377-78.

²⁹⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 379-80.

²⁹¹ *Legazioni*, I, 380.

siege of 1500. With this in mind, it is doubtful that the office of the *Dieci* did not carefully calculate the quantity of food, drink, and other provisions that would be necessary to provide for the French army. It is more likely that the French force, more numerous than anticipated, consumed excessively the food and drink that the Republic provided to them and wasted their munitions before arriving in Tuscany. According to Buonaccorsi, the second commissioner in the field, Ridolfi, anticipating the catastrophe, abandoned the camp, telling the French commander Beaumont that he had some health issues and needed to go to Florence urgently.²⁹²

3.3. The Siege of Pisa of 1500

As the success of a military expedition depends largely on an army's discipline and reputation, it is hard to understand why the Swiss and Gascons would behave in such a disorderly fashion. Were the Swiss not regarded by many as the best soldiers in Europe at the time? If so, how to explain the catastrophe at the Pisan walls? While the Florentines expected unruliness from their mercenary troops, they certainly did not expect to see the most reputable soldiers in Europe flee the battlefield without regard for their hard-won reputation. The following text will try to explain the events of the siege of Pisa in July, 1500. It suggests that the mercenaries never seriously prepared themselves for the conquest of the port city, being confident that the Pisans would surrender at the mere sight of their arms, and they would win their payment from Florence without any effort. Once they had realized that the Pisans were prepared to fight to exhaustion, they gave up the battle.

Although the Pisans knew the French mercenary army to be hungry, thirsty, and badly supplied with munition, the sheer size of the force and its reputation for violence provided the Pisans with reason to avoid open conflict. We should not forget that a few years previously,

²⁹² Buonaccorsi, *Impressa*, 20.

many of these same French soldiers, as followers of King Charles VIII, had visited Pisa twice and experienced a warm welcome from the Pisans. It is probable that some of those soldiers, although their principal motivation was mercenary, felt a sentimental attachment to a population who had treated them well in the past. In the event, the French arrival at the Pisan walls was less than warlike, as many warriors exchanged friendly regards with the besieged, who in some cases offered them food.²⁹³ It is also possible that both sides anticipated some sort of agreement that would preclude conflict. While the chances for such a deal seemed high, the Florentines were swift to quash them. Both Machiavelli and Buonaccorsi refer to negotiations initiated by the Pisans before the assault of June 30th, in which the Pisans offered Beaumont temporary control over their city on the condition that he does not turn it over immediately to Florence. The Florentines, however, opposed any agreement that did not require an immediate transfer of power, thus rendering any further negotiations with the rebels impossible.²⁹⁴

We do not know if Machiavelli appreciated at the time just how rash this refusal was, but according to his later observations in *The Discourses*, he certainly did not favor it:

Vengono oratori Pisani a Beumonte, e gli offerirono di dare la città allo esercito francese con questi patti: che, sotto la fede del re, promettesse non la mettere in mano de' Fiorentini, prima che dopo quattro mesi. Il quale partito fu da' Fiorentini al tutto rifiutato, in modo che si seguì nello andarvi a campo e partirsene con vergogna. Talché, molto più utilmente arebbono fatto a acconsentire che Beumonte l'avessi, sotto qualunque promessa, presa.²⁹⁵

The Florentine secretary targets here the irrational and harmful politics of his superiors, who vacillate between blind faith in the king of France and vain distrust. In the hands of the king, Pisa under any conditions, would have immediately and definitively declared its good or bad faith towards Florence, and if the king practiced other deceptions and extortions to the detriment of

²⁹³ Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 310.

²⁹⁴ Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, I, xxxviii, 100-101; Buonaccorsi, *Impressa*, 22.

²⁹⁵ Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, I, xxxviii, 101.

the Republic, he would have been condemned by other states and seen his reputation undermined.²⁹⁶

Captain Beaumont had no choice but to demand Pisa's immediate submission to the Florentines. For this purpose, he dispatched his envoys to Pisa who were welcomed into the city with great ceremony. What little warlike spirit remained in the besieging army diminished further. It is known that many French nobles had supported the Pisans during Charles VIII's reign, and they continued to do so. As outsiders to the history of the conflict between the two Tuscan republics, the French most likely accepted the Pisan characterization of the Florentines as crass, mercenary oppressors. It must have been hard for the French commanders to motivate themselves and their soldiers to fight with zeal against such an enemy. Thus, it is not surprising that the first military actions against Pisans ended in disaster.

After the failed negotiations, the French opened fire on the Pisan walls on June 30th. Two days of bombardment succeeded in making a breach in the wall, which was a sign for the infantry to attack. In a rash and hasty assault, the Swiss and Gascons were repelled with a great loss of life. Machiavelli was sent on July 1, 1500, to aid the commissioners in their administrative functions and to facilitate communication. From his arrival, he witnessed the worsening of the situation in the camp that ensued over the following days. In a dispatch of July 6th, 1500, he informs the Signoria that the bread has arrived but there is still no wine and adds that Florence must remove any reason for possible disorders that could come up."²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶ When the habit of idleness took over the French mercenaries, and when they began to entertain friendly trade with the besieged, the Florentine government was afraid of a possible conspiracy against the Republic with the king's approval. And the Pisans, animated by this favor from the French army, except Captain Beaumont, tried to avert the storm at all by declaring to the captain and governor of Genoa that they were ready to open the doors to the French army, not the Florentines. See Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 311.

²⁹⁷ *Legazioni*, I, 382.

The troubles continued. The Florentine people had, after much lamenting, managed to collect sufficient funds to cover the third payment to the Swiss at the beginning of July (two payments had been budgeted for, but the Swiss intentionally delayed the campaign). Now the Gascons demanded more pay. In the contract with the king, their pay had been set at 2.5 ducats to be paid on the 15th of every month. However, after the siege had begun, the Gascons suddenly demanded an increase to 3 ducats per soldier with payment on July 1st, the same date as the Swiss.²⁹⁸ This demand degli Albizzi refused; on July 8th, according to Landucci, “bestiali e pazzi Franciosi” abandoned the camp.²⁹⁹ The same day, Machiavelli sent a dispatch to Bertolini, the commissioner in Cascina, informing him of the following: “Sendosi partiti e’ Guasconi a rotta da questo esercito e benché non si sappia che volta piglino, dubitando non segua inconveniente nelle terre nostre, vi avvertiamo per questa che li trattiate come inimici e non li lasciate entrare, né costi né in altri luoghi nostri.”³⁰⁰ It is not known with certainty why the Gascons left; we can only guess at the true reasons. But what stands out here is their rather unprecedented decision, which could have cost them their reputation, their future opportunities, and their very lives as they made their way home through hostile territory. Surprisingly, their return went without incident and they suffered no consequences for their decision to abandon the siege. One may conclude that they made their decision together with Beaumont, and with the king’s approval; Louis XII, after all, had no desire to see the Florentines in Pisa as he wanted to extract more money from them. The possible truth of this theory is supported by the ensuing move of the Swiss, who also decided to leave the camp, but with more drama and violence than the Gascons.

²⁹⁸ Chiaverini, *Onore e Gloria*, 139.

²⁹⁹ Landucci, *Diario*, 212; Chiaverini, *Onore e Gloria*, 140, n. 498

³⁰⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 383.

From the first arrival of their army, the Swiss above all had fallen into the habit of plundering supplies and scattering provisions. At the same time, they complained of not being provided for, and insulted and mocked the commissioners. According to Guicciardini, the attitude and behaviour of the mercenaries had led to major disorder in the camp even before the assault on June 30th.³⁰¹ To communicate the danger of the situation, the Florentine Commissioner Giovanni Ridolfi returned to Florence, leaving alone in the camp his colleague Luca degli Albizzi, a man courageous to the point of temerity. To take the place of Ridolfi, Machiavelli came from Florence. He arrived at the camp when the disorder was at its height, and the uproar of foreign mercenaries, funded by the Republic, had surpassed all limits. A new company of 500 Swiss, commanded by a certain captain Giannotto, demanded that 1500 ducats be paid to them by the Republic.³⁰² When Luca degli Albizzi recognized the claim as unjust and refused to pay, the Swiss took him hostage and threatened his life until the Florentine government paid the required ransom.³⁰³

On July 8th, 1500, Machiavelli sent an urgent dispatch to the Signoria in which he said the following:

Iersera vi scrisse el Commissario e' termini ne' quali ci trovavamo. Ogni dipoi, in su le 14 ore, vennono forse 100 Svizzeri allo alloggiamento e chiedendo danari per la compagnia di Giannotto, dicendo che se ne voleva ire con la paga loro. Non possé el Commissario con alcuna parola o promessa calmarli: in modo che, dopo molta disputa, né lo hanno menato prigione. Né dipoi so altro, perché mi fermai qui nello alloggiamento di San Michele per dare alle Signorie vostre questo avviso; le quali s'ingegneranno che uno loro cittadino non muoino: e nelle mani di chi!³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 200.

³⁰² Chiaverini, *Onore e Gloria*, 146-148; Guicciardini, *Storie*, 200.

³⁰³ According to Guicciardini, "E nel partire, una compagnia di svizzeri, venuti nuovamente in campo da per loro come venturieri, come uomini bestiali e senza ragione prese Luca degli Albizzi nostro commessario chiedendo una paga, in forma che fu constretto per uscire delle loro mani promettere loro milletrecento ducati per una paga; e' quali, come fu libero da loro, gli mandò loro di quegli si trovava del commune." See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 201.

³⁰⁴ *Legazioni*, I, 384.

Machiavelli's reference to "nelle mani di chi" with an exclamation mark was most likely a derogatory characterization, not so much of the Swiss mercenaries in general, but of the specific captain who had captured degli Albizzi. In historiography, the name of the Swiss captain Giannotto is rarely mentioned. What concerns us here is not his origins, but the blunder of the Florentine Signoria that led indirectly to degli Albizzi's abduction. Weeks before the quarrel with the Florentine commissioner in the camp, Captain Giannotto had been a prisoner in Florence. However, due to insufficient evidence against him, he was released from prison on July 6th and assigned to patrol with his small company the roads from Cascina to Florence.³⁰⁵ However, upon his release, Giannotto joined his countrymen at the Pisan camp, hoping to use the chaos in the camp to extort money from degli Albizzi. Having received their money, the Swiss released degli Albizzi and departed, first towards Pietrasanta and then Lombardia, leaving the Republic in disrepair.

While Machiavelli's urgent intervention helped save degli Albizzi's life, the disruption caused by the Swiss must have shocked him. He had seen Florence's military weakness in action coupled with the lack of patriotism and inability to protect its most loyal and honorable citizens. We know from his dispatches the esteem in which Machiavelli held degli Albizzi and his work for the Republic. Before the experience with the Swiss, during the war in Casentino, degli Albizzi had dealt successfully with arrogant and brutish *condottieri* from Milan, for which he earned Machiavelli's praise. But on this occasion, he had been left alone, with no protection from the state he had served so faithfully. Worse, the Florentine government had been humiliated by a petty commander, the leader of a contingent of 500 Swiss. To Machiavelli, Florence's military and political weakness could not be more obvious.

³⁰⁵ Cerretani, *Storia*, 269; Chiaverini, *Onore e Gloria*, 147.

It can be concluded here that Machiavelli's personal experience with auxiliary troops in Florentine service provoked a deep contempt for these types of soldiers, which is evident in his later works, notably in *The Prince*.³⁰⁶ Up to this point in his career, as far as we know, Machiavelli had rarely witnessed an army of mercenary soldiers in camp. As he considered all that he had seen in the Pisan camp in the summer of 1500, especially concerning the abduction of degli Albizzi, Machiavelli realized how harmful, dangerous, and detrimental auxiliary troops could be. We should note that this opinion did not apply to all of the mercenaries in Florentine service. While there is a widespread belief in historiography that Machiavelli was against hiring mercenaries under any circumstances, preferring peasant soldiers, his early dispatches are full of praise for small mercenary companies in Florentine service. He believed that such companies could be beneficial provided they were loyal to the commander and the war commissioner appointed by the Republic. The Roman army, which Machiavelli often used as a model, also had a small contingent of mercenary troops in its ranks. Thus, Machiavelli's contempt was not directed towards all mercenary troops, but only those that answered not to the commander or commissioner appointed by Florence, but to their own king or their mercenary captain, as was the case with the Swiss and Gascons.

3.4. The First Mission to France

To regain its lost prestige and secure its borders, the Florentines needed assurance from the king that their friendship endured despite any lingering rancor. Florence was not in a position to ask the king for satisfaction for the misconduct of his soldiers or compensation for the damage

³⁰⁶ “Le truppe mercenarie e ausiliarie non solo sono inutili, ma anche pericolose. E il principe che basa il suo potere sulle truppe mercenarie, non sarà mai saldo e tranquillo. Esse sono disunite, ambiziose, senza disciplina, infedeli, audaci verso gli amici, codarde contro i nemici; e non hanno né timore di Dio, né correttezza verso gli uomini. Il principe non sarà rovinato finché ritarderanno l'attacco. In tempo di pace sarai spogliato da loro, in guerra dai nemici!” See Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, xii, 47.

suffered; it could only implore, after the injury, the reaffirmation of the friendship and protection of the king of France and the exoneration of the republic from any blame ascribed to it by French captains. For this mission, upon which depended on the future of the republic, the Florentine government decided to send Francesco della Casa, an experienced diplomat, and the Second Chancellor Niccolò Machiavelli. They were to depart on July 17, 1500, almost immediately after the failure of the joint attack on Pisa.³⁰⁷

While della Casa's appointment for this mission is not surprising, considering his status as an experienced diplomat who spoke French, the choice of Machiavelli as his assistant requires explanation. There are several reasons why Signoria chose Machiavelli for this mission. First, as someone who had seen firsthand the conditions in the camp before it was abandoned, and especially the events around the detention of degli Albizzi, Machiavelli was a reliable witness who could answer effectively all the questions regarding the siege;³⁰⁸ second, Machiavelli's capabilities, including his ability to observe, analyze, judge, and summarize information swiftly and accurately, were useful for such an important mission; third, his modest origins and practice in infiltrating the lower strata of society could help obtain for the Signoria information that would not be available at court; fourth, the successful mission to Caterina Sforza in Forlì had proved to the Signoria Machiavelli's capacity for a mission of this type; fifth, a mission in foreign territory to encounter a potentially hostile king and nobles was hardly a desirable diplomatic posting. Machiavelli's republican zeal and loyalty meant he would accept it without complaint.

³⁰⁷ *Legazioni*, I, 388-391.

³⁰⁸ "Magnifici Oratores etc. Noi Mandiano costi lo spettabile Francesco della Casa e Niccolò Machiavelli con la commissione che vi faranno nota. Sono stati di continuo in campo contro Pisa e per questo potranno bene iustificare ogni imputazione ne fussi voluto dare, e con ragione dimostrare ogni cosa che sia a proposito dell'onore e commodo della Repubblica nostra." *Legazioni*, I, 398.

As the failure to subdue Pisa in 1499 was disastrous for Florence from a financial point of view, the defeat of 1500 added a military aspect to Florence's difficulties, as the Republic had been left completely unarmed and vulnerable to attacks. In August 1500, shortly after the French abandoned the siege, the Pisans organized a fierce counterattack, recovering many lost possessions, including Riprafratta.³⁰⁹ Incursions of Pisan raiding parties reached deep into Florentine territory and threatened the city itself. At the same time, Florence and France traded blame for the failure of the siege, Florence faulting the French auxiliary troops, while the French took aim at Florence for not providing enough provisions for the mercenaries. This dispute threatened to rupture the alliance between the Second Republic and France and leave Florence isolated, both diplomatically and militarily. Thus, the commission Machiavelli and della Casa received from the government was to find the king in the city of Lyon and first, accuse the mercenaries of disorder and hold them responsible for the failure; second, defend and excuse Florence from all accusations.

For the first part, the Signoria advised Machiavelli to “enumerare tutte le cagioni che hanno costretto Monsignor Belmonte desperarsi della impresa, e ultimo partirsi dallo assedio di Pisa; le quali sono state al iudicio nostro la poca obediencia al Capitano, le pratiche tenute d'accordo con Pisani, il Capitano de' Svizzeri Giannotto, e dipoi per alcuni italiani per ordine di messer Gian Giacomo Trivulzio”³¹⁰ Likewise, the Signoria instructed Machiavelli to add all

³⁰⁹ “E a dì 19 d'agosto 1500, ci fu come e Pisani avevano avuto la bastia e morto ognuno che v' era, e come gli erano a campo a Rosignano; e nostri non soccorrevano nulla, e pareva eh' ognuno fussi sbigottito. Ci trovavamo senza soldati, o veramente con pochi che non erano sofficienti a potere soccorrere el bisogno, in modo che ci pareva essere tra 'l monte e 'l mare. Era molto affannoso tempo e pericoloso, in modo che a dì 20 detto, el dì di san Bernardo, non lasciorono sonare campane in Palagio per sospetti dentro e di fuori: pure Iddio ha sempre aiutato questa città.” See Landucci, *Diario*, 214-215.

³¹⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 389; Trivulzio was a Milanese *condottiero* in the service of the French king. After the death of Ludovico Sforza in 1500, Trivulzio became Louis XII's right hand in Milan. For more see *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* - Volume 97 (2020). ([https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/trivulzio-gian-giacomo-detto-il-magno_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/trivulzio-gian-giacomo-detto-il-magno_(Dizionario-Biografico)/))

other things he saw in person and he remembers to describe. They reminded Machiavelli that “il principio manifesto della ruina di questa impresa e la partita de’ Guasconi perché dopo loro tumultorono li Svizzeri e negorono volere fare più fazione, donde il campo fu necessitato partirsi.”³¹¹ Ultimately, the Signoria was convinced that Machiavelli could excuse the Republic from any allegations regarding the lack of food and ammunition in the camp.³¹² Convinced in their innocence, the Signoria concluded the letter with the following statement: “A noi non pare necessario potere aggiugnere altro per vostra informazione a questa commissione, perché tutto abbiamo tratto di campo dove voi siete stati presenti, a avete potuto conoscerle e vederle meglio di noi.”³¹³

What conclusions can we draw from Signoria’s instructions to Machiavelli? The accusations against the French seem to allege the existence of a widespread sentiment against fighting amongst the French mercenaries as well as evidence of open sabotage of the war effort by some of the leading French commanders. As we mentioned earlier, many Swiss soldiers were not motivated to fight the Pisans or die for the Florentine cause, trusting rather that their fearsome reputation alone would cause the Pisans to surrender without a fight. Once they realized that the fight was not against a handful of professional soldiers in Pisan pay but rather the whole population united to oppose Florence in the name of freedom, the Swiss and Gascons decided to abandon the siege. The decision was not particularly difficult for them, as they could always blame Florence for failing to provide adequate food and money to prolong the siege. Additionally, far from the eyes of the French king and his closest military personnel, the Swiss and Gascon mercenaries found they could easily disobey Captain Beaumont, who appeared

³¹¹ *Legazioni*, I, 390.

³¹² “A che voi avete escusazione molto facile, perché il ponte non si fece a tempo per difetto della scorta, la quale aveano a mandare loro; e munizioni si providono in maggior quantità.” See *Legazioni*, I, 390.

³¹³ *Legazioni*, I, 391.

unable or unwilling to deal with them. Ultimately, we can place responsibility for the defeat at the feet of the mercenaries.³¹⁴

We can add that the two Milanese captains in the French army, Pallavicini and Trivulzio, would likely have had no interest in seeing Pisa fall into Florentine hands. Since the end of the 15th century, the Milanese had considered Pisa to be within their sphere of influence. Allowing Florence to conquer the port city would significantly strengthen the Florentine economy while diminishing the influence of Milanese merchants. According to the Signoria, Pallavicini instigated the Gascons' departure, making the accusations of widespread conspiracy against Florence quite plausible.³¹⁵ While there is no evidence to prove that they acted together as part of a plan, the actions taken separately by Pallavicini, Trivulzio, and Beaumont point to an anti-Florentine attitude.

While this interpretation is plausible, it also contains one flaw. Although the French king was indeed far from the Pisan camp and thus unable to observe the situation as Machiavelli had, it is hard to believe that Louis XII could be ignorant of what was occurring in the camp. His reputation was at stake during the attack on Pisa, and any failure could reveal the king's weaknesses. Nevertheless, the Signoria assigned no blame to the king, either because they truly believed he knew nothing or because they did not want to offend him by directing accusations at him. Whatever the reason, Florence needed to retain the king's friendship regardless of everything. The following instructions to della Casa and Machiavelli from the Signoria confirm this:

³¹⁴ "E così mostrate le insolenzie e bestialità di quelle fanterie e il disordine che hanno fatto alle vettovaglie, la qual cosa è stato causa d'ogni male." See *Legazioni*, I, 394.

³¹⁵ "E non ommetterete per cosa alcuna come spesso simili entravano in Pisa e in specie Rinieri della Sassetta, il quale ci è stato usato per instrumento e è favorito assai da questi Palavicini: da chi, insieme con li Triulci che non si satisfacevano della impresa di Pisa, noi reputiamo la partita de' Guasconi, perché altra cagione non ci è." See *Legazioni*, I, 389.

E in effeto siate per andare seguire la volontà di Sua Signoria in tutte le cose, perché la città nostra lo ha per precipuo protettore e benificatore. E mosterrebbe che sua Maestà non ne avessi levato il pensiero, che sarebbe di degnità sua e a nostro favore. E così chiederli, per aiutarsi in questi insulti fatti, consentire che messer Giovanni Bentivoglio potessi venire a favori nostri con le sue forze e genti; il quale sarebbe in desiderio di farlo per onore di sua Maestà e bene nostro.³¹⁶

The Signoria advised them also to be cordial to the king's right hand, Cardinal d'Amboise, and the king's secretary, Florimond Robertet, powerful figures at the French court who were perceived as friends of the republic.³¹⁷ But friends of the Republic or not, did the king and his cardinal truly want to see Pisa in Florentine hands?

The following text suggests that, based on events during and after the siege, it was never the king's intention to hand over Pisa to Florence. This fact alone is very important for understanding all the difficulties Machiavelli encountered while at the French court. Even before Machiavelli reached the French king, he had received instructions from the Signoria concerning the king's intention to continue the war against Pisa to regain his lost reputation. Louis XII indicated that he was willing to continue the fight, but only if Florence financed the venture and followed a tactic he called "la guerra guerriabile," which meant razing the Pisan crops to starve them out and force them into surrender.³¹⁸ For the Signoria, the financial aspect of the king's proposal was unacceptable because it would require the provision of lodgings, food, and money for the French troops, who would remain in Tuscany during the fall and winter seasons. It seemed as though the king preferred that someone else pay his troops for him.

Machiavelli and della Casa learned more details about this proposal in Lyon on July 29, 1500, when they met the Florentine ambassador Lorenzo Lenzi from whom they acquired valuable news and advice on how best to fulfill their mission.³¹⁹ Prior to the arrival of the two

³¹⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 393.

³¹⁷ "Le persone di chi aviamo fede appreso la Cristianissima Maestà è primum Monsignore di Roano e Monsignore Generale Robertet, con il quale vi rstringerete spesso e da lui arete e consiglio e aiuto." See *Legazioni*, I, 396.

³¹⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 395.

³¹⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 398-399.

new legates, the king had already made known to Lenzi that he wanted his soldiers to return to the territory of the Republic, while at the same time making raids into Pisan territory. Lenzi informed the two new envoys of the king's idea and recommended that the Republic accept it. But Machiavelli and his companion, having witnessed the pandemonium of the Pisan camp, replied that they could not accept such a proposal because the king's mercenaries hurt their city a lot and, due to this experience, could not trust the king and his army again.³²⁰ Also, they added that it would be impossible to feed the French army of 3,000 infantry and 500 men at arms for a long time. Lenzi was persuaded by these arguments and advised the two envoys to propose to the king, so as not to displease him completely, that a small force of 200 lances of his army should be lodged near Cascina. Although della Casa and Machiavelli reluctantly relayed this proposal to Florence, the Signoria had already turned it down before Machiavelli reached the king in France. As we will see in the following text, Machiavelli's mission to France was set off on the wrong foot from the outset. But the positive takeaways from this mission will outweigh its challenges.

3.4.1. Machiavelli and Louis XII

Machiavelli's mission to the French king could be divided into three parts based on the topics that dominated the discussions at the court between the envoys and the French. The first part, as we will see in the following text, included the arrival of the envoys and their first meeting with the king and his ministers. One important characteristic of the first meeting was the high sense of justice and reason expressed in Machiavelli's replies to the king and the Cardinal of Rouen. Concerning this, it seems that the Florentine government either did not understand or

³²⁰ "A che respondemo come noi esistimavamo la cagione della risposta vostra fredda, e del non vi essere resoluti secondo la richiesta fatta, potere essere la qualità del successo delle cose di Pisa, contro ad ogni opinione, con poco onore di questa Maestà e infinitissimo danno vostro: tal che le Signorie vostre, per la esperienza fatta di quelle genti, non possevano mai più confidare in loro." See *Legazioni*, I, 400.

was not prepared to believe that power was more important than reason in the new post-1494 diplomacy. Its continued refusal to pay the Swiss irritated the king, who threatened to break the alliance. Without an army and in danger of losing the king's protection, the Florentine government ultimately submitted to the king's demands. Thus, the second part of Machiavelli's mission passed in accepting this blow and realizing that reason as a method in politics does not prevail over power. The third and final meeting with the king in November 1500 only confirmed the lessons Florentines had learned in the previous month. The emergence of Cesare Borgia and his campaign in Romagna "disarmed" Florentine diplomacy. Lacking means to protect themselves from this lord, Florence was compelled to accede to all of the king's conditions. In a matter of months, the Florentine diplomatic position regarding the failed campaign had gone from pride to humiliation. To understand the depth of this humiliation, we need to closely read Machiavelli's dispatches written shortly after the first meeting with the king.

Machiavelli's writings are full of references to his missions in France and dealings with the French king Louis XII. Mostly negative, those references are numerous in *The Prince*, where Machiavelli reflects on Louis XII's errors and misjudgments.³²¹ So, what lessons did Machiavelli derive from his audiences with the king and his most powerful ministers? In what way did those lessons affect his political development? First, the French king's overwhelming and unfair demands convinced Machiavelli that loyalty, a quality he valued highly, could hardly win out against pure greed and brute power. In other words, power was more important than reason. Next, in its negotiations with the French monarch, the Florentine government had naively

³²¹ "Io parlerò solamente del re Luigi XII e non di Carlo VIII, perché del primo, che per lungo tempo ha conservato le sue conquiste in Italia, si è potuto conoscere meglio il suo modo di procedere. Ora si può ben dire che egli ha fatto tutto il contrario di ciò che si deve fare per conservare uno stato che è di tipo del tutto diverso da quello che si ha il proposito di annettere." See Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, iii, 14; See also Ronald S. Love, "Contemporary and Near-Contemporary Opinion of Louis XII, "Père du Peuple," *Renaissance and Reformation*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (November, 1984): 235-265.

believed that their loyalty and love for France would be enough to convince the French king, thought to be a reasonable person, of their guiltlessness in the Pisan disaster. But which side is the reason on? Perhaps the king's position was reasonable too as he had no impetus to spend his money on Florence's failures. Yet Machiavelli's reasonable arguments were hardly granted listening. The Cardinal of Rouen refused to hear any evidence contrary to his own position. While the cardinal's stubbornness and hostility towards Florence seemed unreasonable behavior towards an ally, it was perfectly reasonable in the political sense, as Machiavelli had quickly come to understand it.

Machiavelli and della Casa reached the French king on August 7, 1500.³²² Upon arrival, the two envoys to Louis XII eloquently expressed the cause of their mission, narrating the facts regarding the Pisan campaign, and especially the events for which Machiavelli had been present.³²³ The attendance at the audience of Gian Giacomo Trivulzio and the bishop of Novara, Girolamo Pallavicini, prevented the two legates from implementing Lenzi's advice, which was to place most of the blame for the failure on other Italian leaders. According to Machiavelli, the French king paid little attention to the words of the envoys, responding only that it is useless to talk about the things that both sides can dispute.³²⁴ About this, Machiavelli informed the Signoria that Louis XII and the Cardinal of Rouen accepted only partial responsibility for the timid

³²² *Legazioni*, I, 409-416.

³²³ "E in particolare narramo tutte quelle cose ci parsono a proposito e che nella commissione si contengono, e massime quelle parte che riguardano alla partita de' Guasconi e alle soprusi de' Svizzeri, presa del Commissario e parlamenti continui con li inimici: dove ci allargamo assai, narrando quanto disonestamente si parlava contro delle Signorie vostre e di tutti e' Fiorentini..." See *Legazioni*, I, 410-11.

³²⁴ "A che replicando noi non possere sapere in che cosa avessimo mancato, accusorno e' difetti di vettovaglie e munizioni e d'altro, di che dissono non volere né accadere più parlare, essendo cosa che da l'una parte e l'altra si potrebbe disputare assai." See *Legazioni*, I, 411.

accusations of the Florentines, while blaming the Republic for its alleged failure to furnish sufficient provisions and ammunition.³²⁵

Rather than accepting the blame, Machiavelli reasoned that Louis XII's real interest was only to lay plans for the next campaign in order to regain his lost reputation, matters for which Machiavelli and della Casa had no authority to discuss or accept. The king concluded the discussion by saying that, painful as the defeat had been for Florence, it had been equally so for him as he had never seen his army lose a campaign in such a manner. He wished to move forward, and tested Florentine's willingness to resume the campaign by insisting that swift action was needed to restore his lost reputation and salve Florence's wounds.³²⁶ Machiavelli responded that Florence had neither the funds nor the spirit to finance and start a new campaign to which the king and his advisers exclaimed indignantly that it was an unheard-of thing that the king at his own expense should wage a war for the benefit of Florence.³²⁷ The king maintained further that the payment of mercenary soldiers who remained in the camp was Florence's responsibility. Concerning what has been said during the meeting, Machiavelli could only conclude that the king wanted to recover the honor of his army with the money of the Republic.

³²⁵ For the king's partial confession of the blame, Machiavelli reports the following: "Circa Guasconi, la sua Maestà monstro più volte nel parlare suo conoscer la fraude e tradimento loro e che ad ogni modo li farebbe punire. Dela presa del Commissario, di che noi parliamo diffusamente, chiamando non solo l'atto brutto, ma la causa inonestissima; e in questo parlare il Re taglio el ragionamento dicendo conoscere che del canto de' sua non si era operato el dovere, e che ancora che del canto nostro era suto mancamento." See *Legazioni*, I, 413.

³²⁶ "Parendo alla Maestà del Re che delle cose sopradette si fussi assai parlato e discorso, voltatosi veso di noi, disse: Questa impresa ha àuto una volta questo fine e voi dannoso e dame poco onorevole, perché mai per miei eserciti si perdé in alcun tempo una simile impresa. E però è necessario si deliberi quello si da fare in recuperazione dello onore mio e del danno vostro; e più giorni sono che io lo feci intendere a li vostri Signori a questo effetto: perché come io ho fatto dal canto mio infino ad ora è possibile, così farò per lo avvenire, e vi domando che risposta voi me ne date. A che noi respondemo non avere da le Signorie vostre commissione alcuna sopra a questa materia." See *Legazioni*, I, 413.

³²⁷ "Per le quali parole el Re, Roano e gli altri circumstanti cominciorano tutti quasi ad gridare, dicendo essere cosa inconveniente che il Re a sua spese facessi la guerra per noi." See *Legazioni*, I, 413.

Meanwhile, in Montargis, near Orléan, after their official audience with the king, Machiavelli and della Casa spoke to the Cardinal of Rouen in private, of which they notified the Signoria in the letter of August 11, 1500.³²⁸ During the conversation, the cardinal displayed far more hostility towards the envoys than he had during the audience. He accused Florence of dilatoriness in providing the supplies during the campaign and reminded the envoys that Florence must pay for the journey home of the Swiss mercenaries, as was customary for those who hired them.³²⁹ The envoys replied that he could not know or understand the events of the war better than they, as he had not been there. Further, they pointed out that the Florentines were united in their effort to retake Pisa, providing the money and supplies to which two-thirds of those who could vote in the Great Council contributed.³³⁰ As for the Swiss, Machiavelli responded to the Cardinal that Florence would not pay them “perché loro non avevano servito, anzi denegato el servizio delle guardie e fazioni, e inoltre erano quasi tutti dissoluti.”³³¹ Bold as it is, Machiavelli’s answer did not seem to affect the cardinal who bluntly responded that the Florentines “devono pagare, e quando non li pagassi, il Re era forzato pagarli di suo e resterebbe non bene contento di Fiorentini.”³³²

For most other Florentines, the Cardinal of Rouen’s behavior would be seen as arrogant, rude, and disrespectful. For Machiavelli, the king’s minister was merely calibrating his behavior relative to the political power and reputation Florence projected at the French court, which was minimal. It seems that the cardinal had less interest in hearing the message of the envoys than in exploring Florence’s desperate wish to remain the king’s ally. Machiavelli and della Casa

³²⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 417-420.

³²⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 418.

³³⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 418.

³³¹ *Legazioni*, I, 419.

³³² *Legazioni*, I, 419.

reported that the cardinal insisted on blaming Florence for the disastrous campaign despite their argument that the king was not well informed and that the provisions had been stolen and badly distributed among the soldiers. Again, he accused Florence of hoping to conquer Pisa with the king's money and with no efforts of their own: in other words, that Florence was blocking the renewal of the campaign.³³³ Machiavelli responded that the city's spirit was low after so many failed hopes and that it lacked money and force to restart the operations. He added that for the king, this is a small war that he certainly could win with his expenses and that it would be a lot better if the army was under his leadership as the campaign would be safe and the soldiers would not desert."³³⁴ To that remark, Machiavelli informs the Signoria that the cardinal "sempre rispondendo che il Re mai s'accorderebbe a tale partito e che Maestà sua resta sì male soddisfatta e contenta di vostra disposizione che non vede chi di qua vi possa restare più amico che possa aiutare le cose vostre."³³⁵ By this point, it must have been clear to Machiavelli that the French had already made their decisions and there was nothing he could do to change them. All he could do was learn from them.

One may wonder, thus, what respect or fear could the Florentine government, without an army and dependent on the king's protection, inspire in the cardinal? What reputation did Machiavelli's government deserve for placing the future of its citizens in the hands of a foreign king and his mercenaries? The following correspondence shows that the case of Florence was only one of the many manifestations of Italian political disintegration and ruin. For example, on August 12, when the Florentine envoys wrote to the Signoria from Montargis:

Questa Maestà si truova con pochissima corte rispetto a l'altro Re Carlo VIII; e di quella poca il tercio sono italiani chi per uno conto e chi per uno altro, sono tutti mal contenti: Lo oratore veneziano sollecita el Re a

³³³ *Legazioni*, I, 420.

³³⁴ "Concludendo a sua Signoria che, facendo questa impresa di suo in principio, prima li saria non solo più facile, ma li sarebbe securissima, e inoltre più onorevole e con più grado verso le Signorie vostre." See *Legazioni*, I, 420.

³³⁵ *Legazioni*, I, 420.

favorirli contro al Turco; ristrasi, oltra di questo, che 'l Pontefice con ogni istanzia ricerca da questa Maestà favore per la impresa di Faenza, per aggiugnerla a Furli e Imola per il suo Valentinese.³³⁶

There is no doubt that Machiavelli realized in 1500, some 12 years before he wrote *The Prince*, that the ruin of Italy was the work of Italians themselves, not only of foreigners. This was one of the most important lessons he learned in the first weeks of August at the king's court.

The record of Machiavelli and della Casa's reflection on their first meeting with the king and his entourage comes in the form of two long dispatches sent by the envoys on August 26 and 27, 1500.³³⁷ Both dispatches were sent from Melun, a small town northwest of Paris, where the king remained after he had fallen from a horse. While waiting to meet the king again, on August 26, Machiavelli and della Casa had a discussion with the King's secretary, Robertet, who informed them that "la Maestà del Re era malissima contenta di voi, né era più rimaso luogo a li amici di parlare in favor vostro."³³⁸ Despite all the excuses and justifications the envoys offered, Robertet told them that "el Re rimase in su quella opinione che 'l mancamento nascessi di vostre Signorie; e sputo parole non buone circa la disunione vostra."³³⁹ The envoys also spoke to the Cardinal of Rouen, who was unhappy that Florence did not want to continue the campaign and pay the Swiss.³⁴⁰ In his attempt to assuage French dissatisfaction, Machiavelli once again explained that the new campaign against Pisa was impossible as the city had no money for it and because of the Swiss who came more as enemies than friends, and begged the French not to abandon the protection of Florence as the Republic was always on the side of the French. Hearing this, Machiavelli reports the following: "Roano rispose subito, rompendo el parlar nostro: ora voi vi portate male ch'io non saprei più che farmi in beneficio vostro e che alla

³³⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 425-26.

³³⁷ *Legazioni*, I, 433-36.

³³⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 434.

³³⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 434.

³⁴⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 435.

Maestà del Re pareva strano avere pagati e' Svizzeri per le Signorie vostre."³⁴¹ When the envoys tried to reason with him again, Machiavelli reports that the cardinal repeated his demands and stated "che le erano tutte parole, mostrando dar poca fede a nostri ragioni e essere mal contento delle Signorie nostre, parlando *alta voce* in modo che tutti e' circostanti udivano; e monto subito a cavallo per ire a suoi piaceri."³⁴² Humiliated in this way by the cardinal, the two envoys had nothing else to do but to wait for the king who, due to his numerous hunting parties and endless meetings with other envoys, seemed to ignore their presence.

Shortly after they had sent the first letter, regarding their meeting with the cardinal and the secretary, Machiavelli and della Casa penned another one on August 27, 1500, in which they expressed their personal observations and reflections on the meeting. As the personal opinion of envoys was not something that the Signoria would normally request, the letter, sent on August 27 is worth examining. After restarting the reasons for the king's unhappiness with Florence, the envoys expressed their view on the situation in which the city finds itself. They believed that the king did not want to start the campaign on his own (at his expense) and that he did not appreciate much what the Republic offered in the past or will offer in the future, but what it can offer now: "La natura sua rispettiva allo spendere, appresso come si è governato insino a qui nelle cose di Italia, di volerne trarre e non mettervi, e pensare più al comodo presente che a quello liene possessi risultare poi; il che fa che li stimi poco quello le Signorie vostre li offerono, e dice sua Maestà che la è una mocheria."³⁴³ The message could not be more clear: the French were alert only to the present pay-off and blind to the future benefit of an investment in the Pisa War. But is there more to it?

³⁴¹ *Legazioni*, I, 436.

³⁴² *Legazioni*, I, 437.

³⁴³ *Legazioni*, I, 441.

I argue that this remark could also be read as a subtle critique of Florence's common practice of temporizing, buying time, and offering empty promises until circumstances turned in their favor. The question is who exactly utters this critique? Was that Machiavelli's voice alone or della Casa's or both of them? While we cannot be absolutely sure about who exactly is the author of this subtle critique, there are enough reasons to suggest that it was Machiavelli and not della Casa. First, we have already seen earlier in the text that Machiavelli did not hesitate to go beyond the expectations in his reports and utter his opinion on the matters he considered important for his government without being asked to do so. Second, the following dispatch is loaded with the heavy criticism towards the Florentine government that only Machiavelli could unleash; it is hard to imagine that della Casa, a senior diplomat with health problems, suddenly decided to step out of his comfort zone.

As in the previous dispatch, Machiavelli proceeds to criticize a familiar diplomatic practice that has served Florence in the past, but is no longer effective in the post-1494 reality: "Né pension le Signorie vostre o che buone lettere o buone persuasioni ci vaglino, perché le non sono intese: e el ricordare la fede di cotesta città verso questa Corona, e quello che si fece al tempo dello altro Re, e' danari che si spesonno, e' pericoli che si portorno, quante volte siamo suti pasciuti di vane speranze, quello che ultimamente si è fatto, tutto è superfluo." This realization was based on the dismal reality expressed in the following text:

Perché le sono altrimenti discorse queste cose da costoro e vedute con altro occhio che le non si considerarono per chi non è tutto qua, perché sono accecati da la potenza loro e da l'utile presente e stimano solamente o chi è armato, o chi è disposto a dare; e questo è ora per nuocere assai alle Signorie vostre, perché per loro che in voi sieno mancate queste dua qualità: la prima delle armi per lo ordinario, e la seconda, dello utile non sperano più per credere che voi vi tegnete mal serviti e desperati di loro per queste ultime cose di Pisa; e reputanvi *pro nichilo* battezzando la impossibilità vostra "disunione" e la disonestà dello esercito loro "cattivo governo vostro."³⁴⁴

³⁴⁴ *Legazioni*, I, 443-44.

In all of Machiavelli's writings, there is probably no paragraph that summarizes better the critical weaknesses of the Second Republic. Well aware of these weaknesses, Machiavelli, for the first time in his *Legazioni*, did not hesitate to detail them in an open critique of his government. One key point that Machiavelli raises here is that present decisions can only be based on current circumstances, and not on conditions that existed in the past. The history of cordial relations between Florence and France meant nothing in present circumstances. Machiavelli's remark that the French are blinded by power and present gain and that they esteem only those who are well-armed and available perfectly encapsulates the argument. Machiavelli identifies a new post-1494 diplomacy exclusively based on military power or, in lieu of arms, exorbitant amounts of wealth. In the past, Florence had compensated for its lack of military power with a seemingly inexhaustible supply of florins. Now, when her inability or unwillingness to pay came to the fore, Florence was treated as a third-rate power, of no use to potent states like France. In such a situation, that the French should esteem the Florentine government as "pro nichilo" is not surprising.

Finally, to shield himself from possible repercussions that his heavy words might have caused in Florence and prove that he and della Casa are not alone in their opinion, Machiavelli concludes the letter by saying that such opinion is none less of those ambassadors who left before they came. Because of the all stated above, they begged the Signoria "di rimediarvi oportunamente, perché il grado e la qualità nostre, senza alcuna commissione che sia grata a costoro, non sono per possere ripescare una cosa che affondi."³⁴⁵ The envoys also suggested to the Signoria to send the ambassadors as soon as possible but not with "empty hands" because their usefulness would not mean much if they did not offer payment for the Swiss or other way to

³⁴⁵ *Legazioni*, I, 444.

become friends again with the French: “el profitto loro non fia molto se non vengono con qualche partito nuovo, con ordine di pagare e’ Svizzeri e con modo a farsi degli amici.”³⁴⁶ In other words, if the Signoria delays in its reply to these requests, Machiavelli and his companion fear that the king’s avarice, the ambition of the cardinal, and the instigations from the enemies of Florence, would cause the break of the alliance.³⁴⁷ Ultimately, Machiavelli understood the extent to which force and ambition can dictate political matters, and what a powerful engine individual selfishness could be. With words that reveal internal disgust and bitterness, he sought to dispel the illusions of his distant Lords.

When Machiavelli and della Casa sent the dispatches on August 26 and 27, the Florentine government was not yet aware of the level of French discontent. In a letter to the envoys in France written on August 30, 1500, the Florentine government informs Machiavelli and della Casa of the financial issues caused by the civil war in Pistoia and the damage inflicted by the *condottieri* led by Vitellozzo Vitelli. Rather naively, they ask the envoys to avoid irritating the French by harping on about their role in the siege of Pisa, and to focus their attention rather on the return of the fortresses of Pietrasanta and Mutrone which the king had pledged.³⁴⁸ This new request from the Signoria would likely have enraged the king and provoked open hostility between Florence and France. For this reason, Machiavelli and della Casa wrote another letter explaining to the Signoria the seriousness of the situation in which Florence found itself with the king.

To convince the Signoria that Florence was in real peril and it was essential to act immediately, Machiavelli and della Casa emphasized the two key concerns of Florentine foreign

³⁴⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 444.

³⁴⁷ *Legazioni*, I, 446.

³⁴⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 447-49.

politics at the time: the loss of Pisa and the security of the homeland. In the letter of September 3, 1500, they reported that the king's unhappiness gave spirit to Florence's enemies who wanted to turn the king against the Republic.³⁴⁹ Also, the envoys reported rumors about the debates in the king's council to accept Pisa under French rule. The event of Pisa coming under the French king's protection would have been devastating for Florence. Although the king likely used this proposal to motivate the Florentines to pay the Swiss, its realization was a real possibility, as the Pisans had already offered their loyalty to King Charles VIII. While this was not officially confirmed by the French, the envoys expressed to the Signoria their concerns about the fact that their beloved Florence had no friends to support her at the French court. They bitterly observed that "in tutta questa Corte, sendo la Maestà del Re sdegnata, non ci è rimasto alcuno o pochissimi amici vostri; anzi ciascuno senza rispetto vi offende con quelle forze che si truova."³⁵⁰ According to the report, only the king's secretary Robertet remained a friend but it was hard to satisfy him only with words. For the envoys, such a "trista disposizione" left Florence completely isolated and vulnerable to attack from various sides.

The following observation from the envoys sums up the situation: "se le Signorie vostre non rimediono, le si troveranno, e presto, in tale condizione con questo Re, che le aranno più pensare di guardare e difendere le cose tenute e la libertà propria che di pensare alla recuperazione delle cose perdute."³⁵¹ That the envoys had done everything in their power for the Florentine cause within the parameters prescribed is the message of the final paragraph of the letter, where Machiavelli and della Casa admit the following: "Come Signorie vostre intendono, noi senza rispetto e largamente scriviamo come ci pare vedere e intendere le cose di qua.

³⁴⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 450.

³⁵⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 451.

³⁵¹ *Legazioni*, I, 451.

Ricordiamo bene con reverenzia el mandare li ambasciadori e presto, tal che per la prima vostra s'intenda che venghino, e dea potere fare frutto: perché noi non siamo per potere aiutare altrimenti questa materia.”³⁵² At this point, feeling powerless to avert the coming storm, they implore the Signoria to send a diplomat of high status, as they esteem themselves “men of little authority.” There is no doubt that Machiavelli and della Casa in a very short time understood the cruel reality of the political arena in which military power dominated reason. In the dispatches that followed their first meeting with the king and his ministers, Machiavelli and della Casa acknowledged Florence’s inferior position towards the French and recommended to the Signoria to accept all the king’s conditions.

Following della Casa’s departure to Paris due to illness in September 1500, Machiavelli remained alone at the court to carry the full burden of the mission. Now he had to spend several months more at the French court waiting for the Florentine ambassadors to come. While Machiavelli endured what may have been the most difficult period at the hostile French court, he made use of the opportunity to observe the French and sketch an anthropological portrait of the French kingdom, its government, and its people. This experience he later described in a document known as *Discursus de Pace inter imperatorem et regem*.³⁵³ In it, he remarks on French customs, the nature of the king, and the ways of the court. From these observations came another work called *De natura Gallorum*.³⁵⁴ The description of the “things of France” was probably written upon his return to Italy in the first half of 1501. The reflection that Machiavelli wove around the monarchy and its institutions allowed him to establish the conception of a modern state. Having experienced the court of the king, whose initiative decided the direction of

³⁵² *Legazioni*, I, 452.

³⁵³ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 429-34.

³⁵⁴ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 455-457.

the political events of a large part of Europe, Machiavelli saw at close range the motives and forces of a vast monarchy. Yet seeing that all this was the foundation of strength and power, and a source of security and respect in the world, he could not but be persuaded of the real value of those arts and means in politics. His insights proved valuable for future projects, for which he would evoke his experience in the French court to help his government make decisions regarding the Florentine militia, which will be the subject of one of the next chapters.

3.4.2. Waiting for the ambassadors

In a letter to the Signoria of September 8, 1500, Machiavelli reported his second audience with the king, who expressed satisfaction over the prospect of the arrival of new ambassadors.³⁵⁵ Knowing that the Signoria might be slow in sending the ambassadors, Machiavelli's letter of September 14, 1500, urges prompt action. According to Machiavelli's advice to the Signoria, his government had to pay the Swiss if they wanted to retain the friendship with the king. To explain how serious is the king about his demands, Machiavelli reported that "questa Maestà e per risentirsi quando e' fussino 100 franchi, nonché 38 mila come dicono essere."³⁵⁶ Already familiar with the intrigues of the French court, Machiavelli realized that the best recourse for Florence was monetary. The money of its citizens was needed to bribe the French and foster new friendships at court.³⁵⁷ Unfortunately, the Signoria's response to the legates' request was anything but satisfactory, either for them or the French. Financially drained after the campaign against Pisa and without an army to defend their borders from the Pisans and the vengeful

³⁵⁵ "Noi replicamo che questi oratori verrebbero, e che noi credavamo che delle cose ragionevoli e possibili le Signorie vostre sarebbero sempre per seguire la consuetudine loro: e che sua Maestà fussi contenta aspettare la venuta di quelli a giudicare lo animo loro." See *Legazioni*, I, 461.

³⁵⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 466.

³⁵⁷ *Legazioni*, I, 466.

condottieri led by Vitellozzo Vitelli, Florence's sole concern was to hire new *condottieri*. The importance of appointing ambassadors was deemed secondary.³⁵⁸

Although it is an official letter, Machiavelli's reply to the Signoria's is full of yet more criticism of the Florentine government, expressing his personal dissatisfaction with their decision. He started his reply by restating once again how important for the city is to send the ambassadors and avoid the dangers of allowing the enemies of the Republic to tell the king whatever they want.³⁵⁹ Then, Machiavelli reports a rather private discussion with the Cardinal of Rouen ("a mia commodità") where he was asked again why the ambassadors were so late.³⁶⁰ Machiavelli reports that he promised the cardinal that the ambassadors were coming soon, fully knowing this was far from the truth. In doing so, he put himself again in the awkward position of providing covering for his government. Hence, his criticism of the Signoria's temporizing is not surprising: "Si che, Magnifici Signori, come vedete, le cose vostre restano sospese in su la venuta de' vostri oratori, né ci si è veduto altro rimedio a temporeggiarle che questo. Per noi non si puote fare altro."³⁶¹ It was clear to Machiavelli that his government continually procrastinated over the above-mentioned king's requests without any friends at court and in the middle of so many enemies. For this reason, he concludes the dispatch by advising his government that "con quelli di sua Maestà sarebbe necessitato esserli fidelissimo."³⁶²

While in Florence the debates over who should be the ambassador to the French stretched for weeks, Machiavelli in France had to endure the mockery of the French king and the Cardinal

³⁵⁸ In Signoria's letter to Machiavelli and Della Casa from September 20, 1500, the envoys are reminded that Florence remained without an army and for that reason sustained great dangers and loss of Libbrafratta and Bastione. Thus, the regime did not have funds for the king's army again. See *Legazioni*, I, 466-68.

³⁵⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 474.

³⁶⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 475.

³⁶¹ *Legazioni*, I, 475.

³⁶² *Legazioni*, I, 476.

of Rouen.³⁶³ One anecdote illustrates this: during a meeting with the king and the cardinal, when Machiavelli guarantees again the arrival of the ambassadors, the cardinal replies: “Dixisti, verum est, sed primus mortui antequam oratores veniant, sed conabimur ut alii prius moriantur.”³⁶⁴ During the same meeting, the cardinal turned from scorn to threats against Florence. Machiavelli reported to the Signoria that the cardinal spoke for more than 30 minutes about how bad was the Signoria and threatened the Republic with their hostile neighbors. For example, he mentioned that the king is in everyday contact with Luccans, Genovese, and Pisans who are offering money and asking for nothing in return. Seeing that Florence is buying time, the cardinal demanded an answer right away while issuing the following warning: “che li oratori vostri non potranno negoziare, né essere uditi di cosa alcuna, se prima questo pagamento non segue, e che non s’intenda con questa esperienza lo animo vostro: e scrivi subito, perché né vogliamo subito risposta, né possiamo, né vogliamo stare sospesi; e farai loro intendere che, o nimici o amici che voglino essere, ad ogni modo li pagheranno.”³⁶⁵ As we can see, the cardinal not only repeats the request for thirty-eight thousand ducats for the Swiss but also makes it clear that the ambassadors will not be received and heard before all the required payments have been made. We can only imagine Machiavelli’s feelings under this pressure, left alone and powerless between the arrogance of the French and the vacillation of his own government. It had started to seem that the Florentine government would temporize even longer, in disregard of Machiavelli’s recommendations, until one event forced the issue: Cesare Borgia’s invasion of Romagna in the fall of 1500.

