ACTORS AND STRUCTURES IN MACHIAVELLI'S *ISTORIE FIORENTINE*

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Summary: this article examines Machiavelli's understanding of the relationship between actors and structures in the history of Florence through a study of five selected episodes in the *Istorie Fiorentine*. Together, these episodes show the gradual decline of virtue in the city, from the relatively healthy conditions of the late thirteenth century to the pathetic incompetence of the Pazzi rebellion in 1478. These episodes also show that the main cause of this decline was not internal struggles, as stated in the preface, but the decline of military virtue which in turn was caused by changes in the class structure. In expressing these conclusions in the form of dramatic narrative and not only explicit reasoning, Machiavelli brings out tension between actors and structures, showing the limits the structural forces set to individual achievement as well as the possibilities for individuals to assert themselves under particular conditions. Generally, the scope for individual achievement increases as a result of the decline from the thirteenth-century republic, dominated by collective forces, to the fifteenth-century oligarchy dominated by the Medici family.

The following article deals with historical narrative in Machiavelli's most important historical work, the *Istorie fiorentine*.¹ Whereas in his most well-known works, the *Principe* and the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli uses history to discuss various actions and situations that might serve as examples for the practical politician and to form a theory of how society should be organized, the *Istorie fiorentine* is a continuous history of the city of Florence from its origins until 1492.² Although it does contain generalizations on

¹My warmest thanks to Brian Stock for help and encouragement.

²Although the *Istorie fiorentine* is less studied than the *Principe* and the *Discorsi*, the literature is quite considerable. For an earlier, less positive evaluation, see Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 236-42 and *Machiavelli's Istorie Fiorentine*, 75-99; Mansfield, "Introduction" to Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, vii-xv and "Party and Sect in Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*," 209-66. For more positive evaluations, see e.g. Garosci, *Le Istorie Fiorentine del Machiavelli*,

the development of cities or societies in the introductions to each book as well as in the general preface, these passages form a relatively small part of the work as a whole. Only a few of the episodes dealt with by Machiavelli are used to draw explicit general conclusions. Any analysis of the work must therefore deal with the narrative, which has so far not received the attention it deserves. Most important from this point of view is Mark Phillips's distinction between Machiavelli's "representation" and "argument."³ The former refers to detailed and highly dramatic passages, aiming at vividness and emotional appeal in a manner characteristic of medieval narrative. The latter means explicit comments and interpretations as well as brief and terse summaries of events, creating a distance from the events and appealing to the intellect, in a manner characteristic of the narrative style of the Renaissance historians, according to the model of Classical Antiquity. However, a more thorough examination of the significance of this distinction for Machiavelli's understanding of history is still needed.

Such an examination should take its point of departure in the explicit statements, notably in the overall characterization of Florentine history in the preface where the internal divisions form the main theme. Machiavelli sketches the composition of the *Istorie fiorentine* and its main themes in the general preface. He had originally planned to start with Cosimo de' Medici's rise to power in 1434, thinking that Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini had dealt with the previous period. Discovering that these historians had neglected the inner conflicts, he decided to write the history of Florence from the beginning, but left out most of the foreign policy before 1434, focusing on the inner conflicts. According to Machiavelli, Florence differs from other cities in having been subject to many divisions, not just one:

189-91, 253, and passim; Rubinstein, "Machiavelli storico," 704-712; Anselmi, *Ricerche sul Machiavelli storico*; Dionisotto, "Machiavelli storico," in his *Machiavellerie*, 365-409; Najemy, "Machiavelli and the Medici," 555-566; Sasso, *Machiavelli II. La storiografia* and Bagge, "Medieval and Renaissance Historiography: Break or Continuity?," 1356-71.

³Phillips, "Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and the Tradition of Vernacular Historiography in Florence", 86-105; "Representation and Argument in Florentine Historiography", 48-63; and "Barefoot Boy Makes Good: A Study of Machiavelli's Historiography", 585-605. For a similar distinction, see Anselmi, *Ricerche*, 164-65, 178-97. Bondanella, *Machiavelli and the Art of Renaissance History* pays particular attention to the representation, regarding the vivid portraits as a kind of interludes in Machiavelli's mostly abstract exposition. Additionally, Anna Maria Cabrini deals extensively with style and composition in Books II and III; see her *Per una valutazione delle 'Istorie Fiorentine.'*

first, the nobles were divided between themselves, then there was a division between the nobles and the people, and finally one between the people and the plebs. In addition, winning parties were often divided into two.⁴ These divisions are in one sense a sign of greatness: no other city would have survived so many internal conflicts. On the other hand, they are the city's main problem, explaining why this great and noble city did not become powerful in a similar way as Rome. Consequently, Machiavelli points to the importance of these conflicts both in themselves, as they led to remarkable deeds equally worthy of being recorded as the wars against external enemies, and as lessons for future leaders who may study their causes and thus learn to avoid similar conflicts.

As has been noted by several previous scholars, in this passage Machiavelli expresses a more negative attitude to the internal conflicts than in the *Discorsi*, where he regards such conflicts in Rome as a factor contributing to the city's greatness.⁵ The difference between these two statements forms the starting-point for the following analysis of the narrative which aims at showing that the decline of liberty and military virtues is a more important factor than internal conflicts in Machiavelli's account of the decline of Florence. Against this background, the relationship between representation and argument in general will be discussed, including Machiavelli's understanding of the relationship between individual human actions and structural conditions which seems to resemble modern discussions about actors and structures in history and the social sciences.

This analysis will be carried out by examining five narrative sequences dealing with crucial events or turning-points in the city's history, to which

⁴"Ma di Firenze in prima si divisono intra loro i nobili, dipoi i nobili e il popolo, e in ultimo il popolo e la plebe; e molte volte occorse che una di queste parti, rimasa superiore, si divise in due" (Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, 8). References in the following are to books and chapters in this edition, abbreviated *IF*. "But in Florence the nobles were, first, divided among themselves; then the nobles and the people; and in the end the people and the plebs: and it happened many times that the winning party was divided in two" (Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, 7). All following translations are from this edition.

⁵*Discorsi* I.4. For a detailed comparison between the two statements, emphasizing the difference between them, see Cabrini, *Valutazione* 364-74. By contrast, Bock, "Civil discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine*," 181-201 is more inclined to see a connection between the two statements. Alfredo Bonadeo, *Corruption, Conflict, and Power*, 35-71 mostly attributes a negative view of internal conflicts to Machiavelli, regarding the passage in the *Discorsi* as an exception, based on particular circumstances.

will be added an examination of Machiavelli's main portraits of individuals. Such an analysis of narrative entails the methodological problem that conclusions have to be drawn on the basis of the story itself without being supported by the author's own explicit statements. There is no standard method for overcoming this difficulty, but we may derive some help in considering the overall picture emerging from the various stories as well as by comparing Machiavelli with his predecessors. The more he has changed his source, the more likely he is to have had a specific purpose with his narrative.⁶

Why would Machiavelli's narrative differ from or add to his explicit comments? To this rather obvious question, there are two answers. First, the genre of historiography normally entails a considerable amount of narrative which is only to a limited extent interpreted by the author or summarized in explicit statements. And, second, the *Istorie fiorentine* was commissioned by the Medici. Machiavelli had been expelled from political office after the Medici's return to power in 1512, but in the following years had worked hard to obtain such a commission and finally succeeded in 1520. Thus, he had to establish a careful balance between his republican sentiments and his need to satisfy his patron.⁷

In practice, the inner conflicts form the main theme in Books II-IV, covering the period from the beginning until 1434, while Book I gives a general narrative of events in Italy outside Florence. By contrast, the second half of the work, covering the years 1434-92, is to a much greater extent concerned with foreign policy. This applies almost entirely to Books V-VI, largely also to Books VII-VIII. The Medici regime is thus dealt with fairly briefly and the class analysis is not applied to this period. An analysis of the relationship between the class structure and individuals and their actions must therefore deal mainly with Books II-IV, while the narrative of internal events in Florence in Books VII and VIII assumes particular

⁶The most important studies of the sources for the *Istorie fiorentine* are Anselmi, *Ricerche*, 115-59, dealing briefly with the work as a whole, Cabrini, *Valutazione* and *Interpretazione* and Sasso, *Machiavelli* II, on the first four books. See also Rubinstein, "Machiavelli storico," 718-24, and, on the first three books, Niccolò Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, with comments by Vittorio Fiorini. However, no complete examination of Machiavelli's sources exists. Against this background Gisela Bock warns against drawing conclusions about Machiavelli's ideas (Bock, "Civil discord," 186).

⁷The *Istorie fiorentine* was composed during the years 1520-25, commissioned by Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, the future Pope Clement VII (r. 1523-34). On the circumstances around this commission, see Garosci, *Le Istorie*, 185-87; Rubinstein, "Machiavelli storico," 695-96 and Sasso, *Machiavelli* II: 7-45.

importance for understanding Machiavelli's overall view of the decline of Florence. The five episodes to be discussed in the following are selected in order to shed light on both aspects. The first and the second concern the first and second phases of the class struggle, mainly the second, between the nobles and the people; the third and fourth concern the third phase, the conflict between the people and the plebs; while the fifth, concerning the detailed and dramatic story of the Pazzi conspiracy, focuses on the Medici regime as the final stage in the decline of Florence.

1) *Guelphs, Ghibellines, and Popolani*

Book II, dealing mainly with the period from around 1200 until the mid fourteenth century, covers the first two conflicts mentioned in the general preface, between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines and between the nobles and the people, as well as a third one between the Black and the White faction. The first conflict begins when the young Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti breaks off his engagement with his Amidei fiancée in order to marry a beautiful girl of the Donati family and is killed by the Amidei in revenge (*IF* II.3). The ensuing conflict merges with the all-Italian division between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, the Buondelmonti joining the former, the Amidei the latter. The story is to be found in several of Machiavelli's sources. Machiavelli shortens the story and, more importantly, emphasizes the emotional and accidental aspect of the event more strongly than his predecessors. When Buondelmonte sees the beautiful girl offered to him in marriage by her mother, he is so infatuated that he forgets everything else and accepts the proposal. By contrast, Machiavelli's predecessors usually include some persuasion from the girl's mother before Buondelmonte yields.⁸ Furthermore, the broken engagement is to Machiavelli not only the beginning of hostilities between the two families, but the beginning of internal divisions as such.

Machiavelli deals with the outbreak of the conflict between the Black and the White faction in the year 1300 in a similar way, emphasizing its accidental character more strongly than his predecessors. There was an old hatred between two families, the Cerchi and the Donati, but not so serious that it would necessarily have led to open conflict. However, when members of the two warring factions in Pistoia, the Whites and the Blacks, were received in Florence, they carried the "infection" with them. The

⁸See Cabrini, *Interpretazione*, 36-46 with a detailed analysis and quotations from the sources and Sasso, *Machiavelli* II: 19-29 who focuses particularly on Machiavelli's relationship to Dante.

Cerchi family became the leaders of the Whites, the Donati of the Blacks. This conflict divided the Guelph party and cut across the conflict between the nobles and the people. It reached a climax in 1301, when the Whites—including Dante—were driven out of Florence.

