

Notes on the date and genesis of Machiavelli's *De principatibus*

by Robert Black

Machiavelli's letter to Francesco Vettori describes the contents of *The Prince* on 10 December 1513:

io ho [...] composto uno opusculo *De principatibus*, dove io mi profondo quanto io posso nelle cogitazioni di questo subbietto, disputando che cosa è principato, di quale spezie sono, come e' si acquistano, come e' si mantengono, perché e' si perdono¹.

There is good reason for thinking that Machiavelli had completed only the first eleven chapters of the text when he thus described the treatise to Vettori. The summary in the letter corresponds to the contents of chapters 1 to 11: what kinds (hereditary [2], mixed [3], previously principalities [4], formerly republics [5], civic [9], ecclesiastical [11]); how acquired (through the prince's own "virtue" and arms [6], through others' arms and by fortune [7], by crime [8]), how preserved [10], how lost [3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10]). Chapter 11 opens with what seems to be the start of a conclusion: «Restaci solamente al presente a ragionare de' principati ecclesiastici» and ends with what has the appearance of a primitive conclusion: «Ha trovato adunque la santità di papa Leone questo pontificato potentissimo: il quale si spera, se quegli [sc. Alexander VI and Julius II] lo feciono grande con le arme, questo con la bontà»³.

Machiavelli says in the letter to Vettori that he has not yet finished the treatise, which still needs further filling out and refining: «tuttavolta io l'ingrasso e ripulisco»⁴. Machiavelli was possibly still hard at work a fortnight later, when Vettori replied on 24 December to the effect that he had not yet seen the text:

¹ N. Machiavelli, *Lettere*, ed. by F. Gaeta, Torino 1984, p. 426.

² N. Machiavelli, *Il principe*, ed. by G. Inglese, Torino 1995, p. 73 (ch. 3.1). All references to the text of *The Prince* will be given according to this edition, based on Inglese's 1994 critical edition, which I prefer to the critical edition by M. Martelli, Roma 2006, which, in my view, tends to overindulge in conjectural emendation.

³ *Il Principe*, p. 77 (ch. 3.18). See *De principatibus*, ed. by G. Inglese, Roma 1994, p. 2-3.

⁴ *Lettere*, p. 427.

Voi mi scrivete (...) che avete composta certa opera di stati. Se voi me la manderete, l'arò cara; e ancora che non sia drento, iudico che sia conveniente iudichi la cosa vostra; non di meno, in quello mancherà la sufficienza e il iudicio, suplirà l'amore e la fede⁵.

Machiavelli had sent *The Prince* to Vettori by 18 January 1514, when the latter replied, saying that he had seen only chapters and not the entire work: «Ho visto e' capitoli dell'opera vostra, e mi piacciono oltre a modo; ma se non ho il tutto, non voglio fare iudicio risoluto⁶». Machiavelli's work on the treatise after 10 December evidently involved more filling out (*ingrassare*) than polishing (*ripulire*): the ultimate text is hardly a finished piece, resembling his letters rather than polished works such as *The Art of War* and the *Florentine Histories*. The final version of *The Prince* contains numerous latinisms, typical of chancery style⁷ and found abundantly in his letters, but absent in his more refined works; the chapter titles have remained in Latin, in contrast to the Italian titles of the polished texts; there are numerous idiosyncracies, particularly of syntax, indicating that the text remained a rough draft, hardly subjected to scrupulous revision; where first versions of Machiavelli's works survive (for example, in the case of the *Florentine Histories*), it is clear that Machiavelli submitted his early efforts to a fastidious process of stylistic refinement, unlike the text of *The Prince*⁸. With regard to filling out (*ingrassare*), on the other hand, many topics of the second part (beginning with chapter 12) emerge as elaborations and developments of themes raised in part one: fraud [18], love or fear of subjects [17], magnanimity [19], liberality [16], mercenaries and indigenous armies [12-14] – conveniently listed in chapter 7 when he sums up Cesare Borgia's suitability as a model new prince:

Chi adunque iudica necessario nel suo principato nuovo assicurarsi delli inimici, guadagnarsi delli amici; vincere o per forza o per fraude; farsi amare e temere da' populi, seguire e reverire da' soldati; spegnere quelli che ti possono o debbono offendere; innovare con nuovi modi gli ordini antiqui; essere severo e grato, magnanimo e liberale; spegnere la milizia infedele, creare della nuova; mantenere l'amicizie de' re e de' principi in modo ch'e' ti abbino a beneficare con grazia o offendere con rispetto⁹.