³⁶³ *Legazioni*, I, 478-82.

³⁶⁴ “Lo dicesti, è vero, ma saremo morti prima che gli oratori arrivino: tuttavia, faremo in modo che altri muoiano primo.” See *Legazioni*, I, 489.

³⁶⁵ *Legazioni*, I, 490.

In a letter of October 21, 1500, the Signoria tersely informed Machiavelli that the new ambassador, Francesco Tosinchi, was en route for France.³⁶⁶ The remainder of the letter provides a detailed report on the threat from Cesare Borgia, who wanted to restore the Medici in Florence. Now, faced with this new threat, the Signoria, ignoring their obligations towards the king, requested from Machiavelli to present their case to the king and ask for help.³⁶⁷ The Signoria was startled by this new and threatening movement by Valentino. Being without money and fighting men, the Florentines feared the ambition of Borgia but perhaps even more, that of the leaders who accompanied him – the Medici, Orsini, and Vitelli, all inveterate enemies of the republican government. The Signoria commissioned Machiavelli to ask the king for protection from the pope, Orsini, and Vitelli, which he did immediately.³⁶⁸

More details on Borgia's possible intentions came from the king and the Cardinal of Rouen, with whom Machiavelli spoke on the first day of November 1500. On November 4, 1500, Machiavelli reported to the Signoria he spoke to the king and the cardinal about Florence's concern over Borgia's intentions in Italy.³⁶⁹ The French boasted first that Borgia would not do anything in Italy without telling them first. However, in case he decided to continue his campaign from Romagna towards Tuscany, the king would make a decision to stop him or not based on whether the Republic is his ally or not.³⁷⁰ This was yet one more attempt to pressure Florence into paying the Swiss; however, this one was effective. The threat from Borgia, Orsini, Vitelli, and the Medici was too grave to be disregarded. Knowing this, Machiavelli did not miss

³⁶⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 498-99.

³⁶⁷ That the Signoria's fears were not unfounded, shows the fact that on October 17, 1500, in Assisi, Cesare Borgia was seen together with Giuliano de Medici and Vitellozzo Vitelli, Florence's sworn enemies. See *Legazioni*, I, 499.

³⁶⁸ In his reply to the Signoria from October 25, 1500, Machiavelli writes that the king was forced to accept Borgia's campaign because he needed the alliance with the Pope in order to get divorce from his first wife and marry the wife of his deceased brother. See *Legazioni*, I, 500-01.

³⁶⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 505-508.

³⁷⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 506.

the opportunity to remind the cardinal that Florence had always been a loyal ally to the French, especially in 1495 when no other Italian power supported King Charles VIII. However, the cardinal's arrogance was seemingly limitless. He promised no aid to Florence, responding curtly to Machiavelli to write and prompt his government to send the ambassadors and the commission to let them know their intentions."³⁷¹

Finally, pressure from the French, Borgia's swift actions in Romagna, and the plotting of the Medici compelled the Signoria to find funds to pay the Swiss. On November 12, 1500, Machiavelli received a letter from the Signoria in which the government let him know that they finally found the money to pay the Swiss.³⁷² A few days later, the Signoria informed Machiavelli that the Venetians, the Pope, Orsini and Vitelli intended to reinstate the Medici in Florence.³⁷³ Machiavelli confirmed this information in his reply to the Signoria of November 21, 1500, and reported that according to his sources here in France, the Pope wanted to restore the Medici in Florence and that the French king was open to this proposal in case Florence became his enemy.³⁷⁴ It is clear thus from those two reports that the French were prepared to go to any lengths to extract the money from Florence.

Surrounded by enemies on all sides, Florence could no longer delay the payment. It was clear to Machiavelli that necessity and fear had caused Florence to neglect any consideration of justice and that considerable damage would result from the exhaustion of the city's finances. In their straitened conditions, the Signoria asked only for a deferral of payment: they would immediately hand over ten thousand ducats and the rest later. To this, the cardinal responded

³⁷¹ *Legazioni*, I, 508.

³⁷² *Legazioni*, I, 513.

³⁷³ According to Signoria's letter to Machiavelli from November 16, 1500, we find out that the Pope Alexander VI, without openly declaring himself an enemy of the Florentines, supported the Medici family. He invited Piero de Medici to come from France, where he was staying, to Pisa. See *Legazioni*, I, 518.

³⁷⁴ *Legazioni*, I, 519-26.

with hostility and intimidation as he expected the money to be paid upfront the whole amount but in parts. Although Machiavelli's argument was founded on reason, loyalty to, and friendship with the French, it fell on deaf ears, as the dealings of the king and the cardinal were based solely on political and monetary considerations. According to Machiavelli, "Io replicai largamente, mostrando questa mala contentezza del Re, quando ella fussi, essere poco ragionevole non a riguardo di riavere el suo, ma a riguardo di quello che debbe operare un padre verso li suoi figlioli: che è di accettare le opere loro non secondo e' desiderii suoi, ma secondo le possibilità loro."³⁷⁵ Although Machiavelli's lesson on child pedagogy would have easily found approval amongst many parents and teachers today, it did not affect the cardinal in the way the Florentine Chancellor expected. Thus, he sadly informs the Signoria that it is better not to write the cardinal's reply to his comment "perché io mi persuadevo che le Signorie vostre, prive d'ogni speranza di conseguire alcuno bene, si abbandonassino in tutto."³⁷⁶

Three days later, on November 24, 1500, Machiavelli discussed with the king for the final time the payment to the Swiss. This meeting left Machiavelli with a bad impression as once again the French king displayed his scorn for Florence. Shortly before the meeting, Machiavelli had learned that the ambassador from Lucca had offered to pay ten thousand ducats for Pietrasanta, whose return to Florence in accordance with the treaties Machiavelli had unsuccessfully requested.³⁷⁷ When Machiavelli questioned the king about this, the king gave a general answer saying that Florence broke the *capituli* first by not paying on time or not wanting to do it. Machiavelli could only bite his tongue. Afraid not to use his patience badly by responding again, he did not respond. Finally, when he told the king that the ambassadors were

³⁷⁵ *Legazioni*, I, 521.

³⁷⁶ *Legazioni*, I, 522.

³⁷⁷ In the letter to the Signoria, Machiavelli also reports that Cesare captured Val di Lumina and that he is close to capturing Faenza. Also, he had information that Piero di Medici was in Pisa. See *Legazioni*, I, 528-29.

about to come to France in two days, the king responded that it was maybe too late.³⁷⁸ In any case, Machiavelli's last meeting with the king that year did not pass in a friendly manner. Deeply unhappy and away for too long from his homeland and family, Machiavelli was counting the days until the ambassadors came.

3.5. Conclusion

Among Machiavelli's diplomatic experiences, the one at the French court undoubtedly played an important role in the formation of his political thought. His observations and contemplations on the institutions and politics of the monarchy found their reflection in his later works, notably in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*. One of the most basic lessons Machiavelli acquired from his experience in France was the importance of power and force in politics, and that power was measured mainly through the military force a state could muster, its diplomatic strength and maneuverability, and its economic resources. Not long after his first meeting with the French king, Machiavelli realized that Florence lacked the first two and was falling behind in the third. This considered, one may argue that Machiavelli's mission to France was predestined to failure. Florence's boisterous attitude against the French right after the siege, when the wounds from the defeat at the Pisan walls were still open, was apparently naive and ignorant of its weaknesses. Completely isolated, surrounded by numerous enemies, and scorned by the French, Florence was a third-rate power, a fact driven home by her ultimate submission to the unjust demands of the French king.

It was obvious to Machiavelli that without military power or wealth to purchase protection, a state could not hope to survive in the new post-1494 reality. Reliance upon old friendships, loyalties, promises, and flattery no longer served in the contemporary political arena, where a day

³⁷⁸ *Legazioni*, I, 529.

of arrears in a payment could alter the fortunes of a state. The Florentine way of diplomacy was no longer suited to the times, and Machiavelli was acutely aware of it. We have already seen him during the war in the Casentino urging officials to proceed with more efficiency and speed. Now, he urged his government to do the same. Despite his advice, the government chose to obey the king only when the state's security had fallen into peril. The Florentine government lost two months in futile negotiations in which they had nothing to offer and a great deal to lose. Such temporizing put both Florence and its envoys in France in a precarious position. In addition to all of the financial and personal difficulties they experienced while constantly moving with the French court, Machiavelli and della Casa had to tolerate constant humiliation from the French.

CHAPTER 4

Arts and Science in the Service of the State (1503-1505)

4.1. Introduction

May 1503 to September 1505 saw a continuous effort from the Florentine Republic to recover Pisa. After a short-scorched earth campaign in the Pisan *contado*, the Florentine government attempted to divert the Arno River with the intent of cutting off Pisa from water. The Florentine war effort was bolstered by an unprecedented burst of creative propaganda, embodied in Leonardo da Vinci's *Battle of Anghiari* and Michelangelo's *Battle of Cascina* and marble *David*. For a moment, it seemed that Soderini's main political goal – the conquest of Pisa – was within reach. However, these dreams quickly met with disappointment, as the Arno project was abandoned and two of the three artworks remained uncompleted. Concerning the human and financial capital the Florentine government invested to pull those projects off, one may ask what brought about these failures and what was Machiavelli's role in them. How central was he to the projects? Is there any connection between those projects and Machiavelli's ensuing militia project?

Careful analysis of Machiavelli's official dispatches for the period May 1503 to October 1504, reveals that his role in the Arno project was far more prominent than has been acknowledged in historiography. More than 90 dispatches regarding the project testify to Machiavelli's exceptional organizational abilities and the high level of determination he displayed during the project. In only a few weeks, Machiavelli organized and sent to the worksite almost 2,000 workers, a scale unprecedented for the Renaissance standards. Simultaneously, Machiavelli coordinated daily communication and cooperation between the commissioners at the

worksite and the Florentine government. Until the worksite was officially abandoned, Machiavelli never stopped encouraging the commissioners to continue their labors. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that Machiavelli was one of the strongest supporters of the project, if not its soul.

While primary sources confirm Machiavelli's prominent role in the Arno project, that is not the case with his involvement in the commission of the Anghiari and Cascina paintings. On the contrary, this chapter will show that Machiavelli's role in commissioning the paintings was obscure and quite limited. The allure of imagining Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Machiavelli working together under the same banner has led scholars to posit cooperation and friendship between Machiavelli and Leonardo. For example, Leonardo scholar Edmondo Solmi was one of the first to suggest a relationship between Machiavelli and Leonardo that predated the Arno project.³⁷⁹ Solmi's arguments were taken up by Roger Masters, who in his *Fortune is a River* makes several claims about their alleged partnership.³⁸⁰ If one searches for information on Machiavelli's role in the Arno project, the greater number of entries lead to Master's book on Leonardo and Machiavelli's "dream to divert the Arno," "mutual friendship," and "alleged cooperation." While Masters' work has met with mixed reviews, historiography has made no attempt to challenge his suppositions.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ E. Solmi, "Leonardo e Machiavelli," *Archivio Storico Lombardo: Giornale della società storica lombarda*, Serie 4, Volume 17, Fascicolo 34, (1912): 219-244; Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 229-237.

³⁸⁰ Building on Solmi's work, Masters claimed that Machiavelli and Leonardo worked together for the Florentine government in Imola in 1502. He based this theory on Machiavelli's dispatch to the Signoria from November 1, 1502, in which he mentioned conversation with "a friend" who was very close to Borgia and knew some of his secrets. See Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 230; For an overview of Leonardo's service to Cesare Borgia, particularly in relation to his work on the topographical maps and military fortifications, see Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci Rediscovered*, II, 301-27.

³⁸¹ In his later work on a similar subject, Masters realized his unfounded claims and modified his arguments on suggestion from William Cornell. According to Masters, although the argument for the absence of a personal relationship between Machiavelli and Leonardo before 1502 is reasonable, it is also conceivable that the presence of Leonardo at Borgia's court was known to (and perhaps even authorized by) the Florentine Government. See Masters, *Machiavelli, Leonardo and the Science of Power*, 16 and 280, n. 39.

Thus, contrary to the above-mentioned interpretations that are based on circumstantial evidence at best, this chapter will argue that there is no evidence from the source material to suggest that Machiavelli and Leonardo were friends or that they collaborated on Soderini's projects. As neither man mentions the other in his works, the only historical document that confirms they ever met is a contract renewal with the Signoria signed by Leonardo in Machiavelli's presence on May 4th, 1504.³⁸² While this may lead some scholars to conclude that Machiavelli had no interest in the visual arts, this chapter will suggest that some of his rare but important references to this theme in *The Prince* and *Discourses* could be perceived as indicators of his support for Soderini's use of the visual propaganda in the service of politics. As the government's use of martial artistic campaign was to inspire the ancient Roman republican virtù amongst the Florentine citizens, its connection to Machiavelli's militia will also be explored.

4.2. Leonardo, Machiavelli, and the Pisan War (1503-1504)

After two unsuccessful and costly sieges of Pisa we mentioned earlier in the text, the Florentine Republic needed time to replenish its forces. According to a member of the *Consulte*, Florence in 1501 was “uno corpo insensato et che non può esalare, che quando è in tale termine è presso alla morte.”³⁸³ Financially and militarily weak, Florence found itself menaced by both hostile neighbors and rebellious subjects waiting for an opportunity to strike. The greatest threat to the Republic was Cesare Borgia, whose army ravaged the Florentine countryside near Mugello in May 1501.³⁸⁴ Only a sizable payoff persuaded him to withdraw and leave Florence in peace

³⁸² For the contract see Hartt, “Leonardo and the Second Florentine Republic,” 110.

³⁸³ Fachard, *Consulte e Pratiche (1498-1505)*, 563.

³⁸⁴ In a letter to the Florentine ambassadors at Borgia's court, Machiavelli writes the following: “Noi per questa vi voliamo fare intendere come molte delle genti che seguitono lo esercito di cotesto Illustrissimo Duca, oltre all'infiniti danni di bestiame e d'ogni altra cosa che e' fanno in sul dominio nostro, offendono la città nostra in una cosa importantissima e che non potrebbe più danneggiare e' cittadini nostri.” See *Legazioni*, II, 96.

for a time.³⁸⁵ Along with the Borgia threat in Tuscany, Florence had to deal with its subjects in Pistoia and Arezzo, who rebelled with the support of the Medici, the Vitelli, and the Orsini in the spring of 1501 and July 1502 respectively.³⁸⁶ As a result, through the years 1501 and 1502, Florence postponed any serious offensive on the Pisan front as it fought for survival.

At the same time, the Republic instituted significant changes to its political system by creating the position of the *gonfaloniere a vita* under Piero Soderini in October 1502.³⁸⁷ Borrowed from Venice, this new model of governance was meant to help Florence steer through the crisis and ensure a safe and stable regime in the future. As Soderini's friend and confidant, Machiavelli was sent to Borgia's court in Romagna where he spent no less than six months observing the Duke and reporting to the Signoria.³⁸⁸ Only after returning from this mission and the subsequent diplomatic mission to the lord of Siena, Pandolfo Petrucci, could Machiavelli devote his undivided energy towards the ongoing Pisan conflict.³⁸⁹

As for Leonardo da Vinci, after his return to Florence from Milan in 1500, his fame as a painter and military architect caught the attention of the Florentine government. There is evidence to suggest that Leonardo established himself in Florence in 1501 with the support of new patrons who included members of the Ten, for whom Machiavelli worked as well.³⁹⁰ In

³⁸⁵ According to Guicciardini, Borgia was hired as Florence's captain-general for three years and with a commission of 30,000 ducats a year. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 213.

³⁸⁶ For the rebellion in Pistoia see Guicciardini, *Storie*, 205; Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 438-442.

³⁸⁷ For Soderini's election and his relationship with Machiavelli, see Sergio Bertelli, "Machiavelli and Soderini," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28 (1975): 1-16.

³⁸⁸ For Machiavelli's reports during his mission to Borgia see *Legazioni*, II, 331-560; Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 597-606.

³⁸⁹ For Machiavelli's second mission to Pandolfo Petrucci, see *Legazioni*, II, 626-628.

³⁹⁰ F. Zöllner, *Leonardo da Vinci 1452-1519: The Complete Paintings and Drawings* (Cologne: London, 2003), 143-5; Zöllner argued that although Leonardo's lost St. Anne cartoon (1501) was assumed to be connected with the commission for the high altar in the *Annunziata* church in Florence, it is more likely to have been destined for Antonio Giacomini-Tebalducci's chapel in the church. The association of the republican top captain Giacomini with the St. Anne cartoon would, perhaps, partially explain its popularity in spring 1501 when people reportedly flocked to see it. Likewise, according to Cecchi, Antonio Segni, for whom Leonardo made a drawing of Neptune, also had strong ties with the Ten. In December 1503, Machiavelli reported to the Ten that Segni was acting as a go-between

April 1501, Leonardo was working on a small painting for Florimond Robertet (1459-1527), the secretary of state of Louis XII whom Machiavelli had met in Lyon on his mission to France and had identified as one of the few friends Florence had at Louis XII's court. In one dispatch from France, Machiavelli begs his superiors to prepare a suitable gift for Robertet.³⁹¹ Whether or not da Vinci's commission came as an indirect result of Machiavelli's urging, by 1501 Leonardo was considered an important diplomatic asset for the Florentine government in their quest for French support against Pisa.

While the letters between the Ten and Florentine ambassadors that mention artistic commissions have been widely known for more than a century, the direct links between Florentine artistic production and the war effort – particularly in the production of bronze – have only recently become clear. Residing at the *foresteria* of the convent of *Santissima Annunziata* upon his return to Florence, Leonardo was right next door to the new bronze foundry housed in the former university buildings of the *Sapienza*, a space co-opted by the Ten for the manufacture of mortars and artillery. Historian Tommaso Mozzati has suggested that Leonardo may have acted as an advisor to the Ten on the manufacture and design of weapons from his arrival in Florence in the spring of 1500.³⁹² As Leonardo had spent years working on a giant bronze horse for Ludovico Sforza, it is possible that the Ten called on his expertise to improve the quality of their bronze. If that is the case, it may be that the mortars used in the Florentine siege of Pisa in the summer of 1500 bore Leonardo's imprint. Certainly, the fact of the proximity of Leonardo's

in discussions between him, as representative of Florence, and the Genoese captain of the papal ships, Mottino. See Cecchi, "New Light on Leonardo's Florentine Patrons," in C. C. Bambach (ed.), *Leonardo da Vinci Master Draftsman* (New Haven and London, 2003), 131.

³⁹¹ *Legazioni*, I, 508.

³⁹² See Jill Burke, "Missed Deadlines and Creative Excuses: Fashioning Eccentricity for Leonardo and Michelangelo," 5, note 13; Tommaso Mozzati, "Florence and the Bronze Age: Leonardo and Casting, the War of Pisa, and the Dieci di Balìa" in G. M. Radke (ed.), *Leonardo da Vinci and the Art of Sculpture* (New Haven and London, 2009), 195-206.

dwelling to the main foundry for Florentine weapons is tantalizing, though as of yet no reference to him in the archives has been found.

In any case, Leonardo's connections to the Florentine government and the *Dieci* through his artistic commission for the French in 1501 and his knowledge of military engineering displayed at Borgia's court in 1502 were known to Machiavelli, who was directly responsible for Florence's diplomacy and weapons distribution. Whatever the true nature of his relationship with Leonardo, the Florentine secretary was pragmatic enough to recognize Leonardo's potential value to the state as a diplomatic asset and military engineer. Thus, Leonardo's involvement as a military engineer in Florence's military campaign in the summer of 1503 should not surprise. The following text will show that Leonardo's expertise in military fortifications in the case of the Verruca fortress and his topographical sketches of a canal that would run from Florence to the sea served as the groundwork for the subsequent Arno project. Ultimately, we will suggest that Leonardo's focus on both projects had its visual confirmation in the *Mona Lisa* painting.

In January 1503, Machiavelli returned to Florence from his mission at Borgia's court. At this period, relieved of the threat of Borgia's troops, Florence was free to pursue the Pisan War with more intensity. After three years during which his city had been on the defensive, Machiavelli did not hide his enthusiasm for a new Pisan campaign. On May 22, 1503, he writes to the war commissioner "a seguire co' medesimi termini in ogni vostra azione, mostrando sempre dal l'una mano la spada e dall'altra l'unguento, in modo che conoscano essere in loro arbitrio pigliare quale e' vogliano."³⁹³ As he had in his previous dispatches, Machiavelli went beyond the mere transmission of the orders, offering advice, directions, suggestions, and details to the officials. For example, in a letter of instructions sent to the commissioners in the camp

³⁹³ Villari, *La Vita*, op.cit., vol. I, 438.

near Pisa on June 14, 1503, Machiavelli spells out his strategy for taking the fortress of La Verruca from the Pisans.³⁹⁴ Machiavelli's blitzkrieg-style attack proved to be very effective, as La Verruca fell only four days later.³⁹⁵ The fortress was of great strategic importance to the advancing campaign and the Florentine government urgently needed an expert on military architecture to direct its reconstruction. Whether the initiative came from Machiavelli or some other member of the Dieci, Leonardo was invited to inspect the fortress in July 1503. This is the first documented instance of what we might call a joint project involving Machiavelli and Leonardo.

With Leonardo's already established reputation as a civic and military engineer, it is natural that the Florentine government would consult him as a technical advisor or architect for projects associated with the war against Pisa.³⁹⁶ Between 1503 and 1505, he was engaged in three projects concerning the diversion or straightening of the Arno,³⁹⁷ two technical missions to improve the fortresses of La Verruca and Piombino, and one artistic project: the *Anghiari* battle painting. Shortly after the conquest of La Verruca, Leonardo was on site inspecting the fortifications in the official capacity of a military architect in the service of the Florentine

³⁹⁴ "Et perché noi conosciamo quanta sia la prudentia di cotesti capitani, e così quale sia la diligenza vostra, e come voi conoscete che la fortuna buona si fa ottima con lo andare avanti e usare bene l'occasione, né lasciare freddare la caldezza del vincitore né respirare a chi perde, pensiamo che subito voi arete digià pensato di andare avanti e levarsi dinanzi alli occhi la Verrucola, la quale ci è stata sempre una continua molestia e uno impedimento a cotesti nostri luoghi all'intorno, e aiuto non piccolo alli nimici. E tanto più crediamo vi sarete volti ad espugnarla, et noi tanto più desideriamo lo facciate, quanto per altri tempi e da chi è capo di coteste genti è stata giudicata presa non molto difficile." See *Legazioni*, III, 141.

³⁹⁵ Pedretti, "La Verruca," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Winter, 1972): 417-425.

³⁹⁶ Masters firmly believed that it was Machiavelli who recommended Leonardo to the government as he spent some time in Imola with him and was aware of his work for Borgia. While this theory is not impossible, it also needs a proof. See, Heydenreich, L. H., "The Military Architect" in L. Reti (ed.), *The Unknown Leonardo* (London, 1974), 136-165.

³⁹⁷ Luca Beltrami, *Documenti su la vita e le opere di Leonardo da Vinci* (Milan, 1919), no. 126; For a full discussion of Leonardo's project of diverting the Arno River for strategic reasons see Pedretti, *The Commentary on the Literary Works of Leonardo da Vinci; a commentary to Jean Paul Richter's edition* (University of California Press, 1977).

Republic, which can be confirmed by two documents.³⁹⁸ In addition, Leonardo's name appears again in correspondence between Florentine officials when he visited the Pisan camp once again, this time as a hydraulic engineer.³⁹⁹ It is noteworthy that, in Machiavelli's correspondence as secretary of the Florentine Republic, Leonardo's name never appears. At the same time, Leonardo himself made repeated references to his involvement in the plan to make La Verruca impregnable. Sketches of the Pisan hills in the *Madrid* manuscript show La Verruca, while another sketch in the same manuscript offers a close-up view looking towards Pisa, with the Arno valley.⁴⁰⁰ On this basis, we can assume that Machiavelli was fully aware and presumably supportive of Leonardo's contributions to Florence's war effort.

While Leonardo's summer visit to the Pisan Hills was undertaken for the purpose of studying the river Arno and the nearby fortresses, it seems that there were unanticipated consequences that have not been acknowledged in the historiography. Due to its dominating position in the area atop a sharp, rocky site, La Verruca fortress caught Leonardo's eye as a possible background for his paintings. Pedretti argues that for Leonardo, the fortress was no longer a word but an image, which could be magnified and multiplied in his landscape drawings and which could have been projected into the backgrounds of the *Mona Lisa* and the *Louvre St.*

³⁹⁸ On June 21, 1503, Leonardo was already inspecting the fortress. We learn this from the letter sent by Pier Francesco Tosinchi to the Signoria, in which he said the following: "Appresso fu qui hieri con una di V. Signoria Alessandro degli Albizi insieme con Leonardo da Vinci et certi altri, et veduto el disegno insieme con el governatore, doppo molte discussioni et dubai, conclusesi che l'opera fussi molto ad proposito, o si veramente Arno volgersi qui, o restare con un canale, che - almeno vieterebbe che le colline da' nimici non potrebbono essere offese, come tucto referiranno loro a bocha a V. S." As for the second document, on June 26, 1503, the Florentine Republic's master builder, Luca del Caprina, was assigned to carry out the program that Leonardo may have suggested. See Pedretti, "La Verruca," 422; For a payment towards Leonardo's expenses, see Beltrami, *Documenti*, no. 127.

³⁹⁹ The second document that mentions Leonardo appeared only two days later as an entry in the account books of the Signoria of Florence. It says the following: "Spese extraordinarie dieno dare a di XXVI di luglio d. LVI sol. XIII per loro a giovanni piffero...e spese di vitto per andare chon Lionardo da vinci a livellare arno in quello di Pisa per levallò del letto suo." See Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 96; Leonardo da Vinci, *I documenti e le testimonianze contemporanee*, a cura di E. Villata, (Milan: Ente Raccolta Vinciana, 1999), doc. 181, 161.

⁴⁰⁰ According to Pedretti, roughened lines in Leonardo's drawing describe the steep crags around La Verruca, the fortress embedded and protected by the spiky riges. See Pedretti, *Leonardo Architetto* (Milan: Electa, 1978), 188.

Anne.⁴⁰¹ In fact, the background of the *Mona Lisa* painting shows not only a small fortress resembling La Verruca but a winding river reminiscent of the Arno. It is believed that Leonardo began painting the *Mona Lisa* in the late spring or summer of 1503, either during his visit to La Verruca or shortly after. If this is the case, then it is imbued with Leonardo's preoccupations with the war against Pisa.

The strongest evidence in support of this possibility is the *Mona Lisa*'s time frame. According to Vasari, Leonardo accepted the commission after his return from the court of Borgia; hence, after March 1503. To confirm this, we have two documents that concern members of the *Dieci*, Agostino Vespucci and Machiavelli. Recently discovered, Vespucci's gloss dates the beginning of the *Mona Lisa*'s portrait to some time before October 1503.⁴⁰² Around the same time, Machiavelli's wife Marietta gave birth to their first son while her husband was in Rome. Carlo Pedretti discovered a letter to Machiavelli dated November 1, 1503, from his friend and fellow *Dieci* member, Luca Ugolini, in which Ugolini remarks: "Obviously, Mistress Marietta did not deceive you, for he is your spitting image. Leonardo da Vinci would not have done a better portrait."⁴⁰³ Ultimately, as Leonardo's drawings at the time showed his preoccupation with

⁴⁰¹ Leonardo's war experience as Borgia's military architect may have heightened his appreciation for the preciousness of human life and rekindled his passion for art. See Pedretti, "La Verruca," 424.

⁴⁰² The Heidelberg Gloss mentioning Leonardo is dated October 1503. Here Vespucci mentions Leonardo's achievements and works in 1503 including *Mona Lisa* and *Saint Anne*. Agostino's note occurs at the right margin of a printed edition of Cicero's *Epistolae ad familiares*, published in 1477. Next to the paragraph about painting the head and shoulders of their subjects, the comment says "Leonardo da Vinci was using a similar approach for a new work, a portrait of Lisa del Giocondo, as well as for Anne, mother of the virgin, October 1503. We will see how he is going to do it regarding the Great Hall of the Council." See Bambach, *Leonardo*, 252; Armin Schlechter, "Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* in a Marginal Note in Cicero incunabile," in *Early printed books as material objects*, proceedings of the conference (Munich 2009), edited by Bettina Wagner and Marcia Reed (Berlin-New York: De Gruyter Saur, 2010), 151-173; Gerard González Germain, "Per lo studio degli ambienti culturali intorno a Machiavelli cancelliere: nuovi dati su Agostino Vespucci" *Aevum*, (Settembre-Dicembre 2015): 561-583.

⁴⁰³ "Compare carissimo, profitio, et veramente mona Marietta vostra non v'ha ingannato, ch  tucto sputato vi somiglia: Lionardo da Vinci non l'arebbe ritracto meglio." See P. C. Marani, "Luca Ugolini, Niccol  Machiavelli e la fama di Leonardo ritrattista nei primi anni del Cinquecento," in *La lingua e le lingue di Machiavelli*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Turin, 2-4 dicembre 1999): 281-293.

Tuscan hills, the Arno River, and nearby fortresses, it seems that the background of the Mona Lisa painting corresponds to the scenery Leonardo's mind was exposed to in those days.

Considering all we know about Leonardo's activity in the spring and summer of 1503, it is possible that the background of the *Mona Lisa* painting reflects some of the themes and subjects with which he was obsessed at the time. The primeval mountains and seas behind the Mona Lisa's head could be associated with the formation of the valley of the Arno, the country of his birthplace (although this is not to suggest that the mountains and lakes in the picture are necessarily realistic representations of the mountains of Tuscany).⁴⁰⁴ Further, Leonardo positions the Mona Lisa against a fantastical background in such a way that the coiling road, arched bridge, rocks, water, and mountains seem as much a part of her as she was part of them.⁴⁰⁵ The eternal quality of this image is due not only to Mona Lisa's smile, but also to the aerial perspective on the background, which makes it appear that she is in the sky. This aerial perspective, also visible in the bird's eye view of Tuscany on his map, was invented by Leonardo and he used it repeatedly in his sketches of hills and mountains he made in connection with preparations for the Arno project. While we do not know why Leonardo painted the *Mona Lisa* or what exactly is in the background, the painting's origins in the Pisan War and the Arno project are hard to ignore.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁴ K. D. Keele, "The Genesis of Mona Lisa," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, (1959), 135-158.

⁴⁰⁵ Scholars have rightly emphasised the vividly rendered landscape in the Mona Lisa painting, filled with rocky outcrops, sending roads, and pooling watercourses. For one exemplary interpretation of the landscape elements in the painting, see Webster Smith, "Observations on the Mona Lisa Landscape," *Art Bulletin* 67, no. 2 (June 1985): 183-199; For an account of the painting and its recent technical examinations, see Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci Rediscovered*, II, 262-270.

⁴⁰⁶ We still do not know for sure why Leonardo humbled himself by accepting a commission from Francesco del Giocondo, a modest Florentine merchant, for "a typical painting," when three decades earlier he was already working for the Florentine and Milanese elite. Lisa and Francesco del Giocondo just do not measure up to Leonardo's other patrons. Except for the Benci - his first commission - all Leonardo's patrons were nobles, prelates, heads of state, their familiars (courtiers), civic, fraternal, or ecclesiastical bodies. There are many theories that researchers proposed so far but it seems that none of them provides a satisfying answer. In her book *Mona Lisa: A*

4.3. The Arno Project

The Arno project was inaugurated in August 1504 and it represents the Florentine government's genuine attempt to eliminate Pisa's access to the sea by cutting a new channel.⁴⁰⁷ As modern historiography views the project predominately through Leonardo's perspective, a more balanced view is needed to get to the bottom of it. Thanks to more than 95 dispatches sent by Machiavelli to the commissioners in the field from August to October 1504, this chapter tracks the project's day-to-day progress, identifies its protagonists, and exposes the challenges that ultimately brought about the project's abandonment.⁴⁰⁸ The sources confirm that in his capacity as secretary to the Republic, Machiavelli championed this technologically ambitious and costly project from the first day to the last. Through his constant patriotic encouragement, calls for action, advice, and suggestions, his involvement in the project greatly outweighs Leonardo's obscure role. The ultimate goal of the project was not only to win the war against Pisa, but also to solidify the struggling Florentine state through a system of canals and fortresses around which the whole *contado* could readily integrate in the future.⁴⁰⁹ This political goal

Life Discovered, Dianne Hales interviewed art historians about Leonardo's famous painting. For example, historian Timothy Verdon from Stanford University responded that with *Mona Lisa* Leonardo wanted to portray "the complex psychological life of a real person." (Hales, 161); According to Martin Kemp, Leonardo's scholar from Oxford, "no image has ever been more particular in the way it engages us with a specific human presence." (Hales, 166). Ultimately, Hales concludes that *La Gioconda* is nothing but a showpiece of art. For her, it represents a fictive smiling woman, who is so natural that she seems to have been taken from life. Whether Leonardo employed a model or fashioned her from memory or imagination does not matter, since no knowledge of the model is needed to appreciate the painting. The unusual clothing, implausibly elevated balcony, and preternaturally wild landscape, lift the portrait out of any immediate domestic, urban or social context. See Dianne Hales, *Mona Lisa: A Life Discovered*, (Simon & Schuster, 2014), 167.

⁴⁰⁷ Villari, *The Life and Times*, 478-479; E. Solmi, "Leonardo e Machiavelli," 209-244; Pedretti, "La Verruca," 417-425.

⁴⁰⁸ Much information on the Arno project is provided by the correspondence of the office of the Florentine secretary. See *Legazioni*, IV, 111-255; Other excerpts of the same correspondence are given by Canestrini, *Scritti inediti*, 163-175; In addition, an account of the Arno project was prepared by Buonaccorsi, one of Machiavelli's assistances. It was printed in Buonaccorsi's *Diario*, and published posthumously in 1568; See also Parenti, *Storia*, II, 155-6; Guicciardini, *Storie*, 273-274.

⁴⁰⁹ See Dora D'Errico, "Se è da fare opera da volgere Arno." Léonard au service du projet de détournement de l'Arno (1503-1504): 79-95.
<https://web.archive.org/web/20220120155744/https://oajournals.fupress.net/index.php/cromohs/article/download/6908/6906/> (accessed on December 27, 2023.)

eventually came to fruition instead in the creation of the Florentine militia in 1506, with Machiavelli again as the main operative of the project.

The plan to divert the Arno River originated neither with Machiavelli nor with Leonardo. Although the Florentine government officially launched the Arno project in August 1504, the idea of diverting the Arno had been often discussed by the members of the *Consulte*. For example, on January 3, 1496, a member of the *Consulta* named Niccolini endorsed the diversion of the Arno, speaking of the proposal as a possibility known to both Florentines and Pisans.⁴¹⁰ Again, in July 1500, a member of the Magistracy of Monte, Bernardo Beni, made the same proposal.⁴¹¹ Now, in late summer of 1504, Florence revamped the old idea of conquering Pisa by blocking their access to the sea because its diplomatic and military efforts to retake the city had met with no success.

After the final defeat of the French in Italy at the hands of the Spanish in January 1504, Spain became a permanent threat to Florence's Pisan ambitions as the Spanish king needed a friendly harbour on the peninsula. Responding to the new circumstances, the Signoria sent Machiavelli to France to seek protection from the Spanish menace.⁴¹² Machiavelli stayed on in France until the beginning of March, although France and Spain signed a truce in Lyons on February 11, 1504, that temporarily eased the situation and provided Florence with reassurances of French friendship and protection. Upon his return to Italy in 1504, Machiavelli was sent to Piombino to dissuade Jacopo d'Appiano from lending aid to the Pisans.⁴¹³ Finally, by the

⁴¹⁰ "E del volgere Arno, lo rachordava che non sarebbe difficile per quello che n'è di notitia et per sé et da' Pisani, per sapere a punto el luogo per esser stato più tempo a Pisa." See Fachard, *Consulte e pratiche 1495-1497*, I, 87.

⁴¹¹ "Quanto alla impresa, che pure si possa male risolvere se non s'intende quello porta questo mandato del Re, et che sarebbe di grande momento ad ridurre 'Pisani ad volgere Arno per altro cammino," See Fachard, *Consulte e pratiche*, II, 407.

⁴¹² Butters, *Governors*, 166; Machiavelli, *Legazioni*, II, 750-5.

⁴¹³ *Legazioni*, III, 493-94.

beginning of May 1504, we find him back in Florence coordinating military preparations for yet another assault on Pisa.⁴¹⁴ On May 31, the council of Eighty and some 300 other citizens debated the desirability of such an action.⁴¹⁵ According to the sources, the Council of Eighty displayed little enthusiasm for the prospect of new taxes to support the effort. It had been learned from captured Pisans that there were 2000 battle-ready citizens within its walls, as well as 500 foreign soldiers and 300 light horses paid for by Siena and Lucca.⁴¹⁶ Fear of a new defeat, coupled with a shortage of funds and captain Ercole Bentivoglio's departure from the Florentine service, compelled the Signoria to search for an alternate solution. It was known from the Pisan prisoners that the only eventuality the defenders feared was the diversion of the Arno, as this would deprive Pisa of the assistance they had been receiving by sea from Lucca, Siena, and Genoa. On this basis, the Signoria proceeded with the Arno project.

According to Guicciardini, Gonfaloniere Soderini was the driving force behind the Arno project, creating the many committees necessary to get the proposal passed.⁴¹⁷ There is no doubt that Soderini hoped to elevate the popularity of his regime by conquering Pisa. To convince the members of the *Consulte*, on whom he relied the most, Soderini sent a member of the *Dieci*, Giovanni Berrardi, to the Pisan *contado* to investigate the possibility of diverting the Arno.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁴ The Florentine government hired Ercole Bentivoglio and Giampaolo Baglioni and proceeded with the devastation of the lands around Pisa in an attempt to starve the city. However, at this time, the Pisans were getting grain shipments from Siena, Lucca, and Genoa. To counter this, the Florentines blocked the port of Pisa while Riprafrata was captured in May 1504. Antonio Giacomini, the general-commissioner in the field, urged that an attack should be made as soon as possible on Pisa itself. See *Legazioni*, III, 510-22.

⁴¹⁵ Giacomini's letters were read out at the meeting, together with the letters of the Florentine ambassador in Rome, Giovanni Acciaiuoli, which warned that Bartolomeo d'Alviano was preparing to assault the Florentine dominions. See Fachard, *Consulte e pratiche*, II, 241-5.

⁴¹⁶ Fachard, *Consulte e pratiche*, II, 244.

⁴¹⁷ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 274; It is doubtful, however, whether in fact Soderini was the prime mover behind this ill-fated project. Machiavelli was more directly involved with the development of the plan, but it was Soderini, at least in Guicciardini view, who took the blame.

⁴¹⁸ In a letter from Machiavelli to Giacomini on August 2, 1504, we read the following: "Noi habbiamo ordinato che Giovanni Berardi conlega nostro si transferischa insino ad Cascina con certi maestri d'acqua per scandagliare e

Machiavelli's dispatches undoubtedly identify Berardi and not Leonardo as the key figure in the project, not only in terms of coordinating workers but also for his technical expertise.⁴¹⁹ That Berardi's opinion was essential to sway the skeptics is evident in the *Pratica stretta* from August 14, 1504, where he demonstrated in detail the feasibility of the project.⁴²⁰ On the following day, the *Pratica larga* affirmed Berardi's conclusions.⁴²¹ On August 20, 1504, Machiavelli wrote the commissioner in the field, announcing the decision as well as the designation of the commissioner Giuliano Lapi and hydraulic engineer Colombino to direct the work.⁴²² This confirms that Leonardo's role in the project of August 1504 was even less prominent than the one he had played in the summer of 1503. Berardi, Colombino, and Alessandro degli Albizzi as *maestri dell'acqua* retained their respective positions until the end of the project.⁴²³

misurare el corso d'Arno per vedere se si posseva volgere, et se ad questo è ordine veruno. Diamotene avviso acciò sappi la cagione della sua venuta, et cercandoti d'alcuna cosa lo accomoderà. See *Legazioni*, IV, 91.

⁴¹⁹ One of the reasons why Leonardo was not involved on the project in the summer of 1504 is his work on the *Battle of Anghiari* painting in the *Sala del Gran Consiglio*.

⁴²⁰ "A dì XIII di agosto 1504, essendo stato commesso da' nostri Excelsi Signori allo spectabile Giovanni di Currado Berardi, quale per ordine de' nostri Excelsi Signori a dì passati fu mandato a vedere se si può voltare, et così ad esaminare et ponderare ogni altra cosa, il quale Giovanni havendo referito circa all'acqua et tucto quello che ha trovato et visto da quella banda, et inter caetera come Pisani hanno seminato tante biade che se è permesso loro menarle ne viveranno 3 mesi o più, la Excellentia di Piero Soderini in nome de' Signoria commesse si restrignessino insieme et consultassino quello che sia da fare, parlato specificato et senza rimettersi alla Signoria o a' Dieci." See Fachard, *Consulte e pratiche*, II, 1013.

⁴²¹ In the *Consulta* from August 15, 1504, the member of the *Dieci*, Pier Francesco Tosinighi, said the following: "Quanto alla parte d'Arno pare molto a proposito volgerlo, et dixene più ragione; et quando si possa fare commodamente, molto lo commendano et maxime quando la guardia alla peschaia fussi tollerabile; et di questo volentieri si rimetterebbero al iudicio di chi più ne intende di questa cosa. See *Consulte e pratiche*, II, 1014.

⁴²² In a letter to Giacomini, Machiavelli confirms the final decision to start the project: "Iersera ti si scrisse della deliberazione fatta da noi circa el voltare Arno alla Torre a Fagiana, e come noi volevamo fare questa fazione subito dopo el guasto, e che per questo egli era necessario che tu pensassi dove, dato el guasto, stessi bene il campo per rendere sicuro chi lavorerà a tale opera [...] e perché noi non voliamo che si perda punto di tempo domattina mandaremo costà Giuliano Lapi et Colombino acciò che siano teco e, mostroti el disegno, possiate ordinare quanto sia necessario." See *Legazioni*, IV, 112.

⁴²³ On Berardi's suggestion, Torre Fagiana, some 5 miles from Pisa, was chosen as the worksite and not Cascina as Leonardo suggested. It is important to note that on September 4, 1504, Berardi's presence at the cite, followed by Alessandro degli Albizzi was confirmed by Machiavelli's dispatch to Giuliano Lapi from the same day: "Questa mattina è partito Giovan Berardi per essere costì per favorire e consigliare e aiutare la cosa," See *Legazioni*, IV, 102.

While Leonardo's presence on the site was not recorded in the summer of 1504, some historians believe that it was his design that was given to Colombino and Lapi to implement.⁴²⁴ This is highly unlikely, as the actual work on the project differs from Leonardo's plan. In a report on the project written a few months later, Biagio Buonaccorsi provides the precise location of the worksite and describes the work in detail.⁴²⁵ His account shows that Leonardo's estimate of the manpower needed was substantially greater than the one calculated by Colombino.⁴²⁶ Moreover, the *Codex Atlanticus* contains illustrations of the two massive excavating machines and a large drum set on tracks which would have operated as a treadmill driven by a team of workmen. Buckets would be manually filled with earth, and then the machine would lift and transport the loads.⁴²⁷ Thus, Leonardo's only known role in this massive work was the conduct of time-and-motion studies and machines that intended to maximize the output of the workers.

Careful analysis of more than ninety dispatches Machiavelli sent to the work camp between August and October 1504, shows not only his high hopes and desire for this project to

⁴²⁴ In reality, the author of the design was never mentioned explicitly in Machiavelli's instructions to the commissioner in the camp. For Solmi, there is no doubt that the design was Leonardo's. See Solmi, "Leonardo e Machiavelli," 231; Moreover, Solmi claims the following: "Le relazioni tra il politico ed il pittore dovettero essere a quel tempo strettissime...Quasi ogni giorno il Vinci si recava alla Cancelleria fiorentina od alla casa del Machiavelli per ricevere notizie e dare consigli...Leonardo suggeriva ingegnosi metodi di rapida escavazione e il Machiavelli non faceva che scrivere ufficialmente i consigli dell'amico." (Solmi, 557). Despite the fact that such claims from Solmi had never been substantiated from the source material, some historians took them from granted. See G. Castelfranco, "Il canale Firenze-Mare nei progetti di Leonardo," in IDEM, *Studi Vinciani*, cit. (1966): 153-159; and most recently by Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 110-133.

⁴²⁵ "In questi dì si praticò di levare Arno a' Pisani et condurlo in Stagnio, monstrando con questo, oltre ad levare la vita a' Pisani, risaltarne comodo grande alla Città, et tandem, deliberato di farlo, si fermò el campo ad Ariglione, et mandossi per maestri d'acque et, domandato loro quello fussi necessario per tale opera, chiesono dumila guastatori el dì con certa quantità di lignami, per fare una pescaia che ritenessi el fiume et lo mandassi per dua fossoni che ordinarono di fare fino allo Stagnio, per li quali havessi ad correre Arno, et tutto promissono condurre con 30 mila o 35 mila di opere et così, sotto questa speranza, si cominciò con 2,000 operaio pagate ogni dì a un carlino per ciascuno a dì 20 d'agosto." See Fachard, *Biagio Buonaccorsi*, 145.

⁴²⁶ Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 125.

⁴²⁷ Leonardo da Vinci, *Il Codice Atlantico della Biblioteca Ambrosiana di Milano*, Ed. Augusto Marini, (Florence: Giunti, 2000); See also Bambach, *Leonardo da Vinci Rediscovered*, II, 330-346.

succeed but also many details that reveal the daily challenges posed by the Arno's diversion.⁴²⁸

Yet ultimately, the project ended as a fiasco, leading one to ask whether the project was too ambitious to succeed, or hampered by too many poor decisions, or for some other reason. Did the Florentine government learn anything from the project? Through a close reading of Machiavelli's dispatches, we will try to answer those questions and reveal how a grandiose project, subsidized by the state and executed by its best engineers, ultimately failed.

According to Landucci's *Diario*, the work on the Arno Project officially started on August 22, 1504.⁴²⁹ Giuliano Lapi was responsible for the organization of the work while maestro Colombino was named the main engineer in the service of the *Dieci*.⁴³⁰ Machiavelli acted as the chief coordinator of the project between Lapi and Giacomini in the camp and his superiors (principally Soderini) in Florence. Machiavelli's first task was the complicated business of finding and directing 2,000 workers to the worksite from various places in Tuscany. Judging by the initial enthusiasm of the *contadini*, who saw in this project an opportunity to earn some wages and enjoy free food and wine, and the Florentine citizens, who aspired to retake Pisa, the project looked worthy of effort. Machiavelli's dispatches confirm that the project was of a magnitude that had never been seen before in Florence or perhaps in the whole of Tuscany.

⁴²⁸ Machiavelli's dispatches for the last week of August 1504, reveal his genuine belief in the success of the project despite the complaints from Giacomini and Lapi. For example, in a letter to Lapi from August 25, Machiavelli's language is full of hope: "Con piacere intendiamo per questa tua di ieri Colombino avere referito che il dislivello del terreno verso lo Stagno gli risulti maggiore; piaceci ancora che voi vi siate conformati nella opinione nostra di rompere Arno in luogo che l'acqua entri nella rottura più al diritto che si puo. See *Legazioni*, IV, 113; Likewise, in a letter to Giacomini the next day Machiavelli says the following: "E quanto alle difficoltà che tu adduci circa all'opera che si debbe tirare innanzi secondo l'ordine dato, così a noi non manca la speranza che si eseguisca; e crediamo che questo giorno sieno comparsi buon numero, o vogliàn dire tutti gli operai che si sono per voi disegnati." See *Legazioni*, IV, 118-20.

⁴²⁹ Landucci, *Diario*, 272.

⁴³⁰ *Legazioni*, IV, 113.

Hundreds of *contadini* poured towards the worksite from various regions of Tuscany, demonstrating Florence's ability to quickly muster its subjects.⁴³¹

What is of concern here, and what has been overlooked in the historiography, is the manner in which peasants were recruited for the project, for careful reading of Machiavelli's dispatches reveals that the recruitment procedure anticipates that used later in enrolling the Florentine militia. For example, before the peasants were sent to the work camp, they were gathered at a designated meeting place, usually the plaza in the nearby *vicariato*, for inspection. Each household was obliged to send one able man to work. The names of the physically fit were recorded in the official books by the vicar while the men received their equipment (a shovel and a pick), which they had to produce upon their arrival.⁴³² Any disobedience led to both financial and physical consequences for the workers. We will see in the next chapter that Machiavelli used the same methods to recruit and discipline the peasants for the citizen militia, by assigning to them military equipment instead of shovels and picks. In fact, the Arno project gave the regime a perfect opportunity both to tighten its grip on the *contado* and to canvass its manpower for a future militia project. It was none other than Machiavelli who coordinated both projects.

While the militia project, however, was a carefully coordinated action that took more than six months to show results, the involvement of the peasants in the Arno project had never been seriously planned nor did any contingency plans exist in case the initial one did not work. Many citizens, including the historian Guicciardini, were skeptical of the project from the

⁴³¹ "Avendo noi deliberato voltare Arno in Stagno e bisognandoci a questo effetto assai opere, t'imponiamo tenga ad ordine 400 operai buoni che abbino da portare con loro 200 vanghe e dugento fra pale, zappe e ronconi." See *Legazioni*, IV, 115; Other workers were requested from Vicariato di San Miniato al Tedesco, Vicariato di Certaldo, Prato, Pistoia and Mugello, around 2,000 in total. See *Legazioni*, IV, 115-18.

⁴³² On August 24, 1504, Machiavelli requested from the Vicario of Lari the following: "Per altra nostra ti fu commesso mandassi alla volta di Cascina quel numero d'operai e con quelli utensili e a quel tempo che da Antonio Giacomini o da Giuliano Lapi ti fussi ordinato. Intendiamo dipoi come da detti Commissarii ti è stato ordinato che tu mandi mille operai." See Machiavelli, *Legazioni*, IV, 116; Feretti, *La Sala Grande*, 255.

beginning.⁴³³ Indeed, the project got underway very late in the summer, and due to this fact alone, all the decisions and actions of the government were made under pressure and with haste. After the very hot and dry months of July and August, the Tuscan climate is known for humid conditions in September, when rain often drenches the Pisan *contado*. We have seen earlier in the text that heavy rains in September 1499 were blamed for the putrid air and disease around Pisa which caused Paolo Vitelli to postpone the siege. Fearing such a turn in the weather, the commissioners forced their workers, still few in number, to work the whole day under the hot Tuscan sun without rest, shelter, or adequate housing.⁴³⁴ As the need for more workers grew by the day, the distribution of food became a problem as well.⁴³⁵ The dreadful working conditions soon extinguished the enthusiasm of the *contadini*, who now looked for a way to desert and return home.

Machiavelli duly recorded these problems, for which the Florentine government did not have adequate solutions. While the Florentine secretary attempted to minimize food shortage in the camp by suggesting to the commissioners to disband all workers who were not useful

⁴³³ According to Guicciardini who wrote four years after the event, the members of the *Pratica* held in February 1504 rejected the Arno project because “fussi più tosto ghiribizzo che altro.” However, Guicciardini continues, “sendo el gonfaloniere di opinione che si facessi, la girò con tante pratiche e per tante vie, che se ne venne alla pruova; la quale con spesa di più migliaia di ducati riuscì vana e come aveano giudicato e’ cittadini savi.” See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 273; Also, the Venetian ambassador did not believe in the success of the project. In a letter from September 11, 1504, the Serenissima informs their ambassador in Rome the following: “I Fiorentini attendono a svolgere da Pisa il corso dell’Arno, per impedire l’arrivo delle vettovaglie per via di mare ai Pisani; ma è impresa tentata anche altre volte senza effetti e dalla quale non si caverà alcun frutto; giacché se tale diversione avesse effetto, i Pisani, per quanto dicesi, potrebbero approvvigionarsi per un’altra acqua che fa foce in mare.” See Antonio Giustinian, *Ambasciatore veneto in Roma dal 1502 al 1505, Dispacci*, a cura di P. Villari (Florence: Le Monnier, 1876), III, 101.