In contrast to his predecessors, Machiavelli pays greater attention to social factors when dealing with the conflict between the nobles and the people. He shows how the people gradually become more powerful and how a conflict between them and the nobles emerges in addition to the one between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines. Eventually, the people organize under the leadership of Giano della Bella, who carries through legislation barring the nobles from public office and forcing them to obey the laws. When new tumults break out, Giano prefers a voluntary exile to armed struggle in the city. Nevertheless, a battle seems imminent, but moderates from both sides intervene and arrange a compromise (*IF*, II.13-14, 1293-1295). In his brief account of these events, Machiavelli largely follows Bruni, but he differs from him on two points. While Bruni regards Giano and his followers as the representatives of the city as a whole against the narrow interests of the nobles, Machiavelli describes a conflict between two classes. This is expressed particularly clearly in the way Machiavelli depicts the arbitrators as urging both parties to show moderation. They remind the nobles of their bad government which has made them hated by the people, and of the latter's superiority in numbers and wealth. On the other hand, they warn the people against trusting too much in their numbers and point to the military importance of the nobles. Giano is also less prominent in Machiavelli's account than in Bruni's. On both points, Machiavelli has more in common with his medieval predecessors, notably Villani, who is his main source besides Bruni.⁹

Machiavelli also follows Bruni in contrasting the hero, Giano della Bella, and the villain, Corso Donati, the leader of the Blacks, a proud and arrogant noble who subordinates the interests of the republic to his own ambition. Unlike Bruni, however, Machiavelli does not confine himself to a moral evaluation of the two characters, but places them in a social context. Giano is an instrument for the new, rising class, the people. Despite his idealism and unselfish behaviour, the long-term consequences of his actions may be questioned. Corso may have contributed to the sudden

⁹For a comparison between Machiavelli and his predecessors and sources, Villani and Bruni, see Cabrini, *Valutazione*, 113-14; and Bagge, "Medieval and Renaissance Historiography," 1357-58. Machiavelli's less positive evaluation of Giano is also underlined by Sasso, *Machiavelli*, II, 251-59.

decline of Florence at this time, but he is also an example of a structural weakness in the republic, i.e. its inability to make productive use of its great men. There were many men like Corso Donati in the Roman republic who contributed to its greatness through foreign conquests. If the Florentines had been more intent on expanding their realm, they might have found use for such a man, who would then have added to the glory of the republic instead of being a constant troublemaker.¹⁰

Machiavelli's account of the inner conflicts in the republic during the first century of its existence thus contains a curious mixture of pure chance and what in modern terms may be referred to as sociological observations. As for the latter, they serve to explain the conflicts towards the end of the thirteenth century, but are otherwise fairly sketchy. Machiavelli offers no analysis of the economic conditions that might explain the changing social divisions. He even fails to mention what to modern scholars is probably the main explanation of the rise of the *popolo* from the mid thirteenth century onwards, namely the commercial expansion and the alliance with the papacy which secured great incomes for Florentine merchants who collected the papal taxes on ecclesiastical incomes all over Europe. Thus, in his account of the early conflicts in Florence, Machiavelli neither expresses a clear view of the relationship between structures and events, nor explains the social and economic basis of the conflicting classes.

The accidental character of the first and the last of these three conflicts no doubt has to do with the fact that they are conflicts between factions or "sects" on the same social level. However, even the accidental may ultimately have a structural significance. Machiavelli has a pessimistic view of human nature. A well-ordered republic is therefore no natural product, but the result of strict laws and a government meting out harsh punishment to transgressors. It is therefore most likely to be the result of one, wise and strong founder laying down the basic laws and constitution and making the population into virtuous citizens.¹¹ Florence had no such beginning; its

¹⁰This is not stated explicitly by Machiavelli but seems a likely interpretation in light of his comparison between Florence and Rome and his general comments on the disastrous consequences of the decline of the nobility. In his comment on Corso after his death, Machiavelli points to his negative sides but also states that he "deserves to be numbered among the rare citizens our city has had" (*merita di essere numerato intra i rari cittadini che abbi avuti la nostra città, IF, II.23*). Sasso, *Machiavelli II*: 270-75 regards Corso's ambition as a symptom of the problems in Florence at the time.

¹¹According to Fischer, *Well-Ordered Licence*, 111-21, 137-45, Machiavelli regards a virtuous republic initially as the result of the right institutional arrange-

liberty was the result of a chance event, the breakdown of imperial power in Italy. Consequently, no firm structure prevented the passions of individual human beings, whether erotic desire or hatred, from having disastrous social consequences.

Despite his pessimistic view of the origins of Florence, Machiavelli has a considerably more positive view of the thirteenth century than of later periods. In a brief passage, he describes the glory of Florence at the end of the 1290s, its military strength, the great building projects, and the respect the city enjoyed from other powers. No external enemy, only internal disunity could destroy it. Throughout the century there is also a certain balance of power that forces the conflicting parties to show some moderation, and the citizens are full of courage and military virtue. Thus, the Florentines warn their enemies in advance of their coming, regarding attacks by surprise as contemptible, in accordance with the high moral standards of the epoch (*IF* II.5).

Moreover, the situation at the end of the 1290s resembles that of the Roman republic, which Machiavelli compares with Florence in the preface to Book III. In contrast to Florence, the conflicts between the classes in Rome were solved by "disputes" rather than open fighting, and led to the increase of military virtue and not to its destruction, as in Florence.¹² Thus, in Machiavelli's view, conflicts may have harmful as well as beneficial consequences, leading to great conquests in the case of Rome and to stagnation in the case of Florence.¹³ This indicates a more complex explanation

ments, but once established, it may be upheld through socialization. See also Qviller, "The Machiavellian Cosmos", 1383-1404, who finds the origin of Machiavelli's pessimistic view of human nature in Augustine's doctrine of Original Sin. Machiavelli also discusses the importance of the founders of cities in the *Discorsi*; see *Discorsi* I.1 and I.49 and Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 186-87.

¹²"quelle di Roma sempre la virtù militare accrebbono, quelle di Firenze al tutto la spengono" (*IF* III.1); see Sasso, *Machiavelli* II, 177-85 and, for a general analysis of Machiavelli's understanding of social conflicts, Sasso, *Machiavelli* II, 169-218.

¹³Bock, "Civil discord" n. 65 correctly states that Machiavelli does not explicitly link his discussion of internal conflicts to the question of expansion in the *Istorie Fiorentine*, in contrast to the *Discorsi*. This question, however, is far more prominent in the *Istorie Fiorentine* than appears from the explicit comments. On the importance of expansion in the *Discorsi*, see also Guarini, "Machiavelli and the Crisis of the Italian Republics," 17-40 and Connell, "Machiavelli on Growth as an End," 268-69. On the imperialist tradition, not only in Machiavelli but also

of the decline of Florence than the one brought forward in the introduction, and this in turn points to the narrative as the key to an answer. In the late 1290s, Florence happened to achieve the same balance between the competing classes as Rome, but it lacked the firm structure that might have made this situation last. Further, in contrast to Rome, Florence did not embark upon foreign conquest, thus endangering its recently gained internal unity. Although sketchy, Machiavelli's account of the first three conflicts in Florence does give a clue to the city's later history and to why it developed in a different direction than that of ancient Rome.

2) *The Rise and Fall of the Duke of Athens*

Book II ends with the fall of the nobles, which also means the end of the first phase of the class struggles. The main episode in the second half of the book, dealing with the dictatorship of Walter of Brienne, Duke of Athens, and his subsequent fall from power (1342-43, *IF* II.33-37), contributes to this result but is not directly related to the struggle between the nobles and the people. In a brilliant analysis of this story, Mark Phillips shows how Machiavelli combines medieval "representation" with Renaissance "argument", increasing the force of both, so that the episode becomes the great confrontation between liberty and servitude.¹⁴ However, Phillips does not discuss the episode in the context of Machiavelli's general interpretation of the history of Florence.

The duke's rise to power is in one sense a chance event. Its immediate cause is that he happens to be present just when Florence has lost the war against Pisa for the control of Lucca. The leaders, a committee of twenty charged with conducting the war, fear for their position and elect the duke captain so as to avoid criticism. Further, the nobles, some *popolani* families, and even the plebs, regard the duke as a means to solve their problems. Finally, his election is an example of a more general phenomenon in the first half of the fourteenth century. The Florentines repeatedly sought "a strong man" as a remedy for internal struggles and the external weakness resulting from them. Chance more than prudence saved them from

in Florentine Humanist thought in general, see Hörnqvist, "The Two Myths of Civic Humanism," 105-42. My warmest thanks to Dr Hörnqvist for allowing me to read this article in manuscript.

¹⁴Phillips, "Machiavelli," 89-95 and "Representation and Argument." See also Sasso, *Machiavelli e le antiche e altri saggi* I.1: 491-510 and I.2: 278-82 who focuses on the problem of tyranny and on the relationship between the episode and the class conflicts in Florence.

becoming permanently enslaved by these rulers.

The duke frightens the people by executing some of the leaders of the war against Lucca and soon reveals tyrannical tendencies, demanding "free lordship" ("la signoria libera", *IF* II.34). The priors are greatly worried, confer with other citizens, and try to make the duke mend his ways by addressing him directly. In a speech directed to the duke, the first direct speech in the *Istorie fiorentine* and the only one in Book II, an anonymous prior pleads for the cause of freedom and warns against tyranny.¹⁵ He takes his point of departure in the Florentines' love of freedom and tries to show that it will be impossible to enslave this people. No good that the duke might confer on the people, whether riches or empire, will be regarded as compensation for the loss of freedom, and tyranny will make him so many enemies that it will be impossible to rule by force. It will therefore be in the duke's own interest to respect the freedom of the city.

The speech is prophetic but also, in a double sense, ironic. At first, it is without effect. The duke rejects the anonymous speaker's argument in a brief speech, rendered in indirect speech: he does not intend to take freedom away from the city but to restore it, for divided cities are enslaved and united ones free. Thus, by getting rid of sects, ambitions, and enmities, the duke will liberate the city. Here the duke may possibly be expressing Machiavelli's own ideas,¹⁶ but his words seem more likely to be intended as an ironic comment on tyrants' tendency to legitimize their rule through a need for peace and stability. In any case, Machiavelli's subsequent story shows that the duke is not the man to perform this noble task, because he acts as a tyrant. The priors now see no other solution than to grant him lordship for one year. On the following day, this agreement is presented to the rest of the population at a meeting in the Piazza della Signoria, a meeting that further serves to strengthen the duke's position. When the passage about his lordship for one year is read aloud, someone in the crowd shouts "for life," which is then repeated by all who are assembled, drowning the priors' attempts at protesting (*IF* II.35).

¹⁵ *IF* II.34. While the story about the duke as a whole is largely based on Machiavelli's predecessors, Villani and Bruni, the speech is entirely Machiavelli's own (Cabrini, *Valutazione*, 282-83). Marina Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe des Medicis," 110, regards it as the expression of Machiavelli's own opinion regarding the situation at the time he was writing and an appeal to the Medici to restore the republic.

¹⁶ Thus Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe," 147. Bock, "Civil Discord," 187 suggests that the two speeches, the anonymous prior's and the duke's, reflect the ambiguity in Machiavelli's own thought on the matter.