Chapter 12 opens with another introductory summary, indicating that Machiavelli was beginning a new section of the work:

Avendo discorso particolarmente tutte le qualità di quelli principati de' quali nel principio proposi di ragionare, e considerato in qualche parte le cagioni del bene e del male essere loro, e mostro e' modi con e quali molti hanno cerco di acquistargli e tenergli (...) ¹⁰.

⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 433.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 441.

⁷ B. Richardson, *The Prince and its early Italian readers*, in *Niccolò Machiavelli's The Prince. New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by M. Coyle, Manchester 1995, p. 18-39 (p. 20).

⁸ F. Chabod, *Scritti su Machiavelli*, Torino 1964, p. 142-43.

⁹ *Il Principe*, p. 52 (ch. 7.43). See Inglese 1994, p. 3.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 77-78 (ch. 12.1). See Inglese 1994, p. 3.

Indeed, the phrase «in qualche parte» recalls his intention to fill out the text, as articulated in the letter to Vettori, suggesting that Machiavelli had found his treatment in the previous chapters incomplete and that he now aimed to put those deficiencies right.

The latest explicit and direct reference to an historical event in the text is to the burning of Mestre¹¹, which occurred just before the battle of Vicenza on 7 October 1513. It is clear that Machiavelli's efforts to fill out the text did not extend beyond the spring of 1514. In the last chapter, addressing the Medici family explicitly, Machiavelli declares that it is necessary to assemble an army of their own men, thus looking forward to the revival of the Florentine militia, suppressed after the fall of the Soderini republic:

Volendo adunque la illustre Casa vostra seguitare quelli eccelenti uomini che redimerono le provincie loro, è necessario innanzi a tutte le altre cose, come vero fondamento d'ogni impresa, provvedersi d'arme proprie¹².

Leo X was envisaging the reestablishment of this militia in January and February 1514, and it was formally reconstituted by the Florentine Balìa the following 19 May. It would have made no sense for Machiavelli to have called for the revival of a military institution that had already been reinstated, and so the final chapter must have been completed by May 1514¹³. It is arguable,

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 172 (ch. 26.19).

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 173 (ch. 26.20).

¹³ *De principatibus*, p. 5; *Il Principe*, p. IX. This reading was first proposed in 1981 by G. Sasso, *Il Principe ebbe due redazioni?*, reprinted in his *Machiavelli e gli antichi*, Milano 1988, vol. II, p. 197-276 (p. 206-208); see also G. Inglese, *Il principe (De principatibus) di Niccolò Machiavelli*, in *Letteratura italiana. Le opere*, ed. by A. Asor Rosa, I, Torino 1992, p. 889-941 (p. 891-892), revised in his *Per Machiavelli. L'arte dello stato, la cognizione delle storie*, Roma 2006, ch. 2, p. 49, 229-230, where he replies to objections raised by Mario Martelli in his *Saggio sul Principe*, Roma 1999, p. 287-288. The objection by F. Bausi to this reading is that Machiavelli was not alluding to the Florentine militia here, since such a force could not have been sufficient to expel the barbarians from Italy; rather, according to Bausi, this call to arms referred to a national Italian army, to be led by the Medici, as is suggested in the subsequent phrase (26.21, p. 173) «per potersi con la virtù italica defendere da li esterni» (F. Bausi, *Machiavelli*, Roma 2005, p. 198). However, Machiavelli suggests that this call to arms was the preliminary first step («inanzi a tutte le altre cose»), not that it represented final force that would take on the foreign occupiers of Italy. What he appears to suggest is that any attempt to remove the foreigners will fail unless the Medici start by getting together their own militia. Machiavelli makes no comment here about the ultimate force, except that it should, he hopes, be Italian; he does not suggest when an Italian army will be raised, only that the Medici need to start with their own militia. Nor does Bausi take into account the visionary dimension of the call to Italian arms: as with the overall thrust of the chapter, Machiavelli is dreaming of an Italian military renaissance, in which, nevertheless, the call for an indigenous Florentine rearmament has the appearance of a more down-to-earth and practical preparation for this ultimate almost other-worldly aspiration: «perché non si può avere né più fidi, né più veri, né migliori soldati» (26.29, p. 173). The adherence by H. Baron, *The Prince and the puzzle of the date of chapter 26*, in «Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies», 21 (1991), p. 83-102, to the widely held view that the last chapter of *The Prince* was a significantly later addition (see *The Prince*, ed. by W. Connell, Boston 2005, p. 19) is refuted by J. Najemy, *Between Friends. Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515*, Princeton 1993, p. 184-185. H. Jaeckel, in his whimsical *What is Machiavelli exhorting in his Exhortatio? The extraordinaries, in Niccolò Machiavelli, politico*