⁴³⁴ “E ci è stato facto intendere che la cagione perché costesti operai si fuggono è perché non stanno al la notte al coperto, donde nasce che son la mattina più stracchi della sera, et per paura di non ammalare se ne vanno. E a ser Raffaello Fedini si scrive che ne vadia subito a Pistoia e ne provega di 200 altri per cambiarli con quelli Pistolesi che fussino o stracchi o infermi.” See *Legazioni*, IV, 160.

⁴³⁵ In a letter to Cosimo from Saminatio from August 28, 1504, Machiavelli requests the following: “Teri per duplicate vi scrivemo quanto era necessario che voi con ogni estrema diligenza provedessi di pane el campo, e a questo effetto s’ordino che da Antonio commissario vi fussi dati danari. Ma intendendo continuamente come egli è per seguire disordine per detto conto del pane, vi diciamo che se per tale mancamento l’opera disegnata non andrà avanti.” See *Legazioni*, IV, 122.

anymore, he also reminded them not to abandon the camp until they finished the work.⁴³⁶

Machiavelli was also aware of critical technical mistakes made by the main engineer, Colombino. In his letter of September 11, 1504, we find Machiavelli supporting Master Colombino, who had started losing the trust of the commissioners and workers.⁴³⁷ But by September 20, 1504, Machiavelli, in a letter to Giuliano Lapi, was expressing concerns not only about the slow pace of the work but also about changes in the plans.⁴³⁸ While we cannot say for sure, Fachard argues that the first plan corresponded to the map of the diversion drawn by Leonardo that was discovered in Madrid in 1970 while the second seems the same as the final project attributed to Colombino in Buonaccorsi's *Summario* and illustrated by the map in his *Diario*.⁴³⁹ Eventually, although Machiavelli makes his preference clear, he concludes his letter by authorizing Lapi to use his judgment in the light of necessities in the field: "Pure quando le difficoltà dell'opere o altre cagioni che non s'intendono vi forzassino a pigliare questo ultimo partito che tu scrivi, che ne rimettereno a voi, e a noi basterà solo avervene replicato l'opinione nostra."⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ "Pure, come iersera vi si disse, quando venissi a qualche strettezza e che bisognassi alleggerirvi di bocche, potrete, sforzati nondimanco da una necessità, e non altrimenti, licenziare di cotesti operai quelli che fussino più disutili e più propinqui. E insomma vogliamo che si pigli ogni modo perché il campo non si lievi a nessun modo donde egli è, infino che questa opera sia finita in tutto." See *Legazioni*, IV, 149.

⁴³⁷ In a letter to Giuliano Lapi and Giacomini from September 11, 1504, Machiavelli remarks the following: "Colombino è uomo intendissimo di cotesto mestiero delle acque, ma è persona rimessa et che in tanta moltitudine di uomini et di faccende facilmente pare non comparisca; ma è necessario, conosciute le qualità sua, animarlo et non li tôrre cuore. Diciamoti questo, acciò che conoscendolo tu come noi possa secondare la natura sua e metterli animo quando bisogna." See *Legazioni*, IV, 162; Despite the accusations, it is important to mention that Colombino was the only "tecnico" at the worksite and thus almost irreplaceable. The figure who also appears as important for the work was Alessandro degli Albizzi.

⁴³⁸ Of the ninety-five dispatches that Machiavelli himself wrote on the project, the critical text is dated September 20, 1504. Writing to Giuliano Lapi, Machiavelli expressed his preference for the first plan of the diversion over the second plan: "E perché tu di' che costi si era pensato di sboccare el secondo fosso in quel modo che si sarà sboccato questo primo, avendo in questo caso a dire l'opinione nostra, ci piaceva più quel primo disegno che questo ultimo. Perché entrando Arno per due vie, e l'una e l'altra non molto larga, non crediamo che egli entri con quello impeto che farebbe quando se gli facessi una sacca secondo el primo modo." See *Legazioni*, IV, 174.

⁴³⁹ Fachard, *Biaggio Buonaccorsi*, 180.

⁴⁴⁰ *Legazioni*, IV, 175.

However, according to Masters, the river, whose flow had been diverted into the newly dug ditches, had returned to its old course, causing a part of the works to collapse.⁴⁴¹ As the lack of faith in the project grew daily, both in Florence and in the work camp, Soderini was forced to call two consecutive meetings on September 27 and 28, 1504, to determine the future of the project. Not for the first time in his career, Machiavelli transcribed the minutes of the *Consulte* debate and shortly after urged the commissioners to continue with the work.⁴⁴² Nevertheless, despite Soderini's determination that the project should continue at any cost, and Machiavelli's ongoing logistical and moral support to the commissioners in the camp, the diversion of the river was, at least at this moment, an impossibility. With the number of workers dwindling and the funds running out, the project might have continued longer if it were not for the advent of the autumn rains.

Machiavelli's dispatches from September 29 and 30, confirm that the Florentines intended to continue with the project for as long as the weather permitted.⁴⁴³ From his further communication with the commissioners in the camp, we also know that the weather was still

⁴⁴¹ Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 141.

⁴⁴² According to the *minutiae* Machiavelli recorded, there was a long debate on what to do and the decision made was far from being easy. For example, Antonio Malegonnelle, on the question whether the work on Arno project should continue or not, argued that the work should continue but he believed that it was not feasible for the commissioners. He concluded that abandoning the camp at this point would go without shame. On the contrary, Francesco Pepi and Giovanni Soderini wanted to continue to save honour. See *Legazioni*, IV, 194-200; Despite the differences, it was decided to proceed with the work in progress. On September 28, 1504, Machiavelli sent a dispatch in which he notified commissioner Tosinghi on the decision to continue with the work: "In summa deliberamo averne consulta del Consiglio degli Ottanta e di buon numero di cittadini, per vedere come avamo a procedere. E in summa loro consigliono che per ogni rispetto si debbe ire avanti e non abbandonare l'opera, anzi raddoppiare la buona diligenza perché l'abbi el fine si desidera, e non perdonare ad alcuna spesa né disagio, e lo hanno consigliato con tanta caldezza non si potrebbe stimare." See *Legazioni*, IV, 200-202.

⁴⁴³ On September 29, Machiavelli wrote a letter to Lapi emphasising the continuation of the project: "Per la nostra di iarsera, sarete avvisati in che modo el Consiglio delli 80 insieme con la Pratica si erano risoluti circa le cose d'Arno, e come erano desiderosi si seguissi l'opera infino al fine fintanto che le condizioni atmosferiche lo rendano possibile...Desiderando noi di stare ordinati in ogni evento e che non si abbino a fare le cose tumultuariamente. Voliamo, come ti si commisse, la tenga secreta, accio che e' sia in arbitrio tuo el levare el campo." See *Legazioni*, IV, 205-6; The next day, Machiavelli continued in similar fashion by asking the commissioner Tosinghi to proceed with the work as the weather is still good: "E di nuovo brevemente ti replichereno come noi vogliamo si stia tanto in campagna e si seguiti cotesta opera quanto el tempo ci serve; el quale per essere questo di bellissimo, ci dà speranza che, se non manca da voi, cotesta impresa debbi avere el fine desideriamo." See *Legazioni*, IV, 208-09.

favorable on October 9, 1504, when two hydraulic experts from Ferrara showed up at the camp to offer their help in the name of their Duke.⁴⁴⁴ According to Machiavelli, they were invited “per vedere quelli rimedi che ci sono e quelle speranze se ne possono avere.”⁴⁴⁵ However, there was nothing the engineers from Ferrara could do to change the weather. Heavy rains threatened to flood the channel, as the walls of the ditches collapsed. The Pisans, too, started destroying the weir on the Arno and filling the ditches near Stagno.

Aware of the situation, on October 12, 1504, Machiavelli wrote an emotional letter to Tosinchi in which he lamented all the effort his office had invested in the project, which had evidently lost its race with time.⁴⁴⁶ While the choice of leaving or staying was left to Tosinchi, Machiavelli reminds him that if he left he should do it honorably and in an orderly fashion, so that “it looks like a choice and not a necessity.”⁴⁴⁷ Machiavelli concludes that the worksite should be closed temporarily, “in migliore termine è possibile, e in modo sicura.”⁴⁴⁸ Officially, the worksite was closed on October 17, 1504, although armed troops remained to guard the ditches. Over the following weeks, the Pisans sent several raiding parties to different locations

⁴⁴⁴ For the details of the visit, see E. Ferretti, “Fra Leonardo, Machiavelli e Soderini. Ercole I d’Este e Biagio Rossetti nell’Impresa “Del Volgere l’Arno da Pisa,” *Archivio Storico Italiano*, n. 660, (2019): 235-73.

⁴⁴⁵ *Legazioni*, IV, 227; For a long time, the engagement of the Ferrarese engineers Biagio Rossetti (1441-1517) and Alessandro Doria, both in the service of the Duke Ercole I d’Este (1471-1505) in the Arno project has not attracted enough attention in historiography until Emanuela Ferretti documented their presence in the camp. Her research shows that there was a scholarly culture in Italy at the time in which the duke’s court was one of the leading in Italy. Ferretti found a document from October 21, 1504, in which the Florentine government “ricorda il compenso erogato per il sopralluogo di Biagio Rossetti e del maestro d’acqua che lo accompagna, il già citato Alessandro Doria, inviati qui in campo dal Signor Duca di Ferrara con ordine che vegghino et consiglino circa all’opera del volgere Arno et tornarsene a Ferrara a loro spesa.” See Ferretti, “Fra Leonardo, Machiavelli e Soderini,” 238.

⁴⁴⁶ “Noi abbiamo auto tanto desiderio che cotesta opera avessi la perfetione sua, per satisfare a l’onore di questa città e per ’l benefitio e commodo che del fine di essa si sperava, che per noi non abbiamo mai pensato ad altro, poi che si dette principio, che a tutte quelle cose l’avessino a dare favore e a condurla a la perfezione sua.” See *Legazioni*, IV, 231.

⁴⁴⁷ “E avendoti smobilitare il campo, ti leverai con manco tumulto, più ordinatamente e con più onore potrai, accio che la paia tale levata scelta e non necessità.” See *Legazioni*, IV, 232.

⁴⁴⁸ *Legazioni*, IV, 232.

across the worksite in order to overstretch the remaining Florentine forces.⁴⁴⁹ The main body of the army had already headed towards its winter quarters, and the remaining units were too few to protect such a large site. As a result, many dugouts were completely undone by Pisans.⁴⁵⁰ It was clear that Florence could not protect the work and that everything that had been done was lost.

According to Guicciardini, the Florentine government squandered several thousand ducats on the Arno project without any visible benefit.⁴⁵¹ Shortly after the worksite was closed, Cardinal Francesco Soderini was swift to assign blame for the failure, pointing to the engineers and their lack of expertise.⁴⁵² Another contemporary familiar with the project, Biagio Buonaccorsi, concurred with Soderini, singling out Colombino for his ill planning.⁴⁵³ Guicciardini again, now in his *Storia d'Italia*, attributed the failure to a lack of experience on the part of the experts, who showed little or no understanding of the river, its patterns of flooding, or its natural course.⁴⁵⁴ As seen above, Commissioner Tosinghi had already raised doubts over

⁴⁴⁹ Machiavelli's dispatch to the Florentine Captain in Livorno from October 22, 1504, testifies to the Pisan raiding parties in that area: "Noi abbiamo aùto dispiacere grande per intendere per questa tua de' 19 di lo insulto che' Pisani hanno fatto a cotesto luogo, e il danno che ne hanno ricevuto cotesti uomini; perché non ci mouve tanto quello hanno perso cotesti nostri e l'utile che ne hanno conseguitato e' Pisani, quanto el conietturare per tale caso seguito che costì non si facci buona guardia." See *Legazioni*, IV, 246.

⁴⁵⁰ In a letter to Tosinghi from October 27, 1504, Machiavelli could only lament the new developments: "Dispiaceci bene che' fossi sieno ripieni da' Pisani; e aremo desiderato che tu avessi fatto molestarli dalle nostre genti, accio che o lasciassin la impresa, o, avendo a lavorarvi con sospetto l'ostruzione dei canali che facessi più debole." See *Legazioni*, IV, 255.

⁴⁵¹ Guicciardini, *Storia*, 273.

⁴⁵² In response to the collapse of the Arno project, Cardinal Francesco Soderini wrote a letter to Machiavelli in which he also blames the engineers: "Assai c'è doluto che in quelle acque si sia presa tanta fallacia, che ci pare impossibile sia stata senza colpa di quelli maestri, che si sono ingannati sì in grosso." See Francesco Soderini's letter to Niccolò Machiavelli sent from Rome on 26 October 1504 in Villari, *The Life and Times*, cit., 478-479, note 4; Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 135.

⁴⁵³ "And the undertaking was not completed because it required too much time and money, and if Maestro Colombino had promised the finish the whole undertaking with thirty or thirty -five thousand works, eighty thousand works were not even enough to bring it half way, nor was the expected fall for waters achieved, because with the river in flood the waters entered strongly through the ditch but as the Arno went back to its regular flow the flood-waters began to subside." See Masters, *Fortune is a River*, 132.

⁴⁵⁴ Guicciardini, *Storia d'Italia*, I, 604.

Colombino's methods. There is no doubt that a task of such magnitude was beyond the capabilities of the engineers and workers charged with its implementation.

However, Guicciardini's earlier report on the same project does not lay the blame on any one man for the failure, but rather on a series of decisions made by the government that ultimately led to the unfavorable outcome.⁴⁵⁵ Pressured to complete an enormous project within a very limited time frame, the Signoria made hasty decisions that led to errors. First and foremost, the number of workers needed for the project was seriously underestimated. To prove this theory, historian Emmanuela Ferreti found a document written by an anonymous author in *Carte Machiavelli*, in which we can read the following:

Perciò che tali fossi era impossibile con tal numero di opere poter absolvere facendo il conto alla presentia di Giovanni Berardi, havendo la penna in mano, Giuliano Lapi si vedeva che passava el tereno se haveva a cavare a otto centomila braccia quadre e iudicavase che ogni braccio fussi dieci barellate di terra perché in simili opere non se charica e non si può usare quella diligentia se fa nelle opere piccole. Diceva el signor Governatore che quando se desse raguagliato l'uno homo per l'altro, quaranta barellate per opera credeva fusse assai, considerato quanto se haveva a portar discosto maxime in quello pezzo di fosso largho in modo che a far tal fossi che andavano ducentomila opere, cosa impossibile a poter fare maxime essendosi proximo el verno: per questo iudicava non essere per alchuno modo da fare con questa ragione palpabile.⁴⁵⁶

This resulted in disorder and lack of discipline as workers were brought in urgently in small groups from various places across Tuscany. Second, the government made no provision for all the problems that inevitably arose once the workers were on site and doing their jobs. The ensuing mass desertion delayed progress. Lastly, the commissioners themselves lacked confidence in the project, as is evident from Machiavelli's dispatches. Thus, it can be argued that the failure of the project stemmed as much from the government's decisions as from the engineers or the autumn rains.

⁴⁵⁵ In his *Storie Fiorentine*, Guicciardini argues that gonfaloniere Soderini and his supporters are the main culprits for the failure for pushing the projects against all odds and for not taking into consideration all the problems that could come up in such a grandiose project. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 274.

⁴⁵⁶ According to Ferretti, this document is located in BNCF, *Carte Machiavelli*, VI, 78, appendix doc. 2; Ferretti, "Fra Leonardo, Machiavelli e Soderini," 280.

As in the Vitelli case, Machiavelli genuinely stood by his government (that is to say, Soderini) during and after the Arno project regardless of his true feelings about it. In his *Decennale primo*, written in the same year, Machiavelli praised Soderini's effort to divert the Arno.⁴⁵⁷ Despite its negative outcome, Machiavelli could claim that much had been learned from this project, especially regarding his planned future militia. The recruitment of the Tuscan peasants proved to be a first run for the kind of authority, organization, and discipline that would be essential for the militia project. More than 2,000 workers had been engaged in the government-sponsored project, modeling the future unification of the Tuscan *contado* around the general idea of serving the Republic. With all this in mind, the Arno project represents much more than the fabled collaboration of Leonardo and Machiavelli that some researchers have reduced it to. The glorification of Leonardo and his part in the project has distracted attention from the complexity and significance of the actual work, from its inception to its inglorious finale. While the project started as "Leonardian" concerning his role in the early stage of the project, over time it became Machiavellian concerning how much effort he put into it.

4.4. The Power of the Aesthetic: *Anghiari* and *Cascina* Battle Paintings and the Pisan War

There is a general consensus amongst historians that between the summer of 1503 and 1506, both Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo Buonarroti spent time in Florence working for the Florentine government. In this brief time, the two artistic giants produced works that earned them fame: Leonardo's painting, the *Mona Lisa* (1503) and the mural of the *Battle of Anghiari* (1505); Michelangelo's statue of *David* (1504), and the mural of the *Battle of Cascina* (1505).

⁴⁵⁷ "Né dalle offese de' Pisan partisti, anzi, togliești loro le terze biade, e per mare e per terra li assalisti. E perché non temén le vostre spade, voi vi sforzasti con vari disegni rivolger Arno per diverse strade." See Machiavelli, *Decennale Primo*, 253.

The following text will consider the artistic pieces of Leonardo and Michelangelo as visual symbols of the government's political aspirations to bring the Pisan War to a successful conclusion. Whereas the courtly and delicate artworks of the late Quattrocento style reflected the protected society under Lorenzo de' Medici, the visual arts in the public eye during the Pisan War featured martial images that sought to embody the Republic's glorious past and its present readiness for war. In this way, the Pisan War appears as an integral part of the context in which the battle murals were commissioned, an element often neglected in historiography.

As for Machiavelli, this section will show that his role in the commissioning of the battle paintings has often been exaggerated due either to his alleged friendship with Leonardo and Michelangelo, or to his proximity to Gonfaloniere Soderini.⁴⁵⁸ The lack of evidence from the source material suggests that the nature of Machiavelli's participation in the battle painting commissions is unclear but seemingly rather limited. While there is a possibility that Machiavelli suggested to Leonardo the battle of Anghiari as a theme by being familiar with Bruni's work, there is no evidence to confirm it. Nonetheless, some excerpts from Machiavelli's post-1512 writings indicate that he might have supported the use of visual propaganda as a legitimate political tool while in the chancery. Given the timing, the murals may have been the first step in convincing the public of the necessity of his ensuing militia project.⁴⁵⁹

In order to provide a meeting place for more than 3,000 Florentine citizens who were members of the Great Council, the city of Florence began the construction of the *Sala del Gran*

⁴⁵⁸ A scribe employed by the Signoria furnished Leonardo with a translation in the *volgare* of selected passages of the battle of Anghiari. The script was erroneously first attributed to Machiavelli himself by Solmi. But this theory was rejected in 1916 by Girolamo Calvi who identified the hand to be Vespucci's. For a summary of the question see G. Calvi, *I Manoscritti di Leonardo da Vinci dal punto di vista cronologico, storico e biografico* (Bologna, 1925), 250-253.

⁴⁵⁹ For more about this idea see Rubinstein, "Machiavelli and the Mural Decoration of the Hall of the Great Council of Florence,"; Robert Carlucci, "The Visual Arts in the Government of Piero Soderini during the Florentine Republic" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1994), 375-6, 459.

Consiglio, or Great Hall in 1494. But more than just a meeting place, the *Sala del Gran Consiglio*, according to Wilde, displayed an artistic and decorative program directly inspired by political demands. For him, it was a rare case where the existence and significance of a work of art can be completely explained by reference to political events.⁴⁶⁰ To support this theory, one may argue that the Medici, who preceded the Second Republic, already used visual propaganda to strengthen their political legitimacy.⁴⁶¹ Thus, it would not be surprising to think that *gonfaloniere* Soderini as well intended to use the two battle murals in the *Sala* to win over the hearts, minds, and votes of the members of the Great Council for his political agendas. Concerning its financial and military struggles while trying to recapture Pisa, the Florentine government needed a powerful visual propaganda to reinvigorate the eroding spirit of its citizens. Thus, the commission of both battle murals should not be separated from the Pisan War context.

We have seen above that in the summer of 1503, the Florentine government engaged Leonardo in two important projects. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that shortly after his work on La Verruca fortress and Arno Project, on October 18, 1503, the Signoria commissioned him to paint a giant mural representing the Battle of Anghiari in the *Sala*.⁴⁶² On October 24, 1503, Leonardo received the keys to the chamber of the pope and other adjacent

⁴⁶⁰ The principal study of the construction and decoration of the *Sala del Gran Consiglio* remains the seminal article by Johannes Wilde written in 1944. See Wilde, "The Hall of the Great Council in Florence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 7, (1944): 65-81; See also Claire J. Farago, "Leonardo's Battle of Anghiari: A Study in the Exchange between Theory and Practice," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 76, No. 2 (Jun., 1994): 301-330.

⁴⁶¹ In the Pazzi conspiracy of 1478 against the ruling Medici, Lorenzo de' Medici's brother Giuliano was assassinated in the Florentine *Duomo*. However, the conspirators were quickly apprehended and brutally murdered. After the killing spree, Sandro Botticelli was commissioned to paint images of the Pazzi conspirators hanging upside down from the facade of the Palazzo Vecchio, as a vivid visualization of Medici hegemony over the city. See Lauro Martines, *April Blood: Florence and the Plot Against the Medici* (Oxford University Press; Illustrated edition 16, 2004).

⁴⁶² Leonardo's contract with the Signoria states the following: "avendo più mesi fa Leonardo di ser Piero da Vinci, cittadino fiorentino tolto a dipingere uno quadro della Sala del Consiglio Grande, et sendoci de gia per detto Leonardo cominciata tal pictura in sur in cartone, et avendo etiam per tal cagione presi fiorini xxxv larghi d'oro in oro, et desiderando e' prefati magnifici Signori che tale opera si conduca quanto più presto si può al suo desiderato fino." For the transcripts of the document see Edoardo Villata, *Leonardo da Vinci: i documenti e le testimonianze contemporanee* (Sforza Castle, 1999), 166-169.

rooms destined to serve as his working and living quarters as he prepared the cartoon.⁴⁶³

However, Leonardo's progress on the mural was slow from the beginning due to his various intellectual pursuits. For this reason, his contract required renewal, which was effected in Machiavelli's presence in May 1504, when Leonardo agreed to complete the project by the end of February 1505. To provide the painter with some motivation, on September 22, 1504, the Signoria assigned his younger rival Michelangelo, who had already carved for Florence the marble statue of David, to paint a mural of the battle of Cascina on the wall facing Leonardo's. The strategy did not meet with success, however, as Leonardo was delayed again due to his service to Jacopo IV Appiani between late October and December 1504. Then, on June 6, 1505, Leonardo records that when he was painting in the *Sala del Gran Consiglio* a storm struck, damaging his cartoon.⁴⁶⁴ The last recorded payments indicate that any active work on the *Battle of Anghiari* had ceased between October 31 and December 31, 1505, with the work left unfinished.⁴⁶⁵

Michelangelo's engagement in the decoration of the *Sala* originated with a commission by Soderini in the late summer of 1504.⁴⁶⁶ The *gonfaloniere* had realized that Leonardo's painting was not proceeding according to schedule, especially when the campaign to divert the

⁴⁶³ The documents regarding Leonardo's working conditions at the *Sala del Papa* (in the Florentine archives) confirm he could not have begun drawing the battle cartoon before February 1504. Between December 16, 1503 and February 28, 1504, minor construction work in the papal apartment was executed. See Bambach, *Leonardo*, II, 347.

⁴⁶⁴ Frederick Hartt, "Leonardo and the Second Florentine Republic," *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, Vol. 44 (1986): 95-116.

⁴⁶⁵ Whatever the reasons for this may have been (problems with the quality of the material supplied and/or Leonardo's proverbial procrastination), in May 1506 the artist was summoned to Milan, supposedly for three months, and did not return to work on Anghiari painting. Between 1558 and 1563, Vasari covered the area with his own painting. See Bambach, *Leonardo*, 364; Wilde, "The Hall of the Great Council of Florence," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, VII, (1944): 65-72.

⁴⁶⁶ Research by William Wallace concentrating on Michelangelo's developing circle of relationships in Florence from 1500 to 1508 opens new vistas in the investigation of a patronage network. See William E. Wallace, "Michelangelo: In and Out of Florence between 1500 and 1508," in *Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael in Renaissance Florence, 1500-1508* (Georgetown University Press, 1992): 55-88.

river Arno was faltering. For this reason, Soderini urgently needed another artist on board. Art historian Luisa Morozzi argues that Michelangelo was brought into the *Sala* project after Leonardo not only because Leonardo's dilatory pace was seen to be a problem but also because of the ever-increasing need for this supporting political propaganda, especially in the immediate wake of the failed project to divert the flow of the Arno River away from Pisa to starve the city.⁴⁶⁷ She has introduced convincing circumstantial documentary evidence to support a date for the commission to Michelangelo between 22 August and 22 September 1504 based on a record of the latter date allocating to Michelangelo the great hall in the Ospedale de' Tintori in Sant'Onofrio for his work on the battle cartoon.⁴⁶⁸ In the absence of the contract, this reference reflects when work was planned to begin in earnest, not necessarily the date when the commission was awarded. Nonetheless, the information is of critical importance because these references firmly establish that Michelangelo was pressed into service in the late summer of 1504, the period when traditionally the annual spring-summer military campaign against Pisa had reached the usual unsatisfactory conclusion.⁴⁶⁹

Thus, it does not surprise that almost immediately after the Arno project was abandoned, on October 31, 1504, the paper for Michelangelo's cartoon was purchased and two months later there are records indicating the gluing together of the cartoon.⁴⁷⁰ Although the cartoon did not survive, a faithful copy did. It represents nineteen men, drawn nude and in various poses, climbing out of the water in the face of imminent danger. Michelangelo captured the moment when the Florentine captain, seeing his troops swimming in the Arno to escape the summer heat, sounded a false alarm that brought the soldiers out of the river to prepare for the battle, in which

⁴⁶⁷ Luisa Morozzi, "La Battaglia di Cascina," 320.

⁴⁶⁸ Morozzi, "La Battaglia di Cascina," 321.

⁴⁶⁹ Morozzi, "La Battaglia di Cascina," 322.

⁴⁷⁰ On the chronology of the commission, see Tolnay, *Michelangelo*, 203; Morozzi, "La Battaglia di Cascina," 323.

they defeated the Pisans.⁴⁷¹ Working four months without pause, Michelangelo submitted the preliminary drawing for the mural on the last day of October 1504. However, his work on the mural ended abruptly as he left for Rome in response to the summons of Pope Julius II. While the “battle of battles” between two artistic giants ended without a clear victor, Michelangelo’s preliminary sketch and Leonardo’s fragment undoubtedly inspired future advances in art.

Now that we are familiar with the history of the two battle murals, it is important to explore why the Florentine government chose these specific battles to decorate The Great Council Hall, and how they were meant to contribute to the war effort against Pisa. In alluding to the impact of the imagery on the public audience, Kemp noted the importance of a vivid and living memory of the historical battles at Cascina and Anghiari to serve as an inspirational impetus to the challenges faced by the Great Council. He followed traditional art historical precedents in assuming that the actual fourteenth-century battle at Cascina and the fifteenth-century battle at Anghiari were foremost in the minds of the members of the Great Council and that they would have understood the message of the murals in that context.⁴⁷² Similarly, Cecil Gould argued that by choosing Anghiari and Cascina, the Florentine government drew attention to the political importance of those geographical areas. Indeed, Anghiari is located in the Casentino region near the city of Arezzo, the very region where in August 1502, Gonfaloniere Soderini, with the help of the French, achieved a victory over rebels and saved the republic.⁴⁷³ With this victory, he emerged as a hero, and this, more than any other single factor, may have

⁴⁷¹ Hirst, *Michelangelo*, 58-60. Jil Burke, “Republican Florence and the Arts 1494-1513,” in F. Ames-Lewis (Ed.), *Florence* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), 274-82.

⁴⁷² Martin Kemp, *Leonardo Da Vinci: The Marvellous Works of Nature and Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); See also Pedretti, *Leonardo*, 83.

⁴⁷³ Cecil Gould, “Leonardo’s Great Battle-Piece: A Conjectural Reconstruction,” *Art Bulletin*, 36 (1954): 128.

been responsible for his election as *gonfaloniere a vita*. As for Cascina, it is located in the territory close to the rebellious city of Pisa, the target of Florentine aspirations since 1494.

The historical and military aspects of both paintings are thus essential in understanding their purpose. Both artists were commissioned to exalt the victories of the glorious republican past: Leonardo with the battle of Anghiari, where the Florentine and papal troops defeated the Milanese in 1440; and Michelangelo with the 1364 battle of Cascina, where the Florentines defeated the Pisan forces. By choosing these battles, the government seemingly intended to inspire the patriotic zeal of the Great Council in their efforts to recapture Pisa.⁴⁷⁴ While this interpretation neatly corresponds to Machiavelli's use of history to teach by example, I argue that the murals should also be understood in the context of contemporary events. According to this theory, what the members of the Great Council saw in looking at the *Cascina* and *Anghiari* murals could be read as allusions to contemporary events. This is particularly important for the site of Cascina and its immediate surrounding area, which continued to play a crucial role in the Florentine plans to recapture Pisa. By May of 1504, Cascina was the furthest secure outpost in the remaining lands of the Florentines, and the headquarters of the Captain General and Florentine war commissioners.

However, it is important to acknowledge that although the government had a leading role in choosing the place and the subject matter for the two murals, it seems that Leonardo and Michelangelo had some freedom in choosing the iconography.⁴⁷⁵ For example, despite its

⁴⁷⁴ Previous studies have shown that the decision to have Leonardo represent the Battle of Anghiari was determined by Soderini's goal of mustering support among members of the Great Council for the current military campaign against Pisa. This theory was first advanced in Wilde's, "The Hall of the Great Council of Florence," 80; The most intense pursuit of this theory is noticeable in Alessandro Cecchi's, "Niccolò Machiavelli o Marcello Virgilio Adriani?" 102–15.

⁴⁷⁵ As for battles' iconography, scholars have often granted Michelangelo unprecedented artistic leeway. Sydney Freedberg, for instance, wrote of "a constraint of the subject of the artist's interests and will," and Cecil Gould, in the only monograph on the cartoon, guessed that "Michelangelo had the last word in determining subject matter." See Sydney J. Freedberg, *Painting of the High Renaissance in Rome and Florence*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.:

relevance to Soderini's contemporary warmongering, Michelangelo's mural does not depict a violent contest between Pisans and Florentines; there is no fighting to be seen here, nor even an apparent enemy.⁴⁷⁶ Unlike Leonardo's painting, in which the soldiers wear uniforms and insignia identifiable as those of the participants at Anghiari, Michelangelo chooses instead to tell the story through generalized depictions of emotion, gestures, and facial expressions. Michelangelo seemed less interested in depicting the historical event than in portraying the surprise, incredulity, and panic on the faces after the cry of alarm. According to Michael Duffy, the mural represents "an impressive example of the artist's creative ability to subsume natural displays of alarm, haste, hurry, exertion, and eagerness amongst the soldiers."⁴⁷⁷ The message for the audience might have been the following: Florence's military must be ready at any time to engage an enemy who may not be visible to the Florentine citizens but is very much ready to attack their borders.

Likewise, the subject matter and depiction of raw emotional violence in Leonardo's Anghiari mural (as seen through the surviving sketches) would have left its viewers both satisfied and stupefied. According to Vasari's biography of Leonardo, rage, fury, and revenge are perceived as much in the men, as in the horses.⁴⁷⁸ Leonardo's vivid depiction of the violent

Harvard University Press, 1961), vol. 1., 46; Gould, *Michelangelo: Battle of Cascina* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Printing Section University, 1966). Their interpretations ultimately serve to announce the Cascina cartoon as little more than a testament to Michelangelo's artistic freedom.

⁴⁷⁶ According to Sheila Barker, an examination of Michelangelo's cartoon in light of the circumstances of Piero de' Medici's death reveals that numerous aspects of the image correspond more closely to the history of the French defeat at Garigliano than to the Florentine victory at Cascina. Most notably this is the case with the foreground detail of two outstretched hands belonging to a man who has sunk below the water's surface while the unclothed bodies correspond to the wretched circumstances of the French army in the aftermath of the Battle of Garigliano. The soldiers' difficulty in dressing and readying for battle reflects the feebleness and disease that led to the French army's downfall. See Sheila Barker, "The Drowning Man in Michelangelo's Battle of Cascina," in *Renaissance Now*, ed. B. Dooley, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014), 19–37.

⁴⁷⁷ Michael H. Duffy, "Michelangelo and the Sublime in Romantic Art Criticism," *Journal of the History*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (Apr., 1995): 217-238.

⁴⁷⁸ Vasari, *Lives*, 194-195; Ulysses Fiorito, "Machiavelli's Aesthetic Advice: Visual Arte and the Political Sublime in *The Prince*" (PhD diss., Concordia University, December 2020).

emotions of combating soldiers and horses in a battle scene, as seen in his sketches and studies of the heads of the soldiers (particularly that of the screaming Piccinino) is a pictorial realization of Leonardo's anatomical research on the muscles and movements of the human face. It is evident that Leonardo's emphasis on aggression and frenzy amongst the soldiers, much like Michelangelo's emphasis on a strong masculine body and battle readiness, was intended to move the audience and evoke their strong patriotic feelings. Together with Michelangelo's marble David, the battle murals seemed to visualize Machiavelli's ideal soldier ready to die for his *Patria*.

4.4.1. Machiavelli's role in the commissions

Now that we have discussed the Government's intentions behind the two commissions for the *Sala Grande*, it is important to survey Machiavelli's role in them, as he was closely associated with the *gonfaloniere* who commissioned the works. Although the relationship between Leonardo and Machiavelli has inspired much speculation, the silence of the sources has thus far convinced scholars to keep their research on the firm ground of historical fact. Nevertheless, the fact that Machiavelli signed his name on the revised contract with Leonardo has led some scholars to believe that Machiavelli played a decisive role in engaging Leonardo for the project. Cecchi and Wilde have taken this signature to suggest that Machiavelli was actually responsible for the iconographic program in the Sala del Gran Consiglio.⁴⁷⁹ At the other extreme, Machiavelli's signature can be interpreted as nothing more than the circumstantial situation that the secretary happened to be present in the Palazzo della Signoria at the time of the signing and was called in as a witness. Concerning both extremes, it seems that the truth is somewhere in the middle. I tend to agree with Rubinstein who follows a cautious path here,

⁴⁷⁹ Cecchi, "Niccolò Machiavelli o Marcello Virgilio Adriani?" 102-105.

diminishing the simple interpretations that have sought to confer direct control over the project by Machiavelli based on the appearance of the secretary's signature on the second contract for the mural.⁴⁸⁰ In Rubinstein's reconstruction of the events, Machiavelli, in his office as the secretary for the *Dieci di Balìa*, acted only on his government's behest and not as an independent agent, as his position would not have obliged him to be involved in any manner with the business of these commissions.⁴⁸¹ However, his signature may be construed as confirmation that the Secretary enjoyed the esteem of *gonfaloniere* Soderini. While Machiavelli's signature as a witness does not prove that he was involved as an adviser, his sharp mind must have been considered an asset in the second attempt to wrest some progress on the mural out of the elusive Leonardo.

Likewise, while Machiavelli's appearances in the sources regarding the battle commissions are rare, this does not mean that he did not recognize the value of these works and their political and moral significance for the Florentine citizens during the Pisan War. We have seen earlier in the text that the *Sala Grande* was born as a political project aimed at the Florentine citizens who governed the city. According to Jones, Machiavelli must have understood the significance of the Great Council Hall as the "physical expression of the Republic" and a "sacred manifestation of the Florentine People."⁴⁸² Concerning this, Leonardo and Michelangelo's battle murals were intended to produce a strong emotional and political effect on the people viewing them. Through their aestheticization of war and Florence's past

⁴⁸⁰ Rubinstein, "Machiavelli and the mural decoration," 275-285.

⁴⁸¹ Rubinstein, "Machiavelli and the mural decoration," 280.

⁴⁸² Jonathan Jones, *The Lost Battles: Leonardo, Michelangelo, and the Artistic Duel That Defined the Renaissance*. (Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2011), 51; Fiorito, "Machiavelli's Aesthetic Advice," 24-25.

victories, the frescoes would have inspired the citizenry to support the government and its military projects in the war against Pisa.⁴⁸³

Moreover, Wilde argues that “in representing those battles, the frescoes would have been understood as glorification of civilian preparedness, and this idea was a step on the way towards Machiavelli’s law constituting the militia, a law which was perhaps the most notable political event in the short life of the democratic republic.”⁴⁸⁴ For Wilde, there is no doubt that Machiavelli saw the potential for the artworks to achieve favorable political outcomes in the face of war. Following Wilde, Rubinstein went beyond the traditional motif of the battle murals noting that the protracted and expensive war to reconquer Pisa, as well as Machiavelli’s pleas for a citizen militia, would have found support in the images of the murals constantly before the eyes of the Great Council.⁴⁸⁵ For example, from Michelangelo’s cartoon of the battle of Cascina, we can draw the idea of a mobile and virtuous militia recruited from subjects of the Florentine state. At the same time, the negligence of the Pisan *condottieri* is contrasted with the valor of the Florentine civil commander. Similarly, the *Anghiari* battle painting fosters the idea of victory obtained by non-mercenary soldiers. Both paintings thus express a call to arms by ideal figures roused into action in the face of an overwhelming challenge; both seem to express a single political message.

⁴⁸³ According to Jones, such a support would most likely include “votes for taxes to pay for the Arno diversion and any other measure that Soderini and Machiavelli judged necessary in the war against Pisa.” See Jones, *The Lost Battles*, 51; Fiorito, “Machiavelli’s Aesthetic Advice,” 24.

⁴⁸⁴ Wilde, “The Hall of the Great Council of Florence,” 80.

⁴⁸⁵ Rubinstein infers that the combination of Machiavelli’s long-standing position combined with the advantages implicit in the new office of *gonfaloniere a vita* would have allowed the secretary to begin an extended campaign in support of his proposal for a home-grown militia with the continuing support of Soderini. Not an early advocate of the militia, Piero Soderini was eventually persuaded of its value, making Rubinstein’s thesis inviting. In this context, the imagery of the *Anghiari* and *Cascina* offered Machiavelli significant pictorial support for his militia proposal. See Rubinstein, “Machiavelli and the mural decoration,” 285.

Lastly, although Machiavelli never explicitly addressed the use of visual propaganda in politics, some of his writings imply his possible support for its use as one more instrument of political cunning and power. While Machiavelli scholars have offered numerous interpretations of his theories of statecraft and the maintenance of power, they have devoted insufficient attention to the fine arts as a tool in Machiavelli's *arte dello stato*.⁴⁸⁶ As public art had a place in the political forum in Quattrocento and Cinquecento Florence, one may suspect that Machiavelli also recognized its value in politics. We have seen in the previous text that the political goals and aspirations of Soderini's government between 1503 and 1505 were mirrored in Leonardo and Michelangelo's artwork. While Machiavelli's writings are silent regarding the political use of the battle paintings, his vivid portrayal of Cesare Borgia's act of violence in *The Prince*'s chapter vii, and his theory of publicly sponsored violence as expressed in *The Discourses* suggest his support for Soderini's visual propaganda.⁴⁸⁷

According to Fiorito, although Machiavelli never explicitly uses the term "political sublime," he nevertheless implies it in his vivid depiction of Cesare Borgia's murder of his appointed minister Remirro de Orco in the piazza of Cesena in December 1502. Borgia's public display of the dismembered corpse acted as a clear statement of his authority and power over the people, who were both "satisfied and stupefied."⁴⁸⁸ Concerning the fear that such a spectacle was

⁴⁸⁶ Building mostly on Rebhorn and King's analysis of Machiavelli's representation of Borgia and his *spettacolo*, Fiorito has made some connections between Machiavelli and the political utility of the visual art of his day. See Fiorito, "Machiavelli's Aesthetic Advice," 12-15; See also Wayne Rebhorn, *Foxes and Lions: Machiavelli's Confidence Men* (Cornell University Press, 1988); Ed King, "Quinquennial Terror: Machiavelli's Understanding of the Political Sublime," *Open Journal of Political Science*, 03 (02), 2013, 69-75; Robert Arthur Carlucci, "The visual arts in the government of Piero Soderini during the Florentine Republic," Ph.D. diss., (Columbia University, 1994).

⁴⁸⁷ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, vii, 31; Fiorito, *Machiavelli's Aesthetic Advice*, 12-15.

⁴⁸⁸ "Conoscendo poi che la severità del passato avevano generato qualche odio, per ripulire l'animo di quei popoli e tirarli tutti a sé, volle mostrare che se anche si era seguita una strada crudele, ciò non era venuto da lui, ma dalla aspra natura del suo ministro. Colse poi la prima occasione e una mattina lo fece esporre sulla piazza di Cesena, tagliato in due parti, con accanto un pezzo di lego e un coltello insanguinato. La ferocia di quello spettacolo lasciò il popolo stupito e soddisfatto." See Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, vii, 30-31.

supposed to produce amongst the spectators, Machiavelli seemed to understand and value the political utility of visual propaganda as a persuasive instrument rather than a purely aesthetic experience. He described an act of violence perpetrated by Borgia as a spectacle meant to be viewed by the public. Although Machiavelli did not mention it, we know from Landucci's account that Paolo Vitelli's violent public execution was used to send a strong message to the people. According to Fiorito, in neither case did the incident endanger the people within its immediate vicinity, and so no physical pain or danger was experienced; and yet the idea of "pain and danger" is present in the minds of the viewers, and is expressed through their stupefaction.⁴⁸⁹ This leads Fiorito to conclude that, "it is reasonable, then, to say that through his support of the violent public spectacles, Machiavelli emphasized the power of aesthetics and its sense of political utility."⁴⁹⁰

Next, in his *Discourses*, Machiavelli writes in a similar vein in his description of ancient Roman rituals inspiring *virtù* in the people.⁴⁹¹ Based on his account in the *Discourses*, one may suspect that for Machiavelli, visual propaganda inspired by ancient Roman virtue and religious ceremonies was a legitimate tool to be used by the regime both to strengthen its power and to legitimize its political rule. Likewise, the use of visual imagery as a means to political legitimacy and glory in tumultuous times seemed to offer the people an opportunity for civic engagement and judgment. As people can be easily swayed by what they see, one may conclude that Machiavelli considered visual components or "the art of appearances" as persuasive rhetorical tools in the exercise of Florentine politics.

⁴⁸⁹ Fiorito, "Machiavelli's Aesthetic Advice," 15.

⁴⁹⁰ Fiorito, "Machiavelli's Aesthetic Advice," 15.

⁴⁹¹ "Qui non mancava la pompa né la magnificenza delle cerimonie, ma vi si aggiungeva l'azione del sacrificio pieno di sangue e di ferocità, ammazzandovisi moltitudine d'animali; il quale aspetto, sendo terribile, rendeva gli uomini simili a lui." See Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, II, ii, 162.

To conclude, we should take into consideration Jacob Burckhardt's famous comparison of Renaissance Italian statecraft to a work of art that reflects the way states exploited visual imagery to articulate, popularize, and enforce their political agendas.⁴⁹² Although the Battle frescoes were never completed, their display of violence and warfare in a public setting would have articulated the Florentine government's political agendas in the midst of the Pisan War. Likewise, the commissions of the Pazzi conspiracy fresco by the Medici and the Battle frescoes by Soderini's regime suggest that in times of trouble, art could win over the political imagination and create outcomes favorable to the preservation of political society. As a witness to the public executions by the Medici, the Second Republic, and Cesare Borgia, Machiavelli was well aware of the power that those spectacles of violence wield in a society. Similarly, although we lack Machiavelli's opinion on the battle frescoes, we may suggest that he saw them as a powerful tool that could be used to rally political and financial support for the ongoing Pisan campaign. However, without further evidence and research in this direction, Machiavelli's view on visual arts in politics remains unclear.

4.5. Michelangelo's *David* and Pisan War

In the extensive literature on this famous work of Michelangelo, scarcely any attention has been paid to the moment at which the government took over the marble statue for use as a symbol of Florence's republican strength. In the following text, we will examine the reasons behind the appropriation of the *David* statue by the state and the regime's decision to relocate it. It will be argued that with Michelangelo's *David*, as with the *Battle of Anghiari* and *Cascina*

⁴⁹² Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy* (Penguin Publishing Group, 1990).

paintings, art was assumed into the service of the state. I suggest that Gonfaloniere Soderini appropriated the power of art to strengthen his own power over the public, as well as to inspire patriotic feelings amongst the Florentines at a critical moment in their campaign to recapture Pisa. Ultimately, Soderini's patriotic propaganda created fertile soil for Machiavelli's subsequent idea of the citizen militia in which the marble *David* of Michelangelo embodies the ideal citizen-soldier.

We have mentioned earlier in the text that Michelangelo's connections with the Florentine government and gonfaloniere Soderini predate his commissions for the marble *David* and the Cascina painting. On June 22, 1501, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici and Pierfrancesco Tosinchi, ambassadors of the Florentine Republic to the court of France, addressed a letter to the *Dieci di Balìa*, stating that Pierre de Rohan, supreme commander of the French army, desired that a bronze figure of a *David* to be cast for him at his own expense.⁴⁹³ The *David* in question is the life-size figure by Donatello that today is found in the Museo del Bargello. Whether it was through Soderini's intervention or that of some other government patron, Michelangelo was chosen to sculpt the bronze *David* for the French commander.⁴⁹⁴ This fact is

⁴⁹³ According to art historian Giulio Davit, "the request had political significance as the Republic had been dependent on the whims of the French court to have Pisa reintegrated into its dominions. Rohan's request was, therefore, of the utmost importance and was to be dealt with by the *Dieci* as a matter of foreign policy. When Rohan fell into disgrace in 1504, the republic selected a new addressee for what had by then become a gift, namely Florimond Robertet, the treasurer to the (new) king of France, Louis XII, to whom the statue was eventually shipped at the end of 1508." See Giulio Dalvit, "Michelangelo's Florentine Patrons, 1501–1502," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz*, 63. Bd., H. 3 (2021): 395–400; See also Luca Gatti, "Delle cose de' pictori et scultori si può mal promettere cosa certa: la diplomazia fiorentina presso la corte del re di Francia e il Davide bronzeo di Michelangelo Buonarroti," in *Mélanges de l'École Française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée*, CVI (1994): 433–472.

⁴⁹⁴ Tolnay was one of the first biographers of Michelangelo who explored in detail the role Piero Soderini played in Michelangelo's life. For example, Tolnay assigned the role of patron to Piero Soderini for both the *Battle of Cascina* painting and the lost bronze *David* sent to France as a gift from the Republic. Based on references in letters written by the gonfaloniere on behalf of the artist, Tolnay had found that Soderini referred to the artist as *Michelangelo carissimo*. See Charles de Tolnay, *The Youth of Michelangelo* (Princeton, 2nd ed., 1969), 29–31, 105–109, 209–219; Soderini's letters that mention Michelangelo are published in Johann Gaye, *Carteggio inedito d'artisti dei secoli XIV, XV, XVI*, vol. II, (Florence, 1839–40).

important because on August 16, 1501, shortly after he had started work on the bronze *David*, he signed a contract for the monumental marble *David*. Given that many artists were considered for the commission, one may ask whether the same patron vouched for Michelangelo again or whether he was chosen solely for his skills and experience. According to Vasari's story from 1550, Michelangelo heard about the project through friends and returned from Rome to Florence to seek out the commission. Believing the stone was already ruined, the *Operai* let him see what he could do with it.⁴⁹⁵

Now while the question of how Michelangelo got the commission remains open, the fact is that it was not initially the Florentine government that was interested in the giant block of marble that would become *David*, it was the *Operai* of the Duomo Cathedral in Florence. However, as Michelangelo's work was nearing completion between the summer of 1503 and January 1504, a change occurred in the commission: *David* was no longer destined for the Cathedral. According to Keizer, in the case of Michelangelo's marble *David*, the Florentine government led by Gonfaloniere Soderini appropriated the statues for its own ends at the beginning of 1504.⁴⁹⁶

The following events show that there is a strong connection between the display of the statue to the public and the ongoing Pisan campaign of 1504. The transportation of the *David* began on May 14, 1504, precisely the moment when the Florentine troops, primarily stationed at Cascina, launched their attack against Pisa. While there is no documentary proof that Soderini chose May 14 to coincide with the commencement of military action against Pisa, the statue may have come to be seen as the principal visual embodiment of Florence's will and determination in the ongoing Pisan War. Rather than displaying the adolescent hero of the Old Testament in the

⁴⁹⁵ Vasari, *The Lives*, 431.

⁴⁹⁶ Joost Keizer, "Michelangelo, Drawing, and the Subject of Art," *The Art Bulletin*, Volume 92, (2011): 304-324.

Cathedral, the colossal statue could serve a better purpose by mustering Florence's civic and military virtue at the moment of greatest need: The Pisan campaign of 1504.⁴⁹⁷

While the government's motives for appropriating the marble *David* seem evident, the decision to permanently move the statue from the church to the *Piazza della Signoria*, near the entrance to the *Palazzo Vecchio*, replacing Donatello's statue of *Judith and Holofernes* in the process, was more complex. On January 25, 1504, the Florentine government organized a public meeting to propose potential sites for the statue of David. Amongst those invited to the meeting were leading artists such as Sandro Botticelli, Pietro Perugino, Leonardo, and others.⁴⁹⁸ Although it may be that the meeting was staged to make the government appear more inclusive in its decision-making, it was, nevertheless, an important panel, on which the worlds of art, politics, and public opinion intersected. The panel suggested at least nine different locations for *David's* new home, but given the importance of public space in projecting the regime's ideology through visual imagery, it is not surprising that the *Piazza della Signoria*, the most iconic Florentine landmark, was chosen as the new home for the marble *David*.⁴⁹⁹

In the previous pages, we saw how in the case of the *Sala Grande*, space and the visual arts were used as a political tool in an indoor setting, in the place where the most important Florentine citizens convened. Now, parallel with this use of the *Sala*, the Florentine government seemed to use the marble *David* to politicize an outdoor space for a wider public. While access to the *Sala* was restricted only to the Florentine citizens who fulfilled the requirements, the public

⁴⁹⁷ According to Vasari, David was represented as a young man with a sling in his hand so that those who governed Florence should defend it courageously and govern it justly as he had defended his city. See Vasari, *The Lives*, 417.

⁴⁹⁸ The meeting with the artists was held in January 1504. Machiavelli did not attend this meeting as he was already in France at that moment on his third mission to Louis XII. For the meeting see Saul Levine, "The Location of Michelangelo's David: The Meeting of January 25, 1504," *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (Mar., 1974): 31-49.