The scene is a typical example of Machiavelli's sense of mass psychology, while at the same time it forms an ironic contrast to the previous discussion; the anonymous prior's rhetorical skill and clear and consistent arguments are completely overrun by the spontaneous outburst of a plebeian. The duke's victory is, however, short-lived; less than one year later the same plebs rage against him, setting upon one of his followers and his innocent son and tearing them apart. In this sense the speech is prophetic, showing what will actually happen as a result of the duke's tyranny. In the long run, however, it is ironic in a deeper sense, commenting on the development Machiavelli describes later in the *Istorie fiorentine*. Finally, the Florentines did accept tyranny, admittedly in a somewhat more subtle form than the duke's regime, proving that it was not impossible for a tyrant to subdue this freedom-loving people with gifts and favours.¹⁷ In this way, the speech becomes one of several examples of Machiavelli linking this episode with the last in his series of representations, the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478.

In Machiavelli's opinion, the duke's fall is certainly a victory for freedom. The republic as well as internal order is restored, cities under Florentine dominion recover their liberty but join the Florentines voluntarily soon afterwards so that the empire now rests on a firmer foundation (*IF* II.38). Nevertheless, the whole story has a bitter taste. The loss of freedom was the Florentines' own fault, and it was recovered, not only by heroic effort but also to some extent by chance.¹⁸ Nor is Machiavelli's description of mass behaviour particularly flattering, neither when introducing tyranny nor when abolishing it; the masses show ruthless cruelty in tearing apart an innocent young boy.¹⁹ As for the latter, however, Machiavelli may partly have regarded the cruelty as a healthy sign—at least compared to later occasions when the Florentine people were urged to fight for their liberty.

A compromise is reached between the nobles and the people shortly after the duke's fall, but soon afterwards a conflict breaks out, leading to the nobles' final defeat, so that Florence is "stripped not only of arms but

¹⁷On the duke of Athens as an anticipation of the Medici regime, see Anselmi, *Ricerche*, 174.

¹⁸According to Machiavelli, the duke might have succeeded in establishing a permanent tyranny by summoning three hundred of the leading citizens under the pretext of seeking their advice and then killing them. However, he attempted this at such a late stage that three conspiracies were already forming independently of one another, which were then united as a consequence of the duke's initiative (*IF* II.36 110).

¹⁹*IF* II.37, cf. Phillips, "Machiavelli," 93-94 and "Representation," 58.

of all generosity.”²⁰ The duke’s rise to power as well as his fall is also the first sign of the later importance of the plebs. Nevertheless, the importance of the episode for the changing class structure in Florence hardly corresponds to its length and detail. Is Machiavelli’s narrative simply the result of his fascination with the drama of the story? This may be part of the explanation, but another aspect is more important: the story serves as the first stage in the decline of freedom, thus playing an important part in Machiavelli’s overall understanding of the history of Florence. In addition, it raises the question of chance versus determination in history. On the one hand, the duke’s rise to power as well as his fall is the result of chance events; the unpredictability of mass behaviour is demonstrated drastically both when the duke is given power for life and when the populace tears apart its two victims. This chance aspect of the story may illustrate Machiavelli’s historical thinking in general, but it may also be part of his diagnosis of Florence as a city lacking the firm institutions and the republican virtue able to keep its destiny under control. On the other hand, the episode also serves as a diagnosis of the largely healthy condition of the Florentine people in the mid-fourteenth century compared to later periods, notably the end of the fifteenth century, thus confirming the anonymous prior’s statement that it would be difficult to introduce tyranny in this city. This diagnosis is in turn related to the fall of the nobles. Despite all his negative characterizations of them, Machiavelli regards them as essential for the city’s military virtue and capacity. These qualities were still present in 1343, in contrast to what was the case during the rebellion Machiavelli describes towards the end of the *Istorie fiorentine*, the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478.

3) *The Ciompi Rebellion*

The consequence of the fall of the nobles, the new conflict between the people and the plebs, the climax of which is the Ciompi rebellion in 1378, is dealt with in Book III (*IF*, III.9-19). The rebellion starts as a fairly “normal” inner conflict, having its origin in the increasing division between two “sects”, headed respectively by the Albizzi and the Ricci, a division that gradually achieves a social dimension. Most of the leading families in the city rally around the Albizzi, who have revived the Guelph party in order to keep their adversaries out of office by branding them as Ghibellines. The Ricci and their friends represent the opposition and have a broader popu-

²⁰“non solamente di armi ma di ogni generosità si spogliasse” (*IF* II.42).

lar basis, as they are supported by the lesser guilds and the plebs. The first outbreak of violence ends with all the demands from the opposition being accepted. Nevertheless, once begun, violence is not easy to stop. The poorest elements in the city stage a new rebellion, more violent than the first. Despite having been warned about it shortly before, the government proves unable to subdue it and the *signori* gradually leave the *Palazzo della Signoria* fearing the populace. In the prevailing power vacuum a poor wool comber, Michele di Lando, suddenly emerges as the popular leader. He returns the city to order, bans violence and plunder, and has a gallows erected in the piazza to frighten people. Finally, he appoints a new government with representatives, not only from the populace but also from the major and minor guilds. When the populace becomes discontent and rebels, after finding that he favours the greater people too much, he puts down the rebellion by courageous and prompt action. Thus, while the *signori*, when faced with rebellion fear for their lives and give up without a fight, Michele, thinking of his honour and that of the office he holds, launches a successful counterattack.²¹

The Ciompi rebellion is the major event in Book III, together with its immediate aftermath (1378-81), filling around half of the account of the years 1343-1414. Machiavelli follows Bruni in making Michele the hero and the saviour of Florence, in contrast to the medieval chroniclers who attach less importance to him and focus mainly on the collective groups.²² Machiavelli adds to Michele's heroic dimensions by depicting him as the ideal ruler who acts only out of concern for the community as a whole, but who, despite all his virtues and good deeds, was eventually banished by his ungrateful fellow citizens.²³ While Bruni tries to provide some explanation

²¹"thinking that it would be more to his glory to attack others than to wait for the enemy within the walls and have to flee, as did his predecessors, with dishonor to the palace and shame to himself" ("pensando che fusse più sua gloria assalire altri che dentro alle mura aspettare il nimico, e avere, come i suoi antecessori, con disonore del Palagio e sua vergogna a fuggirsi" (*IF* III.17: 165).

²²Machiavelli's main sources for the period 1364-84, including the Ciompi rebellion, are, in addition to Bruni, the *Cronaca* by Marchionne Stefani and an anonymous account of the rebellion, now attributed to Alamanno Acciaiuoli (Rubinstein, "Machiavelli storico," 720; Cabrini, *Interpretazione*, 21). For Machiavelli's account of Michele in comparison with those of earlier writers, see Phillips, "Barefoot Boy"; Cabrini, *Interpretazione*, 89-148; and Sasso, *Machiavelli* II: 333 n. 70.

²³*IF*, III.16-18.22; Phillips, "Barefoot Boy," 601-05. By contrast, Sasso, *Machiavelli* II: 338 regards Machiavelli's opinion of Michele as more reserved;

for Michele's ability as a leader by describing him as widely traveled and a former mercenary in France, Machiavelli deliberately depicts him as coming from nowhere, thus emphasizing the almost miraculous character of his achievement.²⁴ This strong focus on the individual hero differs markedly from Machiavelli's approach when dealing with earlier epochs, for example when he reduces Giano della Bella's importance in the 1290s in contrast to Bruni's account.

Like the account of the duke of Athens, that of the Ciompi rebellion is full of dramatic representation, in which Machiavelli combines Bruni's concentration on a limited number of events with his medieval predecessors' vivid and emotional descriptions. While being elected leader Michele is not only poorly dressed, as in the medieval accounts, but almost naked, and the accidental character of the election is emphasized by the fact that he is acclaimed as soon as he opens his mouth.²⁵ As in the account of the events of 1343, Machiavelli also gives a gruesome description of mass behaviour. While his predecessors report that the unpopular Ser Nuto was hanged and then torn apart by the populace, Machiavelli lets him be hanged alive by one foot, after which pieces are torn from his body until only the foot is left (*IF* III.16). More importantly, Machiavelli links the episode to Michele's statesmanship, while it is simply a spontaneous expression of popular hatred to his predecessors. Michele urges the popu-

he managed to prevent great evils but not to lay a new foundation for the city. It may be objected to this that Machiavelli is more likely to blame the social conditions than Michele for this deficit. Actually, a comparison between Machiavelli's account of Michele and those of his predecessors as well as between Michele and other individuals portrayed in the *Istorie fiorentine*, seems rather to indicate that he was Machiavelli's main hero in the work.

²⁴Admittedly, Machiavelli says about Michele that he "owed more to nature than to fortune" ("piú alla natura che alla fortuna obligato," *IF* III.16, cf. Phillips, "Barefoot Boy," 602-03), i.e. his noble nature overcame his modest origins. However, his election was the result of pure chance; Michele showed his true nature in the way he exercised his leadership.

²⁵When the rebels are entering the Palazzo della Signoria, Michele, carrying the ensign of the *gonfaloniere della giustizia*, turns to them and says: "You see: this palace is yours and this city is in your hands. What do you think should be done now?" To which all replied that they wanted him to be Gonfaloniere and lord, and to govern them and the city however seemed best to him." ("Voi vedete: questo Palagio è vostro, e questa città è nelle vostre mani. Che vi pare che si faccia ora?" Al quale tutti, che volevano che fusse gonfaloniere e signore e che governassi loro e la città come a lui pareva, risponsono." *IF* III.16).

lace to seek out Ser Nuto in order to get them out of the way, so that he can organize the government without interference. Machiavelli thus shows the forces with which Michele has to struggle as well as the cruel means he has to use in order to accomplish his noble task.²⁶

Despite this emphasis on the individual hero, Machiavelli stresses the structural character of the rebellion more strongly than his predecessors. While the medieval chroniclers writing closely after the event focus on the series of violent clashes without much analysis, Bruni essentially understands the rebellion as the result of a failure in "social engineering," an example of the danger arising from conflicts within the leading strata of society. Fortunately, the rebellion is quelled fairly quickly which allows the city to stand united during the ensuing heroic struggle against the tyrant of Milan. To Machiavelli, it is the final breakthrough of a new class conflict, latent since the middle of the century, but forming the key to understanding the city's history until the next turning-point, the Medici takeover in 1434.

In this way, Book III presents a clearer connection between class structure and historical narrative, that is, between long-term and short-term factors, than Book II, as well as a clearer account of the classes themselves. In contrast to his account of the earlier class conflicts, Machiavelli shows the economic motives for the new class, the plebs, to rise against the wealthy merchants and the leaders of the guilds. Most of the poor workers and artisans either have no guild to protect their interests or belong to guilds dominated by the rich, particularly the *Arte della Lana*, where they have no influence. They complain about low wages and oppression without any chance of being heard (*IF*, III.12). Machiavelli also shows, at least in some main outlines, how the conflict between the Albizzi and the Ricci merges with the new class conflict, although he is not very explicit regarding the considerable social differences between the common artisans and the real proletariat, which resembles the industrial working class of later ages. He can therefore be accused of exaggerating the continuity of the plebeian party from the Ciompi rebellion to the change of regime in 1433-34. Nevertheless, he is probably correct in linking the Ciompi rebellion to the social divisions before and after 1378.²⁷

²⁶Phillips, "Barefoot Boy," 601-02 and Cabrini, *Interpretazione* 112-14.