indeed, that Machiavelli had finished his substantial rewriting of the text by 16 April 1514, when he offered a new and entirely negative view of Ferdinand of Aragon in a letter to Vettori¹⁴: «The same actions and methods that Machiavelli had once [*in the letter of 29 April 1513 and in The Prince*] interpreted as the foundation of Ferdinand's great reputation, prestige, and authority, as the source of the amazement and wonderment that he inspired in all who beheld him, have now become traps («tranelli»): sordid tricks entirely lacking in mystery or cleverness and inciting only disgust and hostility»¹⁵.

Doubts have been raised whether Machiavelli ever presented *The Prince* to Giuliano de' Medici. The fact that Vettori, himself intimately involved with the Medici in Rome as Florence's resident ambassador, ceased to mention the work in his correspondence with Machiavelli after January 1514 (see above), has suggested that the dedication to Giuliano – whether owing to Vettori's lack of enthusiasm, or Giuliano's anticipated indifference – never took place. Such a view has been reinforced by the fact that no copy of *The Prince* carries a dedication to Giuliano: the vast majority of manuscripts open with the dedication to Giuliano's nephew, Lorenzo de' Medici; there is also a little manuscript authority for a version of the text without the dedication or with the dedication but without the address to Lorenzo.¹⁶ The question of an actual dedication and presentation to Giuliano has recently arisen again as the result of a suggestion that Machiavelli in fact composed a dedication to Giuliano, not cast in the usual form of a prefatory prose letter but as a metaphorical poem¹⁷:

Io vi mando, Giuliano, alquanti tordi,
non perché questo don sia buono o bello,
ma perché un po' del pover Machiavello
Vostra Magnificenzia si ricordi.

E se d'intorno avete alcun che mordi,
li possiate nei denti dar con ello,
acciò che, mentre mangia questo uccello,
di laniare altrui ei si discordi.

Ma voi direte – Forse ei non faranno
l'effetto che tu di', ch'ei non son buoni

storico letterato, ed. by J.-J. Marchand, Roma 1996, p. 59-84, advocates an even later chronology, minimizing the fact that the presumed call in this chapter for a French-Florentine-Papal alliance against the Swiss and Spanish was more germane to the diplomatic situation in 1513 and 1514, while the papal position was still undecided, than from the very end of 1514, when Machiavelli became aware that Leo X was opting for a Spanish-Imperial alliance against the French: see below.

¹⁴ *Lettere*, p. 452-454.

¹⁵ Najemy, *Between friends*, p. 279-280. See M. Marietti, *Machiavel. Le penseur de la nécessité*, Paris 2009, p. 193.