⁴⁹⁹ Giuliano da Sangallo, one of the speakers assembled by the Signoria to discuss the placement of Michelangelo's David, pointedly remarked that it should be placed close to the seat of political power in Florence, because the figure of David was "cosa pubblica." See Lorenzo Polizzotto, "Iustus ut palma florebit: Pier Soderini and Florentine Justice," 270; Coonin, *From Marble to Flesh*, 101.

space of the Piazza was accessible to everyone. Since the earliest days of the first Florentine republic, the Piazza had functioned as both an outdoor gallery space displaying numerous sculptures and a stage for political propaganda through artwork.⁵⁰⁰ It was also an important location for public messages to be displayed to the greatest number of residents and an ideal social setting for civil ceremonies and religious events. One of the most prominent locations for a sculpture to be placed within the *Piazza della Signoria* was near the entrance of the *Palazzo Vecchio*, on the *ringhiera*, and this was the spot chosen for the placement of Michelangelo's *David*. The public prominence granted to the statue and the location selected for it reveal a shift in the focus of the government's attention outward to the wider public, in contrast to the aristocratic Medici, who displayed the sculptures in their private courtyard.⁵⁰¹

The sculpture's placement outside the *Palazzo della Signoria* suggests that it was meant to portray and inspire civic *virtù* and to serve as a symbol of the Florentine government's strength and perseverance against the Medici and Pisa.⁵⁰² According to Levine, while the view from the front of the statue emphasizes the heroic, Herculean stance embodying strength and defensive capacity, the sharply turned profile directs attention towards the left side of the figure, where one can discern features that are active, aggressive, and even menacing. These features, according to Levine, culminate in the head with the *terribilità* of intensely staring eyes directed

⁵⁰⁰ Danielle M. Brady Deibel, "The Piazza Della Signoria: the Visualization of Political Discourse through Sculpture" (PhD diss., College of the Arts of Kent State University, 2017). <https://docplayer.net/54456944-The-piazza-della-signoria-the-visualization-of-political-discourse-through-sculpture.html>

⁵⁰¹ Donatello's statues of Judith and David not only became known as symbols of Florentine liberty, but also became crucial in the battle of public opinion between the Medici and the Republic. After the expulsion of the Medici in 1494, two sculptures housed in their private collection were claimed by the Republic and moved into more communal environment of the Piazza. See Deibel, "The Piazza Della Signoria," 8.

⁵⁰² According to Levine, David was completed and strategically displayed in front of the Palazzo della Signoria to face the south, and more specifically Rome, where the exiled Medici resided. See Levine, "The Location of Michelangelo's David," 34.

at an enemy.⁵⁰³ For Seymour, for example, a truly distinguished feature of the statue is its intimidating presence.⁵⁰⁴ *David*'s placement on the *ringhiera* near the *Marzocco*, guardian of the Florentines, only intensifies his role as protector of the Florentines against all challengers. As we will see in the subsequent section, it seems that the *David*'s embodiment of a virile young man with an imposing physique and strong determination in the face of danger planted the seed for the Florentine militia.

4.6. The statue of *David* and Machiavelli's Militia

While the origins of Machiavelli's militia project and its creation will be the subject of the next chapter, it is important to establish here the connections between the *terribilità* of *David* described above and Machiavelli's militia project. Once the statue was on display as a symbol of Florentine virtù, *David*'s unapologetic nudity could be read as a symbol of Florentine self-sufficiency. When Machiavelli argues in *The Prince* against the state's reliance on mercenaries and other powers, he uses the analogy of David refusing to wear Saul's armor:

Voglio anche ricordare una figura del Vecchio Testamento che ben si adatta al problema. David, dopo essersi offerto a Saul per andare a combattere contro il filisteo Golia, che aveva sfidato gli israeliti, Saul, per incoraggiarlo, gli mise la propria armatura; ma David, dopo averla provata, la rifiutò, dicendo che con quella non poteva combattere come sapeva fare, e che desiderava affrontare il nemico solo con la sua fionda e il suo coltello.⁵⁰⁵

By invoking David here, Machiavelli alludes to a long Florentine tradition of portraying David as the protector of the *patria*, a tradition most highly developed in the arts. Although *David*'s nudity has perhaps more to do with Michelangelo's artistic style than Machiavelli's militia, *David*'s weapons could be interpreted as a call for *armae propriae*. There is little doubt

⁵⁰³ Levine argues that the statue's intense gaze alerted the viewers to the severity of the combat ahead, as well as David's determination. For him, the symbolism of the gaze is crucial, for it supports the notion that David is the protector of Florentine liberty, able to conquer all of their enemies, despite their size or seeming supremacy. See Levine, "The Location of Michelangelo's David," 34.

⁵⁰⁴ Seymour, *Michelangelo's David*, 8.

⁵⁰⁵ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, xiii, 53-54; On Michelangelo and Machiavelli see Franz-Joachim Vetapohl, *Michelangelo Buonarroti und Niccolò Machiavelli: der David, die Piazza, die Republik*, (Bern and Vienna, 2001).

that Machiavelli enjoyed the presence of the powerful, gigantic image of Michelangelo's David, who, standing before the Signoria, personified the city's capacity to defend itself with its arms. According to Levine, "the marble *David* embodied the sort of "cittadino guerriero" who would participate in Machiavelli's projected armed citizens' militia."⁵⁰⁶ In this context, David's placement in the *Piazza della Signoria*, and Machiavelli's push for the citizen militia are all parts of the same political agenda: to win the war against Pisa.

Machiavelli's references to David in the *Discourses on Livy* could also be perceived as a subtle call for a militia. Amid a discussion on the possibility of founding a new republic, Machiavelli says the following: "E senza dubbio, chi volesse ne' presenti tempi fare una repubblica più facilità troverrebbe negli uomini montanari, dove non è alcuna civiltà, che in quelli che sono usi a vivere nelle città, dove la civiltà è corrotta: ed uno scultore trarrà più facilmente una bella statua d'un marmo rozzo, che d'uno male abbozzato da altrui"⁵⁰⁷ When Machiavelli speaks of a sculptor making a statue from a badly blocked-out piece of marble, he most likely took Michelangelo's *David* as his reference point. However, the moral could be taken that the founder of a republic should rely on a strong peasant army from the mountains – much like the Florentine forces who had already proved themselves in the war in Casentino in 1498. Such soldiers would fight better than city dwellers, who are not destined for war, or those mercenaries who are "badly blocked": that is, shaped by someone else. Machiavelli's explicit and veiled references to artists and sculptors in *The Prince* and *The Discourses* indicate that he hoped the founder of a new republic would, like a great artist, use "the human material" he had at hand to create an army.

⁵⁰⁶ Levine, "The Location of Michelangelo's David," 36.

⁵⁰⁷ Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, I, xi, 42.

4.7. Conclusion

There is little doubt that Michelangelo's *David* served a political purpose as a symbol of Republican *virtù*, tapping into the political imagination of the Florentines and perpetuating the appearance of a glorious state. Seen only as a work of art, *David* exemplifies its Biblical referent - the young hero before his defeat of Goliath. However, the political circumstances under which the sculpture was created, along with the location in which it was ultimately set, reveal an emblematic function that goes beyond religious intentions. The decision to place *David* at the entrance to the *Palazzo Vecchio* suggests a close relationship between artists and political actors in Renaissance Florence, which allowed political intent to be manifested through visual arts. Ultimately, the statue showed forth many of the political virtues he would later emphasize as significant for the acquisition and maintenance of power in *The Prince*, such as the use of one's own arms and the heroic and menacing *virtù* a ruler should strive to imitate.

CHAPTER 5

Machiavelli's Militia Project and the Pisan War

5.1. Introduction

This chapter aims to identify the sources of Machiavelli's inspiration for the militia project and the evolution of his military ideas in his first political writings, namely *Parole da dirle* and *Decennale Primo*. While modern historiography has recognized the connection between Machiavelli's experiences with foreign mercenaries and Cesare Borgia and his militia project, there are other important events and people whose influence on Machiavelli's military deserves our attention.⁵⁰⁸ One is Basilio Nardi, a Camaldolesi monk who successfully led the Casentino peasants against Venice in 1498; another is Caterina Sforza of Imola, whose Romagnol militia first demonstrated to Machiavelli how effectively a peasant militia could perform. Each in their own way influenced Machiavelli's ideas about the Florentine ordinance. Likewise, Machiavelli's early writings show that he never stopped thinking about Florence's "armi proprie." Disappointed with his government's reliance on French mercenary soldiers, Machiavelli strongly argued against it. With this in mind, the first goal of chapter five is to provide a coherent account of Machiavelli's militia experience through a rigorous survey of the primary material from 1498 to 1506.

⁵⁰⁸ Bayley's *War and Society* remains one of the best and most comprehensive studies on the Florentine militia of 1506. However, as his treatment of the subject is far from exhaustive, the definitive history of the Florentine militia remains to be written. According to Bayley, "before Machiavelli's vision of the military renaissance was embodied in the militia project of 1506, the Secretary of the Ten was to have his theoretical preference for the militia confirmed by a varied and painful experience of the greed, duplicity, and ineffectiveness of the *condottieri* of his day. His profound detestation of the professional soldiers linked Machiavelli with an intellectual tradition of Bruni." See Bayley, *War and Society*, 241.

The second aim of this chapter is to critically survey Machiavelli's militia project. While Machiavelli scholarship has often praised his effort to recruit local militia to the point of romanticization, a more critical approach is necessary to explain some of its obvious paradoxes.⁵⁰⁹ For example, historiography has rarely questioned the rather oppressive and violent methods proposed by Machiavelli for the recruitment of the Tuscan peasants. The "stick" of punishment for disobedience or refusal to join the militia was regularly put to use, but the "carrot" of benefits, including the granting of citizenship rights, was largely missing from the equation. While Professor Andrea Guidi in his most recent work on Machiavelli's military thought takes a significant step by questioning the motivation of Machiavelli's recruits, there remains much to be said.⁵¹⁰ Only by bringing to the table the contemporary examples of the Pisan *contadini*, who were granted full citizenship rights by the Pisan government, can we better understand the mentality of the deprived Florentine peasants who could only dream about having the same rights.

5.2. Machiavelli and the idea of the peasant militia before 1498

In the late fall of 1505, many contemporary politicians, including Gonfaloniere Soderini, finally came to support the revival of the peasant militia, long advocated by Machiavelli.

According to Guicciardini:

Ne' medesimi tempi si cominciò a dare principio alla ordinanza de' battaglioni; la quale cosa era stata anticamente nel contado nostro, che si facevano le guerre non con soldati mercennari e forestieri, ma con

⁵⁰⁹ The military and political aspects of Machiavelli's militia have been well studied, notably by Philip Jones, Mikael Hörnqvist, and Timothy J. Luke. See P. J. Jones, "The Machiavellian Militia: Innovation or Renovation?" in *La Toscane et les Toscans autour de la Renaissance: Cadres de vie, société, croyances. Mélanges offerts à Charles-M. de La Roncière* (AIX en-Provence: Press Universities, 1999); T. Lukes, "Martialing Machiavelli: Reassessing the Military Reflections," *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 66, No.4 (Nov., 2004): 1089-1108; Piero Pieri looked closely at the army of the last Republic of Florence. His book focuses on citizenship and the lack thereof, blaming the latter for military ineffectiveness. His argument is acute, and it has been adopted by a long tradition of Machiavelli's studies, particularly the work of Federico Chabod and Gennaro Sasso. See P. Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare* (Einaudi, 1970); Federico Chabod, *Scritti su Machiavelli*, introduction by C. Vivanti (Turin: Einaudi 1993), 336-338; Gennaro Sasso, *Machiavelli il pensiero Politico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1993), 205.

⁵¹⁰ Andrea Guidi, *Books, People, and Military Thought: Machiavelli's Art of War and the Fortune of the Militia in Sixteenth-Century Florence and Europe* (Brill, 2020).

cittadini e sudditi nostri; di poi era stata intermessa da circa dugento anni in qua, nondimeno si era, innanzi al 94, qualche volta pensato di rinnovarla; e dopo el 94, in queste nostre avversità molti avevano qualche volta detto che e' sarebbe bene tornare allo antico costume, pure non si era mai messo in consulta, né datovi né disegnatevi principio alcuno. Volsevi di poi l'animo el Machiavello, e persuasolo al gonfaloniere, veduto che gli era capace, cominciò a distinguergli particolarmente e' modi.⁵¹¹

As modern-day scholarship agrees that Machiavelli was the real instigator and driving force of the project, one must ask how a civil servant with no military background proved to be so able in military matters, including the recruitment of soldiers.⁵¹² What or who directly and indirectly influenced and shaped his ideas about militia?

There is little doubt that before stepping into the political arena Machiavelli was familiar with the existence of the Florentine communal militia of the fourteenth century and, later, Leonardo Bruni's praise of a citizen militia.⁵¹³ We have seen in chapter one that in 1498 Machiavelli was already discussing Hannibal's siege of Saguntum with his colleague from the Ten, which suggests his familiarity with the history of the Roman Republic. The depth of his knowledge of Roman history at the time we cannot know, but from his later works, we can safely assume that the Roman citizen army served as the primary inspiration for Machiavelli's militia project.⁵¹⁴ Thus, one may argue that Machiavelli's military ideas are the product of reflection

⁵¹¹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 281-282.

⁵¹² As for modern scholarship, a far greater role in the political maneuvering behind the project is ascribed to Machiavelli by Villari, *The Life and Times*, 531; Carlo Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie* (Einaudi Paperbacks: Turin, 1980), 3-59. Nicolai Rubinstein also argued that Machiavelli's role in inspiring the project was considerable, while "the political realization was left to others." See Rubinstein (1972), 16; For Hörnquist, "the breakdown of the Florentine territorial state and the increased awareness of the city's dependency on outside assistance in the face of external threats prompted the authorities to accept Machiavelli's proposal for a native militia in 1506." See Michael Hörnquist, "Perché non si usa allegare i Romani: Machiavelli and the Florentine Militia of 1506," *Renaissance Quarterly*, Spring, 2002, Vol. 55, No. 1 (Spring, 2002): 148-149.

⁵¹³ Machiavelli had access to his father Bernardo's library that contained some of the popular ancient and medieval works. There, Machiavelli most likely got a hold on Leonardo Bruni's *De Militia*.

⁵¹⁴ Bailey claimed that it was ancient Rome that inspired Machiavelli based on the ideas he later put forward in *The Art of War*. See Bailey, *War and Society*, 249-50 and 256-58; However, according to Hörnquist, the failure of these scholars to address the complete, or almost complete absence of Roman references in the official writings on the militia makes the interpretation problematic. See Hörnquist, "Perché non si usa allegare," 149.

generated by the digestion of themes and elements related to Roman antiquity, and from the set of experiences that he underwent through his work as a secretary.⁵¹⁵

After the French invasion of 1494, Domenico Cecchi, a supporter of Savonarola, attacked the mercenary system and called for the revival of the native militia of the medieval commune.⁵¹⁶ According to his proposal, each extra-urban community with a church would be responsible for forming a local militia unit composed of all men capable of bearing arms, which they were required to provide. The plan also proposed daily training and severe punishment for any transgression toward civilians.⁵¹⁷ In the first few years of the Pisan war, the Florentine government did indeed avail itself of temporary levies by imposing a so-called *commando* on the subject population, the demand that every household in the *contado* and *distretto* provide one armed infantryman charged with defending the roads in the locality against the invading enemy. However, Cecchi's plan was quickly forgotten due to the lack of interest amongst the Florentine elite.⁵¹⁸ Nevertheless, this plan deserves more credit than it has been given because Machiavelli's proposed law for the militia of December 1506 was an elaboration of Cecchi's earlier plan. Thus, we can safely claim that when Machiavelli became the Second Chancellor in June 1498, he had

⁵¹⁵ We know that Machiavelli already in 1503 used ancient Roman model in his *Del modo di trattare i popoli della Valdichiana ribellati* when he called for direct imitation of it in solving the crisis: "Io ho sentito dire che le istorie sono la maestra delle azioni nostre, e massime de' principi. Se alcuno non credesse questo, si specchi in Arezzo l'anno passato e in tutte le terre di Valdichiana, che fanno una cosa molto simile a quella de' popoli latini." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 462-463.

⁵¹⁶ In Florence, on February 24, 1496, a brief reform tractate entitled *Riforma sancta et pretiosa* was completed by Domenico Cecchi. The writer called for the immediate institution of a popular militia in the city and the Dominion. At the time of the French invasion of 1494, Cecchi's idea was that the rural militia, provided by weapons and pay, should be more closely bound to the city. See Cecchi, *Riforma santa per conservazione di Firenze 1496* (Francesco di Dino, 24 II 1496/97); Bayley, *War and Society*, 238-239.

⁵¹⁷ Bayley, *War and Society*, 237.

⁵¹⁸ The defects of the scheme were obvious. A self-equipped militia would have been inadequately armed, while daily training would have disturbed agricultural routine. As such, Cecchi's proposal could not survive the opposition.

already incorporated some ideas regarding citizen militia from his father's books and contemporary tracts. He was ready for his first direct engagement with this topic.

5.3. A rather “unusual” influence: Abbot Basilio Nardi and Casentino militia

As we have seen in chapter one of this dissertation, Machiavelli devoted considerable attention during his first year in the chancery to dealing with Venice's incursion into the Casentino region in September 1498. As the main Florentine forces during the invasion were miles away at the Pisan camp, the Signoria urgently required an alternative force to slow the enemy's progress until Captain Paolo Vitelli and other *condottieri* could arrive. Thrown into the fire from the outset, Machiavelli had to coordinate from his office the deployment of a number of units to locations where the enemy was progressing. In a letter to Bernardo Diacceto, the commissioner in the Mugello from September 24, 1498, Machiavelli instructed the commissioner to hire local peasants to block the roads and passages against the invading mercenaries, for which purpose he sent 500 ducats from Florence.⁵¹⁹

During the war in the Casentino, the local peasants, motivated by the plunder of their land, were more than happy to serve Florence against its adversary. In Machiavelli's letter to Iacopo de' Nerli from December 4, we read the following: “e potendovi ancora valere commodamente delli omini del paese, e' quali, per essere di natura armigeri e in questa cosa offesi e irritati da' nimici nostri, non potranno se non giovare assai...e per via di Poppi ricevemo lettere degli omini di Bibbiena, per le quali ci significavano della mala contentezza loro, giustificandosi e offerendosi che, potendo, dimostrerebbero el loro buono animo verso la

⁵¹⁹ “Noi ti mandiano pel presente esibitore 500 ducati d'oro in oro, e' quali disegniamo che ti servino a' fanti arruolati con pagare a chi uno fiorino, a chi uno mezzo, a chi una paga, a chi prometter solo le spese, e come meglio potrai, pure che tu ne raccolga insieme più e meglio armati ti sia possibile.” See *Legazioni*, I, 68-69.

Repubblica nostra.”⁵²⁰ Machiavelli’s dispatch is of great interest as it characterizes the people of the Casentino as naturally warlike, “di natura armigeri,” and hostile towards the enemy. This was the same characteristic he used to distinguish them in his later works.⁵²¹ Undoubtedly, this intervention of the peasants in the Casentino left a deep impression on Machiavelli, who writes to degli Albizzi on December 18, 1498: “non solamente e nimici nostri hanno perduto di forze, ma e’ se n’è accresciuto tanto animo a’ nostri, e massime s’agli omini del paese, che speriamo ve ne possiate valere per più che mille fanti.”⁵²² Considering this observation, we can understand why the recruitment of the peasant militia in 1506 commenced in the Casentino.

While the participation of the local peasants in defending their crops and goods from mercenaries was common in Tuscany and thus nothing new for Machiavelli, the military achievements of these peasants, accomplished under the spirited leadership of their local commander, certainly caught his attention. Amongst the many dispatches sent by Machiavelli to the war commissioners and commanders in the Casentino during the first month of the invasion, one in particular stands out. In a dispatch to Basilio Nardi, a Camaldolesi monk, on October 30, 1498, Machiavelli writes:

Intendiamo da la Paternità vostra quanto e’ nimici desiderano insignorirsi di cotesto luogo, e con quanta fede e affezione lo abbiate difeso e di continuo cerchiate difenderlo: per la quale cosa noi vi restiamo obbligatissimi. E quanto e quello ne richiede vostra Paternità di uomini e di munizioni, ne abbiamo dato notizia a’ nostri commissari in Poppi, e’ quali, secondo che giudicheranno el bisogno, vi provedranno. Ma crediamo veramente che’ nimici nostri, mediante le provisioni abbiamo fatte, si terrebbono contenti di potere tenere lo acquistato, e che non sieno per cercare di acquistare di nuovo, della quale cosa vostra Paternità ne vedrà presto frutto. Alla quale di continuo ci offriamo.⁵²³

⁵²⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 150.

⁵²¹ Despite being “uncultured men of the mountains” (*montanari e rozzi*), as we have seen in his *Disocrsi* I, xi, Machiavelli preferred peasant recruits more than those among dwellers in cities where civilization is corrupt. Likewise, in book I of his *Art of War*, Machiavelli’s character Fabrizio praises the peasants: “Questi che ne hanno scritto tutti s’accordano che sia meglio eleggergli del contado, sendo uomini avvezzi a’ disagi, nutriti nelle fatiche, consueti stare al sole, fuggire l’ombra, sapere adoperare il ferro, cavare una fossa, portare un peso, ed essere senza astuzia e senza malizia. See Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, trans., ed. and with commentary by C. Lynch (Chicago & London: Chicago, 2003), I, 141.

⁵²² *Legazioni*, I, 153; Guidi, *Il Segretario militante*, 200.

⁵²³ *Legazioni*, I, 110.

What strikes here is the fact that it is not a military commander Machiavelli is praising here for his prowess and loyalty in defending the *Patria*, but a monk. While there have been numerous examples of warrior monks in history, such as the Shaolin monks, the Ikko-Ikki fighters, and the Templars, Basilio Nardi's case is truly unique and all but forgotten today.⁵²⁴

Basilio Nardi was a well-known figure in Renaissance Italy. Contemporary historians, chroniclers, and diarists have left various accounts of his military accomplishments.⁵²⁵

According to Guicciardini, for example, “villani del paese, che sono naturalmente uomini armigeri e sono in luoghi forti dove non si possono adoperare e' cavalli, ne feciono molte volte occasione, trovandosi a tutto come capo uno abbate Basilio dello ordine di Camaldoli, el quale aveva in Casentino una badia...e' primi urti e più spessi che ebbono gli inimici, furono dallo abbate Basilio e da' paesani.”⁵²⁶

Likewise, for Cerretani, Nardi was a brave man who successfully led his peasant army against the Venetians and their mercenary cavalry:

E fu cosa notabile che uno abbate Basilio dell'ordine di Camaldoli, homo feroce et ardito, con un altro achiamato l'abattino che gli portava la bandiera nella quale era Santo Romualdo, con cavalli et fantti assai

⁵²⁴ Basilio Nardi was born in 1460 in Bagno di Romagna in the heart of the Tuscan Romagna region. According to his biographers, Nardi joined the monastic order of Camaldoli when he was very young (*giovannissimo*). When he joined the order around 1480, the monastery was a learning center in the region. Some of the intellectual giants of the time, Leon Battista Alberti and Marsilio Ficino, often visited the monastery to teach there. In this academic atmosphere, Nardi received his education and made good progress under the leadership of the Prior Pietro Delfino, a Venetian nobleman and the leader of the Camaldoli order in Italy. The sources describe Nardi as a tall, prominent, robust, eloquent, and a brave man, capable of many things. Due to his skills, Nardi became Delfino's right hand and a man of trust, engaged in various missions in Italy. In 1493, Nardi became the prior of the St. Felice abbey in Florence, founded in 1413. He then moved to Florence just a year before the tumultuous events shook the peninsula in 1494. Nardi's story has never been a subject of scholarly discussion. Apart from a short entry in the *Dizionario Biografico Degli Italiani*, and occasional references in local histories of the Casentino region and the Camaldoli monastic order, Nardi's life and achievements are little known to us. For Nardi, see: J.B. Mittarelli - A. Costadoni, *Annales Camaldulenses*, VII-VIII, (Venice, 1762-64); Pietro Delphini, *Epistolarium volumen*, (Venice, 1524), lib. II, 32, 35, 67, 86; III, 78, 98; IV, 68, 71, 93; X, 96; A. Fortunio, *Historiarum Camaldulensium*, III, (Florence 1575), 273-280; V. Guerri, *Il Casentino. Storie, tradizioni e leggende*, (Arezzo, 1952), 85-95. [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/basilio-nardi_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/basilio-nardi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/) (accessed on January 9, 2024).

⁵²⁵ Nardi was a well-known figure amongst contemporary historians and chroniclers such as Guicciardini, Parenti, Vaglienti, and Landucci. They all left an account of Nardi's bravery and successful leadership of Casentino peasants. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 167-168; Parenti, *Storia*, II, 227-8; Vaglienti, *Storia*, 63-64; Cerretani, *Storia*, 258-259; Landucci, *Diario*, 152.

⁵²⁶ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 167-168.

del paese infesto in modo e nimici che non gli lasciava posare puntto, perche erano a chavallo a uso di stradioti armati alla leggiera et sapevano e passi, di modo che un giorno del mese di gennaio apichatosi co' nemici gli ruppe, nella quale rotta tolse loro 300 cavalli, di che ne venne in reputazione non piccola.⁵²⁷

Both Parenti and Vaglienti confirm the story of the Casentino peasants who, led by a Camaldoli monk, recovered booty pillaged by the Venetians.⁵²⁸ Thanks to all his military achievements against the enemy, Guicciardini tells us that “per tutta la città era molto celebrato ed esaltato el nome dello abate Basilio.”⁵²⁹

After the war in the Casentino, Nardi continued to fight for Florence. In May 1501 he led his peasant troops against Cesare Borgia, whose mercenaries had invaded and pillaged the region around Mugello.⁵³⁰ Years later he served both the aristocratic regime of Lorenzo di Piero de Medici and the last Florentine republic in 1527. After commanding the forces of the republic for thirty-nine years, he died in Florence in 1542.⁵³¹ Today, visitors to the Palazzo Vecchio can see the only known visual representation of Nardi in Giorgio Vasari's painting known as “La

⁵²⁷ Cerretani, *Storia*, 258-259.

⁵²⁸ “Pure Idio con sua benignità ci aiutava, impero che avendo sentore lo abate Basilio come di Bibbiena dovevano uscire e' cavalli quali vi si trovavano perché più da pascersi non avevano, lui con forse 500 contadini del paese si mise a tagliare loro la via...E nostri subito, cioe lo abate Basilio, occuparono il monte della Vernia e Monteleone.” See Parenti, *Storia*, II, 227-228; Likewise, Vaglienti tells us that “addi 25 di gennaio e contadini di Casentino coll'abate Basilio, ch'era di lassu, avendo sentore che le gente erano a Bibbiena una parte si volevano partire, stettono a passi dove sapevano dovevano capitare e di e notte in que' luoghi tennono le scolte. Donde e detti capitonno a que' passi dove erano e detti contadini co' lo abate Basilio e comincionno forse 20 di loro contadini assaltalli, ch'erano de' cavalli 400 ed era di notte e gridavano “Vitello, Vitello,” donde e detti dubitando l'esercito fusse maggiore e che fusse tutto el campo si misono in fuga; donde ne fu preso di loro circa 200 cavalli e mortone di loro circa a 400 uomini che fu un grande scorno a nostri soldati. See Vaglienti, *Storia*, 63-64.

⁵²⁹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 168; Guicciardini's claims are confirmed in later Camaldoli's accounts. For example, historian Pietro Farulli writes in his *Istoria cronologica del nobile, ed antico monastero degli Angioli di Firenze* the following: “Ritornato a Firenze tutto il Popolo (come dice il Delfino, che vedde) li andò incontro gridando, viva il Salvatore, e Liberatore della patria. Ricevè gran doni, e sommi onori da tutti i suoi Concittadini.” See Farulli, *Istoria*, 184; Likewise, in *Storia del Casentino* by Pietro Prezzolini, II (Firenze, 1861), we read the following: “...ed essere accolto trionfalmente da un popolo tripudiante di gioia, per aver pugnato da eroe contro chi voleva obbrobrio e schiavitù. Chiun que abbia percorse le pagine gloriose del popolo fiorentino costituitosi in democratico reggimento, avrà veduto quanti furono i generosi, che seppero esporre la propria vita e le sostanze a prò della loro indipendenza; e tra questi luminosamente risplende quel Basilio Nardi, Camaldolese, il quale con la sua cocolla abbaziale brandì la spada per porsi a capo dell'esercito fiorentino.” See Prezzolini, *Storia del Casentino*, 230.

⁵³⁰ Borgia's sudden eruption into Tuscany in May 1501 forced the Ten to levy peasants in Mugello and Casentino. See Bayley, *War and Society*, 246, note 3.

⁵³¹ Nardi was buried in the abbey of Saint Felice in Florence. See *Annales Camaldulenses*, VIII, 56.

Sconfitta dei Veneziani in Casentino.”⁵³² This small octagonal painting depicts Florence’s victory over Venice in Casentino, near Vernia and Mantalona, in the winter of 1498-1499. In his *Ragionamenti*, Vasari gives us more details about the painting:

In quest’ ottangolo adunque, che dicemmo, segue la rotta data all’esercito Veneziano da’ Fiorentini in Casentino alla Vernia, ed a Montalona; e nell’asprezza di quei monti ho finto una grandissima nevata e diaccio per il tempo di verno, nel quale finì detta guerra; e ho ritratto il sito del sasso della Vernia al naturale: similmente l’Abate Basilio con quel numero di villani che li rompe, nella qual fazione restarono prigionieri molti Veneziani, e io gli fingo con gli abiti di que’ tempi. Quello è fatto per un’Appennino carico di diacci e di neve, come luogo per natura freddo e gelato; e le parole, che li sono sotto, dicono: VENETI PISARUM DEFENSORES VICTI.⁵³³

Considering this almost epic story of a holy man leading warlike peasants against professional soldiers, one must ask whether the example of Nardi influenced Machiavelli’s military ideas. While the examples of the ancient and communal citizen militia undoubtedly inspired Machiavelli’s militia project in theory, Nardi’s warlike peasants provided Machiavelli with a living example of the practical benefits of a peasant infantry inspired by patriotism, loyalty, and a charismatic leader. The war in Casentino convinced Machiavelli that the key to Florence’s security lay not in the power of their *condottieri* but among the local peasants, whose mobility in the rough terrain and motivation to defend their homes and fields made them a resource that Florence needed to exploit.⁵³⁴ We have seen in chapter one that the theme of care for the Florentine subjects often resonates in Machiavelli’s early dispatches. Trained and paid by

⁵³² Giorgio Vasari, *La Sconfitta dei Veneziani in Casentino*, olio su tavola, 1563-1565, Salone dei Cinquecento, Firenze. <https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/sconfitta-dei-veneziani-nel-casentino-giorgio-vasari-e-collaboratori/TwE5qU4QHmcRlg>

⁵³³ Giorgio Vasari, *Ragionamenti* (Firenze, 1588), 249.

⁵³⁴ In a letter to the commissioner in the Casentino from January 26th, 1499, Machiavelli praises most likely Nardi’s peasant army and their achievements: “Abbiamo inteso quanto felicemente sieno successe costi le cose nostre, e con quanto estermínio e’ nimici nostri abbino perso 400 cavalli in circa. (Those must be the same horses Nardi and his peasants took from the Venetians, which Cerretani and Parenti reported as well - See the note above) E così e’ vostri soldati sono fatti, per li continui prosperi successi, animosi e disposti a fare e condurre ogni gran cosa. Aggiugnasi a questo lo aiuto degli uomini del paese, e’ quali per essere stati primi irritati dalle continue iniurie ricevute da li inimici nostri.” See *Legazioni*, I, 199.

the Republic, these peasant soldiers could farm their lands in times of peace and fight to protect them in times of war. This was a seed for future national army projects across Europe.

Nardi's example also showed Machiavelli that only a strong, patriotic, and loyal leader could solidify the bond between the metropolis and its countryside. Although born in the countryside, Nardi was imbued with strong patriotic feelings for the Florentine republic, as can be confirmed by a letter of March 3, 1499, from Pietro Delfino to Cardinal Piccolomini, the protector of the Camaldoli order in Rome and future pope.⁵³⁵ There is no doubt that Machiavelli perceived Nardi as a model local militia leader. Unlike the professional mercenary, who sold his services to whoever offered the most, a leader of Nardi's patriotic character would stay loyal to Florence. Machiavelli's comment on Nardi in his *Frammenti storici* supports this view:

“Camaldoli la difese l'Abate Basilio, cujus fuit summa manus in bello, et amor et fides in patriam,” which can be translated as: “Abbot Basilio, who had great skill in war, and love and loyalty to his patria.”⁵³⁶

⁵³⁵ “Un monaco liberò la sua patria dalle mani degli oppressori coll'autorità, la dolcezza, il consiglio, l'industria, la sollecitudine, la vigilanza, e l'acume dell'intelletto. Sofferendo fatiche più di quel che convenga all'umana costituzione, passando i giorni e le notti senza prender sonno, e scorrendo le campagne incessantemente con una mano di contadini, fece sì che avendo astutamente guadagnato Bibbiena, le altre Terre per suo consiglio rimaser fedeli; quantunque il timore non molto innanzi le avesse persuase ad arrendersi. Egli stesso recuperò molte Castella situate sull'Alpi, e prese dai nemici intorno a Bibbiena. Non una, ma più volte riportò sulle truppe nemiche grandissimo, e singular bottino, seco traendo quantità grande e di gran valore, di greggi, d'armenti, e più d'ogni altro di cavalli. Con quant' arte poi procurasse di munir di torri e bastioni, le vinte Terre; con quanta rapidità vi ponesse guarnigione e Capitani eccellenti; con qual destrezza, per mezzo di guardie ai passi delle Alpi, gli riescisse frequentemente l'intercettare lettere de' nemici; con quanta astuzia abbia scansato i tradimenti, giacchè non d'altro più si cercava che della testa di Basilio; e finalmente in quanta stima sia stato sempre, non solo nell'animo de' soldati, ma ancora degli Uffiziali, e fin del Comandante di tutto l'esercito; non è qui luogo di raccontarlo. Perocchè s'io volessi ad una ad una riferir le sue gesta; non una Lettera, ma farei un grosso Volume. Raccomando solo alla vostra pietà questi segnalati meriti di Basilio; il quale mosso non già da desio di preda (che diffuse sempre generosamente ne' suoi soldati, e negli uffiziali), ma solo da lealtà verso la patria, e d'amore di conservare immune l'Ereño, e Camaldoli Maggiore, si addossò quell'incarico alle istanze dell' eccelso Popolo Fiorentino; devotamente vi prega, che se mai fosse incorso per disavventura in qualche censura, stante la guerra, alla quale assiste; e che perciò si fosse attirato l' irregolarità resti per vostro mezzo dalla benignità del Pontefice dispensato e assoluto. Egli però non uccise veruno, veruno ferì, nè in proprio, nè per mezzo d'altri con suo comando.” See Petri Delphini, *Epistole*, Lib. V., 99.

⁵³⁶ Machiavelli, *Frammenti Storici*, II, 149.

I conclude here that Nardi's patriotism and successful leadership of the Casentino peasants against professional condottieri inspired Machiavelli to propose a peasant militia as an alternative to Florence's traditional dependence on mercenary arms. Nardi's peasant army had already provided Machiavelli with the necessary blueprint for his future Florentine militia three years before he witnessed Borgia's Romagnol militia. Coincidentally or not, in a letter of December 1506, Machiavelli's friend Agostino Vespucci informs him that "Abbot Basilio, who has recently been made major-domo of our cardinal of Volterra, sends his regards to you and congratulates you on the new militia."⁵³⁷ This letter suggests that Nardi was familiar with Machiavelli's militia project, and perhaps that he had been approached by Machiavelli with questions about recruitment. Ultimately, the fact that Nardi was the chief of Cardinal Francesco Soderini's household confirms the close connection between Nardi and the militia project, as the cardinal was the chief proponent of Machiavelli's militia in the Florentine government.⁵³⁸

5.4. Machiavelli and Madonna of Imola's Romagnol militia

Military historians from the beginning of the 20th century have argued that Cesare Borgia's efforts in recruiting the Romagnol militia served Machiavelli as an inspiration and contemporary example of his later militia project.⁵³⁹ Indeed, in chapter seven of *The Prince*, among the many aspects of Borgia's good government in Romagna noted by Machiavelli, he considers none more important than his military policy. According to Machiavelli, while other political leaders in Italy

⁵³⁷ Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 151.

⁵³⁸ K. J. P. Lowe, *Church and Politics in Renaissance Italy: The Life and Career of Cardinal Francesco Soderini, 1453-1524* (Cambridge University Press, 1993), 238-239, n. 23.

⁵³⁹ While at Borgia's court in Romagna, Machiavelli allegedly witnessed the recruitment of the local villagers into the Romagnol militia and their training by the Spanish commander don Micheletto. This experience left an impression on Machiavelli and propelled his own ideas about the citizen militia, which he suggested to the Signoria upon his arrival from Borgia's camp. Among military historians, Cesare's originality has been stressed by M. Hobohm, *Machiavelli's Renaissance del Kriegchung* (Berlin, 1913), 182; H. Delbruck, *Gechichte der Kriegskunst* (Berlin, 1920), 22-23; Their work influenced historian Piero Pieri to describe Cesare Borgia as "vero principe precursore dello stato moderno." See Pieri, *Renaissance and Italian military history* (Florence, 1952), 601.

relied on mercenaries, Borgia established *una milizia di paese*, or a military force composed of his subjects.⁵⁴⁰ In historiography, Borgia's influence on Machiavelli's military thinking was largely emphasized by Gennaro Sasso.⁵⁴¹ Building on Sasso's work about Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia, Hörnqvist concluded that, even though Borgia was unable to bring his military and political project to completion, his uncompromising pursuit of a strong foundation based on "his own arms" made him in Machiavelli's eyes a model to be emulated.⁵⁴²

While Machiavelli acknowledged Borgia's efforts to recruit a Romagnol militia, Cesare's approach in this aspect was far from unique and unfamiliar to Machiavelli. As we have seen earlier in the text, the arming of peasants in the Casentino in 1498 followed the common practice in cases of foreign aggression. The Republic availed itself again of temporary troop levies during d'Alviano's invasion of 1505, imposing a *commando* on the subject population requiring one armed infantryman from every household.⁵⁴³ As for Borgia's militia, Larner has shown persuasively that the *Signori* who ruled over Romagna before Borgia were in the custom of raising both paid permanent forces and irregular levies from their subjects.⁵⁴⁴ Hence, Larner argues that the extravagant claims that have been made regarding Cesare's military establishment in Romagna are exaggerated, as Borgia did not establish anything new or extraordinary, but merely continued the established practice of enlisting native troops. Larner concludes that, from Machiavelli's writings alone, it is impossible to build up any comprehensive picture of Cesare as

⁵⁴⁰ Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, vii, 27; Larner, "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia," 253.

⁵⁴¹ Gennaro Sasso, "Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia, Don Micheletto e la questione della milizia," published in *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, 4 vols. (Milan and Naples: Ricciardi, 1987–97), II, 57–117; Sasso, *Machiavelli e Cesare Borgia: storia di un giudizio* (Edizioni dell'Ateneo: Rome, 1966).

⁵⁴² Hörnqvist, "Machiavelli's military project," 118.

⁵⁴³ Hörnqvist, "Machiavelli's military project," 119.

⁵⁴⁴ Larner, "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia," 255.

a ruler who based his authority upon a primarily Romagnol army. All we have in the sources are a few unsubstantiated hints that the duke was thinking along those lines.⁵⁴⁵

However, Larner fails to acknowledge another ruler from Romagna whose recruitment practices and military drills were witnessed by Machiavelli even before his encounter with Borgia. That ruler was Caterina Sforza, also known as Madonna of Imola, whom Machiavelli met in Forlì in July 1499. Before we return to that meeting and its importance for Machiavelli, it is necessary to recall that prior to his meeting with Caterina Sforza, Machiavelli was already fully versed in the political situation in Romagna and the history of Florence's alliance with her. Machiavelli's early dispatches during the war in the Casentino testify to this claim and invite historians to credit Madonna for exercising an influence on Machiavelli's thought that dates back to the year before their famous meeting. In the following text, we will see how Madonna's military practices, including the training and recruitment of the Romagnol militia, served as an important example for Machiavelli's later militia project.

On June 22, 1498, a few days after Machiavelli was hired as the second chancellor, Florence signed a *condotta* with Ottaviano Riario, Madonna's son. After the defeat at San Regolo in May 1498, Florence desperately needed military assistance to ward off the Venetians. Apart from hiring a new captain in Paolo Vitelli, as we have seen in chapter two, the Florentine government also asked for help from Duke Ludovico Sforza and his niece Caterina Sforza.⁵⁴⁶ Sending her son Ottaviano to the Pisan front was the first of many instances in which Madonna of Imola helped the Republic. According to contemporary sources, the main reason behind Madonna's affection for Florence was her husband, Giovanni de' Medici, known as Popolano, the

⁵⁴⁵ Larner, "Machiavelli and Cesare Borgia," 256.

⁵⁴⁶ Capponi, *Storia*, II, 236.

Florentine ambassador in Romagna and a cousin to the ousted Medici.⁵⁴⁷ However, even after his death in September 1498, the Madonna remained the most important Florentine ally in the face of d'Alviano's incursion into Casentino in September 1498.

As Machiavelli's career in the chancery started when the Ten was concluding the *condotta* with Ottaviano, he was most likely well instructed by his superiors about the importance Madonna had for Florence in the ongoing conflict with Venice and Pisa. After all, Ottaviano's *condotta* had been negotiated with her and not her son, as she was the official commander of Ottaviano's troops.⁵⁴⁸ At the time, the Countess was also known in military circles for selling weapons and gunpowder and, more importantly, for the Romagnol militia, whose recruitment and training she supervised. Even before Machiavelli witnessed firsthand the quality and training of Madonna's levied troops in July 1499, references to her troops in the dispatches were plentiful. For example, in a letter dated September 27, 1498, to Andrea Pazzi, the Florentine commissioner in Romagna, Machiavelli mentions that 2,000 ducats were sent to Madonna for her troops.⁵⁴⁹ Then, he concludes the message with the following request: "E portrait referire da nostra parte a cotesta Illustrissima Madonna che de' provvedimenti soprascritti non ne mancherà un iota, e ringraziare sua Eccellentia di quello ha fatto e fa e ordina fare in

⁵⁴⁷ "In the year 1498 our Madonna contracted an alliance with the Florentines by means of the Magnificent Giovanni de Medici, with whom our lady the countess was so infatuated that she would hear of no other power...everyone thought of him as a mere ambassador, and as such he has, for many months, sojourned in the citadel: since then, our Illustrious Madonna has had a chamber nobly painted and adorned near to her own apartment and there has lodged the Magnificent Giovanni." See Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 222.

⁵⁴⁸ We mentioned earlier in the text that Ottaviano's look, behaviour, and skills were at odds with what was required from a military commander at that time. Accustomed to excess in food, drink, and parties, Ottaviano was under strict supervision of his omnipotent mother who saw a career in soldiering as salvation for her son's vices. For this reason, the company's commander was formally Ottaviano, while Caterina was in charge of the training and discipline. See Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 229.

⁵⁴⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 73.

beneficio di questa Repubblica; e come noi li restiamo in modo obbligati, che a tali obblighi non si conosca via di alcuna conveniente recompensazione.”⁵⁵⁰

Machiavelli's dispatches testify to Florence's cynical politics towards Madonna. After the *condotta* with Ottaviano was concluded, Venice threatened to hand over Caterina Sforza's state to Antonio Ordelauffi if she did not stop levying soldiers to support Florence.⁵⁵¹ As further intimidation, the Venetians shifted their troops from Ravenna to Forlì. Fearing Venice and distraught over the death of her husband in September 1498, Madonna begged Florence for help to no avail.⁵⁵² However, shortly after the Venetian mercenaries invaded Casentino, the Florentine government turned to Madonna for assistance. She responded immediately, raising 2,000 local Romagnol militia without requiring advance payment from Florence. Thus, years before Machiavelli wrote about Borgia's Romagnol militia, he knew that Caterina Sforza had levied Romagnol troops to help Florence. While we can only speculate as to why Machiavelli chooses not to mention this in *The Prince*, it may be that he hesitated to cast a woman in the role of a model military figure for the Medici. On the contrary, Cesare Borgia, a friend and ally of the Medici, was a perfect choice that fit the narrative.

Modern scholarship has overlooked Madonna's recruitment practices in Romagna and thus failed to recognize the similarities between Caterina's and Machiavelli's militia recruitment procedures. Although my main source, Pasolini, wrote Caterina's biography more than a century ago, he used Madonna's contemporary chroniclers as his main sources.⁵⁵³ For example, under Madonna's system, Pasolini reports that two citizens were sent into the countryside as deputies

⁵⁵⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 73.

⁵⁵¹ Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 235.

⁵⁵² Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 237.

⁵⁵³ Leone Cobelli, *Cronache Forlivesi* (Bologna: Regia tipografia, 1874); Fabio Oliva, *Vita di Caterina Sforza signora di Forlì* (Casali, 1821).

to make a census of all able-bodied men and to instruct them to present themselves at the fort at a certain time.⁵⁵⁴ In his *Provisione della Ordinanza*, Machiavelli too instructs constables in each *podesteria* to gather all men who can fight into one particular place and to record in their master rolls the names and descriptions of all recruits.⁵⁵⁵ Apart from levying one man from each household, Machiavelli borrowed from the Madonna some recruitment and training practices. For example, according to contemporary sources, when the Romagnol peasant militiamen sought to elude military training and the prospect of dying in a war, they could expect a fine.

According to Pasolini, Madonna would instruct the standard bearers, entrusted with the recruitment, to fine those conscripts who dare to escape the recruitment. She would order her deputies to go to the houses of all those who had not appeared and to order them to present themselves at a stated hour at the fort under penalty of the gallows.”⁵⁵⁶ Pasolini concludes that the conscripts were levied and exercised “with so much zeal that artisans and peasants, tired to death of drilling and standing in the sun, were loud in recriminations against Ridolfi and Madonna.”⁵⁵⁷ As we will see in the following text, Machiavelli also introduced harsh measures in his *Cagione* - heavy fines or blows - for any peasants who failed to appear for recruitment and training.⁵⁵⁸ Is the similarity in the methods employed by Madonna and Machiavelli against their “disobedient” recruits only a coincidence?

⁵⁵⁴ Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 228.

⁵⁵⁵ “Abbino detti uffiziali piena autorità e potestà di potere collocare, nelle terre e luoghi del contado e distretto di Firenze, bandiere, e sotto qualle scrivere uomini per militare a piedi qualunque a loro parrà.” See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 481.

⁵⁵⁶ Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 228.

⁵⁵⁷ Pasolini remarks that harsh recruitment practices did not “move Madonna” because the times demanded many soldiers to be ready and armed at any cost. For instance, lances and breastplates were given to those who had none, and their price taken off the pay. See Pasolini, *Caterina Sforza*, 238.

⁵⁵⁸ “Qualunque delli scritti come di sopra non comparirà alle mostre ordinate nel modo soprascritto, si intenda, ogni volta che sarà trovato assente senza legittima cagione, condannato in soldi 20.” See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 490.

Some may object that Machiavelli was in Florence when Madonna drilled her troops and that he could not have been aware of her recruiting and training practices. While this may be true for the year 1498, Machiavelli spent two weeks in Romagna in July 1499 on a mission to the Sforza court in Forlì. Apart from the new *condotta* for Ottaviano Riario, one of the subjects of negotiations was the hiring of troops from the Madonna for the imminent siege of Pisa. It is clear from Machiavelli's letter to the Signoria of July 18, 1499, that the troops in question are not mercenaries, but soldiers Madonna refers to as "her subjects." Machiavelli explains: "Circa e' fanti, la sua Eccellenzia mi disse essere contenta dare licenzia a' suoi omini che venghino a' servigi di vostre Signorie, ma non sarebbe possibile a lei farli muovere senza danari; però vostre Signorie mandino da posserli levare, che lei s'ingegnerà di farre arruolare omini scelti, bene armati e fedeli, e espedirli presto. Però se vostre Signorie sono in necessità di fanterie, mandino subito 500 ducati per possere dare un ducato per uno."⁵⁵⁹

Machiavelli's further communication with the Signoria on this subject, reveals more details about the troops Madonna was offering:

E suto a me un secretario di Madonna e referitomi per parte di sua Signoria, come sua Eccellenzia ha in su el suo dominio da fare di dua ragioni fanti: l'una sono 500 che lei ne ha armati, per averli ne' suoi bisogni, de quali non manderebbe a vostre Signorie se non dessi loro una intera paga per un mese, e vuogli pagare elle con obbligo di satisfare per qualunque non servissi el tempo d'un mese, e vuole dare per uomo lire 18; si che, volendo vostre Signorie di questi, arebbono a mandare 1500 ducati per 500 fanti, ma promettergli bene armati, e buona gente, e subito. D'una altra ragione fanti ha, che sono usi ad ire al soldo, ma non sono scritti da lei, de' quali sua Signoria vi lascerà trarre come vi pare e con quelli pagamenti fussi d'accordo con loro.⁵⁶⁰

This letter confirms that Caterina Sforza, like Cesare Borgia after her, employed both troops that "she enrolled," and mercenary troops that anyone could hire for money. However, while Cesare Borgia relied predominantly on his mercenaries and used Romagnol militia only as a supplementary army in his absence from Romagna, Madonna's main army consisted of the

⁵⁵⁹ *Legazioni*, I, 284.

⁵⁶⁰ *Legazioni*, I, 285-286.

subjects she hired, trained, and armed, not the mercenaries. They were loyal to her alone and could serve other lords only with her approval.

Ultimately, to assure the Signoria that Madonna and her secretary did not exaggerate the quality of Romagnol troops, Machiavelli writes the following: “Credo che le Signorie vostre aranno mutato pensiero circa e’ fanti volevano trarre da questa Madonna. Ma quando vostre Signorie ancora ne avessino di bisogno, voi aresti buon fanti fedeli e bene ad ordine e espediti presto, ma bisogna mandare danari per la paga intera d’un mese.”⁵⁶¹ This text confirms that Machiavelli took some time to observe Madonna’s troops and their training before recommending those units to his superiors. There are two important conclusions we can draw here. First, concerning the question of *armi proprie*, Caterina Sforza was a more suitable model than Borgia for the prince who relies on “his own arms,” as described in *The Prince*. She had been recruiting and drilling Romagnol troops for longer than Borgia, and she relied more heavily on them (though, for the reasons discussed above, this is not acknowledged in *The Prince*). Second, while Machiavelli mainly *heard* from Borgia about his plan to recruit Romagnol militia, his experience with Madonna’s troops was more immediate as he could actually observe them. With this in mind, there is no doubt that Madonna’s well-established practice of recruiting and training local militia as a parallel force to her mercenary soldiers exercised some influence on Machiavelli’s plan to create a Florentine militia.

5.5. A call for *armi proprie*: Machiavelli’s *Parole da dirle sopra danaio*

In the text above we have seen that Machiavelli’s positive experiences with the local militia from Casentino and Romagna in 1498 and 1499 played an important part in shaping his ideas about the Florentine militia. His experience at Borgia’s court in 1502 only strengthened

⁵⁶¹ *Legazioni*, I, 292.

these views. However, the long period of instability, political crisis, and insecurity that marked Machiavelli's first few years in the chancery did not furnish a favorable atmosphere for the militia project. Only after the quelling of the rebellion of Arezzo and the election of the *gonfaloniere a vita* in September 1502, was the Florentine government stable enough to focus on the following priorities: the recovery of Pisa; the solution to the financial crisis; and a strong response to Borgia's external menace.⁵⁶²

In March 1503, when the Republic was planning a new campaign against Pisa, Machiavelli wrote a draft for the speech that he called *Parole da dirle sopra la provisione del danaio*.⁵⁶³ The speech itself represents a political discourse drafted by Machiavelli for an unknown member of the Florentine *Consulte* held on March 28, 1503, at which more than 300 citizens participated.⁵⁶⁴ The speech was intended to convince the members of the *Consulte* to raise the funds necessary to strengthen Florence's military power and secure its independence. Machiavelli begins this document by arguing that all regimes use a combination of force and wisdom to defend themselves, as only one of these is not enough. He claims that "nervo di tutte le signorie" can be found in the combination of force and prudence, but that wisdom comes from the idea that to face "la variatione della fortuna" it is necessary to get armed.⁵⁶⁵ *Parole* argues strongly against the practice of raising money to hire foreign troops, that is to say, French auxiliary units, which is not wise from Machiavelli's point of view: "E se voi rispondessi: Che ci bisogna forze? Noi siamo in protezione del Re!...vi si respondi tale opinione non potere essere

⁵⁶² Butters, "Piero Soderini and the Golden Age," 56-8.

⁵⁶³ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 446-452.

⁵⁶⁴ Historians are not absolutely sure for whom the speech was written. As this document is presented as an oration destined to the Great Council, Marchand argues that the draft was read by someone who had power, maybe Soderini himself. See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 443-444.