²⁷John M. Najemy, "Arti and Ordini," 161-91 contrasts Machiavelli's deep understanding of and sympathy for the guild system with Bruni's neglect, and characterizes his explanation of the second rebellion in 1378 as "a remarkably sophisticated socio-economic analysis ... whose essential validity is still being discov-

Machiavelli's account of the Ciompi rebellion is complex and even seems somewhat inconsistent at first sight. On the one hand, Machiavelli sympathizes with the lower classes, on the other, he considers the rebellion a disaster. Additionally, he regards it as the expression of a deep-rooted social change as well as a series of chance events in which one, single hero plays a crucial role. On a deeper level, however, there is a connection between these apparent paradoxes which illustrates some fundamental features of Machiavelli's thinking.

Book III contains three great speeches that give important information about these problems. The first is by an anonymous citizen worried about the increasing inner conflicts at the time who addresses the *signori* on behalf of a number of others, apparently in 1372. The speaker gives a drastic account of the moral corruption, with the citizens seeking only their own good at the cost of the city as a whole, and summarizes Machiavelli's previous account of almost constant inner conflicts since the beginning of the thirteenth century, although without his analysis.²⁸ He ends by urging the *signori* to put an end to the conflict between the Albizzi and the Ricci and to reform the city. The *signori* take up this proposal but without success because "they gave more thought to eliminating the present sects than to taking away the causes of future ones; so they achieved neither the one nor the other."²⁹

The second speech, by the *gonfaloniere* Luigi Guicciardini, is held after the first rebellion when the *signori* have given in to the demands of the opposition but the city still fails to calm down (*IF*, III.11). It contains a passionate urge for unity, much in the vein of the anonymous first speaker, while at the same time trying to convince the audience—the representatives of the guilds—that they have nothing to gain by further tumult. The audience is also convinced by Guicciardini's words, because they were true, Machiavelli adds. However, not all the rebels are satisfied by this reasoning and the third speaker, an anonymous *ciompo*, addresses his fellow proletarians in a way that forms the direct antithesis of Guicciardini's words. If nothing had happened, the man says, he might have been

ered in ... modern scholarship" (Najemy, "*Arti and Ordini*," 175). See also Najemy, "*Audiant omnes artes*" 59-93. Machiavelli's sympathy for the lower classes is also emphasized by Sasso, *Machiavelli* II 304-18; Leibovici, "From Fight to Debate," 647-60 and McCormick, "Machiavelli against Republicanism," 615-43.

²⁸ Sasso, *Machiavelli* II, 292-93.

²⁹ "pensarono più a spegnere le presenti sette, che a torre via le cagioni delle future; tanto che né l'una cosa né l'altra conseguirono" (*IF*, III.6).

inclined to keep quiet. Now, however, they have already committed crimes for which they will be punished. Why await prison, death, and torture? Why not rather accomplish what they have already begun? Why not use the opportunity given them by the split among the leaders to conquer the city and become rich, or at least avoid punishment for their crimes? For “when many err, no one is punished” (*IF*, III.13).³⁰

The speech is introduced with the statement that the plebs were full of indignation and fear of punishment and preceded by the passage in which Machiavelli explains the reasons for the plebs’ resentment. Although they had good reasons for doing what they did, they would hardly have acted if they had not been urged on by the speech. In contrast to the two earlier speakers who insisted on the interests of the city as a whole, the anonymous *ciompo* clearly and deliberately advocates those of one, single class. Some passages in the earlier part of Book III, including the two first speeches, may indicate that Machiavelli blames the government of Florence for not trying to accommodate the interests of different classes, including those of the plebs.³¹ In this way, the Ciompi rebellion might possibly have been avoided. After all, the plebs did not act more selfishly than other classes had before. Nevertheless, Machiavelli’s lament at the fall of the nobles in Book II and the introduction to Book III shows that there were clear limits on how far he was willing to go in his sympathy for the *ciompi*. Their rebellion was both more drastic and violent than earlier ones and a symptom of a more serious crisis. From the point of view of the city as a whole, the plebs are the most worthless class and unable to govern the city. Their rise to power is largely to be understood as a consequence of the fall of the nobles and forms part of the same downward trend. As in the case of the nobles, Machiavelli does not judge a class according to the merits of its social program but according to its usefulness to society as a whole, concluding that the plebs have little to contribute to the glory and greatness of Florence.

Machiavelli’s account of the Ciompi rebellion sheds further light on his view of the relationship between actors and structures or short-term and long-term factors in history. The long-term explanation of the rebel-

³⁰On the influence of Sallust, *Catilina* and Livy in this passage, see Phillips, “Barefoot Boy” 601 and Cabrini, *Interpretazione* 96-97. Sasso, *Machiavelli* II 308-18 also points to its similarity to Machiavelli’s own reflections in the *Principe* and the *Discorsi*, although admitting that it does not correspond to his solution to the internal conflicts.

³¹Notably the comment that the *signori* failed to take precautions against future sects (*IF*, III.6, see above).

lion lies in deeply rooted changes in the city's social structure. While the plebs' movement thus seems inevitable, its violence and above all its temporary success seem to be the result of particular circumstances in 1378. At this point, Machiavelli uses his insight into mass psychology to show how the rebellion gets out of control and how the *signori's* lack of nerve at the decisive moment aggravates the situation by creating a power vacuum. Actually, the city would now have been facing complete disaster were it not for the man who, entirely by chance, came to gain the power the former leaders had given up, Michele di Lando, a man concerned with the interests of the community as a whole rather than those of his class. However, Michele's rise to power is also a symptom of the decline of the Florentine republic as a result of the suppression of the nobles. In this respect, it presents a close parallel to the rise of the duke of Athens. The masses give Michele absolute power as soon as he opens his mouth, in the same way as they had spontaneously given the duke "free lordship" for life.³² Thus Machiavelli's account of the Ciompi rebellion is complex but not inconsistent. Deeply rooted structural change and pure chance interact to produce the events of 1378. The importance of chance, however, also has a historical dimension. The more the foundations of a true republic are undermined, the greater the importance of chance and individual achievement. The decadent fifteenth century, when the republic is steadily declining, is also the century of individuals.

4) *The Medici Takeover*

The takeover of the Medici is not depicted as one, dramatic event in the mode of "representation," but nevertheless has a particular position within the *Istorie fiorentine* as a whole. It forms the main theme of Book IV which is the most detailed so far, covering a period of only twenty years (1414-34). Concerning class structure, the book deals with the end of the third of Machiavelli's three stages, the conflict between the people and the plebs, which at the same time marks the end of the republic. The class conflict ends with the victory of the plebs whose leader, Cosimo de' Medici, in reality becomes the sole ruler of the city. Despite its character of general nar-

³²Against this background, it is difficult to accept Phillips's claim ("Barefoot Boy," 604-05) that Machiavelli, in celebrating Michele's heroic qualities, comes dangerously close to accepting tyranny. On the other hand, his belief in the great reformer or legislator as the founder of a true republic may be an indication that, under certain circumstances, he may have been willing to risk the danger of tyranny in order to pave the way for such a reformer.

rative, Book IV is mainly intended to explain this crucial change in the history of Florence.³³

Throughout the period, the city was ruled by the popular nobles who were arrogant and persecuted the leaders of the plebeian party, among whom were the Medici, to such an extent that they were seriously weakened.³⁴ The party itself, however, could not be eliminated, because the majority of the population shared its "humour." When the regime was abolished, in spite of the virtues of the two leaders, Maso degli Albizzi and Niccolò da Uzzano (see below), Machiavelli seeks the explanation in two factors: first, the popular nobles became arrogant through unbroken dominion; and second, they failed to watch who might attack them because of mutual envy and long rule (*IF* IV.2). Thus, Machiavelli indicates that the main theme of the book is the fall of the popular nobles' regime and the rise of the Medici.

The relatively detailed account of the wars, first against Milan (1422-27) and then against Lucca (1429-33), serves to explain the internal conflicts. The war against Milan (1422-27) leads to greater influence for the plebs and Giovanni de' Medici and makes the wealthy complain about higher taxes and attempt to reduce the power of the plebs. The war against Lucca, which proves a failure, further intensifies the conflict between the popular nobles and the plebs. The plebeian party, under the leadership of the Medici, is primarily responsible for starting the war, the aristocratic party for conducting it. Consequently, the leaders of the plebeian party use every opportunity to attack their adversaries, blaming the Florentine defeats on them and criticizing them for real or alleged mistakes.

The aristocratic leader Rinaldo degli Albizzi and his adherents now exploit a composition of the government favorable for them to arrest

³³As is well known, Machiavelli used Cavalcanti's very detailed narrative of these events as a source. See Giovanni Cavalcanti, *Istorie fiorentine* and Bock, "Civil discord," 186 with ref. On Cavalcanti as a source for the Medici takeover, see Kent, *The Rise of the Medici*, 3-11.

³⁴*IF* IV.3. In his picture of the Medici as the leaders of a plebeian party, Machiavelli is probably influenced by his source, Cavalcanti, who was himself an aristocrat and originally opposed to the Medici. Actually, the Medici faction did have more popular appeal and included a higher percentage of "new men" than that of its adversaries, but there was no fundamental social difference between the two factions; see Kent, *The Rise* 3-11, 104-35. Machiavelli's account also contains some hints in this direction, e.g. in the speech attributed to Niccolò da Uzzano who points to the number of aristocrats supporting the Medici (*IF* IV.27 206).

Cosimo. Cosimo escapes death by bribing the *gonfaloniere* and is sentenced to exile. His adherents, however, are still influential in Florence and in August 1434 the sortition leads to a government favorable to him. Rinaldo and his adherents are frightened and try a coup to prevent Cosimo's return. The coup fails, Cosimo returns in triumph, and it now becomes Rinaldo's turn to go into exile – for the rest of his life (*IF* IV.28-33).

The account of these events forms the climax of dramatic "representation" in the book. Compared to other episodes, however, such as the Ciompi rebellion, Machiavelli's narrative is fairly brief and undramatic, the main emphasis resting on Cosimo's arrest, his moderate behaviour in actually appearing before the magistrates, and his cleverness in managing to get off with a fairly light sentence. In a certain sense, Cosimo is represented as the hero of the story and his adversaries as unwise as well as unjust. Some brief remarks at the end of the book and in the following one (*IF* IV.33 and V.5) about how Cosimo and his party treated their enemies after Cosimo's return tip the balance in the opposite direction. Although not many are killed, a large number of men are exiled or ruined so that the opposite party is completely crushed. With his detailed description of Cosimo's unjust arrest and his dignity and prudence under adverse circumstances, Machiavelli presents a picture intended to satisfy the Medici,³⁵ while those who read the brief references to the situation after 1434 more carefully might find Cosimo's persecution of his enemies out of proportion with theirs of him.

A certain caution on Machiavelli's part may therefore be the reason for the relative lack of detail and dramatic representation in his account of the events of 1433-34. Instead, Book IV is "decorated" in other ways, with more portraits of prominent persons than there are in the earlier books, and, above all, with speeches.³⁶ Both are, of course, far more than decorations. The portraits of Giovanni de' Medici and his son Cosimo serve as a presentation of the ruling dynasty of the following period, while the speeches serve as the interpretation of the events.

Giovanni is portrayed as a modest and patriotic citizen who tries to

³⁵On Machiavelli and the Medici, see Gilbert, "Machiavelli's 'Istorie Fiorentine'"; Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe," 81-148; and Najemy, "Machiavelli and the Medici," 551-76.