¹⁶ The Charlecote manuscript (Charlecote Park Warwickshire L.2) has no dedication (*De principatibus*, p. 56); Perugia Biblioteca Comunale Augusta G. 14, Rimini Biblioteca Comunale 'A. Gambalunga' SC MS. 435 and Vatican City Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Urbinate lat. 975 have the dedication without the address to Lorenzo de' Medici (*De principatibus*, p. 41, 51, 54).

¹⁷ H. Jaeckel, *I "tordi" e il "principe nuovo"*. Note sulle dediche del "Principe" di Machiavelli a Giuliano e a Lorenzo de' Medici, in «Archivio storico italiano», 156 (1998), p. 73-92. Jaeckel's hypothesis is rejected by Inglese, *Per Machiavelli*, p. 230 as «inconsistente».

e non son grassi: ei non ne mangeranno.
 Io vi risponderai a tai sermoni,
 ch'io son maghero anch'io, come lor sanno,
 e spiccon pur di me di buon bocconi.
 Lasci l'opinioni
 Vostra Magnificenzia, e palpi e tocchi,
 e giudichi a le mani e non agli occhi¹⁸.

This poem has sometimes been interpreted literally as a gift of thrushes, sent to Giuliano on Machiavelli's release from prison¹⁹: Machiavelli would have been taking the occasion to remind his once intimate friend of the miserable state to which he had been reduced, particularly by the enemies who had taken away his job and caused him to suffer imprisonment and torture. However, there are several problems with a literal reading: it is hard to see why Machiavelli would have sent Giuliano – obviously more than well provided with game birds – a clutch of his own self-confessed miserable specimens. Moreover, it has gone unnoticed that the early spring was well beyond the season for trapping thrushes: in his letter to Vettori of 10 December 1513, Machiavelli said that bird catching had already petered out²⁰. Particularly telling is an allusion to *The Prince* itself: «E li uomini in universali iudicano più alli occhi che alle mani; perché tocca a vedere a ognuno, a sentire a pochi: ognuno vede quello che tu pari, pochi sentono quello che tu se'»²¹. In both cases Machiavelli was elaborating an apologue by Poggio Bracciolini, who tells of a peasant crying while throttling a thrush; one onlooking bird who shows sympathy for the peasant's emotions is reproved by another for judging by appearances rather by actions²². The common subject matter of thrushes linking the three texts offers suggestive confirmation that, in fact, Machiavelli's poem constituted a metaphorical dedication to Giuliano. Nevertheless, it remains unclear when the text and dedicatory poem would have been presented to Giuliano²³.

The date of *The Prince's* rededication and presentation to Lorenzo di Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici is just as problematic. A number of manuscripts refer to Louis XII (died during the night of 31 December 1514-1 January 1515) as «el re di Francia presente» (16.9). These words might seem to suggest that the version of the text upon which these manuscripts were based was available and in circulation before the beginning of 1515²⁴. It is clear, however, that such a primitive version was not the text of *The Prince* in its final form. For there are another group of manuscripts that correct this reference to Louis XII, omitting the word «presente». A few lines later, all manuscripts of the

¹⁸ *Tutte le opere*, a cura di M. Martelli, Firenze 1971, p. 1004.

¹⁹ E.g. R. Ridolfi, *Vita di Niccolò Machiavelli*, 7th ed., Firenze 1978, p. 507 n. 25.

²⁰ *Lettere*, p. 424.

²¹ *Il Principe*, p. 119 (17.17).

²² R. Fubini, *Postilla ai "Tordi"*, in «Archivio storico italiano», 156 (1998), p. 93-96 (p. 95-96).

²³ Jaekel, *I 'tordi'*, p. 82-83.

²⁴ *Il Principe*, p. 106 n.

text contain a reference to Ferdinand of Aragon (d. 23 January 1516) as «el re di Spagna presente» (16.10). The deletion of 'presente' from Louis but not Ferdinand implies that the text of *The Prince* was updated sometime in 1515, or more exactly, between the deaths of Louis XII and Ferdinand²⁵.