⁵⁶⁵ According to Machiavelli, the whole reasoning is based on reality: "E di nuovo vi replico che, senza forze, la città non si mantengono, ma vengono al fine loro. El fine è o per desolazione o per servitù: voi sete stati presso, questo anno, a l'uno e l'altro, e vi ritornerete se non mutate sentenza." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 447.

più temeraria perché ne fu mai né signore né repubblica savia che volessi tenere lo stato suo a discrezione d'altri o che, tenendolo, gliene paressi aver sicuro.”⁵⁶⁶ Indeed, Florence hired French troops on two occasions, in 1500 and 1502. The Signoria had paid 50,000 florins for their services, seriously undermining their finances. As one of the main goals of Soderini's government was to heal the public finances, expensive French mercenaries had to be replaced with less costly domestic troops.

As we have seen in chapter four, the powerful visual propaganda sponsored by the state from 1503 contributed to the martial cultural atmosphere fostered by Soderini's government in its drive to conquer Pisa. In such an atmosphere, where the images of republican soldiers and ancient heroes dominated public space, there was no place for the French foreign troops to whom Florence owed its security. For as long as it fell to foreigners to fight Florence's wars, the warlike statue of *David* with his sling and the murals celebrating Florentine victories seemed cynical and without justification. It is not surprising, then, that Machiavelli's official advocacy for Florence's "own arms" started not by arguing directly for the citizen militia, but first for the establishment of a Florentine state that would minimize, if not eliminate entirely, its reliance on French arms at the expense of domestic troops. Machiavelli argues, further, that the only way to earn respect from foreign kings is through a strong army, "perché fra gli uomini privati, le leggi, le scritte, e' patti fanno osservare la fede, e fra e' signori la fanno solo osservare l'armi."⁵⁶⁷

For Machiavelli, a strong army would not only impress foreign lords but would also make Florentine subjects more loyal to the regime that protected them.⁵⁶⁸ For Machiavelli, the

⁵⁶⁶ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 448.

⁵⁶⁷ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 448.

⁵⁶⁸ "...voi vi troverrete disarmati, vedrete e' sudditi vostri senza fede, e ne avete, pochi mesi sono, fatto la esperienza...perché gli uomini non possono e non debbono essere fedeli servi di quello signore, da el quale e' non possono essere ne difesi ne corretti." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 449.

question of the army is inseparable from the loyalty of the people and their willingness to believe in the authority under which they are subjected. They would not have to wait for a foreign lord to come to their rescue because “non sono quelli medesimi tempi; né sempre si può metter mano in su la spada d’altri: e però è bene averla a lato e cigneserla quando el nimico è discosto...”⁵⁶⁹

With this argument, Machiavelli appeals to his fellow citizens to stop relying on mercenaries (“no metter mano in su la spada d’altri”) and use their “own arms” (“averele la spada a lato”).⁵⁷⁰ Ultimately, Machiavelli warns his fellow citizens that if they do not change their ways they will regret it dearly: “voi piangerete ancora e senza frutto, se non vi mutate di opinione: perché io vi dico che la fortuna non muta parere dove non si muta modo di procedere, ne e’ cieli vogliono o possono sostenere una cosa che voglia ruinare ad ogni modo.”⁵⁷¹ It is thus clear that *Parole* strongly endorses some sort of “*armae propriae*” in place of mercenary troops. Although the word *ordinanza* does not appear in the *Parole*, the dispatches written shortly thereafter point to the recruitment and service of local troops.

That Machiavelli’s thoughts expressed in the *Parole* resonate in his official writings, confirms the dispatch he sent around the same time. For the new Pisan campaign that started in May 1503, Machiavelli urged vicars and captains in the dominion to recruit troops for *guasto*

⁵⁶⁹ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 450; That Machiavelli was right in his observations, shows a dispatch he sent a month later in which tells the commissioner not to rely on the French king’s support against Borgia as he is too busy with other matters. See *Legazioni*, III, 70.

⁵⁷⁰ To what extent Machiavelli’s argument was prophetic, shows an example from the *Consulta* held on January 10, 1504, where some Florentine citizens lamented the political situation in which they found themselves with an indifferent French king. According to Giovanbattista Ridolfi, the Florentines were on their own: “per il disordine duo nel Regno, è impotente ad potere aiutare; et narra i modi de’ Vinitiani dalla parte di Romagna, et di Pisa, et dalla banda verso Arezzo, et dalli Spagnuoli, et non si puo sperare se non in noi medesimi.” See Fachard, *Consulte e Pratiche*, II, 988.

⁵⁷¹ To create a strong emotional connection with the audience, Machiavelli addressed them with “molti di voi,” using Constantinople and Byzantine tragedy to make his point. He uses the past in order to evaluate and judge the present and allegory as a literary device: Constantinople was Florence and the Turk was Cesare Borgia. See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 452.

campaign in the Pisan *contado*.⁵⁷² Machiavelli's letter of May 17, 1503, confirms that Giacomini can count on 2,300 domestic infantry plus *condottieri* who were joining. Of these *condottieri*, only 50 were French lances, procured mainly to "give more reputation to Florence's forces."⁵⁷³ This suggests that the message of *Parole* had been heard, and the Florentine government had reduced its reliance on mercenary forces. In a letter from July 28, 1503, Machiavelli is more specific about the forces from the *contado* he would like to see recruited to bolster the main troops. There, he instructs the vicar of Pieve Santo Stefano, the captain of Valle di Bagno, the captain of Marradi, and the vicars of Firenzuola, Castrocaro, and Modigliani to make a list of all available men per house, the most apt at holding weapons, that must be ready to come when the Ten calls them."⁵⁷⁴ While this army was not near the scale of the Florentine *ordinanza* of 1506, the idea was there.

It can be concluded here that although *Parole* does not argue explicitly for the creation of a Florentine militia, it takes a significant step in that direction, as the government appeared to act on its recommendations during the Pisan campaign of 1503. The *Parole* also captures Machiavelli's thinking at the time in regard to the future military project. Sasso is thus right to call *Parole* the most important of Machiavelli's writings in the early chancery years, as his

⁵⁷² In a letter to Niccolò Guicciardini, the vicar of Pescia and Volterra, on May 5, 1503, Machiavelli writes the following: "Volendo dare el guasto a' Pisani come ti è noto e avendo bisogno di gran quantità di marraioli, ci è parso aggravare tutto cotesto vicariato di 200 marraioli e' quali tu ordinerai subito che si faccino." See *Legazioni*, III, 56; On May 16, 1503, a similar letter was sent to the commissioners Giacomini and Tosinchi: "Avendo ragunato per tutto di 20 di questo costi tante genti quante sapete, pensare di valersene e cominciare a dannificare e' Pisani e dare el guasto da cotesta parte d'Arno donde voi sete." See *Legazioni*, III, 76.

⁵⁷³ *Legazioni*, III, 77.

⁵⁷⁴ "Vogliamo ancora, mandato che arai detto bando, facci diligente descrizione per tutto el tuo dominio detto di uno uomo per casa, el più atto a portare arme che vi sia, descrivendo ciascuno per peli e segni e per nome e soprannome..." See *Legazioni*, III, 195; According to historian Anna Maria Cabrini, the *Parole* thus represent a political and pragmatic document to support the approval of militia, not to discuss its merits or benefits as the later *Cagione dell'Ordinanza*. For more, see Anna Maria Cabrini, "Le forze mescolate con la prudenza," in *Machiavelli senza i Medici*, a cura di J. J. Marchand (Rome: Salerno Editrice, 2006), 334.

various musings from dispatches are for the first time articulated as a single body of thought.⁵⁷⁵

Amongst the principles Machiavelli defended in this document are the pedagogical value of history, the fixedness of human nature, and the value of strong measures against other states. As these themes stand as the foundations of Machiavelli's military thought, *Parole* deserves further attention in the historiography of his militia.

5.6. *Il Decennale Primo*

The main goal of Machiavelli's first historical work was to continue from where he had left off with his *Parole*. That meant confronting the problem of Florence's military weakness and proposing a solution to it.⁵⁷⁶ Niccola Bonazzi supports this view, arguing that both *Parole* and *Decennale* belong to the same historical context, and that both reveal Machiavelli's obsession with the idea of a citizen militia.⁵⁷⁷ Although in *Decennale* Machiavelli exposes Florence's weaknesses in a satirical mood, in contrast to the more serious and dramatic tone of *Parole*, the central arguments in both works are the same. For example, one of the threads that connects both works is the open critique of the French in general and specifically of Florence's delusional faith in their trustworthiness. In verse 18 of the *Decennale*, Machiavelli characterizes the "Galli" (the French) as "genti barbariche"; elsewhere, he claims that they use "modi e termini disonesti." (v.73-74).⁵⁷⁸ From there, Machiavelli goes on to criticize his own city for its perverse loyalty to the French, for which Florence receives no apparent benefits, but thousands of troubles: "e per esser di Francia buon figlioli, non vi curasti, in seguitar sua stella, sostener mille affanni e mille

⁵⁷⁵ Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 58.

⁵⁷⁶ According to Cabrini, *il Decennale Primo* represents Machiavelli's political project of urging the Florentines to adopt their own militia. See A. M. Cabrini, "Intorno al primo Decennale", in *Rinascimento XXXIII* (1993): 75; G. Inglese, "Contributo al testo critico dei "Decennali" di Machiavelli," *Annali dell'istituto Italiano per gli Studi Storici*, VIII (1983-84): 117.

⁵⁷⁷ Nicola Bonazzi, "La poesia Della Storia; Sul Decennale Primo," in *Machiavelli Senza i Medici*, 322.

⁵⁷⁸ Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 234 and 236.

duoli...voi vi posavi qui col becco aperto per attender di Francia un che venisse a portarvi la manna nel deserto.”⁵⁷⁹ From the further examples of French dishonesty towards Florence detailed in *Decennale*, Machiavelli’s intense opposition to Florentine reliance on their military support could not be clearer.⁵⁸⁰ Against this backdrop, an independent Florentine militia appears as an attractive solution to Florence’s unfortunate military alliance with the French.

Machiavelli’s *Decennale* is no less critical of the current state of Florence’s military power. In verses 499-504 of the poem, Machiavelli explains the Arno project as a result of Florence’s inability to subdue Pisa militarily: “...e perché non temen le vostre spade, voi vi sforzasti con vari disegni rivolger Arno per diverse strade.”⁵⁸¹ Likewise, Florence’s reaction to the truce between Spain and France in southern Italy is described as full of fear and sorrow because it makes the conquest of Pisa appear even more distant: “Marco pien di paura e pien di sete fra la pace e la guerra tutto pende; e voi di Pisa troppa voglia avete (v.535-537).”⁵⁸² Ultimately, as in *Parole*, the poem ends with a call for Florence to arm itself: “ma sarebbe il cammin facil e corto se voi el tempio riaprissi a Marte.” (v.549-550).⁵⁸³ Although Machiavelli does not use the word *ordinanza*, the summons to “open again the Temple of Mars” strongly implies the revival of the dormant institution of the Florentine militia. Given Florence’s current military weakness, it seems that only a radical remedy will serve. Thus, Machiavelli concludes the poem by inviting his fellow citizens to arm the city.

⁵⁷⁹ “e per esser di Francia buon figliuoli, non vi curasti, in seguitar sua stella, sostener mille affanni e mille duoli. E mentre che nel Regno si martella fra Marco e Francia con evento incerto finch’e’ Franzesi affamorno in Atella, voi vi posavi qui col becco aperto per attender di Francia un che venisse a portarvi la manna nel deserto.” See Bertelli, *Machiavelli e la politica estera*, 33; Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 236-238.

⁵⁸⁰ “Sol Beumonte vi rende Livorno; ma li altri, traditori al ciel ribelli, di tutte l’altre terre vi privorno, e al vostro Leon trassor de’ velli” (v.121-123); “Ne voi di colpa rimanesti netti, però che ‘l Gallo ricoprir volea la sua vergogna con gli altrui difetti.” (v.283-285). See Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 244-245.

⁵⁸¹ Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 253.

⁵⁸² Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 254.

⁵⁸³ “ma sarebbe il cammin facil e corto, se voi el tempio riaprissi a Marte.” See Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 254; Machiavelli, *Opere*, 940–50.

The poem was well received. Machiavelli sent a copy to Florence's captain-general, Ercole Bentivoglio, who warmly praised its elegance and concision.⁵⁸⁴ However, although it was addressed to the public and represented formally as history, in reality, Machiavelli's poem was carrying a clear political message. The bulk of it was decrying the disasters that had been visited upon Florence due to her dependence on foreign arms and *condottieri*. The experience of the past decade offered proof that the alliance with the French and reliance on their military support would end in nothing but disillusionment. For Machiavelli, the only way to secure the safety of the state was through unity and a domestic militia. To achieve this goal, Machiavelli had ventured the poem as a powerful vehicle for expressing the errors and weaknesses of Italian princes and states, the theme of his major works. Thus, *il Decennale Primo* deserves to be acknowledged as an important link between Machiavelli's early military ideas and his later major works. Together with his *Parole*, Machiavelli scorned the Florentines for their servility towards the French, on whose military support they depended, and argued for the use of *armi proprie*. Although they do not go so far as to call for a citizen militia per se, the emphasis on the *armi proprie* against *forestieri* in these works is an undeniable step towards the Florentine ordinance of 1506.⁵⁸⁵

5.7. Towards the Florentine *ordinanza*

Apart from his *Parole* and *Decennale Primo*, Machiavelli's letters to Cardinal Soderini also reveal the Florentine secretary's campaign for the peasant militia. According to Ridolfi,

⁵⁸⁴ "Notable man, very dear friend. A few days ago, I received your poem, a brief history of the last ten years. Seeing with how much elegance you have discussed in it all the things that have occurred in that time, I cannot help but admire and praise profoundly what you have accomplished." See Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 118.

⁵⁸⁵ As we mentioned earlier in chapter one, in contrast to chapter xii of *The Prince*, Machiavelli's early political writings do not explicitly advise against the use of mercenary soldiers. Moreover, the Florentine republic continued to hire petty *condottieri* in the war against Pisa despite creating the militia in 1506. Thus, the term *forestieri* here refers to foreign mercenaries, mainly French.

Machiavelli had discussed this matter with Cardinal Soderini during his mission in Rome (October 27-December 18, 1503), as can be confirmed by Soderini's follow-up letter of January 27, 1504. In this letter, the cardinal replied to Machiavelli that "il disegno che ce aveti mandato, assai ce piace."⁵⁸⁶ This confirms that Machiavelli's militia project was not impossible, but Soderini needed more time to convince powerful *ottimati* of its benefits. The Florentine *ordinanza* was first documented in Machiavelli's correspondence in a letter from Francesco Soderini dated 29 May 1504.⁵⁸⁷ Here, the cardinal refers to Machiavelli's proposal for a Florentine military ordinance put forth earlier in a lost letter from Machiavelli of May 24, 1504. In his reply, Cardinal Soderini generally approved the idea, which he describes as necessary, but he also advised Machiavelli that the ground offered is not perfect. Despite this initial objection, the Cardinal encouraged Machiavelli not to give up, as there might be another more favorable day for it.⁵⁸⁸

However, between the writing of *Parole da dirle* in March 1503, and late October 1504, when he finished his poem *il Decennale Primo*, Machiavelli spent only a few months in Florence, during which he was fully occupied with the Pisan campaign of 1503 and the Arno project of the summer and fall of 1504. While Machiavelli's frequent absence from Florence on various diplomatic missions during this period had its greatest effect on his family, it also diverted his energies from the campaign for *armae proprie*. Thus, it is not surprising that in the above-mentioned period, the theme of a peasant militia is recorded only in a pair of letters he exchanged on this subject with Francesco Soderini, the *gonfalonier*'s brother. Only after a period

⁵⁸⁶ Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 118-119, and 128; Machiavelli, *Lettere*, lett.86, 187.

⁵⁸⁷ Hörnqvist, "Perché non si usa allegare," 152.

⁵⁸⁸ "La scusa de l'ordinanza non è bona in re tam necessaria et salubri, né si può' sospettare de vi, quæ non paretur ad commodum privatum sed publicum: Non restate, ché forse un dí serà data la gloria, che non se dà l'altro." See Cfr. Francesco Soderini, *Lettera al Machiavelli*, da Roma il 29 maggio 1504, in Niccolò Machiavelli, *Epistolario*, A cura di Sergio Bertelli, (Milan: Salerno Ed., 1969), 102; Hörnqvist, "Perché non si usa allegare," 152.

in which he was deeply involved in the Arno project, was Machiavelli able to renew his call for a new militia ordinance. In a letter to Francesco Soderini which has been lost, but to which we have the cardinal's reply of October 26, 1504, the Cardinal reveals that the true reason for his hesitancy to support Machiavelli's plan was his fear that influential circles in Florence would interpret the project as an attempt by his brother, the *gonfaloniere*, to seize tyrannical power.⁵⁸⁹

Based on Cardinal Soderini's response, it appears that Machiavelli's plan for the Florentine militia needed backing from citizens who held enough influence to turn the tide in his favor. The obvious candidate was Machiavelli's friend and superior, Gonfaloniere Soderini. But Soderini's cautious nature and his fear of the growing opposition to his regime dissuaded him from advancing Machiavelli's initiative. Machiavelli, nevertheless, praised his leadership in the first *Decennale*, albeit in a veiled manner.⁵⁹⁰ It can hardly be a coincidence that on November 9, 1504, only two weeks after Cardinal Soderini's letter, Machiavelli dedicated his *Decennale Primo* to Alamanno Salviati, an influential member of the *Dieci* and the chief of the opposition party against the *gonfaloniere*.⁵⁹¹ In light of the growing rift between Salviati and Piero Soderini in 1504, the first *Decennale* can also be seen as a plea to Salviati (and other potential malcontents) to preserve the unity of the regime and to support the militia. To win Salviati's support for the militia project, Machiavelli celebrated him in the poem for having "maintained

⁵⁸⁹ According to Soderini, "Circa el deletto (cioè il reclutamento dei soldati per l'Ordinanza), siamo nella medesima opinione, ma dubitiamo che chi dite essersi raffredo non lo habi fatto per levare occasione a chi vuol dire e fare male e interorpretare che il ben pubblico sia ben privato." See Machiavelli, *Lettere*, 200.

⁵⁹⁰ Instead of using his name, Machiavelli referred to Soderini as "solid rock or "soda petra" on which the Florentines could build their peace. He also saw him as the "skillful steersman" of the Florentine ship (state) in whom the citizens can have confidence: "Pur si confida nel nocchier accorto." (v.547-549). There is little doubt that these verses do not express a declaration of loyalty to Soderini and the wish for the creation of the militia. See Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 248.

⁵⁹¹ "Leggete, Alamanno, poi che voi lo desiderate, le fatiche di Italia di dieci anni e la mia di quindici di..." See Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 248; Machiavelli lamented that he had only fifteen days in 1504 to compose 550 verses of the poem. Also, the date Machiavelli chose to share his poem is not a coincidence. November 9th is the date Pisa proclaimed independence from Florence in 1494, exactly 10 years before Machiavelli's dedication to Salviati.

the liberty of one of Italy's foremost members," and for remedying three of Florence's "four mortal wounds:" that is, the rebellions of Pistoia, Arezzo, and Valdichiana; the fourth wound, Pisa, remained open.⁵⁹² Despite the praise, Machiavelli failed to win over Salviati.⁵⁹³ While this fact alone threatened to postpone the militia project indefinitely, the new siege of Pisa changed the tides in Machiavelli's favor.

5.8. The Siege of Pisa of 1505

Despite Machiavelli's subtle advocacy for *armae proprie* in his *Parole da dirle* and *Decennale Primo*, the Florentine *ottimati* were still reluctant to support the project. The principal objections were two: first, the fear that Gonfaloniere Soderini could use the militia as a private army against his political opponents.⁵⁹⁴ Memories of the autocratic rule of the Medici were still fresh amongst Florentine citizens; second, the negative experience of the Ciompi revolt more than a century earlier, which caused the Florentine ruling class to be very cautious in granting rights and privileges to the lower classes. The arming of thousands of peasants seemed a risky idea for the many *ottimati* who had properties in the countryside. However, the collective dissatisfaction with the mercenary units that existed amongst the Florentine citizens after the failed siege of Pisa in September 1505, softened the opposition and paved the way for Machiavelli's militia project to proceed.⁵⁹⁵

⁵⁹² "E perché voi col mantenere la libertà di un de' suoi primi membri," and "La quarta piaga non posse far sana di questo corpo, perche nel guarillo s'oppose 'il tempo a sì felice mana." See Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, 233 and 248 (v.370-372).

⁵⁹³ Agostino Vespucci published *Decennale* in February 1506 when the militia recruitment had already started. Machiavelli withdrew the dedicatory letter to Salviati and readdressed it to the Florentine people instead.

⁵⁹⁴ According to Guicciardini, one group believed that the gonfalonier would one day use these men to suppress liberty or get rid of his enemies among the citizens. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 258.

⁵⁹⁵ The terrible performance of the mercenary troops in the siege of Pisa of 1505, convinced the majority of *ottimati* that there should be another solution to the apparent issues with mercenaries. According to Cerretani, "questo assedio pisano fu tanto molesto che si pensò a nuovi modi di soldare, maxime perché s'era visto nel soldare fanti forestieri quanto inghanno et giunterie erano ogni dì fatte..." See Cerretani, *Storia*, 343; Similar argument can be found in the *Consulte* for September 13, 1505, where Francesco Gualteroti argued that "non offendeva la quantità de' fanti ma la qualità loro, la quale non era per migliorare con altri fanti." See Fachard, *Consulte*, II, 60.

In the previous chapter, we have seen that the Florentine government's attempt to use science and technology in the Arno project, and powerful visual propaganda through the works of Michelangelo and Leonardo, did not bring the results they desired in the war against Pisa. Once again, in 1505, Machiavelli and his government had to rethink from the beginning their strategy for a new Pisan campaign. However, the first half of the year was anything but promising for Florence. According to contemporary accounts, it was a year of great famine both in Florence and its *contado*.⁵⁹⁶ Apart from famine, the Florentine army sustained an embarrassing defeat by a numerically inferior Pisan force in March 1505.⁵⁹⁷ Florence's military reputation had declined to the point where even Machiavelli's diplomatic skills were not enough to convince the *condottiere* Giampaolo Baglioni or the Marquis of Mantua to serve the city as military captains for the coming season.⁵⁹⁸ Worst of all, while still without a captain, Florence had to brace for Bartolomeo d'Alviano's invasion of Tuscan territory.⁵⁹⁹

Sponsored by Venice and the Medici in Rome, d'Alviano planned to support Pisa via Maremma and use it as a base for further attacks on Florence. While his forces were still approaching Tuscany, the Pisans took the initiative, making several incursions into Florentine territory and taking livestock from as close as Ponte a Cappiano, just several miles west of

⁵⁹⁶ Cerretani, *Storia*, 335; *Ricordanze di Bartolomeo Masi: calderaio fiorentino, dal 1478 al 1526*; per la prima volta pubblicate da Gius. Odoardo Corazzini (Florence: Sansoni, 1906); Vaglianti, *Storia*, 197-198.

⁵⁹⁷ Vaglianti, *Storia*, 196.

⁵⁹⁸ In April 1505, *condottiero* Giampaolo Baglioni refused to serve Florence for the coming season. He was most likely bribed by Bartolomeo d'Alviano, who intended to invade the Florentine dominion that summer. The *Dieci* was informed of Baglioni's decision in a letter from Machiavelli sent on April 11, 1505. See *Legazioni*, IV, 414-422; In May 1505, Marquis of Mantua also refused to serve Florence as their captain because allegedly the king of France had not ratified his *condotta* with the city. As a result, Florence's military strength was significantly weakened. See *Legazioni*, IV, 446-451; In the same month, Machiavelli was sent to Siena to negotiate a deal with Pandolfo Petrucci who offered help against Pisa in return for the fortress of Montepulciano. See Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 128; Tommasini, *La Vita*, 317; Bonaccorsi, *Diario*, 301-302; *Legazioni*, IV, 544-551.

⁵⁹⁹ Spanish general Consalvo de Cordoba was against Alviano's incursion into Tuscany and thus refused to help him. Machiavelli's *Decennale secondo* reflects the atmosphere in Florence at the time. See Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, 950.

Empoli.⁶⁰⁰ As a union between d'Alviano and the Pisans would have had catastrophic consequences for the security of the Republic, it needed to be prevented at any cost.

Machiavelli's main task during the invasion was to coordinate the cooperation between the administrative authority, such as the commissioners Giacomini in Cascina, Carnesecchi in the Maremma, and Zanobi Ridolfi in Livorno, and the mercenary troops led by Ercole Bentivoglio. However, in those tense moments, Machiavelli also acted as a war strategist and motivator of the troops and the commissioners in the field. On the day before the battle, Machiavelli sagely instructed Captain Giacomini to attack d'Alviano first.⁶⁰¹ On August 17, 1505, the Florentine commanders Ercole Bentivoglio and Giacomini defeated d'Alviano near San Vincenzo in Tuscany. The success of the Florentines in their campaign against the invaders was a victory for the survival of Florence itself, and probably the most significant military achievement of the Second Republic.⁶⁰²

However, the joy over d'Alviano's defeat did not last long. After the victory at San Vincenzo, Gonfaloniere Soderini, inspired by excessive enthusiasm and the desire to solve the Pisan problem once and for all, insisted on another assault on Pisa. Despite resistance from the members of *Pratiche strette*, Soderini called on the *Pratiche large* to decide whether to proceed with a direct assault on Pisa. On August 21, 1505, Soderini secured a vote in the Great Council in favor of the enterprise.⁶⁰³ One of the staunch supporters of immediate action against Pisa was

⁶⁰⁰ Vaglianti, *Storia*, 199; Parenti, *Storia*, III, 199.

⁶⁰¹ "Nondimanco, con tutta questa opinione, vi significheremo lo animo nostro: quale è che noi desideriamo assai che Bartolomeo d'Alviano non passi per a Pisa, per fuggire tutte quelle molestie che ci potrebbe fare essendo congiunto con Pisani." See *Legazioni*, V, 88-89.

⁶⁰² Quickly following the victory, on August 19, 1505, the spoils of d'Alviano's army were brought to the Palazzo della Signoria and then displayed in the hall of the Great Council. The chief among these spoils of war was d'Alviano's helmet decorated with his heraldic crest. It was carried in triumph into the Sala almost as proof of the validity of the Great Council's vote to finance the campaign, following the prodding of Piero Soderini. See Parenti, *Storia*, III, 200.

⁶⁰³ Many prominent *ottimati*, including the historian Guicciardini, expressed caution and reservation about the immediate attack on Pisa. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 278-279.

Machiavelli himself, who, believing the Florentines held a psychological advantage over their adversaries, argued for the swift deployment of force.⁶⁰⁴ Exploiting the elated mood of the citizens in the wake of victory, Soderini moved quickly. By August 27, 1505, the artillery was gathered in the *Piazza della Signoria*, ready for the upcoming siege. Although a civil servant, Machiavelli too left the city and joined the Pisan front to coordinate the maneuvers of the troops.⁶⁰⁵

Despite the high hopes, problems started mounting from the first day of the siege. The Pisans enjoyed the military support of Spain, while on the Florentine side, the poor quality of the mercenary troops, squabbling and hesitant commanders, and low provisions dispersed all hopes of a quick victory.⁶⁰⁶ Between September 8 and 12, the Florentine forces bombarded the city, making several cracks in the walls, but their troops failed twice during the assault.⁶⁰⁷ The massive arrival of infantry from Lucca and Naples made any further attacks impossible, and the

⁶⁰⁴ “Vogliamo usiate quelli termini con la forza e con la industria che voi giudicherete a proposito per tentare in su questa reputazione fresca li animi de ‘Pisani e vedere se si facesse drento qualche tumulto; See *Legazioni*, V, 97; Moreover, in a semi-private dispatch to the war commissioner in the Pisan camp, which was contrary to the recommendations of the *Consulte*, Machiavelli suggested a violent attack on Lucca before the attack on Pisa: “... perché noi vogliamo ad ogni modo avanti che voi vi presentiate a Pisa con l’ordine per espugnarla, assaltare el dominio di Lucca, e quello predare, guastare, ruinare, e ardere ostilmente, non perdonando alcuna cosa che si possa fare loro di danno.” See *Legazioni*, V, 98.

⁶⁰⁵ “Intanto, mandarono Niccolò Machiavelli a disputare col Commissario, e con li altri condottieri dell’impresa, e delle cose che vi occorrono...” See I. Pitti, *Vita di Antonio Giacomini Tebalduci*, 227; No other document confirmed this brave mission of Machiavelli. But his absence from the office at the time of the siege most likely confirms this theory.

⁶⁰⁶ On August 31, 1505, Spanish general Consalvo de Cordoba was threatening Florence with war if they did not withdraw their troops, which can be confirmed in a letter from Machiavelli to Giacomini the following day. Despite those threats, Machiavelli did not think to give up and, on the contrary, he advised Giacomini to continue: “Questo ti si scrive non per sbigottirti ma perché insieme con la Signoria del Capitano pensi se ci è alcuno modo di impedirli e appresso si facci ogni cosa per accelerare la impresa.” (*Legazioni*, V, 107); Nevertheless, in order to defeat the Pisans before the Spanish reinforcement arrived, Florence hired the most desperate and least motivated companies for the direct assault on Pisa. In a letter to Giacomini from August 1, 1505, Machiavelli expressed concerns about 100 Spanish soldiers recruited by Marcantonio Colona because “non sapevamo come ci potessimo confidare in loro né come e’ fussino sopportabili o si potessimo maneggiare.” See *Legazioni*, V, 68.

⁶⁰⁷ The absence of Machiavelli’s dispatches from September 11 and 12, the two most crucial days of the siege suggests that he was probably present at the Pisan camp during the siege in order to help with his experience in the matter.

remaining Florentine troops withdrew to Cascina on September 14, 1505.⁶⁰⁸ Without any prospect of reinforcements, Florence's demoralized troops were easy prey to the Pisan counterattacks that ensued. Only the peace treaty between Spain and France, concluded at the beginning of November 1505, relieved the pressure from Pisan troops and saved the Republic from further humiliation.

While the defeat was devastating for the Republic's finances and reputation, it seemed to revitalize the Florentine army. The victory over the invading army of d'Alviano had proved to the Florentine elite that they could have military success on the strength of mobilized peasants from the *contado*.⁶⁰⁹ In his dispatch from July 28, 1505, Machiavelli encapsulates the reasoning behind the mobilization of peasants:

In questi tempi è bene stare provisto da potere reprimere qualunque invasione che dà nostri inimici fusse per farsi nel dominio nostro, ci pare oltre alle provisioni abbiamo fatte sia necessario che anchora e' paesani stieno in ordine da potere correre a' passi e fare tutti quelli rimedi contro alli avversari sia possibile. E però voliamo che alla aiuta di questa comandi uno uomo per casa nella tua iurisdizione che stia avvertito e con l'arme...⁶¹⁰

The worth of a non-mercenary army recruited from the Florentine peasantry became fully apparent on the heels of the latest military disaster.

⁶⁰⁸ Venetian Sanudo recorded in his *Diarii* for 6 September 1505 the following: "Di Brixigele et Faenza. Dil levar, dil campo di fiorentini, di Pisa, et reduiti a Cassina, e leva l'artilarie, con gran vergogna l'horò." See Sanuto, *Diarii*, VI, cols. 236, 238; Likewise, Machiavelli's letter to Giacomini from September 14, 1505, testifies to the inefficiency of the mercenary troops who abandoned the siege: "Sono dipoi comparse dua altre tua lettere di ieri; e intendendo quanto le fanterie ti peggiorano fra mano per numero, per qualità e per ubbidienza." See Machiavelli, *Legazioni*, 134.

⁶⁰⁹ In previous campaigns, peasants had been assembled from the *contado* mainly as *guastatori* or the lowest ranking local levies who performed auxiliary duties such as the construction of siege works, and the seizure of crops. The better-armed elements were allotted garrison duty in the strong points against Pisan supply lines. At the same time, the wealthy merchants of the Florentine republic, reluctant to provide the fiscal resources needed for maintaining a permanent military organization, continued to rely on mercenary companies hired on a short-term basis for the city's defense. The consequence was that they had to seek *condottiere* quickly and often the choice was not the best. See Bayley, *War and Society*, 239-240.

⁶¹⁰ *Legazioni*, V, 60.

5.9. The Florentine militia of 1506: Machiavelli's fingerprints

Most scholars today would agree that Machiavelli's militia project of 1506 was in many aspects innovative, and beneficial for the Florentine state. After years of struggling with mercenary soldiers' poor performances in battles, the money they drained from the city's budget, and the particular hardships of the Florentine subjects who bore the brunt of invasions, the new militia seemed to be a remedy for Florence's ills. However, in contrast to the praiseworthy aspects of Machiavelli's militia project, the following text will, for the first time, critically examine both the positive and negative sides. It will argue that despite some positive and truly original aspects, there were also drawbacks, particularly the oppressive manner in which the Florentine peasants were recruited and forced to serve in the militia with little or no recompense. Such negative aspects must be considered if we want to have the full picture.

Once the majority of Florence's *ottimati* had indicated their support for the militia project, Gonfaloniere Soderini relaxed his caution and authorized the *Dieci* to start with the recruitment.⁶¹¹ To be fair, it was not only Machiavelli who advocated for the peasant militia. According to historians Iacopo Pitti and Jacopo Nardi, the Florentine captain Antonio Giacomini was also very active in his public support for the project.⁶¹² However, the public vilification of Giacomini after the siege of Pisa in 1505, left only Machiavelli as the leading advocate for the

⁶¹¹ The major role in the approval of the militia was played by Francesco Soderini who not only convinced his overly cautious brother but also most likely used his connection amongst the *ottimati* to sway the opposition. See Hörnqvist, "Perché non si usa," 182; Villari took Soderini's letter to his brother of March 4, 1506, as an example where he encouraged his brother to continue with the project. See Villari, *The Life and Times*, 512; Guidi, *Un Segretario militante*, 215, n. 133.

⁶¹² According to Pitti, "Antonio intento al ben pubblico più che mai, non prima migliore della vita, che egli, salito a' Dieci, salito al Gonfaloniere et alla Signoria, con efficaci ragioni li persuase a creare una ordinanza di giovani del contado e del distretto, più atti a portare l'armi per servirsene ne' bisogni della guerra." See Pitti, *Vita di Antonio Giacomini*, 239-240; Likewise, Nardi in his *Vita d'Antonio Giacomini* said that the Florentine captain was promoting "una milizia propria per difendere la patria." See Pitti, *Vita d'Antonio Giacomini*, 92.

project.⁶¹³ According to Guicciardini, Gonfaloniere Soderini let himself be persuaded by Machiavelli, “in whom he had great confidence,” to reform the Republic’s militia and to restore the military institutions of the past.⁶¹⁴ Guicciardini also emphasized the fact that Soderini initiated the project without first summoning the leading citizens to a *Pratica*, as was the established practice.⁶¹⁵ This confirms that, despite the general consensus against hiring new mercenary troops, some Florentine *ottimati* still expected further discussion and assurances regarding the new militia. We will see in the following text that the *ottimati*’s fear of an armed peasantry played a significant role in determining the nature of the new force, emphasizing the state’s control over the troops while scanting their military training.

The official documents confirm that the recruitment of the new militia started in the Casentino, Mugello, and Romagna regions. On December 30, 1505, Machiavelli departed for Mugello to enroll his first “bandiere.”⁶¹⁶ Considering Machiavelli’s earlier experience with local militia, it’s not surprising that those areas were chosen. Through the correspondence between Machiavelli and the Ten, one can follow the unrolling of the project in some detail. In his first report, dispatched from Borgo San Lorenzo on January 2, 1506, Machiavelli comments on the progress made and the reaction of the local population to ordinance. He noted that while the general reception amongst the citizens he spoke to was encouraging, that of the peasants was less so. While some peasants were curious, others expressed hostility to the idea.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹³ Soderini’s enemies claimed that Giacomini and Bentivoglio’s desire for personal glory led them to rush the ill-prepared and premature siege. Giacomini was accused of military incompetence and abuse of authority. See Bailey, *War and Society*, 232.

⁶¹⁴ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 281.

⁶¹⁵ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 281.

⁶¹⁶ *Legazioni*, V, 251-252.

⁶¹⁷ “Infino a iersera io fornì di arruolare gli uomini delle 7 opere del Borgo e dei pivieri di San Giovanni; che ne ho cappati di buoni uomini, qualche 140. Saranno in questa bandiera del Borgo 180 uomini in circa, e uomini buoni. Vengono questi giovani a scriversi assai volentieri; quel che li fa stare a l’erta è chi teme l’estimo e chi qualche altro inganno; e come si fieno certificati della cosa, molti che si fuggono, correranno. Piace questa cosa a tutti questi cittadini che io ci ho trovati, tutti la favoriscono, e è per riuscire.” See *Legazioni*, V, 252.

Despite the growing dissatisfaction with the recruitment process in the following weeks, more than 500 peasants had been recruited, armed, and dressed in militia uniforms by the end of January 1506. On February 15, 1506, the regime organized a carnival day, which featured 500 newly recruited soldiers parading the streets in their new uniforms. The event was a great success: the diarist Luca Landucci enthusiastically reported that it was the finest thing that had ever been organized by the city of Florence.⁶¹⁸ In the face of the growing problem of peasants who refused to be recruited, it seems that the regime used this public display to produce a positive psychological effect on the people to justify the project. On February 26, 1506, possibly with Abbot Basilio's assistance, Machiavelli managed to recruit 700 soldiers in 4 *podesterie* of the Casentino region (Poppi, Pratovrcchio, Castel San Niccolò, and Bibbiena).⁶¹⁹ The sources confirm that almost all the organization of the militia at the time was handled by Machiavelli himself. Although he routinely asked for opinions and permission from his superiors, he had been granted a free hand in the project, indicating the centrality of his role.⁶²⁰

Considering the wide latitude enjoyed by Machiavelli in recruiting new troops, it is important to investigate in what ways and to what extent his military ideas and recruitment methods differed from the examples he had been exposed to. The sources confirm that Machiavelli's project was quite innovative at the time. To begin with, we have seen earlier in the text that the so-called *guastatori* and *marraioli* were recruited across the Florentine *contado* in

⁶¹⁸ "E a dì 15 di febbraio 1505, fece la mostra in Piazza 400 fanti e quali aveva ordinati el Gonfaloniere, di nostri contadini, e dava loro a ogniuno un farsetto bianco, un paio di calze alla divisa, bianche e rosse, e una berretta bianca, e le scarpette e un petto di ferro e le lance, e a chi scoppietti; e questi si chiamorono battaglioni; e dava loro un conestabole che gli guidassi e insegnassi adoperare Larme. E questi erano soldati e stavansi a casa loro obrigati, quando bisognassi che sieno mossi; a questo modo ordinava di farne molte migliaia per tutto il contado in modo che non bisognassi avere de' forestieri. E così fu tenuto la più bella cosa che si ordinassi mai per la città di Firenze." See Landucci, *Diario*, 273.

⁶¹⁹ For the *Commissaria* in the Casentino, see *Legazioni*, V, 277-278.

⁶²⁰ "E perché noi ci riposiamo delle cose di costa in su te e in su quello che tu iudicherai meglio in sul fatto, però approveranno sempre ogni tua deliberazione. E poiché tu ricordi così, non si manderà per ora altro conestabole." See *Legazioni*, V, 281.

times of war, or when mercenary soldiers were either too few or too distant to intervene.

However, due to the high level of urgency implicit in such situations, the recruitment did not assume pre-training of the peasants or any pre-existing form of organization, or even an obligation to serve.⁶²¹ According to Hörnqvist, what was radically novel in Machiavelli's procedure "was the creation of a permanent military organization throughout the territory based on part-time soldiers, who would also continue to be enrolled, trained, and equipped in times of peace."⁶²²

Thus, while the idea of the militia was not new in Florence, its systematic character and the large scale of recruitment were. The reforms proposed by Machiavelli in his document called *La Cagione dell'Ordinanza* assume unprecedented changes in the tools, practices, and even the documentary procedures governing the recruitment of peasants from the countryside.⁶²³ Contrary to previous recruiting methods, which were *ad hoc* and without selection, Machiavelli envisioned the so-called "lista degli uomini," or lists of all registered militiamen based on the "one man per household" principle that he witnessed during his short stay in Forlì in July 1499.⁶²⁴ The intention was not only to estimate the number of soldiers the state could count on, but also to have a record of their physical condition so that the constable could select the fittest. To this end,

⁶²¹ Guidi, *Un Segretario militante*, 208.

⁶²² Hörnqvist, "Perché non si usa allegare i Romani," 157.

⁶²³ On September 9, 1506, Machiavelli sent to his friend Bernardo Nasi in the *Dieci* the document called *La Cagione dell'Ordinanza* in which he dealt with Florence's contemporary military, institutional, and administrative problems. One of the main goals of this document was to reassure the Florentine political class and, in general, the various social components, of the advantages presented by the enlistment of the inhabitants of the countryside, and even more to convince them that this institution would not pose a danger to the freedom of the State. For the contacts between Machiavelli and Bernardo Nasi and the document in general see Guidi, *Un segretario militante*, 208-210; The original autograph of the document was published by Marchand in *Scritti politici minori*, 470-476.

⁶²⁴ According to Guidi, the militia force created by Machiavelli in 1506, then re-established in 1527-30, involved the production of two types of records: the low-level "practical" records which documented the daily running of an army in the field, such as muster rolls, notes and lists; and the upper-level administrative records, such as the correspondence between governing bodies and military officers. See Guidi, "Per peli e per segni." Muster Rolls, Lists and Annotations: Practical Military Records relating to the Last Florentine Ordinances and Militia, from Machiavelli to the Fall of the Republic (1506-1530)," *Historical Research* 89, n. 246, (2016): 673-686; Guidi, *Un Segretario militante*, 211, and 243.

Machiavelli, on behalf of the *Dieci*, would ask officers to send copies of enrollments and lists of infantry and militiamen to Florence: “Ordinerai ad uno de’ tuoi ufiziali che scriva e rassegni dette sua genti per peli e per segni e ce ne manderai subito la scrittura.”⁶²⁵ Initially, Machiavelli himself was responsible for both the administration and record keeping (*scrivere*), and the recruitment (*rassegnare*) of the new militia, but later he instructed other officials on the recruitment procedure, which he explains in some detail in one of his dispatches to the officials in the *contado*.⁶²⁶ This method of selecting militia was known as *delectus* and Machiavelli borrowed it (not surprisingly) from the Romans. If one compares Machiavelli’s reform to the one Cecchi proposed in 1495, the innovations become more evident, as earlier attempts did not seriously address the organizational and bureaucratic complexities of establishing such an extensive military organism.

Another original aspect of Machiavelli’s militia project is its genuine tendency to reduce the differences between the metropolis and the *contado*. To overcome class and regional differences between the Florentine subjects and their citizens, Machiavelli applied ideas such as patriotism, loyalty, and opposition to a common enemy.⁶²⁷ We have seen in chapter one that in his early dispatches Machiavelli strongly advocated for the protection of the Florentine subjects and their greater involvement in the defense of their *Patria*. In other words, if a positive rapport

⁶²⁵ *Legazioni*, V, 142.

⁶²⁶ “E perché noi confidiamo nella prudenzia tua, ci è parso dare a te questa cura di scrivere questi uomini e armagli. El modo che tu hai da tenere è questo: tu farai in prima venire innanzi a te tutti li uomini della potesteria di Pescia che sieno di età da 18 a 40 anni, e li farai venire comune per comune, e scriverai, distinguendo comune per comune, tutti quelli che ti parranno atti all’armi e ad essere fanti a piè; avendo avvertenza toglgi giovani e più scapoli che sia possibile, fuggiendo li uomini soli e assai obligati. E li scriverai in su’ n quaderno di per sé. E scritti che tu li arai, esaminerai l’armi che ti bisognano, cioè quanti petti e quante lance tu hai di bisogno, e ci scriverai, e noi te le mandaremo subito.” See *Legazioni*, V, 300-301.

⁶²⁷ In his *Cagione dell’Ordinanza*, Machiavelli writes the following: “Perché, se alcuno non ha voluto ubbidire al padre, allevatosi su per li bordelli diverrà soldati; ma, uscendo dalle scuole oneste e dalle buone educazioni, potranno onorare sé e la patria loro.” See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 476.

could be ignited between the government and its subjects in the dominion, the subjects would willingly defend their *Patria*.

To foster just such a spirit of patriotism, Machiavelli opened an avenue for rewarding the *contadini* according to their merits: “Essere bene armarsi d’arme proprie; e delli uomini suoi, de’ quali in un momento si possa valere, e li possa gastigare errando, e premiare meritando.”⁶²⁸

According to Guidi, “In promoting the role of peasants in the army and the state, Machiavelli once again drew inspiration from ancient Roman history.”⁶²⁹ There is also the likelihood that *contadini* would feel more secure, as the institution of the militia would require the government to administer its territory better through administrative justice. For example, in a response to Machiavelli from March 4, 1506, Cardinal Soderini said, “saviamente scrivete che a questo principio dell’ordinanza sopra tutto bisogna la iustizia, così né la città come nel contado.”⁶³⁰ In other words, justice and the army are inseparable in Machiavelli’s vision of civil construction and state politics.

One more aim of the project was to unite the *contado* itself. Comprised of various clans who were not friendly to each other, the Florentine *contado* suffered from their feuds. In one of his earlier dispatches from July 23, 1501, Machiavelli remarked: Ti si scrissono circa el comandare uno uomo per casa, e fare di riunire cotesti sudditi nostri...”⁶³¹ The same problem still existed five years later when Machiavelli reports that in “in tutta la potesterià di Decomano, ho scritti 200 uomini...e mi è sutta una fatica grandissima a condurli per due cagioni: la prima

⁶²⁸ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 478.

⁶²⁹ For the role of peasants in Machiavelli’s militia see Guidi, *Books, People, and Military Thought*, 63-71.

⁶³⁰ Robert Black, “Machiavelli and the Militia: New Thoughts, *Italian Studies* Vol. 69, (2014): 41-50.

⁶³¹ *Legazioni*, II, 130.

per la loro consueta e antica inobbedienza, l'altra per la inimicizia quale è fra quelli da Petrognano e Campani, che hanno diviso quella montagna.⁶³²

At the end of the letter, he expresses frustration over the type of men he was trying to yoke together: “Non si puo qui dare l'armi a l'una potesteria e l'atra insieme per essere distanti l'una dall'altra assai, né ho possuto fare queste cose con più brevità; e chi crede altrimenti, lo pruovi e vedrà che cosa è avere a raccozzare insieme uomini contadini e di questa sorte.”⁶³³ To mitigate this problem, Machiavelli insisted that all new recruits regardless of their *podesteria* wear the same uniforms and serve under the same banner. All local and regional differences had to be set aside during training and in battle.⁶³⁴ As a further measure, the commanders of units could not be from the place where those units were located, and they were rotated so that the unit and commander did not bond too closely.⁶³⁵ For Machiavelli, a unified *contado* meant better defense for the Republic. The subtle ideological conversion of the peasant units by the metropolis could also lead to more malleable subjects, as their wishes for local and regional autonomy were reduced.

Having considered all the positives above, it is important to ask about the military effectiveness of Machiavelli's militia in the first year of its existence. Did the militia truly replace mercenary units, the purpose for which it was created? On June 4, 1506, the first contingent of 800 militiamen was ready to be sent to the Pisan front. Machiavelli's letter from the following day tells us that more than half of the men recruited were not only accustomed to

⁶³² *Legazioni*, V, 265.

⁶³³ *Legazioni*, V, 265.

⁶³⁴ “Quanto a' segni, è parso che le sieno bandiere tutte con uno segno medesimo del liono, a ciò che tutti li uomini vostri sieno affezionati di una medesima cosa, e non abbino altro per obietto ch'el segno pubblico, e per questo ne diventino partigiani. E però si è dato ad ogni potesteria una bandiera.” See Marchand, *L'Arte della Guerra*, 474.

⁶³⁵ “...bisogna avere avvertenza alli capi a chi si danno le bandiere in governo continuamente, che non piglino più autorità con loro si si conviene.” See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 475.

fighting but had been leaders in their previous companies.⁶³⁶ From another dispatch, we learn that the men recruited for the Pisan front were excused of all charges against them, including accusations of rebellion, as an inducement to join the militia.⁶³⁷ It is clear from the letters above that, for offensive purposes, the *Dieci* preferred former soldiers and ruffians who had some fighting experience. The first official report that records their engagement in battle is from August 5, 1506, when a small militia unit defeated Pisan cavalry.⁶³⁸ Historiography has understated the importance of the new militia, yet the citizen militia law of 6 December 1506 stipulates an army of several thousand well-equipped and trained soldiers, a significant force. Although these militiamen did not have an immediate effect on the Pisan front or on the war's outcome, the sources confirm that they attracted attention from Florence's enemies.⁶³⁹ It seemed that Machiavelli's militia had everything necessary for success: the recruits, a commander with a high reputation such as Don Micheletto, and the support of the government. But behind this illusion of an ideal militia, there lay unresolved issues that eventually contributed to its downfall in 1512.

⁶³⁶ “Avendo desiderio di provedersi di quelli fanti ci avete domandati...E avendo fatto fare la monstra ad 800 de' nostri dell'Ordinanza, e avendogli veduti bene ordinati e di ottima apparenza, e avendo relazione da' connestaboli come più che la metà di essi sono gente usa al mestiero, e infra loro vi e molti uomini da bene che sono stati capi nelle altre compagnie, ci è parso delli 800. Li mandiamo costi sotto el governo di Sarra da Cisterna e Castiglione, sotto 4 bandiere di quattro podesterie. Potrai valerti della opera loro in quelle cose che saranno necessarie, e pigliare delle occasioni per offendere e' nemici qualli ti paranno. Anda cauto in modo che disordine non nasca.” See *Legazioni*, V, 355-356.

⁶³⁷ In a letter to the Vicar of Pescie, Lorenzo de Neroni, from June 6, 1506, Machiavelli says the following: “Egli è stato qui messer Giliberto, capo di coteste bandiere in cotesta valle, e ci ha fatto fede come li uomini sono sufficienti al mestiero, e come tu con ogni sollecitudine e diligenza favorisci questa opera; e questo à che li scritti sotto dette bandiere sieno assolti di ogni condannagione avessino dal di che furno scritti indreto, da condannagioni di capo forche e ribelli in fuora; e de' peccati che facessino per lo avvenire voliamo ne sieno gastigati, ma in certo modo e in maniera che conoschino, per essere scritti, aver qualche vantaggio dagl'altri.” See *Legazioni*, V, 357.

⁶³⁸ “Noi intendiamo come era proceduta la cavalcata di Val di Nievole, e come per valore militare di quelle poche gente d'arme che vi sono e delli uomini del paese, e' Pisani erano stati ributtati, con loro danno.” See *Legazioni*, V, 424.

⁶³⁹ In a letter from the commissioner of Fivizzano from June 6, 1506, we read the following: “Altro non occorre, salvo che facci sollecitare le domeniche le mostre, accio che la reputazione si mantenga e a cotesti nostri vicini cresca la paura.” See *Legazioni*, V, 358.

5.10. Oppression, Control, and Desertion

Although some of Machiavelli's ideas regarding the militia brought a fresh breeze to early modern military thinking, they were not sufficiently radical to make a noticeable change in the order of things as they existed in Florence at the time. To assure the *ottimati* that the militia would pose no danger to them, Machiavelli envisioned and put in place laws and practices intended to prevent this outcome at any cost.⁶⁴⁰ His *Provisioni dell'ordinanza* contains numerous references to peasants' insubordination and the oppressive response of the government to the slightest sign of disobedience or desertion. This can also be confirmed from Machiavelli's official correspondence for the year 1506, which catalogs countless examples of peasants' unwillingness to serve in the militia. Despite their objections, the peasants were left with little choice regarding their service in the militia. Through financial penalties and physical punishments, many of them were forced into service without any visible benefits. This fact alone, compounded by the situation of the Pisan *contadini*, who enjoyed full citizenship rights and political agency granted to them by the Pisan government, significantly undermined Machiavelli's militia project and crippled the Florentine peasants' motivation to fight for the republic. The slaughter at Prato in 1512, in which the Florentine militia failed to perform as was expected, remained an indelible stain on the history of the Florentine ordinance.