³⁶Machiavelli's main source, Cavalcanti, also has a large number of speeches which to some extent form the basis of Machiavelli's own. Nevertheless, the influence of Cavalcanti is hardly sufficient to explain Machiavelli's arrangement, as the content and purpose of the speeches differ considerably from Cavalcanti's.

serve the interests of the city and suppress sects (*IF* IV.11). When asked to unite with the aristocratic party in order to reduce the power of the people, he refuses, speaking in defence of the prevailing constitution and warning Rinaldo degli Albizzi against his aggressive policy (*IF* IV.9-10). On his deathbed he urges his sons to behave in the same way. After his death, Machiavelli gives a short but very favorable characterization of him, praising his charity, compassion, generosity, and prudence (*IF* IV.16).³⁷ Together with the reference to Veri de' Medici refusing princely power (*IF* II.25), the portrait must be intended as a contrast to the later Medici. However, it must also be intended as a characterization of the Florentine republic. Giovanni is the ideal republican citizen,³⁸ but his importance and influence in the city is limited. In contrast to the Roman republic, Florence is unable to make use of its great leaders. Giovanni de' Medici is a rare example of a virtuous man who is able to live as a highly respected citizen in Florence, without, however, having a decisive influence on the city's destiny. As for the comparison between Giovanni and his son Cosimo, Cosimo is the more successful, while Giovanni is the more virtuous. Machiavelli's characterization of Cosimo shows his similarity to, as well as his difference from, his father. He gains popularity through generosity and friendly behaviour, but he "conducted himself with greater zeal and more liberality toward his friends than his father had done". As for his aims, Machiavelli states that by winning partisans in this way, "he would either live in Florence as powerful and as safely as anyone else or, if because of the ambition of his adversaries it came to something extraordinary, he would be superior both in arms and favor."³⁹ Cosimo is thus not deliberately planning to gain absolute power, but neither does he refrain from it. Actually, his enemies give him the opportunity he has envisaged by attempting to remove him.

Apart from his arrest and his clever escape from the threatening death sentence, Cosimo plays a curiously subordinate role in the story of the Medici takeover. He never comes forward with a speech and his behaviour as the leader of his party is only hinted at. Instead, Machiavelli regards the

³⁷ Compare the equally favorable portrait of Giovanni in Cavalcanti, *Istorie Fiorentine* III.6 (vol. I: 96).

³⁸ Pace Sasso, *Machiavelli* II 385 who finds a more reserved attitude to Giovanni.

³⁹ "con maggiore studio e più liberalità con gli amici che non aveva fatto il padre, si governava; [...] per questa via, o vivere in Firenze potente e sicuro quanto alcuno altro, o, venendosi per la ambizione degli avversarii allo straordinario, essere e con le armi e con i favori superiore" (*IF* IV.26).

events mainly from the point of view of Cosimo's adversaries.

Throughout the book, the ruling party of the popular nobles is faced with the problem of how to deal with the Medici. As soon as he notes Giovanni's popularity, Niccolò da Uzzano warns against him, pointing out—in accordance with Machiavelli's own understanding—the danger such a popular man represents, and how easy it is to oppose disorder in its beginning and how difficult when it has been allowed to increase, but he speaks in vain (*IF* IV.3). When the other members of the aristocratic party eventually discover the danger the Medici represent, Niccolò understands that it is too late to act and argues in favour of moderation. He first tries in vain to make Giovanni de' Medici join them in curtailing the influence of the plebs and then, when Cosimo has taken over, he warns against challenging him.

Approached by Niccolò Barbadori, Niccolò da Uzzano once more gives an analysis of the situation, concluding that an intervention at this time will only make matters worse; it would be impossible to excite the people against Cosimo, for he can be accused only of kindness and liberality. Although these qualities may be a means to gain absolute power, it would serve no purpose to eliminate Cosimo solely for this reason. Such a step will either make the aristocratic party unpopular and lead to defeat, as the plebeian party not only have the people on their side but also a large part of the aristocracy, or it will pave the way to absolute power for another, such as Rinaldo, to whom Cosimo is clearly to be preferred, if this should be the outcome (*IF* IV.27).⁴⁰

In presenting the Medici takeover mainly from the point of view of the members of the previous regime, Machiavelli's account looks like a case study of a political coup, intended to teach politicians, particularly republican ones, how to protect their regimes. Taken together, the speeches address a problem Machiavelli has discussed in his earlier works, namely the importance of time in such deliberations.⁴¹ It is important to discover the danger early and to react immediately; if this opportunity is missed, it

⁴⁰The account of this meeting is also based on that of Cavalcanti (Cavalcanti, *Istorie fiorentine* VII.7-8, vol. I: 381-87). Machiavelli renders Barbadori's words very briefly, while significantly changing those of Uzzano. In Cavalcanti, the latter's speech is full of hatred against Rinaldo degli Albizzi and his father Maso and introduced with the observation that the great men are able to agree only in extreme situations. Thus, Machiavelli once more changes his source in a rational choice direction, transforming Niccolò da Uzzano from a passionate faction leader to a calm analyst of politics who is able to predict the course of events.

⁴¹In the *Discorsi* I.33 Machiavelli uses this episode in a discussion about how to

would be better not to act at all. At the same time the speeches present three different attitudes to the problem, represented by Rinaldo degli Albizzi, Giovanni de' Medici, and Niccolò da Uzzano. The first is the faction leader, eager to crush his enemies, while possibly representing the same threat to the republic as Cosimo himself.⁴² The second is the real republican, the patriotic citizen who refuses to be involved in factional struggles but who shows an equally good grasp of rational choice politics as his adversaries. In addition to his appeals to patriotism and loyalty to the republic, Giovanni points to the psychological effects of reducing the power of those who have it and giving it to those who do not have it: while the latter will be content without power, the former will not, and consequently, what the popular nobles intend to do will increase the tension in the city instead of reducing it.⁴³ Finally, Niccolò da Uzzano is the "pragmatic republican", trying to preserve the privileges of his class but understanding that he can achieve this aim only by behaving moderately and establishing a broader consensus.

In this way, Machiavelli's account of the crisis resembles argument more than representation, while at the same time it focuses less on the class struggles than Books II and III. Nevertheless, his case study of the events of 1433-34 also forms part of his continuous narrative of the city of Florence and its shifting social forces. The Medici takeover means the final

prevent a powerful individual from destroying a republic by means of generosity. The solution is for the republican leaders to use the same means themselves.

⁴²Against this background, Rinaldo can hardly be regarded as Machiavelli's hero, as Gilbert, "Machiavelli's 'Istorie Fiorentine'," 87 and Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe," 126-131 suggest. Rinaldo is equally as much a faction leader as Cosimo, as stated in Niccolò da Uzzano's speech; cf. also Sasso, *Machiavelli* II 384-85 and 402-05. Moreover, while Cosimo during his exile is strictly loyal to Florence, Rinaldo persuades the duke of Milan to go to war against the city. Despite the fact that the speech Machiavelli attributes to him on this occasion contains an elaborate defence for taking such a step, including appeals to liberty (*IF* V.8), it is difficult to accept Marietti's conclusion that Machiavelli found this behavior acceptable ("Machiavel historiographe," 131). There is nothing in Machiavelli's account of the war between Milan and Florence to suggest that the tyrant of Milan would have abolished the tyranny of Florence if he had won.

⁴³Machiavelli follows Cavalcanti on this point as well, but abbreviates Rinaldo's speech while extending that of Giovanni. In Cavalcanti, Giovanni argues mainly from moral principles, contrasting Rinaldo's attempt to oppress the people with his father's goodness to them (Cavalcanti, *Istorie Fiorentine* III.4-5, vol. I: 93-95).

victory of the plebs over the popular nobles. In presenting the events of 1433-34 as the last stage in the class struggle that started with the Ciompi rebellion, Machiavelli manages to connect his overall interpretation of Florentine history with his narrative of concrete political events. In this respect he differs from Cavalcanti who regards the factional division as temporary and the consequence of particular circumstances in the 1420s and the aristocratic party as less coherent than Machiavelli does. While Machiavelli barely hints at a conflict between Niccolò da Uzzano and Rinaldo degli Albizzi, Cavalcanti lets the former express his violent hatred of the latter and point to a conflict between the two families going back to the previous generation. Thus, Machiavelli plays down the importance of personal enmity in favour of long-term class conflict.

Machiavelli's emphasis on class opposition and long-term structural change also serves to reduce the importance of Cosimo de' Medici's personal role in the coup, an approach that may be the republican Machiavelli's solution to the problem of writing for a Medici patron. However, Machiavelli's analysis here can hardly be explained as simply tactics; as we have seen, the relationship between the social structure and individual actors is one of the main problems in the *Istorie fiorentine*. In this way, Machiavelli continues his analysis from his account of the Ciompi rebellion of long-term social change versus chance or individual assertion. In contrast to the situation prevailing in the late fourteenth century, the breakdown of normal government and the rise of a sole ruler is not only a danger in a chaotic situation such as the Ciompi rebellion, but is a permanent threat from both factions in the internal conflict. If the coup against Cosimo de' Medici had succeeded, Rinaldo degli Albizzi might have destroyed the republic instead. Nevertheless, the detailed account of the events and the analysis given in the speeches, particularly those of Niccolò da Uzzano, suggest that the outcome was not predetermined. On the one hand, the tenuous balance of power might have continued if Cosimo's adversaries had not staged the coup against him; on the other, the destroyers of the republic might have been considerably worse than Cosimo and his successors.

Even more so than in the previous episodes, the Medici takeover raises the question of the decline of Florence. In the introduction to Book IV, Machiavelli comments on cities changing between license and servitude (*IF* IV.1), the former being the result of the people's dominance, the latter of the nobles'. In such a situation, it may happen that a republic is sustained by the virtue of a single citizen, as was the case in Florence in the period 1382-1434, when two great leaders held a dominant position, first

Maso degli Albizzi, then Niccolò da Uzzano. Machiavelli thus takes a fairly negative attitude to this period, considered by contemporaries as well as by later ages one of the most glorious epochs in the history of Florence.⁴⁴ In this late phase of its existence, the Florentine republic had the fortune of good and virtuous men's leadership but lacked the solid foundation in good laws and good order, a situation which makes a single man's virtues superfluous (*IF* IV.1). Characteristically, the speeches in Book IV differ from those of Book III, which are centred on the opposition between the interests of the city as a whole and class interests. Except for the arguments of Giovanni de' Medici, who dies before the crisis reaches its climax, the case of the city as a whole is not a theme in the discussion, which is confined to the question of how a particular oligarchy may preserve its rule. In such a situation, the fall of the republic is neither as unexpected nor as disastrous as it would have been a hundred years earlier. The problem, which Machiavelli treats in the following books, is how Cosimo de' Medici and his adherents exploited their newly gained victory.

5) *The Pazzi Conspiracy*

Given the fact that Machiavelli devotes half of the *Istorie fiorentine* to the years 1434-92 and that these years must have been of particular interest to his Medici patron, his account of the inner history of Florence in the period is surprisingly brief. Books V and VI are almost wholly devoted to foreign policy, which is also fairly prominent in Books VII and VIII. The period 1434-55 is dismissed with the remark that things went reasonably well as long as Cosimo was in good health and there was a kind of balance of power between him and Neri Capponi (*IF* VI.2). By contrast, the period of crisis, 1455-69, is dealt with in some detail. Then there is another gap until the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478, which is the subject of a long, vivid, and dramatic narrative.