Early in the recruitment drive, on January 17, 1506, the *Dieci* issued a proclamation to the Florentine subjects in Mugello ordering all men of that *podesteria* who could carry arms to present themselves for recruitment. Anyone who refused to appear for the military inspection in

⁶⁴⁰ In order to convince the *ottimati* in Florence that the militia project was safe for the regime and that it was not going to be used for partisan quarrels, Machiavelli argued in his *La Cagione dell'ordinanza* that the Florentine government should start the project by hiring *contadini* first because “è più facile imparare ad obbedire che a comandare.” Second, once the peasants were recruited, Machiavelli recommends the following: “...dovransolo votare alcune disposizioni per evitare che questo esercito nuoccia alla repubblica, anziche servirla.” It is clear from those remarks that the idea was to have a better control over peasants in the *contado* than to give them more freedom. See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 471.

the *podesteria* del Borgo a San Lorenzo would receive a fine of twenty liras and lashes.⁶⁴¹ Once the list of all battle-ready men had been prepared for each *podesteria*, the government could control their whereabouts and prevent them from moving freely. Assigned to every church there was a government official whose duty was to record the names of those who attended the Mass. He would later compare that list with the list of recruits provided by the constable and record the recruits who were absent.⁶⁴² Likewise, those who did answer the call for recruitment were expected to be “bene ordinati, che non possono nuocere e che si remunerino.” According to Machiavelli’s *Cagione*, the slightest disobedience was punishable: “A tenerle ordinati, bisogna che questo Magistrato abbi autorità di punirli e facultà da farlo, e che la legge lo necessiti a fare tutto quello che è in sustenzia essenziale e le facessi danno.”⁶⁴³ Ultimately, to be “affezionati di una medesima cosa,” according to Machiavelli, all peasants were required to conform to the same “ordini” and “modi,” including the same flags, weapons, and clothes.⁶⁴⁴ In this way, the Florentine secretary intended to impose to the peasant recruits the idea of belonging to the Florentine state (Marzocco) and not to their local communities only.

⁶⁴¹ “Per parte del Magnifico e onorevole Vicario e Commissario di Mugello, si fa bandire e notificare a qualunque è stato per ordine de’ nostri Eccelsi Signori e Magnifici Dieci di Libertà e Balia del popolo fiorentino, scritto e deputato con le armi sotto le bandiere delle podesterie del Borgo a San Lorenzo e di Vicchio, che sotto pena di 20 lire e di quattro tratti di corda, debbino ripresentarsi a le rassegne ciascuno nel castello della sua podesteria. E notificasi a ciascheduno che non ubbidirà che non se ne riceverà scusa veruna.” See *Legazioni*, V, 256-257.

⁶⁴² “Debbino detti ufficiali, per rinovare gli uomini del contado e distretto loro, ordinare che tutti i rettori de’ popoli e sindachi particolari de’ comuni, portino ogni anno in novembre al magistrato loro le liste di tutti gli uomini che abitano nel popolo o commune loro, che siano di età di anni quindici o più, sotto pena di 2 tratti di fune almeno, da darsi a quel sindaco o a quel rettore che ne avesse lasciato alcuno indietro. E per potere meglio evitare le frodi, debbino tenere in ogni pieve o altra chiesa simile principale di quelli luoghi dove saranno uomini descritti, o dove di nuovo ne volessino scrivere, uno tamburo (un urn where people would put the names of the ones they wanted to denounce) il quale si apra ogni dua mesi almeno per chi parrà a detti uffiziali.” See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 486.

⁶⁴³ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 474.

⁶⁴⁴ “E però si è cominciata questa Ordinanza nel contado, dove, volendola ordinare, bisognava darle ordine e modo: cioè insegne sotto chi e’ militassino, armi con chi si avessino ad armare, determinare chi avessi a militare sotto ciascuno segno e dare loro capi che li esercitassino. Quanto a’ segni, è parso che le sieno bandiere tutte con uno segno medesimo del liono, a ciò che tutti gli uomini vostri sieno affezionati di una medesima cosa, e non abbino altro obietto ch’el segno pubblico, e per questo ne diventino fedeli.” See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 472.

Concerning the text above, what conclusions can we draw from the heavy restrictions laid on the peasants? To begin with, it tells us that recruitment was not optional or voluntary as it had been in the past, but mandatory.⁶⁴⁵ Peasants who had never wielded or chosen to bear weapons before were pressed into service regardless of their wishes. Although some peasants had experience in fighting, namely former criminals and those who had served in mercenary companies, the majority of the recruits were farmers and herdsmen who had no inclination to fight in a war. In Italy, at the time, fighting was a profession or trade practiced mainly by professional soldiers with years of training. For a peasant, being forced to face professional soldiers in battle must have been truly terrifying. However, the penalties both monetary and corporal for those who resisted recruitment were so severe that peasants accepted the recruitment to avoid financial ruin and public humiliation through whipping. This psychological and physical tool was deliberately used by Machiavelli to force peasants into the militia. In sum, we can argue here that Machiavelli's system of recruitment was oppressive and, as such, hardly a promising basis for the future of the Florentine militia.

While we do not have sources that give voice to the Florentine peasants' opinion of the recruitment or confirm its oppressive nature, we do have several dispatches that emphasize the *contadini's* refusal to join the militia. For example, in a dispatch from January 21, 1506, Machiavelli reminds the Vicar of Mugello what the punishment is for those who refuse to show up for the military inspection or due to their poverty, cannot pay the fine.⁶⁴⁶ On the same day, the

⁶⁴⁵ According to Machiavelli's *Cagione*, "e bisogna constringerlo a tenerne armati un numero almeno sufficiente a tenere le bandiere e e' conestaboli, a provvedere all'armi, a far fare loro le mostre in certi di e in certo tempo, e rimetterli, a mescolarci qualche cosa di religione per farli più ubbidienti." See Marchand, *L'Arte della Guerra*, 474.

⁶⁴⁶ "Noi voliamo che ogni volta che Bastiano da Castiglione, el conestabole sopra a fare le rassegne delle dette bandiere scritte, ti manderà a ricercare di uno cavallaro de' tua per fare alcuna esecuzione contra li disobbedienti, liene mandì. Perché abbiamo commesso a detto Bastiano che quelli che per alcuno conto controaffaranno al bando mandato, s'ingegni, e con el favore tuo e con la sua autorità e forze, metterli nelle nostre mani; e tu a quelli tali darai quella pena che nel bando si contiene. E chi non potessi pagare le venti lire per povertà li darai dua tratti di fune." See *Legazioni*, V, 258-259.

Dieci sent a dispatch to Bastiano da Castiglione, in which they first praised his skills as a governor and then recommended the following:

Ci pare che a mantenerlo una delle principali cose sia punire e' disubbidienti che non si rappresentassino e quelli che in su le rassegne facessino scandalo. Lo ofizio tuo in questo caso ha ad essere notare quelli che disubbidissino, e darne nota al Vicario ad averli nelle mani; usando in questo ogni diligenza perché e' ti riesca mediante el Vicario detto punirne qualcuno e sotto li occhi alli altri; Ma quanto alli scandalosi, faccendoli stare ubbidienti con le mazzate (torture) e con tutti quelli modi che s'usano in simili casi.⁶⁴⁷

What we notice here is yet another psychological tool the government used to enforce recruitment: the public execution of justice and corporal punishment as a message to those who dare to disobey. To achieve his goal of creating a disciplined and obedient peasant militia, Machiavelli harks back to the Roman model, where units that fled the battlefield were decimated publicly.

Despite the iron discipline and forceful recruitment, many peasants continued to avoid military service. Even in the Casentino, the warlike province where many peasants had taken arms to fight the Venetians in 1498, there was little enthusiasm for the militia. Machiavelli attested in his report to *Podestàs* in the Casentino from March 23, 1506, that all peasants who avoided the recruitment needed to be punished.⁶⁴⁸ Similarly, two weeks later, Machiavelli sent a dispatch to the Vicar of San Giovanni in which he reminded him of the following:

E perché la importanza di questo ordine è che si mantenghino armati e ubbidienti, farai mettere un bando in sul mercato del Ponte a Sieve che qualunque scritto sotto la bandiera di detto Ponte non si rappresenterà con le armi in que' luoghi e a quel tempo che li sarà ordinato dal conestabole, s'intenderà subito incorso in pena di 4 tratti di fune e 20 lire; e così t'ingegnerai di fare qualche viva dimostrazione contro a chi disubbidissi.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁷ *Legazioni*, V, 260.

⁶⁴⁸ "Noi abbiamo commesso ad Agnolo Martinelli che, insieme con li conestabili, rassegni in su le mostre le bandiere che sono in cotesta valle, e li disubbidienti di cotesta podesteria di Poppi metta nelle tua mani, e quelli altri in nelle mani de' loro potestà. Pertanto voliamo che quelli disubbidienti che ti saranno dati da detto Agnolo o Morgante, punisca secondo el bando. E le condannagioni in danari che tu riscotessi da tali disubbidienti metterai in mano d'uno camarlingo." See *Legazioni*, V, 285.

⁶⁴⁹ *Legazioni*, V, 268.

Again, the Florentine government used the combination of fines, blows, and public humiliation to coerce peasants into service. While there is no doubt that Machiavelli's recruiting methods were any more severe than standard practices throughout early modern Europe, the Florentine peasants did not enjoy the same privileges as the peasants in France or Germany for example.⁶⁵⁰

Such practices continued in the following months. By this time, Machiavelli had been relieved from the recruitment in the field, assuming the role of advisor to the new constables. In a dispatch from May 20, 1506, the Florentine secretary recommends severe measures against disobedient *contadini*, but this time it adds some important details about the motives for which some peasants joined the militia: "Noi voliamo che' disubbidienti e delle mostre e di quelli che non sono venuti a pagliare e' panni, sieno puniti, e che chi cerca di uscire dell'ordinanza con questi modi se ne esca con una punizione esemplare e con qualche suo disagio, abbiamo ordinato che ti notifichi tutti quelli che sono stati nelle sopradette contumacie."⁶⁵¹ Elsewhere, peasants were condemned for selling weapons they received from the government upon recruitment.⁶⁵² It is clear that some peasants joined the militia due to poverty or simple greed to obtain money or food for themselves and their families.

While petty thievery did not significantly harm the militia, the desertion of the militiamen from the battlefield could have had devastating effects on Machiavelli's project. From his letter of June 10, 1506 to Carlo Boninsegni in the Castel San Niccolò, we learn that militiamen

⁶⁵⁰ For recruitment methods in France and Germany see Lauro Martines, *Furies: War in Europe 1450 - 1700* (Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

⁶⁵¹ *Legazioni*, V, 339-340.

⁶⁵² In a letter to the Vicar of Pescia from January 29, 1507, Machiavelli reports the following: "Noi intendiamo come molti di cotesti nostri scritti hanno vendute o giocate le armi; e perché nessuna cosa importa quanto questa, volendo tenere ordinati e armati li uomini; non ci potrebbe più tale trasferimento di proprietà dispiacere; e voliamo ad ogni modo ci si provenga e ora e per lo avvenire." See *Legazioni*, V, 547.

deserted from the military camp because of bad weather, lack of food, and fear of the Pisans.⁶⁵³

Twelve days later, a group of militiamen escaped from the camp with the money they received for their service.⁶⁵⁴ Again, on June 26, 1506, Machiavelli informs the commissioner in Cascina the following: “Ricevemo per la penultima tua la copia delli assenti della compagnia di connestabile Sarri da Citerna e Agnolone; sonsi citati per punirli come e’ meriteranno; e tu farai loro intendere, in modo che lo sappino, che chi si partirà di costà senza tua licenza sarà trattato peggio che nostro rebelle.”⁶⁵⁵ The situation deteriorated in the following week again some militiamen who had not been paid on time deserted *en masse*. Though their Constable searched for them throughout the province, he could not recover all of the deserters.⁶⁵⁶ As it seemed that its measures against rebellious peasants needed strengthening, the government found a solution in sending to Casentino their ruthless commander, the former Borgia’s captain, Don Micheletto de Corella, to remind the peasant soldiers of their obligations.⁶⁵⁷

During his long legation to the court of Cesare Borgia from 1502 to 1503, Machiavelli had acquired direct personal experience of the ways and methods of Don Micheletto. Their later communication suggests that they had developed a friendship based on mutual respect.⁶⁵⁸ Considering this fact, it would not be surprising if Machiavelli suggested the famous *condottiero* to Soderini as the new military captain. In historiography, there is still a debate over the true

⁶⁵³ “Per la tua de’ nove noi restiamo avvisati come la piova, la mala contentezza de’ panni mescolata con la paura di non avere andare a Pisa a dare guasto, fece che nulle ultime mostre mancò a cotesti connestaboli di molti uomini.” See *Legazioni*, V, 361; Guidi, *Un Segretario militante*, 262, n. 242.

⁶⁵⁴ “Con questa sarà una listra de’ fanti che si sono fuggiti con la paga di Sarra da Citerna; voliamo comandi loro per tuoi emissari che li trovino in persona.” See *Legazioni*, V, 373.

⁶⁵⁵ *Legazioni*, V, 377.

⁶⁵⁶ *Legazioni*, V, 395.

⁶⁵⁷ The Florentine government hired Don Micheletto on April 18, 1506, “per tenere a freno e’ sudditi nostri” as Machiavelli put it. See *Legazioni*, V, 292.

⁶⁵⁸ That Machiavelli and the Spaniard developed a strong bond, confirms the letter don Michele wrote to Machiavelli on September 15, 1507. Here he evokes their mutual friendship, as he knows that “Machiavelli loves him” and “is fond” of him. See Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 161.

intentions of the Florentine regime in hiring Don Micheletto.⁶⁵⁹ According to Robert Black's recent findings, in order to secure the success of the militia, Soderini's regime required Don Micheletto's severe hand not only to control the troops in the countryside but also to deal with opponents in the city.⁶⁶⁰ Faced with strong opposition from the *ottimati*, the original plan to appoint Don Micheletto as the *bargello del contado* had to be abandoned, and on April 18, 1506, the Council of Eighty elected him as "il capitano di guardia del contado e distretto di Firenze."⁶⁶¹ While there is little evidence to suggest that Soderini would have used Don Micheletto to intimidate his opposition in the government, we have reasons to believe that his appointment was intended to discipline the existing militia, instill fear into those peasants who intended to desert and tighten the government's grip on the Florentine subjects in the *contado*. Don Micheletto was to act as *polizia militare*, to arrest the disobedient and deserters. Machiavelli's letter to him from March 3, 1506, encapsulates the duties of the Spaniard: "usate grandissima diligenza di reprimere tutti gli scandali che nascessimo infra li scritti e non scritti."⁶⁶² From the dispatches sent after his appointment, we can see that the number of complaints about disobedient peasants

⁶⁵⁹ A major historical controversy has ensued between scholars who see this appointment as solely a military policy and others who detect an attempt by the Soderini government to counter its opponents. For the later camp, see Dionisotti, *Machiavellerie*, 3–59; Bertelli, "Petrus Soderini patriae Parens," *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et renaissance*, 31 (1969): 93–114; Bertelli, "Machiavelli and Soderini," 28; In the former camp, see Sasso, "Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia, Don Micheletto e la questione della milizia," 57–117; Rosalyn Pesman Cooper, "Machiavelli, Francesco Soderini and Don Micheletto," *Nuova rivista storica*, 66 (1982): 342–357; Humfrey Butters, *Governors*, 108, 112–13; Hörnqvist, "Perché non si usa allegare i romani," 183.

⁶⁶⁰ Robert Black offered new evidence, in the form of letters from Cardinal Francesco Soderini to his brother the gonfalonier, demonstrating that the latter saw don Micheletto's appointment as a means of intimidating the internal enemies of the regime. It is suggested that Piero Soderini himself must have backed his brother's political view of don Micheletto's role. See Black, "New Thoughts on Militia," *Italian studies*, Vol. 69, No. 1, (March 2014): 41–50.

⁶⁶¹ Butters, *Governors*, 108. Hörnqvist, "Perché non si usa allegare," 157.

⁶⁶² Sasso, *Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia*, 80; Guidi, *Un Segretario militante*, 285.

fell drastically. While we cannot know for sure why is that, we can propose that Don Micheletto's reputation for strictness and cruelty had a strong effect on potential deserters.⁶⁶³

5.11. Machiavelli's Militia Paradox: Non-Citizen Militia between the carrot and the stick

While the fear of severe punishment may have compelled many peasants to join the militia, it did not give them motivation to fight. The lack of motivation can be attributed above all to their non-citizen status as *sudditi* of the Florentine state, and the very low prospect of improving such status. We have mentioned earlier that as a result of Florence's negative experience during the Ciompi revolt in the late fourteenth century, the government was reluctant to arm peasants or grant them rights of citizenship within its dominion. Though aware of this, Machiavelli appeared indifferent to the peasants' plight for as long as he was arming and training them principally for defensive purposes. In times of war, the peasants of the *contado* were the first to suffer from foreign invasions, and the Florentine government could count on this as the *contadini's* greatest motivation to fight. This motivation vanishes, however, when the peasants are asked to risk their lives to defend the territory of the greater republic.

While Machiavelli does not explicitly mention peasants' admission to citizenship as a political strategy, some of his ideas suggest that he might have considered such an option. For example, in his *Cagione* Machiavelli discusses the idea of offering rewards and benefits to the most adept conscripts in order to motivate them and give them a sense of participating in the defense of their state: "Quanto al premiarli, non è necessario ora pensarci; ma basterebbe solo darne autorità, come di sopra se dice, e dipoi venire a' premii di mano in mano, secondo e' meriti

⁶⁶³ In a letter to the *Podestà* of Dicomano from April 23, 1506, Machiavelli uses Don Micheletto's name to install fear amongst the disobedient: "E perché noi non voliamo che li animi di cotesti uomini stieno più codi, t'imponiamo che subito arrivato che sarà costi don Michele con la sua compagnia." See *Legazioni*, V, 298.

loro.”⁶⁶⁴ According to Gramsci, Machiavelli intended through the reform of the militia to introduce the masses of peasant farmers simultaneously into political life as the Jacobins did during the French Revolution.⁶⁶⁵ Certainly, the establishment of a highly disciplined army of *contadini* on such a great scale made many citizens uneasy, especially as the *condottiere* hired to train the troops was the ruthless Don Micheletto. Ultimately, in his post-1512 works, Machiavelli strongly advised princes and those planning to establish or rejuvenate republics to favor the *popolo* over the *grandi*.⁶⁶⁶ The sources for the period *ante perditas*, however, tell a different story.

As, in the event, the participation of the peasant militia in the war against Pisa was occasional and without a significant impact on the outcome, the opportunities for advancement within the militia were rare.⁶⁶⁷ Thus, it is not surprising that there is no evidence in the sources of conscripts being rewarded with promotions in the army or privileges in the community. Some parts of the *Cagione* express the idea that the militia should expand from the *contado* to the city, suggesting that Machiavelli aimed to create a larger military organism that would include both the countryside and the metropolis.⁶⁶⁸ However, the role that Machiavelli reserved for citizens in the *Cagione* was primarily to serve as the cavalry militia and command the infantry, thus

⁶⁶⁴ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 476.

⁶⁶⁵ Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Joseph Buttigieg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), III, 248, 327.

⁶⁶⁶ Najemy, “Occupare la tirannide:” Machiavelli, the Militia, and Guicciardini’s Accusation of Tyranny,” in *Della tirannia: Machiavelli con Bartolo*, ed. Jérémie Barthas (Florence: Leo S. Olschki Editore, 2007), 75–108.

⁶⁶⁷ Many conscripts from the *contado* were auxiliaries, and inferior to the professional troops. For example, many were simply *marraioli* and *guastatori*, laborers used to dig ditches or to build fortifications. Even in the quelling of the Pisan rebellion in 1509, the major success of Machiavelli’s militia came from the militiamen who used to create barricades and prevent Pisa’s food supplies. See Mallett, “Siegecraft in Late Fifteenth-Century Italy,” in *The Medieval City Under Siege*, ed. By M. Wolfe (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1999), 254.

⁶⁶⁸ “Questo ordine bene ordinato nel contado, de necessità conviene ch’entri a poco a poco nella città e sarà facilissima cosa ad introdurlo e vi avvedrete ancora a’ vostri di che differenza è avere de’ vostri cittadini soldati per elezione e non per corruzione, come avete al presente.” See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 476.

perpetuating the social separation between the city and its *contado*,⁶⁶⁹ and leaving the Florentine peasants with little incentive to defend the city.⁶⁷⁰ With this in mind, it is clear that the main problem of Machiavelli's militia is its contradictory character: the subjects of the metropolis are supposed to defend the city that denies them citizenship rights. This rigid separation between citizen and subject did not bode well for the creation of the "cittadino-soldato." It can be concluded here that the question of how to stimulate the peasants to take part in Machiavelli's military project remained unresolved.⁶⁷¹

Lastly, there is evidence suggesting that Machiavelli's attitude towards *contadini* in general was, ultimately, one of contempt for them and what they wanted to achieve. In the spring of 1509, Machiavelli negotiated surrender with the Pisan delegation in Piombino, which was comprised of both Pisan citizens and former *contadini* who had received citizenship rights. With typical sarcasm, Machiavelli remarked after meeting the delegation: "...dissi che m'incresceva della loro semplicità, perché giocavano un giuoco, dove e' non poteno vincere, perché comé e' Pisani avessin vinto la gara loro, e' non li vorrebbero per compagni, ma per servi, e tornerebbono ad arare."⁶⁷² This is an important reflection of Machiavelli's view on the *contadini* while in the office. By scoffing that they cannot win in this contest against the *grandi*, Machiavelli takes it as a given that the *contadini*'s political privileges would be withdrawn once the peace with Florence was concluded; that when they are no longer useful, they will be "tornati ad arare." It is possible, then, to think that Machiavelli did not cherish high hopes for the Florentine peasants' future success in their game of power with the Florentine *grandi*.

⁶⁶⁹ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 471.

⁶⁷⁰ Guidi, *Books, People, and Military Thought*, 3; See also, P. Pieri, *Il Rinascimento e la crisi militare Italiana*, 381.

⁶⁷¹ Guidi, *Un Segretario Militante*, 327.

⁶⁷² *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

Machiavelli's leanings were anything but populist in 1506, as the examination of the Pisan "people's regime" that follows will confirm.

5.12. Pisan *contadini* and Machiavelli's militia

We have seen that one of the goals of Machiavelli's militia project was to reduce the traditional separation between the city and the countryside. However, despite Machiavelli's efforts to create a sense of cohesion between the two, the inability to fully achieve this objective greatly weakened the militia's effectiveness and motivation to fight at Prato in 1512. By contrast, Pisan peasants who had taken refuge in the city when the war started in 1494, performed admirably against Florence and its allies until the war ended in 1509. Considering this fact, one may ask what motivated Pisan peasants to defend the city. The answer may be that the more than 2,000 Pisan *contadini* within the walls hoped to acquire a voice in the political camp based on their contributions to the war efforts.⁶⁷³ Though offered amnesty and free passage by the Florentine government, Pisan *contadini* chose to stay in the city because only there they could hope to win political privileges. Indeed, after the Venetians left Pisa of their own volition in April 1499, the Pisan government made the revolutionary decision to extend citizenship rights to their *contadini* on May 6, 1499, and to grant them representation in the government.⁶⁷⁴ The intent

⁶⁷³ The Pisan *contadini*'s participation in the war against Florence started right after the rebellion when they came in masses to the city avoiding ravaged *contado*. According to the author of the *Guerra del Millecinquecento*, in 1499 Pisa had 24 men at arms, 150 balistreri, 500 foreign mercenaries and 2,000 *contadini*. Despite very low numbers of people in the city and the army, the Pisan spirit never faltered. The reason for the city's obstinacy the author finds in the following: "Noi con fermo e costante animo difendiamo e difenderemo questa città insino al sangue e ad la morte, sopportando ogni cosa dura, difficile e extrema per salute di quella e nostra: perché ogni buon cittadino è obligato così fare..." See *Guerra del Millecinquecento*, 379.

⁶⁷⁴ On May 6, 1499, the *Anziani* and Gonfaloniere of Pisa made the following announcement: "seguendo la forma della autorità et balia a loro concessa et attributa da tucto il popolo di poter decernere a fare tutto quello che conosciranno utile e necessario a la impresa de la guerra presente...considerato che il contadini del nostro contado hanno in là presente guerra sopportate molte angustie et affanni et etiam unitamente con li cittadini concorso a tucte le factioni della città e del contado e non altrimenti per la conservatione della nostra libertà sparso il sangue et sudore...noi desiderando, come è debito, mostrarli evidente segno di gratitudine...se ordina e dispone che de cetero tucti li contadini veri del contado di Pisa si intendino essere e siano in perpetuo immuni et exempti di ogni gravessa, balsello, imposta, angaria, come son propri li cittadini Pisani...possano insuper dicti contadini godere tucte le

of these political concessions was not, as in the case of Florence, to keep the *contado* under its control. On the contrary, it was a shared aspiration for freedom from the Florentine yoke that united Pisan citizens and peasants ideologically and gave Machiavelli a blueprint of how the city and *contado* could work together against a common enemy.⁶⁷⁵

Over and above the usual categories of *nobili*, *cittadini*, and *contadini* in the war against Florence, contemporary Pisan chronicler Portovenieri introduces another social category: women. All contemporary accounts agree that Pisan women fought bravely shoulder to shoulder with men against Florence during the sieges of 1499, 1500, and 1505.⁶⁷⁶ For instance, the anonymous author of *Guerra del Millecinquecento* writes of the siege of 1499: “che li nostri cittadini, valorose donne, provvigionati e contadini comparse e non con solite veste, ma come esercitati lavoranti...e che mai né dì né notte fu veduto questo esercito di donne stracco nel lavorare, non temendo alcuno imminente pericolo o de artiglieria o d’altre armi.”⁶⁷⁷ Cerretani and Guicciardini also praised the bravery of Pisan women during the siege.⁶⁷⁸ The participation of the Pisan

immunità, privilegi, officii e dignità che godeno li cittadini Pisani, come se di cittadini pisani nati fusseno.” See *Commune C*, n. 8, cc. 61-62.

⁶⁷⁵ According to the anonymous chronicle, “al presente in Pisa non si tiene bottega aperta: tutti in arme e cittadini e contadini e artefici.” See Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 340; According to Guicciardini, “Pisa era ben difesa grazie ai Veneziani, oltre al numero, l’esperienza e l’animo de’ cittadini e contadini Pisani. A Pisa, c’era ostinazione inestimabile così nel popolo come ne’ contadini che vi si erano condotti dentro e che già tutti per il lungo uso delle armi erano diventati sufficienti nella guerra.” See Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia*, 354; Likewise, the Venetian chronicler Sanudo reported a letter from Pisa in which we read the following: “siamo d’uno medesimo animo tutti, cittadini et contadini...” See Sanudo, *Diarii*, II, 225-226; Lastly, in a letter to the Pisan *Anziani* from May 15, 1502, Vitellozzo Vitelli said the following about the contadini: “...credo che el più, et maxime quelli hanno qualche iudicio, giudichino e pensino a casi loro, et che se divenissero sotto fiorentini saria metterle uno freno e iugo al collo da scorticarle presto, come ciascuno puo giudicare...” See Luzzati, *Una Guerra di Popolo*, 89.

⁶⁷⁶ “A Stampace (during the siege of 1499), le done cittadine e contadine e artefici di Pisa lavoravano tutta la notte come cani.” See Portovenieri, *Memoriale*, 342.

⁶⁷⁷ Lo scrittore anonimo, *Guerra di Millecinquecento*, 366, 375.

⁶⁷⁸ For the siege of 1499 Cerretani says the following: “E s’io avessi a narrare e l’eccellenza delle offese pe’ fiorentini e delle difese per gli omini pisani e loro donne, e’ seria necessario farne uno solo volume, perché v’accadde accidenti memorabilia.” See Cerretani, *Storia*, 257; Likewise, Guicciardini in his *Storia d’Italia* complimented Pisan women: “I Pisani non intermettendo di e notte di lavorare, e insieme con loro le donne non meno pertinaci e animose a questo che gli uomini, feciono in pochissimi di all’opposito della muraglia che si batteva...non gli spaventando che mentre che lavoravano ne erano feriti e morti molti delle artiglierie.” See Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia*, 654.

women in battle was recorded again in July 1500 when the Pisans repelled French troops.

Portovenieri tells us that on June 30, 1500, “a un trato gli Alemanni introrono drento tra il bastione e le mura rotte, e qui ne funo morti da ogni parte, e furon rimossi di fiori; e le donne di Pisa che lavoravano nel fosso ne funno ferite, e alcune morte.”⁶⁷⁹

Similar reports came five years later during the siege of Pisa by the Florentine army under Ercole Bentivoglio and Antonio Giacomini. According to Cerretani and Guicciardini, women and men participated equally in the defense of the city.⁶⁸⁰ Although sources cite many instances in the Renaissance of Tuscan women defending their city walls alongside men, or fighting in support of the male soldiers, the women of Pisa were also known for taking the offensive, a phenomenon unique at the time.⁶⁸¹ As a result, long after the Pisan War, the bravery of Pisan women echoed in Renaissance literature. In the third book of Castiglione, amongst the virtues and strengths of Queens, it is recorded that “molte Pisane, che alla difesa della loro patria contra Fiorentini hanno mostrato quell’ardire generoso, senza timore alcuno di morte, che mostrar potessero i più invitti animi che mai fussero al mondo.”⁶⁸² So, what conclusion can we draw from this phenomenon? When the city of Pisa was in extreme danger, the women

⁶⁷⁹ Lo scrittore anonimo, *Guerra del Millecinquecento*, 375; In addition, thanks to this heroic resistance against the French, the Pisans were considered, according to Priuli’s reports, “la gloria et l’honor degli Italiani, perché virilmente se hanno diffeso da li inimici loro et etiam dalle genti oltramontane, quale erano molto temute da tutta l’Italia.” See Priuli, *Diarii*, II, 124; Likewise, Sanudo’s letters from Ferrara from July 1500 confirm that “le donne di Pisa han fatto più difesa di homeni” See Sanudo, *Diarii*, III, fol. 514.

⁶⁸⁰ The Florentine artillery breached the walls but “il pisani, lavorandovi, secondo il solito, con non minore animo le donne che gli uomini, aveano, mentre si batteva, tirato uno riparo con uno fosso innanzi” See Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia*, 649; To repair the walls, Cerretani tells us that there were units of “dieci huomini vecchi et 50 donne per portare d’ogni matterie, e queste mai restavano,” while other noble ladies “con una bandiera che v’era Nostra Donna et uno Chrucifisso facevano procissioni.” See Cerretani, *Storie*, 331r-332v.

⁶⁸¹ There is an episode in *Guerra del Millecinquecento* that records a 17 years old Pisan girl called Fauglia. According to the author, during the siege of Stampace fortress in 1499 she fought like a lion saying “fatevi avanti Fiorentini, femminelle senza quore, che vi do la fede mia spettar il primo di vostra nazione.” See Lo scrittore anonimo, *Guerra del Millecinquecento*, 375.

⁶⁸² Castiglione, *Il Cortegiano*, III, 350-351.

participated in the city's defense in all capacities and regardless of their class. Together with the male nobles, citizens, and peasants, they worked as one against the enemy.

Remembering the political confirmation of the peasant classes in Pisa during the war against Florence, we can turn again to Machiavelli and his attempt to bind together the Florentine *contado* and the government he served. A comparison of the two peasant fighting forces suggests that the Pisans were far more advanced and successful in implementing the kind of militia that Machiavelli championed in Florence. While Machiavelli's militia could hardly be called "citizen" due to the large number of *contadini* without the rights of citizenship, the Pisan *contadini* enjoyed the same political privileges as the rest of the Pisan citizenry. The Florentine patricians' innate fear of social experiments involving the lower classes proved to be an insurmountable obstacle to the social advancement of the Florentine peasants. Consequently, Machiavelli's project served more to control the subjects in the *contado* rather than to make them a serious military force. As Guidi argues persuasively, Machiavelli's militia, though nominally it aspired to revive the classical Roman tradition of the citizen soldier, had, in truth, much smaller and more immediate aims in mind: namely, to administer Florentine territory more strictly and limit the possibility of rebellions - and additionally to defend the country in time of war.⁶⁸³ This was borne out in the Pisan War, where the performance of Machiavelli's militia was more symbolic than combative, while the Pisan peasants proved to be a potent fighting force.

5.13. Conclusion

Today, most historians agree that Machiavelli's concern with military affairs was at the heart of his political thinking. He believed that good laws and good arms, along with strong discipline and military training, should encourage civic virtue and patriotism in Italy. Building

⁶⁸³ Guidi, *Un Segretario militante*, 373-386.

on the ideas borrowed from Bruni and Cecchi, and the practical use of peasant militia in Casentino and Romagna, Machiavelli added his own imprint by institutionalizing his military ideas and adding administrative structure and sets of laws to his militia project. In this way, he was able to do a seemingly impossible task: to convince the *grandi* about the practical use of his peasant militia and to chase away their fears of a new “Ciompi Revolt.” Although it turned out to be an idealistic project, Machiavelli’s militia offered a plausible solution to Florence’s military, financial, and political weaknesses of the time.

However, despite Machiavelli’s genuine idea to transform Florence’s military, this chapter has shown that his militia project was based on a false premise that assumed successful integration of the Florentine peasants into the Florentine state without granting or promising them citizenship rights. As many peasants joined the militia out of fear and under coercion, Machiavelli’s intention to bring the *contado* closer to the metropolis apparently missed the “glue” to tie them together. On the contrary, the success of the Pisan experiment in granting citizenship rights to its *contadini* showed that the Florentine government was far behind in its efforts to motivate its own peasant militia. Machiavelli’s recruits were forced into service under the threat of severe punishment, while the Pisan *contadini* fought for the civic ideal of liberty from Florentine oppression. If not for the ultimate abandonment of Pisa by the French and Spanish, Pisa might have held out indefinitely against the Florentine militia. Considering the differences between the two contemporary republics, especially the existence of a native populism in Pisa that the Florentines could never rival, I question the romanticized and populist representations of Machiavelli’s *armi proprie*.

CHAPTER 6

THE WAR SECRETARY (1508-1509)

6.1. Introduction

The premise of the final chapter of this dissertation is that Machiavelli's continual efforts and actions at the Pisan front and in the office significantly contributed to Pisa's surrender to Florence in June 1509. To prove this proposition, this chapter will take a closer look at Machiavelli's role in bringing about the submission of Pisa. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Machiavelli's persistent petition for *armi proprie* ultimately won the day in Florence, resulting in a profound transformation of Florence's military. Additionally, Machiavelli introduced a set of laws that institutionalized the newly founded Florentine militia and the new office of the Nine. Through his tireless administrative and fieldwork with the new recruits in the *contado*, Machiavelli laid the necessary groundwork for the subsequent actions against Pisa.

But he did not stop there. As we will see in this chapter, between August 1508 and March 1509, Machiavelli spent almost every day as the sole representative of the government in charge of military affairs. In this capacity, he not only raised new levies and inspected troops, weapons, and payments but also supervised canals, bridges, and bastions at the borders with Lucca, Siena, and Pisa.”⁶⁸⁴ Indeed, it was Machiavelli who, in March 1509, negotiated peace with the Pisan delegation, and – when that initiative failed – devised the strategy that would finally defeat the rebellious city in June 1509. For all of this, Machiavelli well deserved the highest praise from his

⁶⁸⁴ For Pitti, the whole responsibility for all this rested mostly on Machiavelli's shoulders. See Pitti, *Vita di Antonio Giacomini Tebalducci*, IV, 247.

colleague Casavecchia who considered him to be “the prophet” of his people.⁶⁸⁵ Unlike Savonarola who could not have his institutions respected for long because he had no means to protect them with arms, Machiavelli’s tireless work on arming and employing the Florentine subjects ultimately reformed Florence’s institutions and ensured the victory over Pisa.⁶⁸⁶

6.2. The Gathering Storm (1507-1508)

Machiavelli’s successful recruitment of the new militia through 1506 continued in the first quarter of 1507 as the Florentine Secretary devoted himself completely to this task. In January 1507, the new magistracy of the *Nove*, for which Machiavelli was named chancellor, came into function. In those first few months of 1507, Machiavelli’s activity was entirely taken up by this new magistracy, as all his dispatches until March 1507 were issued from the *Nove*. The first duty of the new magistracy was to implement a census amongst all *contadini* available for recruitment, age 15 and above.⁶⁸⁷ Machiavelli’s letter to the Vicar of Scarperia from January 27, 1507, summarizes his efforts in recruiting, organizing, and inspecting new troops.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁵ In Casavecchia’s letter to Machiavelli after Pisa’s surrender, he said the following: “Every day I discover you to be a greater prophet than the Hebrews or any other nation ever had.” See Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 182.

⁶⁸⁶ In chapter six of *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes extensively about founders or prophets who acquired new principalities by their own arms and virtues. At the end of this chapter, Machiavelli warns the potential prince that in order to avoid risk, successful prophets must rely not only upon opportunity and virtue but also on their own resources and strength. From this, Machiavelli argued that all armed prophets were victorious and the unarmed came to ruin. See *Il Principe*, vi, 23-24.

⁶⁸⁷ One of the powers the new Magistracy had was to recruit anyone they saw fit. In his instructions to the *Podestà* within the Florentine Dominion, from January 13, 1507, Machiavelli requests the following: “Secondo gli ordini della nostra Repubblica, siamo suti deputati per ordinare quella parte all’armi dei nostri uomini che noi giudicheremo atti, e desiderando sapere appunto di che numero di uomini ci possiamo valere, voliamo che subito abbia a te tutti e’ rettori de’ popoli della tua potesteria, o sindachi de’ comuni, o chi sotto altro nome avessi simile uffizio. E comanderai per parte nostra che fra 6 o 8 di dal di del comandamento ti presentino in su una listra tutti gli uomini che abitano nel suo popolo o sindacato di età da xv anni in su; e ti farai portare dette listre e le trascriverai in uno quaderno e ce le manderai subito.” See *Legazioni*, V, 542.

⁶⁸⁸ “Volendo noi col nome di Dio cominciare a fermare e saldare le bandiere ordinate per li spectabili Dieci, e volendo cominciare da quelle che furono prima poste, cioè Borgo, Vicchio, Scarperia e Barberino; e scriverai quelli che ti parranno atti, e quelli che non ti parrano licenzierai. Tu userai buona diligenza e durerai questa fatica volentieri per amore della tua patria...” See *Legazioni*, V, 546.

However, given that skirmishes with the Pisans were rare in the winter months, crime and disobedience amongst the new recruits appeared to be Machiavelli's principal preoccupation. For example, from the dispatches we find that some *contadini* were illegally selling the weapons they had received from the *Dieci* upon recruitment.⁶⁸⁹ Others, by contrast, used their weapons in violent confrontations to solve their personal differences.⁶⁹⁰ Lastly, despite heavy penalties, many recruits continued to escape army inspections and avoid serving in the militia altogether.⁶⁹¹ It seemed that more time was needed for the peasants to accept their new reality. Eventually, the Florentine government had to rely on anonymous complaints to fight desertion.⁶⁹²

While the issues mentioned above were challenging for the new administration of the *Nove*, they were still local and minor in nature. However, a new problem that emerged in the summer of 1507 threatened the security of the Republic and thus required Machiavelli's immediate attention. From his dispatch of July 8, 1507, to the constable of Firenzuola, Antonio da Castiglione, we learn that many *contadini* had asked permission to leave their territory and fight for Venice, as their constable was offering payment to any who enrolled.⁶⁹³ As mentioned

⁶⁸⁹ "Noi intendiamo come molti di cotesti nostri scritti hanno vendute o giocate le armi; e perché nessuna cosa importa quanto questa, volendo tenere ordinati e armati li uomini, non ci potrebbe più tale alienazione dispiacere, e voliamo ad ogni modo ci si provenga e ora e per lo avvenire; avvertirai oltra di questo ciascuno delli scritti che se per lo avvenire venderà o comperrà le armi, che noi lo gastigheremo in modo che se ne ricorderà." See *Legazioni*, V, 547.

⁶⁹⁰ In a dispatch to the Vicar of Sanminiato from February 20, 1507, Machiavelli reports the following: "E' ci fu questa mattina ad ore 14, notificato come Menico di Giovanni da Fucecchio aveva ferito in su' l capo Giovanni di Pagolo. Non lo abbiamo fatto citare, stimando che tu né abbi la prevenzione: e quando non avessi, li farai fare comandamento si rappresenti a noi. Noi desideriamo che questi nostri uomini sieno gastigati in persona, e non in danari, cioe che le pene sieno corporali e non pecuniarie." See *Legazioni*, V, 554; Similarly, in another letter, Machiavelli reports a duel between two men that happened at the Piazza in Saminiato. See *Legazioni*, V, 556.

⁶⁹¹ In a dispatch to the Vicar of Firenzuola, of April 8, 1507, Machiavelli reports the following: "Intendiamo quanto ci scrivi de' danari riscossi e de' disubbidienti; commendiamone la diligenza tua." See *Legazioni*, VI, 39.

⁶⁹² From the dispatch sent to the *Podestà* of San Gimignano on June 16, 1507, we see that there are still examples of disobedient *contadini*. The Florentine government had to employ the so called "tamburi" or boxes in which anonymous complaints were deposited. See *Legazioni*, VI, 56.

⁶⁹³ "Per la tua de' tre, ricevuta ier mattina, intendiamo come molti di cotesti scritti ti chiegono licenza per andare a pigliare danari con li conestaboli che soldano per li Veneziani. Abbiamoti a fare intendere questo: che noi desideriamo sopra ogni cosa che detti nostri scritti non piglino danari per andare al soldo d'altri. Voliamo che in

earlier, fear of the emperor's looming invasion had brought on a temporary pause in the fighting between Florence and Pisa. This compelled many peasants from the *contado* to seek other avenues of employment. Having sold the weapons provided by the state, some now decided to sell their newly acquired combat skills. Considering the amount of effort Machiavelli had invested into the approval, recruiting, and training of the Florentine militia, one can understand his reaction of learning that Venice was attempting to "steal" the fruits of his labors.

On July 10, 1508, Machiavelli again penned a long dispatch to the Vicar of Firenzuola in which he restated his indignation over "renting" the militia to Venice in more detail:

Facciamoti intendere generalmente come noi desideriamo sopra ogn'altra cosa che nessuno suddito di questa Repubblica, ed in spetie e nostri scritti, vadino al soldo con alcuno; perché, andando tempi che noi potessimo averli ad operare, noi non vogliamo che sieno partiti da casa ed a' servizi d'altri con l'armi nostre.⁶⁹⁴

So that there would be no doubt about the consequences of such actions, Machiavelli informs the Vicar that all peasants who fight for Venice will be considered rebels and fathers will be punished for their sons and one brother for another.⁶⁹⁵ He concludes the dispatch with the following threat: "Noi disegniamo, per dare terrore a chi volessi disubbidire e rendere reputazione a questa cosa, di mandare costà Don Micheletto chi potrai fare loro intendere di nuovo quello che di sopra ti si dice."⁶⁹⁶ Considering the tone of these words, one may wonder: Why such a negative reaction from Machiavelli, given the example of Madonna of Imola who, despite the danger of Cesare Borgia, had willingly offered her Romagnol militia to Florence? After all,

ogni altro modo e' ci si usi ogni diligenza perché non partino. Ed a chi ti chiederà licenza, farai intendere che se li andrà e' sarà gastigato." See *Legazioni*, VI, 59.

⁶⁹⁴ *Legazioni*, VI, 60.

⁶⁹⁵ "Farai intendere a ciascuno che, se partirà per ire al saldo d'altri senza licenza nostra, che ne sarà punito o a l'andata o a la tornata, e sarà trattato come nostro rebelle, e sarà gastigato el padre per il figliolo e l'uno fratello per l'altro." See *Legazioni*, VI, 60.

⁶⁹⁶ *Legazioni*, VI, 61.

would not the *contadini* who went elsewhere to fight in times of local peace gain battle experience and reputation that would serve Florence when the war with Pisa resumed?

It seems to me that the answer to the question lies in the doubtful loyalty of the new militia to the state that forced some to serve under threat of punishment. As long as problems with deserters and “disobedient” recruits plagued the *Dieci* and the *Nove*, there was a legitimate fear that the new recruits would not return but remain instead in the service of Venice. Nor could those who did not return be penalized. Thus, Machiavelli turned to using family members of deserters as “hostages.” The use of innocent persons as scapegoats for the crimes of family members seems unfair today, but for Machiavelli it was just another way to preserve his militia and protect the state from the enemy. And if even these threats did not suffice, as often they did not, Machiavelli could always send Don Micheletto to provide further persuasion. To a modern reader, the Florentine Republic may seem like a police state where the government strictly monitored peasants’ movements and where their freedom of action was circumscribed. To Machiavelli, these conditions, like the execution of Vitelli, were necessary to protect the state.⁶⁹⁷

Nevertheless, Machiavelli’s work in recruiting and preparing militia for the new campaign against Pisa came to a sudden halt due to external events, as once again the eyes of the Signoria turned to a more pressing matter. In July 1506, a popular revolt in Genoa expelled the city’s pro-French nobility to Savona. Infuriated, the king of France launched an offensive against the city in the early spring of 1507, capturing it at the end of April after a short siege.⁶⁹⁸

According to Guicciardini, when the French king conquered Genoa, “Ebbe di questa vittoria grandissima allegrezza la città nostra, perché avendo e’ pisani mandato aiuto di molti uomini a’

⁶⁹⁷ It is interesting to notice that the Venetian constable who was recruiting Florentine *contadini* had his headquarters in Lucca, an enemy of Florence at the time. Thus, the recruitment was indeed a threat to the security of the Republic. See *Legazioni*, VI, 62.

⁶⁹⁸ Mallett and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 84-85.

genovesi, el re dimostrò averlo per male e disse molte volte agli oratori nostri che, acquistata Genova, voleva renderci Pisa, e che, bisognando, verrebbe a questa impresa per nostro capitano.”⁶⁹⁹ Nonetheless, Florence’s hopes were quickly dashed. Once Genoa was reconquered, the French king declined to continue south with his troops and returned to France.⁷⁰⁰ Meanwhile, Florence’s plans to form an alliance with the king of Spain fell through as he failed to convince the Pisans to return under Florentine rule. On yet another diplomatic front, a proposal to the Signoria by the French ambassador that the Kings of France and Spain could act as joint arbiters of a settlement with Pisa was rejected by a *Pratica* in May 1507.⁷⁰¹

Shortly after, the attention of the Signoria was drawn to the actions of Emperor Maximilian I. When the French occupied Genoa, the emperor declared Louis XII of France an enemy of Christianity and a threat to Italy. At the Imperial Diet of Konstanz, he requested and received funding for an Italian expedition, or *Italienzug*, intending to claim the crown and reaffirm his imperial rights.⁷⁰² When the news reached Florence, the Signoria decided to send an envoy to closely observe the emperor’s preparations and movements and determine how much his friendship would cost should he enter Italy. The gonfaloniere, Ridolfi claims, wanted to send a person of trust and experience as *mandatario* to the emperor, so Machiavelli was chosen for this role on June 19, 1507.⁷⁰³ However, according to Guicciardini, many powerful citizens who were not in favor of Soderini and his decision to send Machiavelli won the day and sent a

⁶⁹⁹ “Ma come facevano tutte le nostre buone nuove, ogni cosa diventò vana...e però subito rimandò parte delle gente in Francia, licenziò e’ svizzeri che aveva tolti a soldo, dette voce volersi presto tornare in Francia.” See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 296.

⁷⁰⁰ Drawing from Dejardin’s *Negotiations diplomatiques*, Villari tells us that the French king promised the Florentine legate, Francesco Pandolfini that he will restore Pisa after conquering Genoa. Nevertheless, shortly after the conquest of Genoa, the king returned to France, failing to keep yet another promise to Florence. See Villari, *La Vita*, 449.

⁷⁰¹ Butters, *Governors*, 114, note 9.

⁷⁰² Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 86; Butters, *Governors*, 116, note 14.

⁷⁰³ Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 100.

younger envoy from a prominent family, Francesco Vettori in June 1507.⁷⁰⁴ Consequently, the affair around the German emperor and his looming invasion paralyzed Florence, which could not take any serious initiative against Pisa.

With the Pisan summer campaign suspended for the time being, the Signoria sent Machiavelli to Siena, where the papal legate had been commissioned to convince emperor Maximilian I not to enter Italy. While Machiavelli's dispatches from Siena suggested that Maximilian's descent to Italy with an army was opposed by the Pope, Vettori's from Germany claimed that Maximilian's preparations were going well and that his *Italienzug* was imminent.⁷⁰⁵ As the reports were conflicting and the support for the emperor's expedition was eroding daily, the gonfaloniere convinced the Signoria to send Machiavelli to Germany to join Vettori. Despite the assertions of Soderini's enemies that Machiavelli was sent to Germany to be his "eyes and ears," Butters argues persuasively that his sole mission was to deliver instructions orally to Vettori after which he was to return immediately.⁷⁰⁶ Little did he know that the emperor's unexpected decision to declare war on Venice would compel him to stay in Germany until June 1508.⁷⁰⁷ However, as Machiavelli's German sojourn had little to do with the Pisan War, we will

⁷⁰⁴ "E fu eletto per opera del gonfaloniere, che vi voleva uno di chi e' si potessi fidare, el Machiavello; el quale mettendosi in ordine per andare, cominciorono a gridare molti uomini da bene, chi e' si mandassi altri, essendo in Firenze tanti giovani da bene atti a andarvi ed e' quali era bene che si esercitassino. È però mutata la elezione, fu deputato Francesco di Piero Vettori con commissione generale, e da intendere e scrivere, non da praticare e conchiudere." See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 297.

⁷⁰⁵ On August 14, 1507, Machiavelli writes to the *Dieci*: "Parlando con questi del Legato e con uomini di qualche cervello, ritraggo che la commissione sua è di fare ogni opera, innanzi ad ogni cosa, che l'imperatore non passi; e per levargli via la necessità di venire per la corona, ha dato autorità a detto Legato, di coronarlo là; ma quando lo vegga volto a passare in ogni modo lo persuada a passare disarmato." See *Legazioni*, VI, 72-74.

⁷⁰⁶ Butters, *Governors*, 116.

⁷⁰⁷ Machiavelli departed for Germany on December 17, 1507, arriving in Bolzano on January 11, 1508. See *Legazioni*, VI, 103; After meeting Vettori and relaying the latest instructions from the Signoria, he was meant to come back to Florence to continue with his usual duties. However, On January 24, 1508, Maximilian requested permission to march to Rome through Venetian territory, but the Venetians refused to let him pass through their territories and prepared for war. On February 4, 1508, Maximilian I proclaimed himself the Holy Roman Emperor in Trento and shortly after declared war on Venice. Despite initial success in raiding Venetian territories as far as Vicenza, the Venetian victory at the battle of Cadore in March 1508 and the capture of Trieste in May of that year forced the emperor to sue for peace. Venice agreed to a separate three-year truce with Maximilian without the

not discuss it in this chapter. At this point, though, it is sufficient to mention that shortly before his arrival from Germany, the Florentine government started yet another summer campaign against Pisa. The stage was set for the War Secretary.