Machiavelli's account of this conspiracy is preceded by a detailed account of the murder of the duke of Milan, Galeazzo Sforza, which took place in 1476, and by some general observations on conspiracies as a phenomenon (*IF* VI.33-34 and VIII.1). As adduced by Machiavelli, the fundamental cause for the actual conspiracy in Florence is that the Medici,

⁴⁴Machiavelli briefly refers to what his predecessors regarded as the city's heroic struggles against Milan and Naples, adding that it was saved mainly by the sudden death of its two main adversaries, Duke Giangaleazzo Visconti of Milan in 1402 and King Ladislaus of Naples in 1414, and that greater things would have been achieved had the city maintained its unity (*IF* III.29).

after their victory in 1466, had become so powerful that the only means of bringing an end to their regime was a coup. In contrast to the earlier period, one could no longer hope that the sortition—which still continued—would bring an anti-Medici government to power, as the Medici were now able to control the nominations (*IF* VII.2, VIII.1).⁴⁵ Both passages suggest that a definitive change has taken place. Although Lorenzo and Giuliano de' Medici cannot be accused of the same crimes as the duke of Milan, they have, like him, become princes who can be removed only by murder, an observation that is made explicit in the introduction to Book VIII.

After this general observation, Machiavelli turns to a detailed and dramatic account of the conspiracy, starting with a presentation of the Pazzi family, rich, splendid, and proud, who eventually became enemies of the Medici because they were not given the ranks of honour that they felt entitled to. A number of incidents, which Machiavelli mentions briefly, add up, causing the younger members of the Pazzi family to become the enemies of the Medici and to conspire against them. They join with the archbishop of Pisa, Francesco Salviati, who has been offended by the Medici, and the pope who, in alliance with the king of Naples, wants to expand his power at the cost of Florence and her allies. They succeed in killing Giuliano de' Medici, but otherwise the conspiracy is a total failure. Most of the conspirators are killed, and the Medici are even more secure in their power—in accordance with Machiavelli's generalization about what normally happens as the result of a conspiracy against a ruler.

Machiavelli's sense of psychology is expressed in his description of the conspirators' various attitudes and ways of behaving. He marvels at Francesco de' Pazzi's and Bernardo Bandini's cynicism and ability to conceal their intentions. They converse amiably with Giuliano, jesting and joking, while caressing his body so as to find out if he wears armor. Shortly afterwards, they ruthlessly attack him and Francesco strikes him with such zeal that he wounds himself seriously (*IF* VIII.6). Conversely, the two men selected to kill Lorenzo are by nature inept for such an undertaking, lacking the "spirit" to commit such a cruel act. They are clumsy and incompetent and fail in their undertaking (*IF* VIII.5-6). The archbishop fails for a similar reason. Trying to detain the *gonfaloniere* so that the conspirators can occupy the palace, he immediately gives himself away by speaking with broken and hesitant words and looking excited and nervous. The *gonfaloniere* reacts quickly, escapes from the room, raises the alarm and has

⁴⁵For constitution and government during this period, see Rubinstein, *The Government of Florence under the Medici*.

the conspirators captured or killed. The archbishop himself is hanged immediately (*IF* VIII.7).

Machiavelli's tragic-ironic representation of the coup reaches its climax in the scene when the head of the Pazzi family, Messer Jacopo, makes a last, pathetic effort to rally the Florentines to join the cause of the conspirators. "Although old and not practiced in such tumult," Jacopo goes with one hundred armed men to the piazza and the palazzo, "calling to his aid the people and liberty. But because the one had been made deaf by the fortune and liberality of the Medici and the other was not known in Florence, he had no response from anyone."⁴⁶

From a literary point of view, the description of the Pazzi conspiracy is one of the best in the *Istorie fiorentine*, resembling some of the great "scenes" in the earlier books such as the rebellion against the duke of Athens and the Ciompi rebellion. This literary excellence is not *art pour l'art* but intimately connected to Machiavelli's main story. As the last struggle for liberty in Florence, the Pazzi conspiracy forms a contrast, which must be deliberate, with the rebellion in 1343.

First, the conspirators were not really fighting for liberty. Admittedly, the tyranny of the duke of Athens was far worse than that of the Medici. However, the main difference between the two conspiracies, from Machiavelli's point of view, was the personal ambition of the Pazzi. They were in no way against the Medici power monopoly; they had only been expecting to profit more from it. The same applies to the archbishop. As for the pope and the king of Naples, their motive, bringing down Florence, was even worse. Rather than aiming at liberating Florence from the tyranny of the Medici, the conspirators are willing to betray their city to foreign powers for the sake of their own gain.

Second, the conspiracy is amateurish in its execution. While the rebels in 1343 had the toughness and cruelty to literally tear apart one of their enemies and his innocent son, the conspirators in 1478 are too soft to kill Lorenzo.⁴⁷ Admittedly, Francesco de' Pazzi and Bernardo Bandini manage to kill Giuliano and are even eminently able to conceal their intention when conversing with him before the murder. In this, however, they show

⁴⁶ "Messer Iacopo, ancora che vecchio e in simili tumulti non pratico [...] chiamando in suo aiuto il popolo e la libertà. Ma perché l'uno era dalla fortuna e liberality de' Medici fatto sordo, l'altra in Firenze non era cognosciuta, non gli fu risposto da alcuno." (*IF* VIII.8).

⁴⁷ Cf. here Machiavelli's contempt for Giovampagolo Baglioni who lacked the courage to kill Pope Julius II (*IF* I.27); cf. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, 88.

the typical fifteenth-century Italian ability to make intrigues and “phoney wars,” but Francesco shows extreme incompetence in the use of arms by wounding himself.

Third, the scene with the old and decent Jacopo de’ Pazzi trying to rally the people to the cause of liberty but failing utterly forms a pathetic contrast to the numerous conspiracies and great popular mobilizations against the duke of Athens. It must be pointed out, however, that Machiavelli is not quite consistent here. If the Pazzi were not really fighting for liberty, why should the people of Florence be blamed for not joining them?

Instead of an explicit analysis of the transition from republic to principality, Machiavelli has chosen dramatic narrative. One reason for this may have been prudence, as this transition is the most sensitive part of his story. His comment on the death of liberty in connection with Jacobo de’ Pazzi’s vain attempt to move the people against the Medici is of course a clear enough declaration of his own conviction to make him suspect in the eyes of his patron, but he may have thought that an explicit discussion would be even more offensive. Or he may simply have thought that a dramatic narrative, a “representation,” would bring home his “argument” even better than an abstract analysis. In any case, this scene sums up the main lesson of the story starting with the statements about the Medici’s generosity in Book IV. The Medici excel through “private” means; they create a “sect” by attracting people who become dependent on their generosity and, although they also excel in public matters, they gradually undermine what remains of republican virtue by making all citizens their clients. Even the opposition against the Medici during the period 1455-69 is motivated by private interests.⁴⁸ Characteristically, when Tommaso Soderini “prudently” recommends continued Medici rule after Piero’s death, he considers his “fortune” and the interests of his house, not the interests of the republic (*IF*, VI.24).

Machiavelli does not directly address the question of the fall of the republic and the transition to a principality; there is no explicit discussion parallel to the one about the inevitable split in the victorious party. There are several hints, however, that a decisive change has taken place. Already under Cosimo’s son and successor Piero, princely magnificence is intro-

⁴⁸*IF* VII.3, 10-11. An exception is Niccolò Soderini who acts in the interest of the republic but lacks the necessary prudence (*IF* VII.11, 14). Further, the leaders of a rebellion against Piero get wide support from the people who are deceived by their appeals to liberty (*IF* VII.11 345; cf. Marietti, “Machiavel historiographe,” 136).

duced in contrast to Cosimo's simplicity. Lorenzo is married to a lady of the Orsini house and the marriage is celebrated in the princely style, with balls, banquets, ancient dramas, and—not the least—tournaments. The young men in the city take to indulging in luxury, particularly after a visit by the duke of Milan, so that eventually a law against excessive luxury is introduced (*IF* VI.21, 28). And when Lorenzo and Giuliano succeed their father, admittedly as the result of an election, they are honored as "princes of the state".⁴⁹ The decisive event, however, is the Pazzi conspiracy, which serves as a demonstration of the degree of princely rule in Florence as well as a further promotion of it.

Machiavelli's dramatic representation adds to his argument in several ways. First, it shows the stages in the decline of the republic and contributes to the understanding of its causes. A comparison between the rebellion against the duke of Athens in 1343 and the Pazzi conspiracy in 1478 shows the contrast between the unruly, but relatively healthy republic of the mid fourteenth century and the decadent principality of the late fifteenth century. The occurrence of the Ciompi conspiracy in between gives substance to Machiavelli's observation that the decline of the nobility is disastrous and that the most useless element in the city is the emerging plebs, whatever the justice of its demands. The gradual rise of the Medici as described in Book IV gives further substance to this latter conclusion while also forming an ironic comment on the patriotic utterances during the 1343 rebellion. What the anonymous speaker said could never happen, did happen, but through more subtle means than those of the duke: the Medici's generosity eventually made the majority of the people members of a sect with the Medici as rulers. The representation does give evidence in support of Machiavelli's argument about endemic inner strife as a major problem in Florence, but it also makes clear that the greatest problem is the decline of republican virtue and the transition to a principality. From the beginning of the fourteenth century onwards, the republic is under almost constant threat from ambitious individuals wanting to establish a principality, but for a long time it manages to fend them off. When it finally succumbs in the fifteenth century the explanation must largely be sought in the gradual decline of virtue, above all military virtue, in the preceding period.

⁴⁹"come principi dello stato onorati", *IF* VII.24.

The Role of the Individual: From Republicanism to Princely Power

According to Humanist doctrine, republicanism was a stimulus for patriotic virtue. Whereas a prince is always jealous of extraordinary achievement, a republic causes its citizens to compete with each other in serving the state.⁵⁰ Thus, the republican period ought in principle to offer the opportunity to describe prominent individuals. Apparently, however, Machiavelli has not found many worthy of special attention and generally focuses on collective forces in his account of the period until the late fourteenth century. Thereafter, individuals start to play a more prominent role, and Machiavelli now even turns to direct characterizations. A possible explanation of this fact may of course be that he had more information about this more recent period. This is hardly the only explanation; the historical importance of the individual does actually change from the late fourteenth century onwards in Machiavelli's account. Thus, while Machiavelli reduces the importance of Giano della Bella when compared to his predecessors, he heightens that of Michele di Lando. Nor is it a coincidence that Machiavelli gives a detailed characterization of Cosimo de' Medici, ending with the statement that Cosimo has been described in the manner of a prince (*IF*, VI.5-6). The characterization is thus clearly intended to express the different role of the individual ruler in the "princely" fifteenth century. It is built up around two contrasting features, simplicity and modesty on the one hand, and princely power on the other. Cosimo is actually the prince of Florence; he is powerful and wealthy enough to behave like a prince, but he is wisely content with the real power and lives like an ordinary citizen.⁵¹ In this way, the portrait serves to characterize not only Cosimo as a person but also his regime as a stage in the transition from republic to principality.

In the dedicatory letter to Pope Clement VII Machiavelli refers to his patron's wish that his account should be honest and free from flattery and expresses his fears that Pope Clement will regard his very favorable representation of Giovanni, Cosimo, and Lorenzo de' Medici as flattery, assuring him that he has found nothing unfavorable about these men in his sources and thus had to choose between a favorable account or complete

⁵⁰ Skinner, *The Foundation of Modern Political Thought*, vol. I: 79-80 with references.