6.3. Machiavelli and the Pisan Campaign of 1508

Official dispatches, contemporary chronicles, and histories undoubtedly list Machiavelli as the main operator in the war camp near Pisa in the second half of 1508. On August 16, 1508, the Ten sent the following letter to all officials in the Florentine dominion:

Dieci di Libertà e Balia della Repubblica fiorentina significhiamo a qualunque vedrà queste nostre patenti lettere come ostensore di esse sarà lo spettabile e prudente Niccolò di messer Bernardo Machiavelli nostro Secretario, el quale noi mandiamo per selezionare e reclutare certa quantità di fanti nel territorio di Pisa. E per questa cagione comandiamo a tutti voi scritti nell'Ordinanza della Repubblica nostra che obediate a esso Niccolò non altrimenti faresti al Magistrato nostro, ed a voi rettori, ufficiali e sudditi che li prestate tutti quelli favori che fussino necessari e che lui vi ricercassi per condurre detta commissione più facilmente.⁷⁰⁸

The importance of Machiavelli's presence in the summer campaign of 1508 is confirmed by Jacopo Pitti's later account: "In questo anno 1508, al certo assai cagione di esercitarsi l'operosità del Niccolò Machiavelli, per le commissioni ricevute dalla sua Repubblica."⁷⁰⁹

The dispatches Machiavelli wrote from the camp tell us that he started the Pisan campaign in Pontedera on August 21, 1508, where his troops began to lay waste to the nearby Vico Pisano in the Pisan countryside.⁷¹⁰ In the past Machiavelli had occasionally visited the countryside to recruit militia or bring money to the war commissioners in the camp but he had never remained for long due to his chancery duties in Florence. Now, for the first time in his career, he was assigned for three consecutive months to recruit and follow the army in the field

knowledge or consent of King Louis XII of France. Angered by this "betrayal," Louis XII sought to punish the Venetians and started contemplating a Franco-German alliance with Maximilian I against Venice. The seed for the showdown at Agnadello in May 1509 was sown. See Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 86-87.

⁷⁰⁸ *Legazioni*, VI, 258.

⁷⁰⁹ Pitti, *Vita di Antonio Giacomini*, IV, 244.

⁷¹⁰ *Legazioni*, VI, 60-61; Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 105.

while supervising the destruction of the Pisan harvest. How can we explain this radical change? What made Machiavelli the ideal candidate for this mission?

After the introduction of the Florentine militia and the *Nove* in January 1507, Machiavelli's primary duties shifted towards military matters and the pressing need to end the Pisan War. As we have seen in the text above, for more than a year, the emperor's looming invasion had paralyzed Florence's offensive plans against Pisa. Freed from this menace, the Florentine citizens could begin consultations on a strategy of laying waste to Pisan territory. At one *Consulta* at the beginning of 1508, Guicciardini reports that nearly all citizens thought that *guasto* should be avoided this time because although such actions hurt the Pisans, they do not assure victory.⁷¹¹ Additionally, Guicciardini claims, some citizens considered *guasto* to be unnecessarily cruel, "perché questo conduceva molti villani in tanta estremità, che le famiglie di molti, e massime le donne, ne capitavano male."⁷¹² However, Gonfaloniere Soderini, who according to Guicciardini was always enthusiastic about any campaign against Pisa, pressed for the devastation of the enemy's harvest. He was convinced by the letters from the camp that "se questo guasto si dava, le cose di Pisa si conducevano in tanta estremità, che o e' contadini farebbono tumulto in Pisa, non volendo aspettare di perdere le loro ricolte, o se pure aspettassino, la fame in ultimo gli sforzerebbe a cedere."⁷¹³ Eventually, Soderini's view won the day and the new campaign was proclaimed for May 1508.

The campaign started a month before Machiavelli's return from Germany when it was clear that the emperor's Italian adventure had failed.⁷¹⁴ Similarly, Buonaccorsi writes: "e

⁷¹¹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 307.

⁷¹² Guicciardini, *Storie*, 308.

⁷¹³ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 308.

⁷¹⁴ According to the contemporary chronicler Vaglianti, "di poi addì 2 di maggio anno 1508 costoro levorno tutte le gente di quel d'Arezzo e per tutti e luoghi dove avevano gente d'arme e mandorolli in quel di Pisa insieme con circa 4500 fanti nominati battaglioni, e quali sono tutti contadini del contado nostro a' quali a tutti avevano dato

cominciono a tornare le nostre fanterie e battaglioni di quel di Pisa e dissono avere fornito di dare el guasto e che questa volta hanno tagliato le vigne e li alberi per tutto paese.”⁷¹⁵ Even without Machiavelli present, the campaign started strongly, with the utter destruction of the Pisan harvest. While Vaglianti and Buonaccorsi differ in the number of *contadini* who participated in the campaign against Pisa, they both emphasize that Machiavelli’s newly founded battalions operated alongside *gente d’arme*, confirming that Machiavelli still considered mercenary units as necessary auxiliaries in the Florentine army, as their cavalry battalions and battle experience provided for what the *contadini* lacked. Also, though Machiavelli remained in Germany, the constables he had trained led the peasant battalions well and without any reported issues. Pisa – bereft of protection from Spain, Venice, and France, and devastated by hunger and poverty – looked to be on the verge of surrender. However, just when it seemed that Florence was free to deal with Pisa on its own terms, without the interference of any great power, the French king once again gave Florence a lesson on power in politics. Recognizing that the war between the emperor and Venice was about to end in a truce leaving a large unpaid bill for mercenaries, Louis XII decided to extract money from Florence in an unprecedented way.

In his *Négociations*, for May 19, 1508, Desjardins reports the following: “Le Roy enjoint aux Florentines de suspendre quant à présent toute attaque contre Pise et le territoire de son comté...pour ce que ceste matière touche non seulement à nous, mais à notre Saint Père le pape, au Roy Catholique, notre bon frère, et à la Seigneurie de Venise.”⁷¹⁶ While the French directive to the Signoria may surprise, as the French had shown no care for Pisa since King Charles VIII’s

connestaboli. E mandorolli su in quel di Pisa con detti loro connestaboli bene a punto e bene a ordine d’armadura e di petti e assai scoppettieri e ronconi e lance lunghe per dare el guasto in quel di Pisa. E a dì 7 detto feciono la mostra a Cascina circa 250 uomini d’arme e circa 100 caballeggieri e sopradetti contadini a fatti di dare detto guasto. E comincionno a dare detto guasto a dì 14 di maggio in Barberecina...” See Vaglianti, *Storia*, 214.

⁷¹⁵ Buonaccorsi, *Diario*, 134.

⁷¹⁶ Desjardins, *Négociations*, II, 252; Tommasini, *La Vita*, 413.

duplicitous diplomacy of 1495, it was clear to the Florentines what the king really desired. According to Guicciardini, the king expected compensation if Florence wanted to take Pisa without his objections.”⁷¹⁷ Since 1494, the French kings had extorted money from Florence whenever the opportunity arose. We have seen in chapter two that despite its protests to the French king, Florence had been made to pay the Swiss mercenaries more than 30,000 ducats. Now, in 1508, due to its military weakness and diplomatic dependence on France, Florence again served as a perfect target for extortion. Once more, Machiavelli learned that diplomacy was based on current political circumstances and not ancient loyalties and friendships.

Initially, as in 1500, the Florentine government ignored the king, continuing with the *guasto*. Machiavelli’s remark to his government from August 1500 of being “messer Nihilo” did not seem to convince them to accept the unacceptable. As intimidation, King Louis XII sent his envoy, Michele de Ricci, to remind the Signoria “ch’egli (the French) non si acconcerebbe a che i Fiorentini riavessero Pisa per quel mezzo.” Soderini’s answer was cold and brief, arguing that Florentines had the right “di riacquistare le cose sue.”⁷¹⁸ In response, the French king ordered his captain Trivulzio to prepare 300 lances to send in Pisa’s defense. Needless to say, the Florentines were infuriated by the king’s decision and turned again to their endless debates in the *Consulte* to solve the problem. Most members of the *Consulte* expressed legitimate fear that the French would no more honor this agreement than it had the previous ones. According to Francesco Gualterotti, “considerata la natura de’ francesi, che sono senza fede e non vogliono stare a ragione, lo effetto sarebbe che questo accordo non ci darebbe Pisa.”⁷¹⁹ It was to this political

⁷¹⁷ Guicciardini, *Storia*, 334; Also, in his *Diario*, Buonaccorsi reports that the French king wanted money to let Florence have Pisa. Otherwise, he was ready to send general Trivulzio with 300 lances to protect Pisa.” See Buonaccorsi, *Diario*, 136.

⁷¹⁸ Nitti, *La Vita*, 375.

⁷¹⁹ Bertelli, *Legazioni*, II, 1157.

atmosphere that Machiavelli returned to join the ongoing Pisan campaign. Nevertheless, despite the circumstances between August and November 1508, Machiavelli not only recruited and inspected the new troops but also led the *guasto* against Pisa and Lucca. On August 26, 1508, Soderini addresses Machiavelli about the slow progress of the *guasto* in a manner that suggests he was a war commissioner or military captain:

My dear friend Niccolò. To our group here it seems as if this laying waste is going very slowly. Therefore, we thought we ought to write you the present letter and urge you to press for it to be finished, in such a way that the least possible fodder is left to the enemy and with the greatest possible swiftness, and you will be very highly praised for it over here. Therefore, make sure you do as much as possible, always with the understanding that you should not put yourself in a position where our troops would run any risk. Farewell.⁷²⁰

There are several conclusions we can draw from this letter. First, although Soderini starts the letter with “my dear friend Niccolò,” the wishes expressed are not those of the gonfaloniere alone, but rather of “our group here,” which refers either to the Signoria or the *Dieci* or to both. Likewise, in saying “We thought we ought to write to you,” the subject is the Florentine government, which expects results from no one else than Machiavelli, entrusting him alone with the entire conduct of the campaign. Although Capponi, stationed in Cascina, was the war commissioner, his role “from behind the walls” was insignificant in comparison to Machiavelli’s active work in the field. As no previous Florentine secretary had been entrusted with similar duties, Machiavelli’s leading role in the Pisan campaign is truly unique and unusual concerning his status. To boost his motivation, Soderini alludes to Machiavelli’s wider reputation by saying, “You will be highly praised for it over here,” again emphasizing that it is not Soderini alone who will be pleased. And despite the urgency of the message, the Florentine government evidently considers Machiavelli too valuable to be exposed to the risk of close proximity to conflict. Reading between the lines, the implication is that Machiavelli did not hide behind his soldiers

⁷²⁰ Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 170.

but followed them instead to the point where he was exposed to risk. However, there remained one problem, which undermined the whole rationale for the *guasto*; namely, that the Pisans were not injured by it. Despite Machiavelli's attempts to starve Pisa, grain – originating mostly from Genoa, Lucca, and Siena – continued to enter the city by way of the Arno Valley. It was clear that if Florence did not seal these supply routes, the *guasto* would be ineffective.

To prevent Genoese ships from sending grain to Pisa, Florence had hired Bardellotto, the son of a corsair named Bardella from Porto Venere, near modern-day Spezia, tasking him with blockading the mouth of the Arno with three vessels.⁷²¹ While travel on the river itself was slow and risky, the Luccan smuggling channels via the Arno Valley were much shorter and harder to track, hence more dependable. According to Guicciardini, Lucca supported Pisa for many reasons: “Apart from fear and hatred towards Florence, they profited a lot in the war through the trade with Pisa.”⁷²² Nardi, too, tells us that Lucca did everything to prevent Pisa from falling into Florentine hands.⁷²³ As the trade continued to hamper Florentine efforts, Guicciardini reported that one of the committees of the Ten had decided to instruct commissioners in Cascina to attack Viareggio, where they burned warehouses, stole clothes, cattle, and did great damage.⁷²⁴ Nardi concurs with Guicciardini, writing the following:

Il Dieci ordinarono al Commissario, che sotto colore d'andare a predare le robe de' Pisani a Viareggio, vi mandasse la gente d'arme con fanterie, e predasse e abbruciasse e danneggiasse più che potesse; non facendo però prigionieri se non Pisani. Esegui il Commissario, tra pochi di, questa commissione, con danno di più che dieci mila ducati de' Lucchesi...I quali...deliberarono di mandare ambasciatori a Firenze a domandare di stare per innanzi in buona amicizia. Dove, doppo molte dispute, si concluse tra loro, alli dodici di gennaio, una lega per anni tre.”⁷²⁵

⁷²¹ The Florentine government hired Bardella on August 29, 1508, to guard Torre de Foce on the river Arno near Pisa. See Buonaccorsi, *Diario*, 134; According to the Pisan chronicler Perizzolo, “A 29 di Agosto presente condussero al loro saldo il figliolo del Bardella da Portovenere con più legni per serrare la via di mare a Pisani con provisione di fiorini 600 il mese.” See Perizzolo da Pisa, *Ricordi*, 394.

⁷²² Guicciardini, *Storia*, 306.

⁷²³ “Ma li Lucchesi, che vedevano manifestamente cadere Pisa in breve, li sumministravano quanto più aiuti e più coperti potevano.” See Nardi, *La Vita*, 245.

⁷²⁴ Guicciardini, *Storia*, 313.

⁷²⁵ Nardi, *La Vita*, 245.

Landucci also provides vivid details about the campaign against Lucca.⁷²⁶ Finally, Machiavelli's friend Buonaccorsi and the Pisan chronicler Perizzolo da Pisa both record for November 28, 1508, that the commissioner in Cascina received instructions to plunder Luccan territory around Viareggio.⁷²⁷

It is not clear who was the commissioner responsible for the campaign against Viareggio. Though Capponi was the official war commissioner in Cascina, Guicciardini, Nardi, and Buonaccorsi do not mention his name. On the contrary, Nardi names Machiavelli as the "commissario in Cascina" who led the campaign against Lucca. It could be that Nardi accidentally or intentionally confused Capponi and Machiavelli, as the Florentine secretary was far more present in the camp than Capponi. Machiavelli's dispatches around this time are surprisingly sparse, perhaps due to his intense involvement in the campaign. As Machiavelli's presence in Pescia in late November 1508, only 35 km from Lucca, is confirmed, and his perennial desire to punish Lucca for helping Pisa is already mentioned, there is reason to suspect that it was he who led the battalions in the campaign of plunder and destruction.⁷²⁸ In any case, swift action against Lucca was needed, as many Florentine citizens had become convinced that Pisa would only fall if aid from Lucca could be halted.

Despite progress on the Florentine side, however, the final outcome still depended largely on French approval. While Florence initially refused to pay the large sum of money demanded

⁷²⁶ "E a dì 12 di novembre 1508, ci fu come e nostri di Pisa avevano andato a' danni de' Lucchesi e predato Viareggio e arsono ciò che vi restò; che fu un bottino di diecimila fiorini, perchè è el porto di Lucca. E poi scorsono insino presso a Lucca, in modo che 'l popolo di Lucca uscì fuori; è furono rotti e morti circa 40 uomini di loro con grandissimo loro danno. E questo e poveretti si sono andati cercando el male, sempre tenendo la parte pisana e aiutatogli; dovevano pensare che Marzocco era atto a fare loro male: pigliavano la fallace. See Landucci, *Diario*, 230.

⁷²⁷ For the year 1508, the Pisan chronicler Perizzolo says the following: "Seguitoe lo exercito Fiorentino la sua visita alle nostre campagne, sacco ponendo; et arrivanoo fino aili muri de Pisa, ma no tentano altra cosa, per lo riguardo dello Re di Francia e del Re de Ispagna; e danno el guaste al tenitorio de Lucca, perchè soccorrieno noi affamati per le biauade mancanti, e tolte sulla colta." See Ser Perizzolo, *Ricordi*, 396; See also Buonaccorsi, *Diario*, 137.

⁷²⁸ *Legazioni*, VI, 266.

by the French, the potential for war in Italy in the spring of 1509 forced the Signoria to reconsider. Between late November and early December 1508, the French king, the pope, the emperor, and the king of Spain formed the so-called League of Cambrai against Venice and its ever-growing influence in Northern Italy.⁷²⁹ As the French military presence in Northern Italy was dangerously close to Pisa, the Florentine government finally realized that a deal with Louis XII was unavoidable. For this reason, ambassadors Alessandro Nasi and Giovanni Ridolfi were sent to Blois where, according to Guicciardini, they promised the king 100,000 ducats and 50,000 to the Spanish ambassador if, in return, he did not send help to Pisa and stop Genoa and Lucca helping the rebellious city.”⁷³⁰ On March 13, 1509, after many debates and opposing arguments and opinions, the Florentines agreed to pay the king.⁷³¹ In his later *Decennale Secondo*, the frustrated Machiavelli did not forget to mention French and Spanish hunger for lucre, which he described as “stuffing each country’s throat and whatever mouth remained open.”⁷³² According to Butters, “It was the money that bought Pisa in the end rather than the military prowess of the new militia at a time when Venice was too occupied with the looming threat of the League of Cambrai.”⁷³³ While there is some truth in this statement, the following text will show that the conquest of Pisa was anything but smooth.

⁷²⁹ Mallet and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 87.

⁷³⁰ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 282; Villari, *La Vita*, 451.

⁷³¹ In a letter from the Florentine ambassador in France from March 13, 1509, we find out about two treaties concluded with the French and Spanish king. The first treaty obliged Spain and France to protect Florence for three years and to help her recover Pisa. If Pisa fell within a year, Florence would pay France and Spain 50.000 ducats each. The second treaty was a secret one between Florence and France by which Florence agreed to pay France 50.000 ducats and France to pay them back the same amount if Pisa did not fall within a year. See Butters, *Governors*, 135; The Pisans were also aware of the contract. Their chronicler left the following remark: “Fu concluso il detto accordo alli 14 di marzo oltre a che fu di bisogno promettessero i Fiorentini di donare a ministri de arte si haveva a distribuire secondo la volontà del cardinale di Roano: le quali conventioni benché fussero con grandissima spesa de Fiorentini.” See Perizzolo, *Ricordi*, 367.

⁷³² Machiavelli, *Opere letterarie*, (vv.155-156), 254.

⁷³³ Butters, *Governors*, 137.

6.4. The Mouse Trap of 1509

After the dissolution of the League of Cambrai at the end of 1508, it was clear that the spring of 1509 would bring yet more turmoil to Italy. The Florentine government intended to end the siege of Pisa before the confrontation in Lombardy between Venice and the League could spill into Tuscany. There was a fear that whoever emerged victorious from the conflict could take possession of or offer protection to Pisa. Thus, the Florentine government did not prepare for a *guasto* in the spring as they had done in the past but planned instead to use manpower provided by the militia and *guastatori* from the *contado* to block every possible access to Pisa for grain and other provisions. The intention was to cause widespread starvation in Pisa and conflict between its citizens and *contadini*. The main operative behind this campaign was none other than Machiavelli. From the end of January to June 1509, Machiavelli's efforts to end the Pisan War included several duties. He was responsible for recruiting, inspecting, providing for, and paying the troops within the Florentine dominion; warding off any attempt by the Pisans or their allies from Genoa and Lucca to distribute provisions to the city; creating a plan to seal permanently all unofficial trade routes towards Pisa; negotiating peace with the Pisan delegation, and later escorting them to Florence. Considering his efforts during those few months in 1509, we can safely argue that no other Florentine official did more to bring about an end to the war.⁷³⁴

In the first days of February 1509, we find Machiavelli in the field around Val di Serchio near the border with Lucca, recruiting *guastatori* for the upcoming fieldwork along the Arno River. Despite the French king's ban on Genoese trade with Pisa, a large convoy of ships from Genoa loaded with provisions was heading towards Pisa.⁷³⁵ To block the shipment of grain from

⁷³⁴ Pitti, *La Vita di Antonio Giacomini*, 247.

⁷³⁵ Pisan chronicler from the 17th century, Iacopo Arrostiti, reports the following: "Come i Genovesi messero insieme più legni carichi di grano, e li mandorno alla volta di Pisa et la foce di Arno et altri luoghi dove poteva venire questo soccorso tenutolo impedito da Fiorentini se ne ritornò indietro i Pisani che in quest'anno non havevano viveri per i

Genoa, Machiavelli, as the highest government official in the camp, had divided the Florentine militia into two parts, assigning them to patrol both banks of the river. In addition, he supervised the construction of a bridge over the Arno at San Piero a Grado, some 10 km from Pisa near the modern-day airport. On receiving news of the Genoese ships' arrival on February 8th, 1509, Machiavelli was immediately sent to the mouth of the Fiume Morto, 5 km west of Pisa, to prevent them from reaching the besieged city. He sent one battalion of the militia to San Piero in Grado to hold the river mouth and a second band of equal strength to Fiume Morto, a canal by which boats passed to get to Pisa.⁷³⁶ According to the contemporary Pisan chronicler Perizzolo, “vennono li Fiorentini con lo exercito a Pisa; e, fatte guardare da uomini d'arme e artilierie le foce dell'Arno e del Serchio, perchè li Genovesi con loro legni non passasseno a portare grano, feciono duo bastie et ponte sopra lo Arno, e così restrinsono la nostra città; e convenne rendersi a buoni patti, e foronoci mantenuti.”⁷³⁷ The later Pisan chronicler Arrostiti tells a similar story but in more detail.⁷³⁸ It is evident from the Pisan sources that it was the Florentine militia, supported by the artillery and towers over the river, that prevented the Genoese ships from advancing further. Despite their naval superiority over Florence, the Genoese seamen did not want to fight the

loro bisogni procurorno che di Genova loro confederati gliene mandassero, e non mancorno ancora i Lucchesi farli noleggiare da Genova per detti Pisani, e perciò del mese di febbraio i Genovesi havevano messo insieme più legni tra grossi, e piccoli per mettere in Pisa certa quantità di grano.” See Iacopo Arrostiti, *Croniche di Pisa*, 369; Nitti, *La Vita*, 377; Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 106.

⁷³⁶ Nitti, *La Vita*, 377.

⁷³⁷ Perizzolo da Pisa, *Ricordi*, 370.

⁷³⁸ “Ma i Fiorentini hebbero avviso del detto soccorso che veniva a Pisani alli 8 del detto mese, quali Genovesi glielo mandavano perchè si potessino sostenere fino a ricolta; ma i detti Fiorentini cercorno di ovviare che detto grano non entrassi in Pisa, et i Pisani erano in termine che non vi entrando detto grano, si potevano tenere perduti; et a questo effetto mandorno a San Piero in Grado una parte delle gente di arme, et 800 fanti in circa di quelli dell'ordinanza, con qualche pezzo di artiglieria per tenere la foce d'Arno, et in Valdiserchio mandorno ancora altrettanta gente, per tenere la foce di fiume Morto, e di Serchio; et così ordinate queste provisioni circa alli 18 di febbraio arrivò in foce d'Arno l'armata sopradetta con li grani, et trovate le genti ordinate da ogni banda in terra con artiglierie, et buona armata in mare non potendo entrare se ne ritornorno indietro a Lerici donde era partita.” See Arrostiti, *Croniche di Pisa*, 369.

militia on land so they turned back on February 18, 1509.⁷³⁹ As a result, just two days later, Machiavelli informed Capponi in Cascina that he and his militia were on alert and ready to prevent any further enemy ship towards Pisa.”⁷⁴⁰ Although it was a great victory for the war secretary, it came with a cost.

As mentioned earlier, from August 1508 Machiavelli was the only government representative in the war camp. Due to his tireless effort in recruiting, inspecting, and supplying troops in the dominion and organizing defenses along the Arno, Machiavelli did not have enough time to update Capponi daily about the events that were taking place.⁷⁴¹ It might also be that Machiavelli had a contempt for the war commissioner who was hiding behind the walls in Cascina; we will never know. In any case, Machiavelli’s success in chasing off the Genoese ships inspired Capponi, whether through jealousy or annoyance at the secretary’s lack of communications, to file an official complaint with the *Dieci* against the Florentine Secretary.

We learn about Capponi’s complaint from Buonaccorsi’s private letters to Machiavelli written shortly after the Genoese ships were repelled. In a letter of February 21, 1509, Buonaccorsi writes: “My honored Niccolò. I am answering you with a few words about the part dealing with the case of the commissioner against you, which did not at all please the office. But the more powerful always must be right and one must show respect for them. So, if one or two letters are needed to make him happy, it will not take much effort.”⁷⁴² Then, hinting at

⁷³⁹ “L’armata che venne era la nave Lomellina con quattro galeoni, 15 brigantini in circa 30 barche cariche, et quella della città era il galeone del Bardella, una navetta, dua fuste, e sette brigantini con le genti sopradetti legni, e vedendo quest’armata ritornossene come sopra si è detto indietro del che inteso dai Pisani ne ricevemo gran disgusto, e malinconia.” See Arrosti, *Croniche di Pisa*, 370.

⁷⁴⁰ “E altro non ho a dire all Magnificenza vostra, se non che noi siamo qui alle Mulina di Quosa, per vedere se nuovo barchereccio venissi per entrare, per impedirlo, come si è fatto al all’altro.” See *Legazioni*, VI, 275.

⁷⁴¹ According to Ridolfi, Machiavelli “hovered everywhere around the armies,” and the soldiers recognized his authority more than that of the commissioners. Capponi eventually filed an official complaint with the Ten about not receiving enough information from Machiavelli. See Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 169-171; Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 484, n., 11.

⁷⁴² Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 178.

Machiavelli's dissatisfaction with his overwhelming duties in the camp, Buonaccorsi advised Machiavelli that the leave is not to be discussed for now "because the fear that they could not manage over there without you won the day."⁷⁴³ Then, to show the importance of Machiavelli's reports amongst the elite who made the decisions, Buonaccorsi concludes:

I want to remind you of one thing, and that is that when you write, you should tell every slightest event that happens, both over there and in Pisa, because these details give a good deal of satisfaction and fulfillment to the group, and it is those that will get you lauded to the skies. This evening, aside from your last one, all your letters will be read in the Eighty and the Eight of Pratica, and so it will continue to be done.⁷⁴⁴

What conclusion can we draw from Buonaccorsi's letters to Machiavelli? While it is clear that Capponi is disgruntled at not receiving regular updates from Machiavelli, Buonaccorsi's lesson on power in politics comes to the fore. Due to his lower social status relative to the prominent Capponi family, it was expected that Machiavelli would bow his head and do what was asked of him. But such expectations did not sit well with Machiavelli, whose intention was not to impress the *grandi* with his reports or to win personal advancement, but rather to benefit the city of Florence. Recognizing his devotion to the *Patria*, the Florentine government continued to multiply his responsibilities to the point where, according to Buonaccorsi, "the fear that they could not manage over there without you won the day." As Machiavelli's letters from the camp were often read during the *Consulte* where decisions were made based on his observations, the Florentine Secretary's removal was not an option. We have already seen in chapter one a similar situation in which the Florentine government refused Luca degli Albizzi's leave to return to the city because his services were indispensable. Now, Machiavelli found himself in the same situation due to his exceptional qualities and diligence. Thus, it could be concluded that Machiavelli's presence in the war camp against Pisa was crucial

⁷⁴³ Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 178.

⁷⁴⁴ Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 178.

to Florence's war effort. The only thing that could justify his departure from the camp was a new diplomatic mission.

6.5. Diplomatic missions to Lucca and Piombino

In March 1509, Machiavelli was involved in two important diplomatic missions in Lucca and Piombino that contributed to Florence's effort to subdue Pisa. Rarely mentioned in historiography, those two missions deserve our attention for the following reasons: first, the mission to Lucca proves Machiavelli's leading role in pressuring Pisa's main ally to eventually give up on the rebellious city and stop supplying them with provisions. This fact alone significantly altered Pisa's decision to surrender two months after; second, Machiavelli's "Divide et Impera" strategy used against the Pisan envoys during negotiations planted a seed of division amongst the Pisans that also altered their decision to surrender. Evidently, Machiavelli's role in Pisa's surrender deserves more credit than it has received in historiography.

The prevention of grain arriving from Genoa caused widespread famine in Pisa. According to the Pisan chronicler Scipione Ammirato "era intanto la città di Pisa nell'estremo di tutte le cose pervenuta, non v'essendo restato vino, olio, aceto, né sale, cose tanto necessarie al viver humano...stanchi gli animi e i corpi de contadini I quali erano al fine caduti in disperazione..."⁷⁴⁵ To make things worse for the Pisans, the Florentine government ordered Machiavelli to use the militia to completely seal off Pisa and prevent even the poor and women with their children, known as "bocche disutili," from leaving the city.⁷⁴⁶ The further instructions were clear: "Innoltre vi ordinerete in modo che da cotesta banda non possa uscir di Pisa, né uomini né cavalli né donne a provedersi di legne o d'altro...Ed a questo effetto pensarete di

⁷⁴⁵ Scipione Ammirato, *Dell'istorie fiorentine*, (Florence, 1600), 286.

⁷⁴⁶ "Dell'avere ordinato di fare scorrerie la notte ed il di per fare guardare che in Pisa non entri alcuno con vettovaglia né ne esca bocche disutili, non ti potremo più commendare, perché sapiamo di luogo certo che di Val di Calci del continuo vi va buona somma di viveri." See *Legazioni*, VI, 282.

adattare el paese in modo da poter correr co' cavagli con fare spianate..."⁷⁴⁷ Two days later, Soderini advised Machiavelli "di stringere li nimici per ogni verso sempre con buone cauzioni e con securità."⁷⁴⁸ However, the "noose" did not provide any result and Pisa did not beg for peace as expected: a lifeline had opened once again from Lucca.

The letters Machiavelli exchanged with the Ten in the first week of March 1509 show Florence's frustration with Lucca, which despite the treaty with the Second Republic continued to supply Pisa. For example, on March 3, 1509, the Signoria notifies Machiavelli of the following: "Iersera ricevemo la tua del primo, la quale ci ha dato qualche dispiacere, intendendo per quella li inimici nostri essere del continuo sovvenuti del dominio di Lucca. E però bisogna usare diligenza in esaminare cotesti presi ed intendere da loro dove vanno per detto grano, in che modo lo hanno, chi dà loro favore e chi vi tiene le mani."⁷⁴⁹ On the following day the *Dieci* instructs Machiavelli to interrogate captured Pisans to find out where the food from Lucca is coming from.⁷⁵⁰ As there is no dispatch that instructs Machiavelli to go to Lucca to warn against further support for Pisa, it seems that he did so on his own initiative. We only have the Signoria's letter from March 6, 1509, in which we read, "L'andata tua a Lucca ci e piaciuta e tanto più e' termini usati da te. Crediamo aranno giovato in qualche cosa."⁷⁵¹ We do not know what terms

⁷⁴⁷ *Legazioni*, VI, 282; Pisan chronicler Arrostiti provides more detail: "E perché detti Fiorentini si volevano sollecitare in questa impresa, e non volevano dare tempo al tempo, oltre all'esercito che havevano posto a San Piero in Grado, et alle foci di Arno, Fiume Morto, e Serchio per guardia de soccorsi di mare, preveddero ancora a mettere fanterie per guardia de soccorsi di terra, perché da Lucca era impossibile poterli tenere che non ci venissi, o si provedessero de loro bisogni. E perciò collocorno a Mezzana un campo, uno a San Piero a Reno et a San Iacopo al Poggio mettendovi in ciascuno di questi molti fanti, e cavalli, e per guardare meglio la via de monti per la strada di Valdoseri fecero verso lo spedale magno un bastione capace di 250 fanti. See Arrostiti, *Croniche di Pisa*, 372.

⁷⁴⁸ *Legazioni*, VI, 286.

⁷⁴⁹ *Legazioni*, VI, 291.

⁷⁵⁰ "Desideriamo ancora che interroghi con diligenza quelli Pisani che hai presi costi per intendere da loro più particolarmente di quali borghi esattamente, oltre a quello cavano di Lucca, traggono el grano per posserne fare più fondata querela." *Legazioni*, VI, 292-293.

⁷⁵¹ *Legazioni*, VI, 294.

Machiavelli used to threaten Lucca, but they effectively sealed that supply line until the fall of Pisa in June 1509.

While Machiavelli was occupied with issues regarding the trade between Pisa and Lucca, the Florentine government sent two commissioners, Alamanno Salviati and Antonio Filicaia, to the camp to ease the weight on Machiavelli's shoulders.⁷⁵² It was clear from Capponi's complaint to the Signoria and the Florentine Secretary's desire to return to Florence, that the situation was not sustainable in the long term. It may also be that the two commissioners desired credit for themselves, as all expected Pisa to surrender at any moment. In any case, having dealt with Lucca, Machiavelli returned to the camp at Fiume Morto, where he was engaged in building the bridge over the river Arno, participating more as a military engineer and student of Leonardo than as Second Chancellor. His dispatch to the Ten of March 7, 1509, demonstrates his detailed knowledge of the material necessary to build and secure a bridge: "E per tutto di d'ieri con el nome di Dio facemo la palafitta ed il fondo sotto la Figuretta verso foce di Fiume Morto uno miglio. Abbiamo fatto tre ordini di pali, fasciati di listre di ferro, perche e' Pisani non li possono seccare né tagliare..."⁷⁵³ At one point, he even boasted the following: "Ed ogni volta che si abbi a passare e le genti portino con loro 50 fascine, passerebbe lo esercito di Serse."⁷⁵⁴ This is yet another of the occasional allusions to ancient history Machiavelli makes in his dispatches. Apart from confirming his own interest in the Greco-Persian wars, the reference to Xerxes suggests that some members of the *Dieci* were familiar with and discussed Herodotus.⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵² Guicciardini, *Storie*, 310.

⁷⁵³ *Legazioni*, VI, 296.

⁷⁵⁴ *Legazioni*, VI, 296.

⁷⁵⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xerxes%27_pontoon_bridges

By March 10, 1509, the bridge across the Fiume Morto was completed.⁷⁵⁶ Now, with three commissioners and the Second Chancellor in the camp near Pisa for the first time, a plan for further operations against Pisa was necessary. According to Vaglianti, on March 10, 1509, the Florentine commissioners Filicaia and Salviati went to Cascina to “serrare Pisa da tutte bande,” one from Chinzica, south bank of Arno at Pisa, and the other from Lucca, “acciò che da nessuna parte non potessino esser soccorsi di vettovaglia.”⁷⁵⁷ In Cascina, the two commissioners were supposed to meet the third commissioner, Capponi, and Machiavelli. The two dispatches in which the Signoria and the new commissioners invited Machiavelli to the meeting on March 10, 1509, confirm that the Florentine Secretary’s participation was important.⁷⁵⁸ Also, when the commissioners mentioned “cose importanti” as the reason for Machiavelli’s arrival, they indicated that they would not make any decisions without consulting him. Having spent several months at locations in the Pisan countryside where the enemy had tried to break through, Machiavelli was best informed on how to shut off the city. According to Pitti, the group decided to form three camps: the first in San Pietro di Grado with Machiavelli and Salviati in charge; the second in San Jacopo to guard Val di Serchio, with Filicaia in charge; and the third at Mezzana to prevent the passage of food from Lucca by mountain paths, under the command of Niccolò Capponi.⁷⁵⁹ However, further planning had to be postponed as on the same day Machiavelli

⁷⁵⁶ Villari, *La Vita*, 453.

⁷⁵⁷ Vaglianti, *Storia*, 220.

⁷⁵⁸ “Abbiamo reservato apresso di noi una commissione di detti Signori Dieci in voi perché non vadi male ed anche per avere voi fare la via di qui. E perché la partita vostra non dessi confusione o alterazione, farete noto a ciascuno venire a Cascina per essere con noi per cose importanti ed avere a ritornare subito.” See *Legazioni*, VI, 301.

⁷⁵⁹ Pitti, *La Vita di Antonio Giacomini*, 247; Cerretani, *Storia*, II, 362.

received a dispatch from the Ten ordering him to go to Piombino to negotiate surrender with a Pisan delegation.⁷⁶⁰

In Adriani's detailed instructions to Machiavelli, we also learn that the lord of Piombino had sent to Florence one of his officers of the court, Giovanni Cola, to inform the *Dieci* that the Pisans had manifested to him their readiness to negotiate. They requested safe conduct to Piombino to parlay with Florentine representatives with the power to conclude a peace agreement. They also insisted that they would not explain themselves, nor come to any particulars upon any point unless some confidential person were present on their part.⁷⁶¹ For Adriani, this all appeared to be "a pretext for gaining time."⁷⁶² To determine the truth of the matter, he decided to send Machiavelli as a discreet and low-status official who could meet the Pisans with the least possible display, instructing him to enter negotiations only if the Lord of Piombino concluded first that the Pisans' intentions were serious and that their delegation had sufficient authority to conclude an arrangement.⁷⁶³ Otherwise, Adriani instructed that Machiavelli should return immediately.

On March 14, 1509, Machiavelli arrived in Piombino, where he introduced himself to Lord Jacopo d'Appiano, who would act as an intermediary in the talks. The Pisan delegation was comprised of twenty-four men, more than half of whom represented the Pisan *contadini*. In accordance with Adriani's instructions, Machiavelli first asked the Lord of Piombino whether the Pisans were sincere about negotiating or merely stalling for time. When d'Appiano expressed

⁷⁶⁰ "Ingegnerà' ti per tutte le vie e modi possibili ritrarre di questa mossa e mandata de' Pisani la più il vero che si può. Dal canto nostro non si ricerca se non una cosa, e questa è Pisa libera con tutto il dominio e iurisdizione come era avanti la rebellione." See *Legazioni*, VI, 304.

⁷⁶¹ "Oltra questo, ha fatto instazia grande che vi mandiamo nostro uomo, dicendo che e' Pisani non vogliono parlare seco ne venire a particolari di cosa alcuna se non vi è tal nostro omo." See *Legazioni*, VI, 306.

⁷⁶² "In fatto, noi dubitiamo che ciò che si fa, si facci dal canto de' Pisani artificiosamente per acquistar tempo e servirsi di questa dilazione a qualche loro beneficio." See *Legazioni*, VI, 306.

⁷⁶³ *Legazioni*, VI, 306.

frustration with the Pisans' reticence to share the objectives of their mission, Machiavelli wanted to leave. However, the Lord of Piombino convinced him to stay and at least hear the Pisans out.⁷⁶⁴ According to Guicciardini, the Pisan delegation had not come to make terms; rather, the leaders in Pisa had set these negotiations afoot only to appease their masses and to keep them in line as best they could.⁷⁶⁵ Regardless of Guicciardini's assessment, it seems that Pisa's actions largely depended on the result of the upcoming confrontation between Venice and the League of Cambrai. The Venetians, who had always supported Pisa against Florence, could not rescue the Pisans without defeating the French and their allies first.

Having consented to see the ambassadors, Machiavelli found himself under fire from the Pisan delegation who had complained to the Lord of Piombino from the outset of the Florentine secretary's low status as a negotiator. In his dispatch to the Ten after the meeting, Machiavelli writes that the Pisans were dissatisfied because "li era suto promesso loro che verrebbe a Piombino dua o tre cittadini per trattare con loro, e chi li era venuto uno Secretario, che anche non veniva da Firenze."⁷⁶⁶ After the initial complaints, the Pisan delegation told Machiavelli that the people of Pisa are disposed to do all that Florence wants, for the sake of peace and union, provided they were assured of their lives, their property, and their honor. However, according to Machiavelli, the Pisan delegation could not venture to conclude anything without fresh instructions from their superiors.⁷⁶⁷ This confirmed to Machiavelli that Adriani was right in

⁷⁶⁴ *Legazioni*, VI, 308.

⁷⁶⁵ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 344; However, the secondary literature does not agree with Guicciardini's biased view of the *contadini*. On the contrary, Michele Luzzati and Villari argue that one of the reasons why the Pisans did not surrender was the disagreement between the citizens and *contadini* because the latter would have been treated as subjects once the war was over. They would lose their recently gained independence. See Villari, *La Vita*, 429; Luzzati, *Una guerra di popolo*, 49.

⁷⁶⁶ *Legazioni*, VI, 309.

⁷⁶⁷ *Legazioni*, VI, 309.

suspecting the Pisans of playing for time.⁷⁶⁸ Annoyed, Machiavelli informed the lord of Piombino that he had no reply for them, “perché loro avevano detto nonnulla e se volevon che io rispondessi qualche cosa, dicessino qualcosa.”⁷⁶⁹ According to Machiavelli, the Pisans answered that they had said enough in asking for security for their lives, their honor, and their property, whereupon he replied that if their demand for security was reasonable and honorable, it would not be wanting, since his government asked nothing more of them than obedience.⁷⁷⁰ It was clear to Machiavelli that without a definite offer from the Pisans, the negotiations were pointless.

Pressed, the Pisans finally proposed to yield the territory surrounding the city walls while keeping the city for themselves. To this, Machiavelli commented first to the Lord of Piombino the following: “Ora è chiara la Signoria vostra che costoro hanno dileggiato e dileggiono quella; perché io credo che se vi avessino detto questo prima, o se voi lo avessi creduto, voi non aresti voluto pigliare tale carico, né intromettervi in una cosa che avessi questa riuscita.”⁷⁷¹ Then, turning to the Pisan delegates, Machiavelli told them clearly that if they did not intend to put into Florence’s hands Pisa unrestricted, with all her territory and jurisdiction, the same as before the rebellion, it would be useless to negotiate any arrangement.⁷⁷² Again, he reminded the delegates that Pisans need not worry about their security as the Florentine government desired not their lives and goods but only their loyalty.⁷⁷³ He then made sure to conclude his position with a

⁷⁶⁸ The Florentine chronicler Gino Capponi also believed that this proposal was the deal breaker: “Ma perchè i Pisani facevano strane proposte, e dicevano di essere senza mandato a conchiudere, il che mostrava d’aver voluto solamente guadagnar tempo; il Machiavelli si licenziava con parole crude, e quella pratica andò a vuoto. See Capponi, *Storia della repubblica di Firenze*, 105-106.

⁷⁶⁹ *Legazioni*, VI, 309.

⁷⁷⁰ *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

⁷⁷¹ *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

⁷⁷² *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

⁷⁷³ “Dissero che quel popolo Pisano era contento fare tutto quello che volevano Vostre Signorie, purché avessero sicurtà della vita, della roba e dell’onore loro. Risposi, che avevano a dire che sicurtà, se volevano che io rispondessi; perchè Vostre Signorie volevano da loro ubbidienza, né si curavano di loro vita, né di loro roba, né di loro onore.” *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

“Divide et Impera” comment intended to stir conflict among the members of the Pisan

delegation:

E qui mi distesi con quante parole più efficaci seppi da moverli. Volsimi poi a quelli contadini e dissi che m'incresceva della loro semplicità, perché giucavano un gioco dove e' non poteno vincere; perché come e' Pisani avessin vinto la gara loro, e' non li vorrebbon per compagni ma per servi, e tornerebbono ad arare; da l'altro canto, se Pisa sarà sforzata, di che ad ogni ora e' possono dubitare, e' perderanno la roba e la vita ed ogni cosa.⁷⁷⁴

Machiavelli's jibe had struck its target judging from the furious reaction of one of the Pisan delegates, Messer Federigo dal Vivaio, who according to Machiavelli's dramatic account, “cominciò a gridare che io volevo dividerli e che questi non erano termini convenienti.”⁷⁷⁵ Machiavelli could not resist mentioning to the Ten that the deputies of the *contado* never said a word, but seemed to relish his remarks.⁷⁷⁶ Ultimately, Machiavelli claimed that his comments provoked one of the *contadini*, Giovanni da Vico, to say twice, in a loud and resolute manner, “Noi vogliàno la pace, noi vogliàno la pace, imbasciadore,” which, according to Machiavelli, enraged the lord of Piombino who spoke to the Pisan ambassadors in a loud and angry voice, saying that they had deceived him.⁷⁷⁷ While there is little doubt that the primary intention of Machiavelli's cartoonish description of the Pisan delegation and their overtly emotional reactions was to entertain his audience in the Ten, it also hints at serious divisions amongst the delegates regarding the terms of peace with Florence. On his departure the next morning, Machiavelli was notified by the Lord of Piombino that some delegates had pondered deeply on Machiavelli's words and intended to send a delegation with a proposal that would satisfy Florence. Although the initiative came too late, Machiavelli strongly supported it.⁷⁷⁸ We can conclude here that while

⁷⁷⁴ *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

⁷⁷⁵ *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

⁷⁷⁶ “Quelli contadini non dissono mai cosa alcuna e mi parve che gustassino quelle parole; e trassine questo bene nel parlare che si fece fra noi, che dicendo io che non volevano pace e che li arebbono più guerra che non vorrebbono.” *Legazioni*, VI, 310.

⁷⁷⁷ *Legazioni*, VI, 311.

⁷⁷⁸ *Legazioni*, VI, 311.

the parley did not bring any immediate benefits to either side, it was a step forward toward the peace resolution that ensued two months later. The meeting had shown that the exacerbation of internal divisions between the Pisan citizens and *contadini* could create favorable conditions for surrender from the inside. But before that happened, the Florentine army experienced one last humiliation at the walls of Pisa. In the following text, we will examine Machiavelli's role in this event.

6.6. Machiavelli's *Provvedimenti* and Mutolo Conspiracy

After the failed negotiations with the Pisans, Machiavelli returned to the camp to develop the plan that he and the three commissioners had discussed before his trip to Piombino. The Florentine government needed to tighten its control over the routes that Pisan smugglers used for trafficking grain. As before the siege of Pisa of 1499, Machiavelli drafted a proposal on how to force the rebellious city to surrender, presenting it to the three commissioners at their meeting at the river Osoli on March 28, 1509. The document is known today as the *Provvedimenti per la riconquista di Pisa* and belongs among his political writings.⁷⁷⁹ It was Machiavelli's final plan to defeat the Pisans through psychological warfare and starvation instead of an assault on the Pisan walls. Although Machiavelli raises the option of just such an attack in the first sentence, it proved unnecessary as starvation in Pisa slowly but surely wearied the defenders' spirits.⁷⁸⁰

To ensure that no food reached Pisa from Genoa or Lucca either via the river Arno or through the mountain passes, Machiavelli argued in his *Provvedimenti* for the creation of three

⁷⁷⁹ According to Marchand, "da una lettera dei Dieci di Libertà del 31 marzo ad Alamanno Salviati, sappiamo che i commissari e i condottieri impegnati sul fronte pisano avevano elaborato il 28 marzo un progetto di creazione di tre campi attorno alla città ribelle. Machiavelli ne aveva fatto una sintesi per le autorità il 29 o il 30 nel testo anepigrafo, che abbiamo intitolato *Provvedimenti contro Pisa*, quando l'abbiamo separato da un altro scritto politico-amministrativo del 1499, con cui era stato erroneamente accorpato nel Settecento." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 541.

⁷⁸⁰ "Ad ultimare l'impresa di Pisa, bisogna averla o per assedio e fame, o per espugnazione, con andare con l'artiglieria alle mura." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 541.

different camps that would form a triangle around Pisa, locking the city off from any influx of provisions.⁷⁸¹ To prevent trade via the Arno, Machiavelli proposed a camp at San Piero in Grado, where the Genoese were prevented from entering Pisa in February 1509. As for the other secret trade routes from Lucca, Machiavelli believed that two more camps were necessary to seal those, one stationed at Mezzana, some 6 km east of Pisa, and the other at San Jacopo, some 4 km north of the city.⁷⁸² *Provvedimenti* suggests both of these camps be manned with around one thousand soldiers, of which 800 would be militiamen. Because the area of the camp in San Piero in Grado was prone to malaria, Machiavelli proposed a huge tower there that could host 300 to 400 soldiers. However, he also informed his employers that building the fortress in San Piero in Grado would require a month of work, in which case it would make no sense to plan to attack the city. So either or.⁷⁸³ If his government decides to starve the Pisans out, Machiavelli estimates in the conclusion that 40 to 50 days of total blockade would suffice.⁷⁸⁴ All that was required was patience. Gonfaloniere Soderini, however, did not share this opinion, as the following text will show. Impatient to break the Pisans before the anticipated confrontation in Lombardy between Venice and the League of Cambrai, Soderini fell into a costly trap.

According to the sources, after the meeting at Osoli, the Pisans saw no choice but to break through Machiavelli's deadly "triangle" in search of food. Pitti tells us that at the end of March 1509, the Pisans attacked the mountain passages and defeated Commissioner Filicaia in

⁷⁸¹ "Li quali campi stando in questo triangolo terreno assediata Pisa contro alla voglia de' Lucchesi..." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 514.

⁷⁸² "Per guardare le marine basterebbe tenere un campo a San Piero in Grado con il Ponte sopra Arno...che non sia da fidarsi al tutto che questa parte sia guardata da' Lucchesi, ma che bisogni a' Fiorentini pensarvi...non basti fare un solo campo a San Piero in Grado ma bisogna pensare di farne un altro o due altri. E però dicono ch'el più vero e fermo modo sarebbe fare 3 campi: San Jacopo l'altro, e Mezzana..." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 514.

⁷⁸³ Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 514.

⁷⁸⁴ "Penson bene che sarà impossibile che vi resistono, tenendo voi questi modi di tenerli stretti il più potete un 40 o 50 di." See Marchand, *Scritti politici minori*, 514.

one of the skirmishes.⁷⁸⁵ However, such occasional successes, while costing lives, brought Pisa no closer to ending the famine.⁷⁸⁶ With the failure of this strategy, some Pisans turned to deception as the only way to escape their city's desperate situation. In his Book III on Conspiracies in the *Discourses*, under the chapter titled "Quando si vede fare uno errore grande a uno nimico, si debbe credere che vi sia sotto inganno," Machiavelli tells of the Pisan prisoner Alfonso del Mutolo and the duplicity that claimed the lives of many Florentine militiamen:

Quando nel 1509, stando li Fiorentini, a campo a Pisa, Alfonso Del Mutolo, cittadino pisano, si trovava prigioniero de' Fiorentini e' promise che, se gli era libero, che darebbe una porta di Pisa allo esercito fiorentino. Fu costui libero: dipoi, per praticare la cosa, venne molte volte a parlare con i legati de' commessari; e veniva non di nascosto ma scoperto e accompagnato da' Pisani; i quali lasciava da parte, quando parlava con i Fiorentini. Talmente che si poteva conietturare il suo animo doppio; perché non era ragionevole, se la pratica fosse stata fedele, che elli l'avesse trattata sì alla scoperta. Ma il desiderio che si aveva di avere Pisa, accecò in modo i Fiorentini, che, condottisi con l'ordine suo alla porta a Lucca, vi lasciarono più loro capi e altre genti, con disonore loro, per il tradimento loro doppio che fece detto Alfonso.⁷⁸⁷

While Machiavelli used this story to teach his readers that an enemy should never be trusted to play the role of a "trojan horse" against his own people, he deliberately omitted important facts of the story that implicate both him and Soderini in the affair.

Guicciardini, as in many instances where Soderini is concerned, does not fail to present details that cast the gonfalonier in a poor light. But his account, however biased, adds details that help us better understand the affair itself as well as Machiavelli's "short memory." According to Guicciardini, Alfonso del Mutolo had been captured a year earlier by Alessandro Nasi, Machiavelli's friend and a member of the Dieci.⁷⁸⁸ The son of a blacksmith renowned for his bravery in the war against Florence, Mutolo was regarded as an important prisoner who could be

⁷⁸⁵ Pitti, *Vita di Antonio Giacomini*, 250.

⁷⁸⁶ According to Landucci, "E a di 5 di aprile 1509, ci fu come e Pisani, e' nostri, avevano presi circa 60 cavagli e morto e presi molti uomini che conducevano grano in Pisa: si disse l'avevano tratto di Lucca secretamente. E in detto di ci giunsono 54 uomini di quei presi, legati a una fune tutti; e missongli nel palagio del Podestà, e dicevano che n' era morti." See Landucci, *Diario*, 290.

⁷⁸⁷ Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, III, xxxviii, 348-349.

⁷⁸⁸ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 340.

exchanged for an equally valued Florentine hostage. Thanks to his model behavior, Mutolo was befriended by his Florentine guard, a militiaman named Canaccio, and earned his trust.⁷⁸⁹ While this information about Mutolo and the guard might be regarded as mere background color, I think it is deliberately mentioned by Guicciardini. Proud of his status in Florentine society, as well as of his high education and profession, Guicciardini held people of base origin in low esteem. Thus, by presenting Mutolo as the son of a blacksmith and Canaccio as a militiaman, Guicciardini seemed to emphasize their low status, and hence, their low credibility in the eyes of educated individuals. It is Guicciardini “the lawyer” at his best.