⁵¹ See Bagge, "Medieval and Renaissance Historiography," 1362-64 for a more detailed discussion of the characterization. On the classical models for such descriptions, see Burke, "Individuality and Biography in the Renaissance," 1372-82.

silence (IF, *proemio* pp. 3-4). The passage is no doubt ironic, but also intended to defend Machiavelli against the opposite criticism of the one he mentions explicitly; namely that of blaming the Medici for Florence's loss of liberty. Actually, Machiavelli seems to solve this problem by directing his criticism against the Medici regime rather than at Cosimo personally. Cosimo has to be understood against the background of Florence and Italy in the fifteenth century. He is not an ideal, republican citizen like his father, but deliberately seeks to build up a clientele to extend his power. In contrast to his rival Neri Capponi, he gains power not only by public but also by private means. This makes him as much of a partisan leader as a statesman, in accordance with Machiavelli's reflections on this theme in the preface to Book VI (IF, VI.1). In the long run, Cosimo's influence is therefore harmful. On the other hand, Machiavelli's portrait shows him as a man who is eminently able to exercise his power in such a way as to cause minimal offence. He shows concern for the city and wants to rule it well, and he blames himself for not having extended its borders. But there is nothing heroic or glorious about Cosimo. He is a product of the fundamentally unheroic fifteenth century. The truly great and devoted leaders had little chances of remaining in their positions for long, as the fates of Giano della Bella and Michele di Lando show, and would hardly have been able to gain power at all in the fifteenth century. Cosimo is perhaps the best that can be hoped for in this decadent age.⁵² In this way, Machiavelli poses the question of the relationship between the collective, structural forces in history and the importance of the individual. In the early fifteenth century, Florence had declined so much that any ambitious leader could have taken control of the city. The result could therefore have been far worse than Cosimo's and his successors' regime. Quite possibly, however, Machiavelli may have thought that it could also have been far better; a strong leader might have restored a true republic. This idea plays a prominent part in the treatise Machiavelli wrote shortly before he started working on the *Istorie Fiorentine*, in which he sketched a plan for the reform of Florence, including a concrete plan for a new constitution based on the

⁵² This interpretation corresponds to that of Najemy, who regards the portraits of the Medici as positive despite Machiavelli's negative attitude to their regime: the system as a whole, rather than the Medici personally, is to blame (Najemy, "Machiavelli and the Medici," 563-74). Alternatively, Marietti finds a predominantly negative attitude under the apparently favorable characterizations. She regards Cosimo's cynical remarks concerning his enemies as a very negative feature and the key to Machiavelli's characterization of him (Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe," 132-33).

cooperation of all the social strata of the city so as to avoid sects and internal divisions.⁵³

The *Istorie fiorentine* ends with a characterization of Lorenzo de' Medici after his death, which is favorable, although less so than that of Cosimo. Lorenzo is a complex character, having vices and weaknesses that are not normally compatible with greatness; he is greatly attached to the pleasures of the flesh and he loves childish plays. Most importantly, however, in contrast to Cosimo, he is not content with the actual power, but directly behaves as a prince. He has one of his sons made cardinal, he marries his daughters to princes, he is a great patron of the arts, he loves pomp and festivities—and he neglects the family business with the result that he becomes completely dependent on income from the state. Despite these weaknesses, there can be no doubt of his greatness or his services to Florence. His death in 1492 marks the end of the happy age of Italy; he was the only one who could have prevented the evils that befell the country during the following period.

The portrait of Lorenzo is somewhat shorter and less vivid than that of Cosimo. Despite the fact that Machiavelli was twenty-three years old when he died and may have seen him and even talked to him he appears more distant, and there are no anecdotes or sayings that might have served to give life to the portrait. The less dignified features of his private life were clearly not of the kind apt for elaboration. Not only the content of the portrait, with the references to Lorenzo's princely style, but also its form, has a princely ring; Lorenzo is too august and distant a person to be portrayed in the same vivid way as his grandfather.

There is a similar difference in the two leaders' roles in the narrative. Cosimo plays an important, although not dominant, part in Book IV but is largely absent in V and VI;⁵⁴ here the republic of Florence is treated as a collective entity. As we have seen, Machiavelli omits the period 1434-55 almost entirely in dealing with the internal history of the city, and in the following period Cosimo is old and ill and gradually losing control. By contrast, Lorenzo is more in focus. Like Books V and VI, Book VIII mainly deals with foreign policy and contains the same kind of condensed narrative of wars and frequent shifts in alliances.

⁵³Machiavelli, *Discorso sopra il riformare lo stato di Firenze al istanza di papa Leone*, 526-40; cf. Najemy, "Machiavelli and the Medici," 557-58 and Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe," 105-19.

⁵⁴Actually, his rival Neri Capponi plays a more prominent part (Najemy, "Machiavelli and the Medici," 571).

During the war following the suppression of the Pazzi conspiracy, Lorenzo comes forward as the saviour of Florence. The city is in a difficult situation, having to fight both the pope and Naples, and Lorenzo decides to visit the king of Naples in person in order to make peace and an alliance with one of his enemies (*IF* VIII.17). This is a very dangerous mission, giving King Ferdinand of Naples an easy opportunity to get rid of Lorenzo or deliver him to the pope. Ferdinand keeps Lorenzo in Naples for a long time, trying to make up his mind about what to do with him. However, being deeply impressed by Lorenzo's greatness of spirit, intelligence, and soundness of judgment, and in addition seeing that there is no reason to believe that the Florentines will desert Lorenzo in order to install a regime more favorable to Ferdinand himself, he concludes an alliance with him and sends him back to Florence (*IF* VIII.19). Here Lorenzo shows heroic dimensions, in contrast to his grandfather as well as his contemporaries, by running a great risk on behalf of the city.

However, Machiavelli's picture of Lorenzo also contains shadows which fall on the city as well as Lorenzo.⁵⁵ Although Florence is fighting a numerically superior enemy, the city is not in a truly desperate situation from a military point of view. The problem is that the citizens complain about high and unjust taxes and incompetent leadership in the war (*IF* VIII.17), the latter being amply confirmed by Machiavelli's account (*IF* VIII.12-18). Admittedly, Machiavelli does not directly make Lorenzo responsible for these failures, but as he is the actual ruler of the city he can hardly escape criticism. Thus, Machiavelli makes three points: first, that the Florentines lack the patriotism and determination to endure the hardships of war; second, that Lorenzo himself is to blame for the problems the city is facing and third that his own position is in danger. His courageous journey to Naples is therefore also intended to save his own position.

Still, the peace with Naples does not solve all the problems for Florence. The pope as well as the Venetians are discontented. There is great fear that an even more dangerous war may result from this peace, and "everyone affirmed that our city had never been in such danger of losing its liberty."⁵⁶ In this desperate situation, God intervenes to save Florence by

⁵⁵See Marietti, "Machiavel historiographe," 137-46 who discusses Machiavelli's portrait of Lorenzo against the background of the changing attitudes to him in the period after his death and who points to various critical remarks in his account, although without mentioning the examples to be dealt with in what follows.

⁵⁶"e afferma ciascuno la città nostra non essere mai stata in tanto pericolo di perdere la libertà." (*IF* VIII.19 196).

making the Turks attack Rhodes which causes the pope to conclude a peace treaty with the Florentines (*IF* VIII.20). It is surprising to find a reference to divine intervention in Machiavelli; he normally uses *fortuna* to explain sudden and unexpected events. His aim in this context is clearly to reduce the importance of Lorenzo's heroic mission: not Lorenzo but chance saved Florence. His aim in appealing to God rather than *fortuna* must be to avoid criticism from his patron; the pope could hardly object that a religious explanation reduced the merit of his great ancestor. On the other hand, there is certainly some irony in the idea of God mobilizing the Turks against Christendom in order to save Florence from the pope!

Machiavelli is hardly a great renewer in the field of biography, but he shows the same skill as his Renaissance contemporaries and predecessors in creating colorful glimpses of individuals, particularly through his use of stories, anecdotes, and concrete situations to illustrate a specific character. Moreover, Machiavelli's descriptions of individual as well as collective psychology are not interludes or vignettes in an otherwise structural history; they are intimately connected to the structure and pose the problem of how far human actions are determined by social forces. The answer is, in Machiavelli's opinion, largely a matter of the structures themselves: the scope for individual action changes over time. The importance of the individual increases with the decline of the republic. Therefore, Machiavelli's portraits of individual leaders become more detailed from the age of Cosimo onwards, and under the rule of Lorenzo the history of Florence is almost identical with the biography of Lorenzo. This change may be understood in light of J.G.A. Pocock's discussion of *virtù* and *fortuna* in Machiavelli's earlier works.⁵⁷ A true republic depends on *virtù* and is based on solid constitutional arrangements and the right attitude in its citizens, while the prince, and particularly the new, "self-made" prince, without legitimacy and hereditary power, depends on *fortuna*. Consequently, in such a society *fortuna* creates open situations that give great scope for individual actions, for good or bad. Michele di Lando's rise to power is a prominent example of such a situation and forms the point of division between the early and the later period, showing the power vacuum resulting from the decline in republican institutions.

⁵⁷Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 156-218. For other discussions of Machiavelli's understanding of *fortuna*, see Flanagan, "The Concept of *Fortuna* in Machiavelli," 127-56, who compares Machiavelli's concept to the modern concept of chance, and Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, 63-85, who regards it as derived from astrology.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis of the narrative has shown that Machiavelli's view of internal conflicts in the *Istorie fiorentine* is actually closer to that of the *Discorsi* than his statement in the preface indicates. The main problem in the history of Florence is the loss of freedom, not the internal conflicts. The narrative shows the gradual decline in the Florentine people's ability to govern and defend themselves until the pathetic rebellion against the Medici in the Pazzi conspiracy. The loss of freedom is in turn related to another problem, the decline of military virtue, which is illustrated in the contrast between the thirteenth century when the Florentines themselves formed the army, and the fifteenth century when they relied on mercenaries. Although Machiavelli points to this problem already in the preface,⁵⁸ he never deals explicitly with military change as a problem in the *Istorie fiorentine*. Its consequences, however, form the main subject of his account of the wars in Italy in V and VI. In the prefaces to these books, he states that there were no real wars in this period, no gain and no loss: "men are not killed, cities are not sacked, principalities are not destroyed."⁵⁹ Accordingly, his narrative contains a series of intrigues and shifts of alliances, where military victory or defeat is of relatively slight importance. By contrast, if internal peace were the highest goal, Machiavelli's story of Florence would have been a story of success from the chaos let loose by the Buondelmonte murder to the unity of the city under Medici leadership. This way of using the narrative as opposed to explicit commentary clearly stems from Machiavelli's effort to balance his republicanism and his Medici patronage. With respect to the latter, it is of course safer to make the internal struggles rather than the decline of republican freedom the main problem of Florence.

This does not mean that the internal conflicts are unimportant. While conflicts in themselves may have beneficial as well as harmful consequences, the particular form the Florentine conflicts took made them disastrous. First, the defeat of the nobles led to the loss of military virtue,⁶⁰ and second, the conflicts moved downwards on the social as well as the moral scale, as illustrated by the Ciompi rebellion. Finally, the victory of

⁵⁸Cf. the contrast between the mobilization of men before the battle of Campaldino in 1289 and the mobilization of money in the war against Filippo Visconti of Milan (1422-27) and later against Lucca (1429-33) in *IF*, *proemio* 9.

⁵⁹"gli uomini non si ammazzano, le città non si saccheggiano, i principati non si destruggono [...] vedendo come tanti nobilissimi popoli da sí deboli e male amministrate armi fussino tenuti in freno" (*IF* V.1).

⁶⁰Sasso, *Machiavelli*, II, 173-81.

the plebs through Cosimo de' Medici's coup replaced classes with sects. By contrast, the Roman patricians were not defeated, but were spurred on to military virtue through their competition with the plebeians. In this way, the character of the internal conflicts in Florence serves to explain both the decline of military virtue and the loss of liberty, as becomes evident in the three crucial episodes discussed above where liberty is at stake: the tyranny of the duke of Athens, the Ciompi rebellion and the Pazzi conspiracy. Thus, the narrative does not directly contradict the statement in the preface, but develops it in a way that would hardly have pleased Machiavelli's patron if it had been stated directly.

In a similar way, the narrative partly modifies and partly develops Machiavelli's characterization of the classes in the preface. Machiavelli's classes are based on common interests, like classes in modern historiography and social sciences. There is an inevitable conflict of interest between the rich and the poor based on the former's wish to command and latter's unwillingness to obey,⁶¹ an idea ultimately derived from Machiavelli's rational choice understanding of human nature. In other respects, however, a modern social historian would have difficulties with Machiavelli's class analysis. Considering that Machiavelli regards the social divisions as crucial to his whole interpretation of the history of Florence, his brief and superficial discussion of the origin or definition of the classes seems strange. His account of the changing social composition of the Florentine people is not based on an analysis of changing economic conditions; he fails to connect the rise of the people to the economic expansion in the second half of the thirteenth century or the conflict between the people and the plebs to the crisis around 1350. Even more seriously, by his own definition of the class divisions, the consequences of the fall of the nobles become difficult to understand. If wealth is the main criterion of nobility, why did not the new upper class, the *popolani*, take over the role of the old nobility? When the nobility was finally defeated around the mid fourteenth century, many noble families apparently joined the *popolani*. Thus, the modern historian will ask: How great was the real social change during this period? Did it actually mean that a new, united upper class was formed which was in turn challenged from below, from people who had earlier been the allies of the rising *popolani* leaders? Implicitly, Machiavelli seems to apply a cultural definition of the nobility which has also been suggested by some modern scholars: the nobles differed from the rest of the population through a par-

⁶¹ "Le gravi e naturali nimicizie che sono intra gli uomini popolari e i nobili, causate da il volere questi comandare e quelli non ubbedire" (*IE*, III.1).

ticular lifestyle, celebrating pride, honour, and martial exploit, while the *popolani* were equally wealthy or more so but had a more bourgeois lifestyle.⁶² Such a definition would support Machiavelli's argument about the disastrous consequences of the decline of the nobility, but it is clearly a weakness that he fails to make it explicit.

Without a link to economic conditions, Machiavelli's class concept becomes static and inflexible, an observation that might support Parel's conclusion that Machiavelli's account of "humours," in society as well as in the individual, is based on astrological rather than sociological theory.⁶³ Society essentially resembles the human body, and the humours represented by the different classes play a similar role as the four liquids in the human body which give rise to the four tempers. In the same way as a harmonious mixture of these liquids is necessary for the health of the body, a harmonious balance between the classes is necessary for the health of society. Machiavelli's account of social divisions is thus *a priori* and fairly rigid, being based on the medical theories of Hippocrates and Galen which were current from Classical Antiquity onwards.

However, even if we accept Parel's conclusion about the metaphysical basis of Machiavelli's class theory, this does not prevent his account of class conflicts from also being based on observations of actual human behaviour.⁶⁴ First, Machiavelli occasionally shows a good understanding of the social and economic issues involved, notably in connection with the Ciompi rebellion. Second, and most important, his real interest was not social divisions, nor different living conditions, but how these "humours" affected the body politic as a whole. Despite all of its inadequacies, Machiavelli's distinction between social groups enables him to give an

⁶² See Lansing, *The Florentine Magnates. Lineage and Faction*, 17-22, 115-16, 231-32 who also gives a survey of the extensive modern discussion on the Florentine nobility. Machiavelli gives the following comment on the noble lifestyle and its decline: "the nobles were left deprived of the magistracies, and if they wanted to regain them, it was necessary for them not only to be but to appear similar to men of the people in their conduct, spirit, and mode of living. [...] So the virtue in arms and the generosity of spirit that were in the nobility were eliminated" ("i nobili privi de' magistrati rimanevano; e volendo racquistargli era loro necessario, con i governi, con lo animo e con il modo del vivere, simili ai popolani non solamente essere, ma parere," *IF* III.1).

⁶³ Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, 141-52.

⁶⁴ The same applies to Qviller's interpretation, that Machiavelli's cynical view of human nature is based on the Augustinian idea of Original Sin. See Qviller, "The Machiavellian Cosmos," 1383-1404.

account of the long-term trends in Florentine history and an explanation of the events that reaches deeper than the actions and motives of individuals.

Machiavelli's distinction between classes and "sects" is particularly important in this respect. The universal condemnation of internal conflicts by Machiavelli's contemporaries and predecessors is based on what to us seems a curious feature of the Italian city republics, including Florence, namely that all conflicts of interest between the citizens were considered illegitimate and barred from the official political system. The many popular representatives in the service of the republic were supposed exclusively to represent the city as a whole and care for its interests.⁶⁵ Of course, in practice they had their particular interests to defend and various ties of loyalty to individuals and groups, although it is often remarkable how rarely factional conflicts were expressed in different attitudes to important decisions.⁶⁶ Machiavelli's sharp opposition between public and private interests corresponds to this ideology, whereas his distinction between necessary conflicts between classes and unnecessary ones between sects⁶⁷ lays the theoretical foundation for an understanding of politics as the competition among parties representing different interests in society.

The representation, which has played a prominent part in the preceding discussion, may from one point of view be regarded as a contrast to the argument in the form of class analysis presented in the preface, as a vivid and dramatic picture of concrete human beings in contrast to a rigid "sociological" schema. It is, however, even more a contrast to the kind of argument presented in Bruni's work, with its focus on the "social engineering" by great and heroic leaders. Although ultimately wanting his writings to

⁶⁵Kent, *The Rise*, 11-19.

⁶⁶Kent, *The Rise*, 198-99.

⁶⁷*IF*, VII.1. Machiavelli first uses the term "sect" about the Albizzi and the Ricci factions from the middle of the fourteenth century and then frequently about the Medici faction and their opponents. By contrast, the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, as well as the Whites and the Blacks, in Book II are usually referred to as *parti* and only indirectly as *sette* (*IF*, II.2-3 and 16; cf. Bock, "Civil discord," 197-98). Although Machiavelli does not discuss in detail how the adherents of these factions were recruited, his generally more positive view of the period indicates that he does not regard their ties as stemming from "private" interests to the same extent as the Medici faction later, but rather saw them as being based on family loyalty, the quest for honour, and even competition for public office in order to serve the state. This interpretation differs from that of Mansfield, "Party and Sect" who argues that Machiavelli understands sects as groups ultimately based on religious affiliations.

serve as lessons for practical politicians, Machiavelli is acutely aware of the difficulties in controlling human passions and antagonism. The dramatic narrative serves to bring home this doctrine. His actors often present excellent analyses of the situation and intelligent plans about how to proceed, only to have them thwarted by some spontaneous reaction by the mob,⁶⁸ as when the duke of Athens is made ruler for life. And the story of Buondelmonte's infatuation with the beautiful girl may well have been placed deliberately at the opening of Machiavelli's history of the Florentine republic in order to show the importance of emotions in human nature and consequently in political communities. Although he seems to adhere to the traditional ancient and medieval view of individual human character as fairly constant,⁶⁹ his descriptions of conflicts and rebellions show an excellent sense of mass psychology. Additionally, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of time in a double sense. First, decisions often have to be made quickly, under particular circumstances, without time for systematic analysis of the problems. If the wrong decision is taken, it may be too late to mend it, as for instance the *signori* in Florence discover when, in sudden fear, they have left the palace to the mob.⁷⁰

Second, the importance of emotions is also an aspect of the change from *virtù* to *fortuna*, the decline of republican *virtù* and the increasing influence of the masses resulting in decisions based on fear or other emotions instead of in a rational consideration of the best interests of the republic. The increasing importance of individuals from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century points in the same direction. While Machiavelli reduces the importance of republican heroes like Giano della Bella in com-

⁶⁸Anselmi, *Ricerche*, 182-86 points to the ideological character of the speeches in the *Istorie fiorentine* as opposed to speeches serving to characterize the individual actors, a difference corresponding to the one between Machiavelli and Cavalcanti. Quoting E. Raimondi, Anselmi also stresses the democratic character of the speeches which imply a belief in the ability of the audience to act according to their conviction (Anselmi, *Ricerche*, 184 n. 42). In the *Istorie fiorentine*, however, the point seems rather to be that the rational analyses in the speeches are in vain, the masses acting according to spontaneous emotions.

⁶⁹Nederman, "Machiavelli and Moral Character."

⁷⁰Cf. also the case of Count Guido Novello, the Ghibelline leader who, out of sudden fear, leaves the city during a rebellion. Regretting his behaviour the day after, he finds it impossible to return, "for the people who had been able to drive him out only with difficulty were able to keep him out with ease" ("perché quel popolo che con difficoltà lo arebbe potuto cacciare, facilmente lo potette tenere fuori," *IF* II.9).

parison to his predecessors, he exaggerates that of Michele di Lando, and he ends his work by making the history of Florence almost coincide with the biography of Lorenzo de' Medici. In the relatively sound thirteenth century, the importance of individuals is subordinated to that of the classes or the city as a whole. In the decadent fifteenth century, the class conflicts are over and the city is dominated by a few powerful individuals who base their power on sects. In the middle of the two periods, Michele di Lando is portrayed as a great hero and the saviour of the city, while at the same time his emergence as a leader anticipates the gloomy future, where any resourceful individual will be able to take control of the city. Thus, Machiavelli's descriptions of individuals are not digressions or interludes in his "sociological" history, but directly intended to underline his sociological analysis.

Machiavelli's way of writing history is in many ways alien to modern historians. He is a writer more than a researcher, he uses literary effects that seem strange to us, such as invented speeches, and to some extent dramatic representation, although the latter has become more acceptable now than it was a generation or two ago.⁷¹ His use of Roman social organization as a model for his contemporaries, admittedly less prominent in the *Istorie fiorentine* than in his more systematic works, but still present nonetheless, suggests an understanding of historical change fundamentally different from the modern one. And last but not least, his sociology may possibly be to some extent derived from astrology. Nevertheless, on some important points he seems to be concerned with similar problems as our own. Although not always successful, his model of successive class conflicts represents a deeper understanding of social forces than his predecessors' explanation in terms of individual virtue and constitutional arrangements, while laying the foundation for a periodization of history based on fundamental social change. In combining dramatic narrative with sociological analysis, Machiavelli struggles with the problem of the scope for individual human action and its relationship to historical development and the structure of society. Concerning these important matters, he seems to be on our side of the gap that separates us from traditional historical writing, ancient, medieval and Renaissance.

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⁷¹ See e.g. the vivid representation of peasant life and mentality in Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975) and Michel Foucault's use of dramatic or cruel representation, as his description of Damien's execution in *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), 9-11.

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