In one of their daily prison conversations, Mutolo convinced Canaccio that he wanted to help Florence end the war with Pisa, promising that if he were allowed to go back to the city, he would secretly open the gates to the Florentine army.⁷⁹⁰ Seeing this as a great opportunity to end the war, Canaccio, Guicciardini writes, “Conferinne col gonfaloniere e con Gherardo Corsini che era de’ dieci, perché si pensassi qualche modo che Alfonso tornassi in Pisa.”⁷⁹¹ However, Guicciardini claims that “e rispondendo Gherardo di non ne volere fare nulla perché non gli pareva potersi pigliare fede di Alfonso.”⁷⁹² When Gherardo refused the offer, Canaccio contacted

⁷⁸⁹ “Era stato molti e molti mesi innanzi, insino quando Alessandro Nasi fu commissario a Cascina, stato preso Alfonso del Mutolo pisano e ritenuto prigioniero a Firenze. Era costui di nazione vile, figliuolo di uno fabro ed ancora nell’azione sua di poco giudicio; ma sendo della persona molto gagliardo e fiero ed adoperatosi assai nelle fazioni fatte contro a noi, aveva in Pisa seguito di molti bravi e che erano in sulle arme. Sendo adunque stato costui più di uno anno nelle Stinche fu tentato da uno Canaccio da Pratovecchio che era della ordinanza, suo intimo amico e che in queste sue calamità gli aveva fatti molti benefici e sovvenutolo di danari e di ogni sua necessità, di volere pensare, se mai tornassi in Pisa, di essere operatore che e’ fiorentini la riavessino; a che lui sendo stato da principio renitente, in ultimo, fatto altro disegno, mostrò di acconsentire.” See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 340.

⁷⁹⁰ While the contemporary sources, including Guicciardini, single out Mutolo as the instigator of the plot, in his *Storia d’Italia*, written three decades after the event, Guicciardini hints at a larger conspiracy that might have come from Pisa and in which Mutolo was used as an instrument: “Onde per queste strettezze cresceva ogni dì la penuria de viveri in Pisa, i quali Pisani cercando di ottenere con le fraudi quello che già disperavano di ottenere con le forze ordinario a un loro soldato animoso chiamato Alfonso del Mutolo, giovane di bassa conditione, il quale era stato preso non molto prima da soldati de’ Fiorentini, et haveva ricevuto grandissimi benefitii da colui, di cui era stato prigioniero, offerisse per mezzo suo di dare furtivamente la Porta a Lucca.” See Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia*, VIII, viii, 128.

⁷⁹¹ Guicciardini, *Storia*, 340.

⁷⁹² Guicciardini, *Storia*, 340.

Commissioner Filicaia, who eventually accepted Mutolo's proposal. Filicaia, Guicciardini claims, saw this as an opportunity to exchange Mutolo for the son of the sea captain Bardella, who had been captured in one of the skirmishes with the Pisans near Piombino.⁷⁹³ The *Dieci* was reluctant to accept the plan, regarding Mutolo as untrustworthy. However, according to Guicciardini, Gonfaloniere Soderini allowed himself to be convinced by the Pisan prisoner.⁷⁹⁴ It seemed that Mutolo's motivation was not to betray Florence but to save his city from further suffering. Indeed, with many Pisans dying of famine, this position seemed credible. Soderini must also have hoped to spare his militia from the perils of a direct assault as his memory of the previous defeats was still fresh.

According to Guicciardini, Soderini sent Mutolo to the camp near Pisa to discuss his plan with Filicaia in secret, intending that the other commissioner Alamanno Salviati, the gonfalonier's political opponent, would not participate in the glory of Pisa's conquest.⁷⁹⁵ Mutolo's plan was straightforward: on a day decided by Commissioner Filicaia, Canaccio would lead militiamen to Pisa, where Mutolo would open the gates to the Florentines.⁷⁹⁶ On the chosen day, April 7th, 1509, a Holy Sunday, the militiamen from Casentino with Canaccio at their head came under the tower called Calcesana near the gate that opens towards Lucca.⁷⁹⁷ Slightly behind came Paolo da Parano, a famous Florentine *condottiero*, with the rest of the army of 200

⁷⁹³ Guicciardini, *Storia*, 341.

⁷⁹⁴ "Alla quale cosa concorrendo e' dieci con difficoltà, perché pareva loro che Alfonso fussi di momento nelle cose di Pisa." Guicciardini, *Storia*, 341.

⁷⁹⁵ Guicciardini, *Storia*, 341.

⁷⁹⁶ "Fatta la deliberazione, Alfonso fece col gonfaloniere, Antonio e Canaccio questa conclusione: che si insignorirebbe di una porta e della torre, ed uno di, quale e' determinassi con Antonio che di già era eletto commissario, tirerebbe in sulla torre Canaccio con uno numero di uomini; e perché quello che e' faceva lo faceva per salvare la città sua e non voleva in modo alcuno essere chiamato traditore, che chiamerebbe e' pisani, direbbe loro che e' fiorentini fussino signori della porta e della torre e che quando e' volessino mettergli dentro amichevolmente, che aveva e' capitoli in mano co' quali si intendessi fatto lo accordo, e che stimava che e' calerebbono in ogni modo; e, quando pure non volessino calare, che in quello caso darebbe loro la entrata libera." See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 341-342.

⁷⁹⁷ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 342; Cerretani, *Storia*, 363-365.

men. When Mutolo gave the signal, one group of militiamen scaled the walls to seize the tower while the others entered slowly through the gates. It was not until the final militiaman who reached the top of the wall realized that the ones who preceded him had all been killed or captured. He managed to raise the alarm, alerting the soldiers who had entered through the gate to run back. At that very moment, Mutolo lowered the shutter, trapping many within the walls. The Pisans opened fire from their muskets and cannons on these soldiers killing many, including Canaccio, while Paolo da Parano, gravely wounded, died a few days later.⁷⁹⁸ If it had not been for the alarm, all 200 Florentine soldiers would probably have been massacred.

It did not take long for the news of the catastrophe to reach Florence. Cerretani writes that, “Pisani sparato moltissime artiglierie amazzorno gran numero di fanti, e maxime Paolo da Parrano, condottiere fedele e savio et animoso del quale si fe’ gran perdita.”⁷⁹⁹ Vaglianti, too, laments the death of many militiamen and especially the loss of Paolo da Parrano: “E forse dugento fanti uscino di Pisa gridando Marzocco, Marzocco; e spararono loro spingarde e ferirono alcuni de’ nostri di fuori, fra’ qua’ fu uno nominato Paolo da Parrano, un buono e perfetto fante el quale s’era portato sempre valentemente contro a di loro, d’una spingarda in nella spalla in modo si stima si morrà, ch’è un gran danno pel campo nostro.”⁸⁰⁰ Similarly, on April 9, 1509, the well informed Luca Landucci writes: “E a dì 9 di aprile 1509, ci fu come e’ fu un certo Alfonso del Mutolo, che mandò a dire a’ nostri Commessari che dava loro una porta a entrare dentro, e quando ebbe dentro un numero d’ uomini che volle, lasciò cadere la saracinesca

⁷⁹⁸ “lo effetto fu che avendo Alfonso tirato su a uno a uno Canaccio con una compagnia di circa a trenta dell’ordinanza di Casentino, ne amazzò qualcuno e gli altri tenne a prigionie e cominciò a salutare e’ nostri colle artiglierie; dove sendo ferito che poco poi ne morì Pagolo da Parrano, le gente nostre si ritirarono a’ luoghi loro, maravigliandosi ognuno che per sí poco acquisto avessino fatto un trattato di questa sorte. See Guicciardini, *Storie*, 342.

⁷⁹⁹ Cerretani, *Storia*, 365.

⁸⁰⁰ Vaglianti, *Storia*, 220-221.

e rimasono presi molti uomini; e in un tratto dettone fuoco a molte artiglierie, a quelli che rimasono fuori, e ammazzaronne molti.”⁸⁰¹ Later, the Pisan chronicler Iacoppo Arosti confirms the information from the Florentine sources, leaving no doubt about what happened that day.⁸⁰²

Apart from blaming Mutolo for the betrayal, the sources above did not investigate the government’s involvement in the plot either because they did not have the knowledge or because they did not wish to write about it. Guicciardini, for his part, did not miss the opportunity to criticize Soderini, underlining the gonfalonier’s credulousness and impatience to conquer Pisa as the main reasons for a catastrophe that could have been avoided. For Guicciardini, it was unthinkable to trust a sworn enemy of Florence. But it was not only Soderini’s misjudgment that Guicciardini targeted. Previous to this incident, Soderini had often called *Consulte* when there were important decisions to be made; this time he acted alone, probably fearing that his plan would be rejected. One may wonder who else may have known about the plot. Was Machiavelli, often accused of being Soderini’s right-hand man or even his lackey, aware of it? If so, was he too implicated, and to what extent?

According to Marchand’s recent article titled “Un progetto di colpo di mano contro Pisa di Piero Soderini e Niccolò Machiavelli,” Machiavelli was fully aware of the plot that cost Florence so much.⁸⁰³ To prove his claims, Marchand has produced two unedited documents written by Machiavelli that form part of Gonfaloniere Soderini’s semi-formal collection of letters

⁸⁰¹ Landucci, *Diario*, 291.

⁸⁰² “Andò il suddetto Alfonso, e fece il trattato, e fedelmente conforme gli era stato ordinato, e la notte veniente escì fuori et andò al campo per dare la porta a Fiorentini i quali secondo l’ordine datoli da detto Alfonso venendo alla porta alcuni nell’antiporto, ma il campo non si accostò tanto alle mura che bastassi fare quello havevano disegnato i Pisani non conseguirno altro di questo trattato che la morte di pochi huomini che si condussero nell’antiporto per entrare nella città al segno dato, tra quali fu morto Canaccio da Prato Vecchio di cui era stato prigioniero Alfonso del Mutolo, e vi morì ancora di un’artiglieria Pavolo da Parrano capitano d’una compagnia di cavaleggieri de Fiorentini.” See Arrosti, *Croniche di Pisa*, 372.

⁸⁰³ J. J. Marchand, “Un progetto di colpo di mano contro Pisa di Piero Soderini e Niccolò Machiavelli,” in J. J. Marchand, *Studi machiavelliani* (Florence: Polistampa, 2018), 273-295.

from kings, ambassadors, cardinals, and commissioners.⁸⁰⁴ In one of these documents, Marchand found that on March 30, 1509, Soderini received Antonio da Ostia from Commissioner Filicaia to discuss Mutolo's plan. Marchand claims that Ostia was first met personally by Soderini and then in secrecy with Machiavelli present.⁸⁰⁵ A meeting of this type can only be explained as an operation known only to the gonfaloniere and Machiavelli, without the involvement of other members of the *Dieci* or the *Signoria*. While the presence of Machiavelli in the gonfalonier's *minutiae* is rare, if not unusual, Marchand claims that it is the ultimate proof of their close collaboration in the last few years of the regime, which drew negative comments from *ottimati*, especially Salviati.⁸⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, the document suggests that Machiavelli and Soderini allied themselves with Filicaia against Salviati, who remained in ignorance of the whole operation. Due to his proximity to Soderini and the gonfaloniere's reliance on his qualities, Machiavelli was indirectly implicated in the plot.

Likewise, he was also responsible for its application in administrative and military terms. As the individual responsible for the *Nove* and the newly recruited militia, it is hard to believe that Machiavelli would not be aware of the participation of the Casentino militia in the action. Only he could have authorized and placed the troops at Pisa without raising suspicion or the necessity of informing other commanders of the operations. Also, it was most likely Machiavelli who contacted *condottiero* Paolo di Parano and instructed him to assist the militia in this venture. Considering the above, it is not hard to understand why Machiavelli's retelling of the plot in *The*

⁸⁰⁴ Marchand, "Un progetto," 278; For those interested in the original document, it is located in *Registri dell'ASF* (Signori, Carteggi, 19-20).

⁸⁰⁵ Marchand, "Un progetto," 279.

⁸⁰⁶ "Per esempio, con Francesco della Casa, in occasione della prima legazione in Francia (1500), con Francesco Soderini alla prima missione presso Cesare Borgia (1502), con Niccolò Valori alla corte di Francia (1503), con Francesco Vettori alla corte Imperiale (1508)." See Marchand, "Un progetto," 279.

Discourses avoids any mention of him or Soderini. It was certainly not something he could be proud of.

In any case, the Florentines were surprised at this desperate attempt by the Pisans, which did not in any way change their position for the better. Worse for Pisa, on April 11, 1509, Capponi arrived with an army from Cascina to join the other two commissioners in the upcoming *guasto*. At the same time, Machiavelli was instructed to visit all three camps and get the lists of all soldiers present to replenish missing troops where necessary.⁸⁰⁷ That the situation in Pisa was dire and nearing civil war is suggested by Filicaia's letter to the *Dieci* of April 14, 1509, autographed by Machiavelli. In the letter, Filicaia notifies the Ten that some militiamen who had survived Mutolo's ambush had come to his camp to beg for money and food because the Pisans had no food to give them. The only reason why they had not been killed was that the Pisans hoped to exchange them for the Pisan prisoners.⁸⁰⁸ Filicaia also mentioned a meeting with a priest who had visited Pisa during Lent and who confirmed that "li Pisani non possono più, che la miseria vi è maggiore che la non si dice, e che e' sono mal d'accordo a pensare a bene veruno, perché e' tristi governono, e che una parte degli uomini che sono di miglior qualità, desidererebbono lo accordo; e iarsera se ne ando al Palagio degli Anziani più di trecento uomini, gridando: "Noi moiamo di fame, e questi aiuti che voi aspettate non vengono; noi non arémo più pazienza."⁸⁰⁹ Whether or not the priest's story is true, Filicaia concludes the letter by saying that as far as he was able to learn from others, the Pisans can hold out no longer."⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁷ "Noi desideriamo avere il più presto potrai una listra di tutte le fanterie distinte campo per campo ci troviamo di costa, e sotto che capi a punto." *Legazioni*, VI, 315.

⁸⁰⁸ *Legazioni*, VI, 317.

⁸⁰⁹ *Legazioni*, VI, 318.

⁸¹⁰ "Io ho voluto ragguagliare le Signorie vostre, e per quanto io ne intenda per qualche altro riscontro, e' Pisani non possono andare troppo in là." *Legazioni*, VI, 318.

As we have seen in previous chapters, Machiavelli often urged his government to use force and speed against the Pisans. While the letter is signed by Filicaia, a large portion of the text seems to reflect Machiavelli's thoughts and experiences. Otherwise, it is hard to explain how a priest who recently visited Pisa for religious reasons, would be allowed to leave the city and report everything he had seen to the Florentine commissioners. It seems as though Machiavelli invented the priest to urge his government to action.⁸¹¹ This time, however, it seems that Dieci did not appreciate Machiavelli's "meddling" in the affairs of the commissioners. From his letter to the Ten of April 16, 1509, we learn that Machiavelli's superiors have ordered him to move to the safety of Cascina.⁸¹² Machiavelli's response reflects his frustration with their decision and also with Capponi, to whom he was supposed to provide rearguard services and supplies:

Vostre Signorie disegnano mi fermi in Cascina il che non è punto a proposito, perché quivi può stare ogni uomo di ogni qualità. So che la stanza sarebbe meno pericolosa e meno faticosa, ma se io non volessi né pericolo, né fatica, io non sarei uscito di Firenze, sì che lascinmi vostre Signorie stare infra questi campi e travagliare fra questi Commissari delle cose che corrono, dove io potrò essere buono a qualcosa, perché io non sarei quivi buono a nulla e morrè'vi disperato.⁸¹³

Faced with strong arguments from a tireless and diligent patriot, the Ten granted Machiavelli's request just a day later.⁸¹⁴ The scene was set for his last effort to bring down the rebellious city.⁸¹⁵

⁸¹¹ Similarly, in 1502, Machiavelli reported to the Signoria how Vitellozzo Vitelli looked shortly before he was executed at Senigallia. As Machiavelli was not present at the time, his description of Vitellozzo's last moments is used more for dramatic purposes than as real history.

⁸¹² *Legazioni*, VI, 319.

⁸¹³ *Legazioni*, VI, 320-321; See also Nitti, *La Vita*, 379-380; Ridolfi, *La Vita*, 107.

⁸¹⁴ "E poiché tu non ti contenti stare in Cascina, approvando le ragioni che ne allegghi, siamo contenti te ne governi in quel modo che ti pare, e tu potrai liberamente attendere alle altre cure che ti occorreranno di per di a te ed a cotesti Magnifici Commissari." See *Legazioni*, VI, 322.

⁸¹⁵ From April 17th to May 20th, 1509, Machiavelli continued to supervise a wide range of matters, including payments and transfers of constables and troops. At one point he was paying the men, at another, he was sending off provisions.

6.7. The Surrender

The following text will show that despite his great efforts to subdue Pisa, acknowledged by his close friends and contemporaries, Machiavelli did not get the credit he deserved. The two war commissioners were sent from Florence two months before the war ended, and Commissioner Capponi who spent most of his time in Cascina made sure that their prominence did not get overshadowed by Machiavelli's tireless work. Nevertheless, even though Machiavelli's role in the last days of Pisa's independence was not as prominent as it was before, he undeniably helped create the conditions that altered Pisa's decision to surrender.

To understand better the last days of Pisa's independence, one needs to take a closer look at an anecdote from Landucci. Although the account may be no more than hearsay, it illustrates important facts about Pisa's heroic struggle to retain its independence from Florence. On May 8, 1509, Landucci recorded in his diary this gripping story:

E in questi dì Pisa era molto stretta dall'assedio e stavano molto male; tutto dì si sentiva di loro cose molte ostinate, e, infra l'altre, venne una donna di Pisa con due sue figliuoli, e andò innanzi al Commissario dicendo che si moriva di fame e aveva lasciata sua madre in Pisa che stava male della fame; e 'l Commissario comandò che le fussi dato del pane per sé e per la madre e figliuoli; e tornando col pane in Pisa ne dette a sua madre che stava già male, e quella vecchia vedendo quel pane bianco disse: Che pane è questo? E la figliuola gli disse che l'aveva avuta di fuori da' Fiorentini; ond'ella gridò e disse: portatelo via el pane de' maladetti Fiorentini! Voglio prima morire; e non ne volle.⁸¹⁶

Lamenting the fate of those who remained in the besieged city, Landucci makes a penetrating remark on war and those who suffer the most from it: "Pensa quanto odio portavano le povere persone a questa città, trovandosi a così dure sorte senza lor colpa. Quanto gran peccato a ordinare le guerre! Guai a chi la causa. Iddio ci perdoni; benché questa nostra impresa è presa lecitamente: pensa che peccato fa chi la piglia illecitamente!"⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁶ Landucci, *Diario*, 233.

⁸¹⁷ Landucci, *Diario*, 233.

What conclusions can we draw from this anecdote? After fifteen years of constant struggle to keep their independence, the Pisans had not lost their spirit to fight, even when famine had decimated their numbers. One reason why they were able to continue for so long is the atypical nature, by Renaissance standards, of the warfare they were waging: the total war. Warfare in the Renaissance was a trade in which the majority of soldiers were mercenaries with only a small percentage being ad hoc or short-term recruits from the *contado*. In Pisa, however, the majority of the fighting force was composed of peasants from the *contado* as well as women of all ages and social statuses as we have seen in chapter five. We remember that after conquering Naples and Milan, the Swiss mercenaries declined to fight against Pisa because they were facing a new type of enemy: not only regular soldiers but the entire Pisan population. This total commitment to defending their independence seems to belong to a future era. Even after the sacrifice of so many lives, only famine could induce the Pisans to surrender. Ultimately, to Pisa's despair, the only state that could help them, Venice, experienced a catastrophic defeat at Agnadello on May 14, 1509.⁸¹⁸ All hopes for the Pisans were shattered; surrender was the only alternative.

The news of the Venetians' defeat spread swiftly across the peninsula. While the members of the League of Cambrai were busy seizing as much Venetian territory as they could, Soderini believed that it was the moment to take Pisa by a direct assault. In a letter to Filicaia from May 13, 1509, Machiavelli requests total destruction of the Pisan harvest and death for any Pisans who leave the city in search of food.⁸¹⁹ These harsh measures are confirmed by

⁸¹⁸ Mallett and Shaw, *The Italian Wars*, 89.

⁸¹⁹ "Desiderando noi che questo guasto si dia più a punto si può, e che, se possibile fussi, non rimanga spiga a' Pisani; in modo che, circa al dare questo guasto presto e totale, noi e tutto questo popolo ne siamo soddisfatti. Altra volta ti si è scritto che tutti quelli che escono di Pisa per andare per grani e tutti quelli che vanno in Pisa con grani che ti capitano nelle mani, noi vogliamo che muoino. E perché questa cosa è desiderata qui, noi di nuovo te lo ricordiamo e t'imponiamo osservi quanto di sopra ti si dice!" See *Legazioni*, VI, 332.

Guicciardini, who confirms that in mid-May 1509, all the crops around the city were destroyed.⁸²⁰ However, despite the dire conditions in the city and Soderini's desires, his proposal was rejected by many in the Ten. According to Guicciardini, "Le ragione potissime che gli mossono furono queste: l'aver veduto esperienza negli anni passati con quanto poco successo si fussi tentata tale espugnazione, e se bene e' pisani erano più deboli che e' non solevano, el medesimo accadere a noi, e' quali eravamo in grande scarsità di danari, senza condottieri a cavallo da farne molto conto, senza capi di fanterie che avessino riputazione alcuna e senza fanti pratici ed esercitati."⁸²¹ So the idea of an assault was put aside. While Guicciardini's assessment of Machiavelli's militia is open to debate, the following events show that the Pisans were ready to surrender.⁸²²

The first sign came on May 20th, 1509. In a dispatch written by Machiavelli and sent to the *Dieci* on that day, we learn that when all of the commissioners had gathered in the camp to decide what to do once the *guasto* was over, the delegation from the Pisan mercenary captain Tarlatino interrupted their plans.⁸²³ The delegates reported that Tarlatino wanted to send four of his men to negotiate peace, a proposal that the commissioners accepted. At the meeting, they understood that the Pisan government had elected a team of 12 citizens "per venire costi a Firenze ed essere a' piedi de' nostri Eccelsi Signori."⁸²⁴ To assure the Florentines of their good intentions, we find out from Machiavelli that Tarlatino sent a letter the following day informing the commissioners that "Pisani si sono risoluti eleggere meno numero di *contadini*, cioè da otto

⁸²⁰ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 338.

⁸²¹ Guicciardini, *Storie*, 338.

⁸²² According to Cerretani, "un giorno, senddo di maggio, un contadino con seghuito di molti homini giunto im palazzo alla porta della praticha la fe' aprire et entrato dentro dice: "qui bisogna pigliare partito, noi siamo deliberati non morircci di fame." See Cerretani, *Storia*, 369-370.

⁸²³ *Legazioni*, VI, 335.

⁸²⁴ *Legazioni*, VI, 336.

redurli a cinque, perché mostro che tanto numero di contadini passava con poco onore di quelli della città.” This suggests that the *contadini*’s influence in the Pisan government had weakened since the meeting in Piombino, and that they were the ones who now wanted least to surrender as they stood to lose all of their hard-won privileges.

On May 24, the newly elected Pisan ambassadors made an agreement with Alamanno Salviati to gain safe passage to Florence. Most contemporary accounts confirm that Salviati accompanied them to Florence while Parenti adds that they wanted him because they feared for their safety.⁸²⁵ It is not clear from the sources whether Machiavelli joined them as well but considering his importance and skills he might have.⁸²⁶ On May 25, 1509, the eight Pisan ambassadors arrived in Florence. The following day they had an audience in the *Palazzo* and then with the *Dieci*. The negotiations went smoothly this time; after three days the Pisan delegation accepted unconditional surrender.⁸²⁷ Landucci reports that on May 28, 1509, two delegates returned to Pisa to sign the agreement that was officially ratified by the Pisan government on June 2, 1509.⁸²⁸ Upon their return to Florence, on June 4th, 1509, the official act of surrender, in which the Pisans “with humility and reverence” begged the Florentines to accept them and their descendants as loyal subjects into perpetuity, was signed and countersigned for the Florentines by Marcello Virgilio Adriani and Machiavelli.⁸²⁹ On June 8th, 1509, the Pisan magistrates handed over the keys of the city to the Florentine representatives, and shortly after

⁸²⁵ Cerretani, *Storia*, 378; Nardi, *Storia*, I, 371; Vaglienti, *Storia*, 223; Parenti, *Storia*, 301; Landucci, *Diario*, 292.

⁸²⁶ According to Hörnqvist, Machiavelli and Salviati came together with the Pisan delegates. However, he does not cite the source that contains such information. See Hörnqvist, “Perché non si usa allegare,” 163.

⁸²⁷ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 456.

⁸²⁸ Landucci, *Diario*, 293.

⁸²⁹ “I Pisani con umiltà e riverenza supplicando d’essere, essi e i loro posterì in perpetuo accettati per sudditi dall’eccelso dominio fiorentino.” The official document is published in Tommasini, *La Vita*, 685-701; See also Hörnqvist, “Perché non si usa alegare,” 163, n. 71

the Florentine army headed by its commissioners entered the exhausted and starving city in triumph.⁸³⁰

The news of the surrender caused widespread celebrations and festivities in Florence. According to Parenti, “sollevossi subito tutta questa città, serroronsi le botteghe, corsesi in Piazza e al Palazzo, rallegrandosi con multitudine di fuochi, e grida e strepito assai di campane e bombarde.”⁸³¹ Machiavelli’s friend Casavechia reports on the same day: “Here it is not possible to express how much delight, how much jubilation and joy, all the people here have taken in the news of the recovery of that city of Pisa: in some measure every man has gone mad with exultation; there are bonfires all over the city, although it is not yet three in the afternoon; just think what they will do this evening after nightfall.”⁸³² There is no doubt that after fifteen years of struggle, the Florentines truly celebrated the achievement of their primary political goal.

6.8. The Aftermath

As the Pisan rebellion and independence came at enormous cost to Florence, while the hatred between the two cities reached an almost pathological level, Pisa’s surrender proceeded without a single incident on either side. On the contrary, the sources report a surprisingly high level of clemency on Florence’s part. In his *Storia d’Italia* Guicciardini writes the following: “E in questo fu memorabile la fede de’ fiorentini che, ancora pieni di tanto odio ed esacerbati da tante ingiurie, non furono costanti nell’osservare le cose promesse che facili e clementi

⁸³⁰ “Venerdì, otto di giugno, s’entrò in Pisa con tutto l’exercito in questo modo: e commissarii giunti alla porta vi trovorno e priori e l’gonfaloniere e quali dettono con non molte parole le chiavi della citalatà in mano D’Antonio da Filichaia.” See Cerretani, *Storia*, 378; Similarly, Buonaccorsi reports the following: “Addì 8. di giugno dopo tanti affani entrarono I Comessari Fiorentini con parte delle genti in Pisa e con letizia di quel povero popolo, e di tutto quello si aveva a esquire per l’una parte e per l’altra. Furono i Commessarri Alamanno Salviati, Antonio di Niccolaio da Filicaia, e Niccolò di Piero Capponi perche ad assediare la non bastavano i dua campi sopradetti col ponte e però fu necessario fare un’altro campo a Mezzana.” See Buonaccorsi, *Diario*, 141.

⁸³¹ Parenti, *Storia*, III, 300; Similarly, Landucci reports the following: “E a dì 8 di giugno 1509, in venerdì, circa a ore 18, giunse el cavallaro con l’ulivo dell’avuta di Pisa; e fecesi gran festa e sorressi le botteghe, e fecesi molti fuochi e panegli a tutte le torri e Palazzo.” See Landucci, *Diario*, 235.

⁸³² Atkinson and Sices, *Machiavelli and his friends*, 183.

concederle.”⁸³³ Parenti also reports Florence’s generosity: “Entro in Pisa l’esercito nostro sotto 3 commessari per la porta del Parlascio. Quietamente e senza offensione d’alcuno si posò ogni cosa: mandovvisi 40 carra di pane, e ordinossi a’ comuni delle colline che con farina e altre grasce portassino soccorso, e’ quali abbondantemente volentieri el feciono.”⁸³⁴ However, despite Florentine clemency and peace terms which permitted Pisans to retain their property and freedom of commerce, many left the city for Palermo, Lucca, Sardinia, and other parts. After the long siege and famine, during which corpses remain unburied under the hot Tuscan sun, the smell of death and devastation must have lingered. It was a bittersweet victory for the Florentines. Thinking of this tragic war between neighboring cities, the historian Capponi leaves a profound reflection for generations to come: “Questa fu l’ultima guerra tra città e città che nell’Italia si combatte: erano tempi nei quali ogni cosa fino agli odii era meno viva; sopra all’ antica idea di Città, che solea essere tanto stretta e tanto forte, sorgeva più ampia l’idea di Stato, dimodoché Pisa godendo favore sotto al Principato alquanto risorse.”⁸³⁵

It was those who claimed political credit for the victory who profited most. For example, Buonaccorsi writes that amongst the commissioners Alamanno Salviati deserved the greatest credit for the treaty with Pisa. Though Soderini enjoyed some recognition, he was not seen as the principal figure behind the final negotiations; in Vaglianti’s detailed account of the negotiations, he is not even mentioned. For many contemporaries, Salviati, one of Soderini’s most bitter enemies, played the most significant role, acting as the Florentine ambassador during the negotiations even though he had joined the campaign only two months earlier.⁸³⁶ Machiavelli,

⁸³³ Guicciardini, *Storia d’Italia*, VIII, 290.

⁸³⁴ Parenti, *Storia*, III, 311.

⁸³⁵ Gino Capponi, *Storia*, IV, 107.

⁸³⁶ Guicciardini’s narrative breaks off abruptly before the surrender of Pisa is recorded. See also Parenti, *Storia*, III, 311.

for his part, who had been actively involved in the efforts to conquer Pisa from his first day in office, did not receive the same accolades as his superiors. After the surrender, he looked on as the vanity of the commissioners was eternalized in stone: the inscription over the main doors of the Palazzo Comunale di Pisa that testifies to Pisa's surrender does not include Machiavelli's name:

“RECEPTIS I DEDITIONEM PISIS QUADRIMESTRI TRIV[M] CASTROR[UM],
OBSIDIONE ANTONIUS, FILICAIA ALEMANUS SALVIATUS, NICOLAUS CAPONIS
COM. TRES FLOR. CVM EXERCITV URBE INGRESSI POSUERE
ANNO M. D. VIIII. DIE. VIII. IVNIJ.”⁸³⁷

6.9. Conclusion

Again, due to his low status amongst the officials, Machiavelli's efforts in the war against Pisa went without mention. Nevertheless, modern historiography and this dissertation, in particular, testify to Machiavelli's central role in the Pisan War. The Pisan rebellion, the fourth wound of the Florentine republic, which Machiavelli had lamented in the *Primo Decennale*, had finally been remedied, and the secretary had played a major part in the venture. This was arguably the high point of Machiavelli's chancery career, as by returning Florence to the military orders of her medieval past and conquering Pisa he had accomplished what many Florentine chancellors had only dreamt of. The historian Nitti was right to conclude that “quando si pensi anche, che Machiavelli fu quegli che spiegò la massima attività nelle operazioni di quest' ultimo assedio di Pisa, si può, senza esagerazioni, dar merito a lui, più che a qualsiasi altro della fine felice per Firenze, della guerra di Pisa.”⁸³⁸

⁸³⁷ Tommasini, *La Vita*, 461.

⁸³⁸ Nitti, *La Vita*, 381.

CONCLUSION

Machiavelli remains one of the most studied political thinkers in historiography. In the last five centuries, scholars have produced thousands of books and articles on the famous Florentine thinker. Concerning such a long and productive scholarship, one may ask, is there any aspect of Machiavelli's life and career that has not been explored sufficiently? Have Machiavelli scholars overlooked or sidelined some of his early writings? My dissertation has shown that there are still aspects of Machiavelli's career and intellectual output that have not received enough attention in historiography. With this in mind, the last section of my dissertation will conclude the study of Machiavelli and the Pisan War by readdressing its research aims and summarising its key research findings, their value, and contributions to the field. It will also review the limitations of this work and propose opportunities for future research.

It is truly puzzling that the fifteen-year-long conflict between Florence and Pisa, filled with so many important events and lasting changes for both cities, has never generated a synthesis that traces the war from its beginning to its end. While Pisan historians have studied some crucial events of the war, there is much to be done in the future if we want to get a better picture of its entirety and importance. Thus, one of the first aims of this dissertation has been to put the Pisan War on the scholarly radar by emphasizing its importance for the history of the two Tuscan republics in general and Machiavelli's chancery career and his early intellectual formation in particular. Concerning this goal, chapter one starts with a brief introduction to the centuries-old rivalry between Florence and Pisa and provides a short history of the ongoing Pisan conflict that Machiavelli inherited first as the Florentine citizen and then as the Second Chancellor. His inherited view of Pisa as an integral part of the Florentine territorial state and

Pisans as rebels and not freedom fighters, as many contemporaries saw them, is essential for our understanding of Machiavelli's approach to the Pisan War.

As Machiavelli's post-1512 *opere* still dominate the scholarship, the second research goal of chapter one has been to point to the Florentine secretary's early writings as valuable source material for tracing his early political experience and intellectual formation. The collection of Machiavelli's earliest dispatches and political works published by Marchand as *Legazioni. Commissarie. Scritti di Governo* and *I Primi scritti politici di Machiavelli* respectively, testify to his highly prolific first year in the chancery. With no experience in the political arena and military matters, Machiavelli started his chancery career in the midst of the ongoing Pisan War which inevitably influenced his subsequent thinking towards military matters. Thus, to understand better the themes that occupied Machiavelli's intellect in the post-1512 period, such as the use of force and deception in politics or the plea for native militia against mercenary troops, to name a few, one cannot ignore the Pisan War as the context in which those themes appeared for the first time in his writings.

We have seen how the Venetian incursion into the Casentino in September 1498 caught the Second Republic off-guard and sparked its young secretary to use, when the military means lacked, language imbued with patriotism and love for the republic to motivate Florentine officials to do their job honorably and dutifully as he did. As the arguments Machiavelli used to educate the officials about their duties to the Patria were unlikely to have been dictated to him by someone else in the office, his early dispatches testify to his embryonic views on citizenship and patriotism in a republic. Thus, one of the main historiographical aims in chapter one has been to introduce Machiavelli's *Legazioni* as an important source that connects his early and late political thought.

Likewise, apart from his official documents regarding the Pisan conflict, Machiavelli wrote his first political draft on how to deal with Florence's rebellious city and successfully end the war. Machiavelli's *Discorso* re-confirms that his mental landscape at the time was occupied by the Pisan conflict and a swift solution to it as opposed to the well-known indecisiveness of his superiors. Similarly, Machiavelli's first political work strongly fostered the force and love dichotomy as the "only" way to deal with the Florentine subjects. With this in mind, chapter one clearly establishes a strong connection between Machiavelli's first and post-1512 political writings, notably *The Prince*.

Lastly, in chapter one, I aimed to open some new perspectives on Machiavelli's first diplomatic missions. Contrary to scholarly tradition that emphasizes their outcome, I approached Machiavelli's first missions through the lessons and experiences the Florentine thinker acquired while carrying them out, irrespective of their results. Whether Machiavelli outsmarted Madonna or it was the other way around is truly less important to us than the scientific method that Machiavelli employed during his missions. Coined by him as "aver gli ochi alle mani," Machiavelli's approach to his missions assumed gathering necessary intelligence and knowledge through rigorous observation and careful judging of people's appearances and intentions. This theory not only proved to be essential in all of Machiavelli's missions, but it also became an integral part of his *Prince*.

While chapter one explored Machiavelli's fervent patriotism and republican zeal in dealing with the foreign invasion of his homeland, the second chapter highlighted his loyalty and service to the regime during the controversy caused by Florence's execution of its Captain, Paolo Vitelli. Often sidelined in historiography, the dispatches Machiavelli sent shortly before and after Vitelli's death complement the conflicting contemporary sources on this event and help us

reconstruct Machiavelli's role in it. The letters show that Machiavelli was familiar with his government's plan to lure, trap, and execute Vitelli. While it is not clear from the dispatches if he was the one who devised the plan to capture Vitelli, it is clear that he did everything he could to cover up the crime for the regime that had a hard time justifying the captain's death. Regardless of what he believed to be the truth in this case, Machiavelli defended his regime and his *Patria* with his pen and words, as he had done during the war in the Casentino.

However, the controversy does not end there. The second aim of chapter two has been to point at some ambiguities in Machiavelli's "post perditas" stance on Vitelli that is at odds with his views while in the chancery. The question that comes up here is to what extent does Machiavelli's reflection on the same events or people during and after his chancery career differ? Or if we look at the bigger picture, we may ask how to square Machiavelli's changing views on Vitelli, Borgia, mercenaries, and God, to name a few. While further research is required to better understand Machiavelli's oscillating views, the Vitelli case offers a possible explanation. It supports Black's theory that Machiavelli was a writer for the occasion who carefully threaded his words when describing the events he was part of. Thus, depending on the regime to whom Machiavelli's writings were intended, Vitelli was for Machiavelli both a traitor and an outstanding commander.

Next, while Machiavelli's loyalty towards the regime he served never shifted, his critical observations towards some of the Signoria's decisions started to emerge from 1500 onwards as the Florentine Secretary could not withhold anymore his disappointment with Florence's military and diplomatic failures. Thus, the main research goal of chapter three has been to show how Machiavelli's negative experiences with foreign mercenary troops during the siege of Pisa and the power-hungry French king and ministers while on a mission to France significantly

influenced his perspectives on power and politics. While historiography has acknowledged Machiavelli's negative experience with French mercenary soldiers during the siege of Pisa, more work is required to fully understand what preceded the siege and how it ended up in disaster. Again, as in chapters one and two, Machiavelli's *Legazioni*, in combination with other contemporary sources, proved to be a valuable source in providing us with day-to-day accounts of the French army's movements, lack of discipline, and ultimate withdrawal. They reveal that the French mercenary army never seriously intended to conquer Pisa, as they were more invested in extorting money and finding excuses to abandon everything and return home, most likely with the king's tacit agreement.

Concerning the French monarchy's intervention in the siege, the second goal of chapter three has been to identify the lessons on power and politics that Machiavelli learned through his interactions with the French king and his ministers. A close reading of Machiavelli's long dispatches from France reveals examples of the psychological abuse that he and his colleague endured at the French court. Often scolded and looked down upon, Machiavelli, for the first time in his *Legazioni*, criticizes his government for their dilatory decision-making, naïveté, and military weakness. His bitter realization of the fact that one state's loyalty, honour, and decision-making based on reason do not weigh much when faced with the harsh realities of *realpolitik*, re-emerged fully in *The Prince* where boldness, deception, and strong arms appear to be the most important qualities of a statesman. Concerning Machiavelli's later obsession with the Florentine militia and the idea that only strong regimes are those with strong armies, there is little doubt that the lessons at the French court strongly influenced his military thinking.

However, lacking a strong army, but still with a burning desire to re-conquer Pisa, the Florentine government opted for science and visual arts as two new means to solve the Pisan

problem. Hence, the first goal of chapter four has been to throw light on Machiavelli's role in Florence's ill-fated attempt to divert the Arno River and deprive Pisa of water. After Master's fanciful approach to this topic that saw Machiavelli and Leonardo "working side by side," modern historiography requires a new study of the Arno project. To fill this gap, chapter four has looked into Machiavelli's day-to-day dispatches regarding the project and brought to light many unknown details that testify to its grandiosity in scope and challenging nature. But more than that, chapter four has demonstrated Machiavelli's leading role in organizing the workforce and dealing with the challenges that both the workers and project designers ultimately failed to overcome. Despite its failure, the Arno project provided Machiavelli with an ideal opportunity to exercise the recruitment and organization of a large body of peasants in a state-sponsored project, which proved to be a valuable experience for his subsequent militia project.

Additionally, chapter four has aimed to clarify the purpose behind yet another state-sponsored project that assumed visual warlike propaganda through the works of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci. Through careful analysis of the political and cultural climate in which the Anghiari and Cascina battle paintings and Michelangelo's David originate, this section has demonstrated that the Pisan War had much to do with the state's visual propaganda. Contrary to some historiographical tendencies that place Machiavelli at the center of the regime's artistic propaganda due to his alleged friendship with Leonardo and Michelangelo, chapter four offers a more moderate picture of the Florentine secretary's role in it. But despite the obscurity in the sources regarding his involvement in the artistic projects, chapter four suggests the idea that Machiavelli had many reasons to endorse the regime's visual propaganda. Seeing David as the ideal model of a citizen soldier and the battle paintings as public spectacles that could sway people's opinion towards war, Machiavelli had enough reasons to support Florence's artistic

projects. Concerning this theory, Machiavelli's ensuing militia project would make perfect sense because it represents the culmination of the government's warlike propaganda. But how did Machiavelli develop this idea? Who influenced him? The first aim of chapter five has been to bring abbot Basilio Nardi and Madonna of Imola (Caterina Sforza) as two unacknowledged sources to be added to the historiography of Machiavelli's militia. Revealed in Camaldoli chronicles and contemporary histories, Basilio Nardi's extraordinary story demands a place in the historiography. Machiavelli's praise of Nardi's military prowess and patriotism in leading Casentino peasants suggests Nardi's strong influence on the Florentine secretary's military thinking. Likewise, contrary to common views that portray Cesare Borgia as Machiavelli's model prince who relied on "his own arms," Machiavelli's *Legazioni* shows that Caterina Sforza fitted into that role better than the pope's son. In charge of recruiting, training, and even leading her own Romagnol militia, Caterina was a brave leader of her subjects with unquestionable virtue worthy of Machiavelli's Prince. As modern historiography needs to investigate further Madonna's influence on Machiavelli", chapter five asks for a work that would do justice to the Tigress of Forlì.

Chapter five shows the traces of Machiavelli's ideas of Florence's "armi proprie" in his early political writings. Modern historiography has found some traces of this idea in two letters to Cardinal Soderini and the last sentence of Machiavelli's "Decennale Primo." Seen this way, it seems that Machiavelli's "occasional" fancy of the Florentine militia suddenly came to fruition at the end of 1505. Contrary to this idea, chapter five has shown that, read as a whole, Machiavelli's *Parole de dirle*, *Decennale Primo*, and *Legazioni* fostered the idea of the Florentine army that would minimize, if not exclude entirely, the participation of the French

mercenary forces. Although this was not a public call for the peasant militia per se, it was a call for breaking with the practice of hiring foreign troops at the expense of domestic forces.

Lastly, though Machiavelli's militia project improved Florence's military institutions and undoubtedly brought many benefits to the Second Republic, it had its negative side as well. Thus, the last goal of chapter five has been to critically examine the militia project and provide a more realistic view of its advantages and disadvantages. In doing so, chapter five has tapped into Machiavelli's *Legazioni* and his two militia laws known as *Provvedimenti* and *Cagione della ordinanza*. A careful reading of Machiavelli's dispatches has shown that the recruitment process in the *contado* was difficult, as many local peasants refused to join the militia. While some of the reasons for desertion have not changed to this day, such as fear of battle and dying in it, many Florentine peasants refused militia because they lacked the motivation to fight for the regime that still held them as subjects and offered little to no reward for their service. Eventually, as Machiavelli's militia laws did not include citizenship rights or some other more immediate benefits to the peasant recruits, the regime turned to violence and coercion to secure the number of recruits it needed, leaving a permanent stain on the process that historiography should not ignore.

In the end, despite the drawbacks, Machiavelli's militia proved to be a useful and practical tool in Machiavelli's strategy to bring down Pisa by blocking their food supply lines and causing widespread starvation in the city. Unlike most scholars who have approached the Florentine secretary as a man of letters only, the last chapter of this dissertation has examined some of Machiavelli's less-known military exploits in the last stage of the Pisan War. A close reading of the *Legazioni* for the years 1508 and 1509, has revealed Machiavelli's active involvement in devising and executing the blockade of Pisa. More as a war commissioner than as

secretary, Machiavelli spent almost a year far from his office with his Florentine militia in the camp. His triangular “noose” around Pisa and the seed of division he sowed while meeting the Pisan delegation in Piombino proved to be an important moment in Pisa’s decision to surrender. However, despite his relentless effort to force Pisa’s surrender, Machiavelli could not avoid yet another bitter lesson on power and politics, this time served cold from his fellow Florentines. As the last chapter has shown, the war commissioners with higher status and more prominent family names in Florence than Machiavelli received most of the accolades for the successful end of the Pisan War. As Machiavelli’s name is not engraved amongst the commissioners who re-entered Pisa after fifteen years, this dissertation represents a genuine effort in restating Machiavelli’s role in the conquest of Pisa and engraving his name in the historiography of the Pisan conflict for the generations to come.

To create such a lasting impression in historiography, the dissertation under review hopes to make a few important contributions to the field. First, this dissertation offers scholarship a variety of new source material. While Machiavelli’s *Legazioni* are not new in historiography, not too many historians delved deeply into their content. Their sheer number—exceeding 3,000 in the first six volumes—may have alienated many researchers from approaching them and grappling with their content. I saw in Machiavelli’s dispatches a gold mine and the opportunity to position myself in the field by bringing some fresh perspectives to it. Although reading often dry and repetitive dispatches has not been easy, it proved to be a truly rewarding experience. The “gold” I discovered, in my opinion, can be described as a fresh perspective on Machiavelli that does not appear often in the secondary literature. Machiavelli from the *Legazioni* is a highly loyal, professional, patriotic, and tireless government official who devoted most of his time in office and the field to one specific cause: Florence’s effort to recapture Pisa. Concerning this, the

perspective that my dissertation tends to illuminate here is Machiavelli's engagement in the Pisan War, a conflict that in many aspects defined his career and influenced his subsequent writings.

To prove this argument, each chapter of this dissertation deals with some less-known aspect of Machiavelli's career and intellectual formation that is connected to the Pisan War. The war in the Casentino, the Vitelli affair, the Arno project, and the blockade of Pisa, to name a few, are some of the topics that most scholars would not identify as major aspects of Machiavelli's formation. Also, as Machiavelli's *Legazioni* permeates all chapters and ties them together to the main subjects of this dissertation, my reliance on this source material has ultimately helped me bring some fresh perspectives that have not been sufficiently addressed in historiography.

For example, instead of disregarding Machiavelli's official writings as "too official" and "not personal enough" to be regarded as his own thoughts, I see them as the most revealing of Machiavelli's writings. While we all can agree that Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* or *The Discourses* far from the fast-paced atmosphere in the chancery, with enough time to contemplate, perfect, and tailor his text for a specific purpose, the ambiance in which he wrote his daily dispatches differs significantly. Resembling the British Foreign Office during WWI, Machiavelli's chancery was anything but a quiet place to work at. The number of letters and dispatches Machiavelli sent daily shows that he did not have much time to reflect on and edit their content as most of the letters had to be expedited with utmost urgency. Concerning this dynamic, Machiavelli's dispatches offer short but very specific and rich observations of great value. Like pieces of a puzzle scattered across the room, those dispatches, once grouped together according to the topics they address, form a big picture of the themes that occupied his *mente*.

Likewise, while on a mission to foreign lords, the Florentine government expected Machiavelli to send back the reports that would provide a reflection of the place or people to the best of his abilities. While indeed Machiavelli had more time to edit those reports by adding more “flesh” to the content in order to satisfy some of the “fans” of his writing style in the government, he still had to remain as truthful as possible. For example, if we take two different portrayals of Cesare Borgia, one from *Legazioni* and one from *The Prince*, the probability of the first to be more truthful than the second is higher for two reasons: first, because the Signoria’s possible actions against Borgia in 1502 depended largely on the accuracy of Machiavelli’s report of Cesare; second, Machiavelli’s view on Borgia in 1512 was colored by the fact that Giuliano de’ Medici, to whom the Florentine secretary initially devoted *The Prince*, and the pope’s son were friends. With this in mind, the context in which Machiavelli wrote his dispatches testifies to their historical value and thus cannot be sidelined in studying Machiavelli’s career and intellectual formation.

The third and last major important contribution that my dissertation makes is its tendency to debunk certain myths that try to conceal or play down some of the less favorable events that Machiavelli was part of. For instance, modern historiography has often portrayed Machiavelli’s service to the regime and his republican values in a positive light. Starting from the famous Cambridge school to the most recent versions of Machiavelli as a populist and democrat, Machiavelli’s actions and writings have rarely been questioned in recent historiography. However, Machiavelli’s participation in the Vitelli and Mutolo affairs and his harsh treatment of the Pisan rebels and Florentine peasants confirm that a more nuanced view of the Florentine secretary is required if we want to remain true to our profession. With this in mind, my dissertation aims to offer a fair and more balanced portrayal of Machiavelli’s service in the

chancery during the Pisan War. My view of Machiavelli is strongly against any firm classification of the Florentine secretary as an imperialist, republican, democrat, or populist. Probably a bit of everything, Machiavelli features in this dissertation as the government's official who did his best to help Florence retake Pisa. Whether he covered up the evidence against Vitelli or rightfully attacked the regime's weaknesses in his writings, Machiavelli always had in mind the wellbeing not of a particular regime in power but only the city he loved more than his soul. Thus, Machiavelli in this dissertation does not belong to any faction and does not fit into any particular theory. He is Machiavelli the Florentine at his best.

Nevertheless, despite the above-mentioned contributions to the field, my dissertation has some limitations as well. While I have made a strong case for the historiographical value of the *Legazioni*, there are still certain questions that need to be addressed. One of the questions that Dr. Thomas Cohen raised during our discussions was how to discern Machiavelli's inner voice from the official one in the dispatches. In other words, how do we know that what Machiavelli wrote in the dispatches came from his heart alone and was not expected from him to say as part of his job? While nothing is certain, it seems that his remarks in the dispatches are his own for two reasons: first, as we have seen already, some of them reappear in his political writings and later in his post-1512 opere; second, Machiavelli's own personality testifies to his writing's originality. Known as brisk, prickly, impatient, critical, and often bitter with his words, it is hard to imagine that Machiavelli used "prescribed" expressions and comments in the dispatches instead of his own. Machiavelli's harsh words to the Lucchese diplomat in the letter of October 1499 or the nickname he coined for the weak Florentine state, "Meser Nihilo," testify to this theory. However, concerning the dispatches from France, Germany, or the Pisan camp where Machiavelli was not alone and where he co-signed the letters with some of his colleagues, it is

difficult to discern his own voice. This was particularly problematic in chapter two where we have dispatches signed by Machiavelli and della Casa together. What was the method they used to send the letters? Who has the final say in them? We do not know. While the comparison with Machiavelli's other dispatches may help, it is far from an ideal solution.

Ultimately, there are some methodological considerations that I wanted to acknowledge in this section. Some readers may wonder why I opted to quote the text from the sources in the original Italian throughout my dissertation instead of translating it first into English. The reasons for such a decision are quite practical and unique to this dissertation only. First, Machiavelli's *Legazioni* are a very rare body of work from his entire *opere* that have not been translated into English. While my Italian is good enough to read and understand Machiavelli's dispatches, the most accurate translation of a large body of text on my part would have been quite a challenging task for the purpose of this dissertation. Machiavelli's language is vivid and elusive at the same time, so even the most experienced linguists would not have translated him identically. For example, Dr. Cohen pointed out in one of his lectures some inaccuracies in Mark Musa's translation of *The Prince*. Thus, having in mind the fact that all committee members can read Italian fluently, I decided to leave the original text instead of translating it. At the same time, it is a practical decision as Machiavelli's *Legazioni* are not easily accessible online. There is only one hard copy for each volume in Canadian libraries. In any case, if I ever decide to publish this work, I will definitely work on the translations to make it readable to non-Italian readers as well.

Now, concerning all the limitations above, it would be praiseworthy if, in the near future, we see Machiavelli's *Legazioni* translated into English. It would allow the opportunity for many researchers who are not necessarily experts in Italian to dig deeper into this gold mine and bring some new perspectives and directions for future research. This would also take the burden from

the scholarly focus on Machiavelli's post-1512 opere and shift attention to his less-familiar chancery writings and the Pisan War. This dissertation has demonstrated clearly that a war that affected the two Tuscan republics so profoundly definitely deserves a monograph. While this is not an easy task, I truly hope that my dissertation will spark researchers' interest in this direction as such a study would ultimately fill the existing gap in Machiavelli scholarship.

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