There is further indication of when Machiavelli retouched the text of his completed work. Ch. 14 contains the following passage:

la prima cagione che ti fa perdere quello è negligere questa arte [delle arme], e la cagione che te lo fa acquistare è lo essere professore di questa arte. Francesco Sforza, per essere armato, di privato diventò duca di Milano; e' figliuoli, per fuggire e' disagi dell'arme, di duchi diventorno privati. Perché, in tra le altre cagioni che ti arreca di male, lo essere disarmato ti fa contennendo²⁶.

Among Francesco Sforza's descendants who were dukes of Milan, only his son Ludovico il Moro and the latter's own son, Massimiliano, lost power after military defeats. Massimiliano suffered defeat by the French on 13-14 September 1515 at the battle of Marignano, and so the allusion to Massimiliano must have been added by Machiavelli thereafter²⁷. Moreover, it has gone unnoticed that in the *Discourses* Machiavelli uses the identical word «figliuoli» in reference to Francesco Sforza's issue:

Tanto che un principe savio e buono, per mantenersi buono, per non dare cagione né ardire a' figliuoli di diventare tristi, mai non farà fortezza, acciò che quelli non in sulle fortezze, ma in sulla benivolenza degli uomini si fondino. E se il conte Francesco Sforza, diventato duca di Milano, fu riputato savio, e nondimeno fece in Milano una fortezza, dico che in questo ei non fu savio; e lo effetto ha dimostro come tale fortezza fu a danno e non a sicurtà de' suoi eredi²⁸.

²⁵ *De principatibus*, p. 18, 91-92. It is improbable, given the diffuse manuscript evidence, that the elimination of 'presente' from the identification of Louis XII was the result of the intervention by a copyist rather than by Machiavelli himself, especially since he himself apparently updated the text of 3.43 to the same effect, interpolating the phrase «vivendo lui» to imply that Louis XII was dead; otherwise, there is no specific indication in the text of chapter 3 that Louis XII was dead while Machiavelli was writing. Without the phrase «vivendo lui», the text is coherent on the presumption that Louis XII was still alive: «E quali errori ancora, potevono non lo offendere, se non avessi fatto il sesto, di torre lo stato a' viniziani». There is no clear reason, with regard to content, why Machiavelli should have written the phrase «vivendo lui», except to update the text in the light of Louis XII's death. For the significance of this phrase, see Connell, *The Prince*, cit., p. 19, 33, 49 and below.

²⁶ *Il Principe*, p. 97-98 (ch. 14.2-4).

²⁷ First noted by F. Chabod in his edition of *Il principe*, Torino 1924, p. 73 and in 1925 (see F. Chabod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance*, Cambridge Mass. 1958, p. 35) but retracted by him in 1927 (see Chabod, *Scritti*, p. 156). The interpretation of «figliuoli» as descendants, not sons, was rejected by Chabod, basing himself on the erroneous opinions of E. Rossi, *Per la storia delle opere del Machiavelli*, «La cultura», 6 (1926), p. 194, whose only evidence is a general passage from Muratori's *Annali d'Italia*, written more than two centuries after *The Prince* and without any specific relevance or reference to Machiavelli; for more references to «figlioli» meaning descendants, see S. Battaglia, *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana*, vol. V, Torino 1968, p. 967, where the passages cited include Dante *Purgatorio* 12, 71 and Guido da Pisa.

²⁸ N. Machiavelli, *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*, a cura di F. Bausi, Roma 2001, p. 467 (II.xxiv.16-17).

In this latter case «figliuoli» can be interpreted only to mean “descendants” because he goes on to discuss the Sforza losses of Milan referring consistently to the Sforza in the plural («loro» and «Sforzeschi»), so indicating that he meant Ludovico il Moro and Massimiliano:

Perché, giudicando mediante quella vivere sicuri e potere offendere i cittadini e sudditi loro, non perdonarono a alcuna generazione di violenza, tale che, diventati sopra modo odiosi, perderono quello stato come prima il nimico gli assaltò, né quella fortezza gli difese, né fece loro nella guerra utile alcuno; e nella pace aveva fatto loro danno assai, perché se non avessero avuto quella, e se per poca prudenza avessero agramente maneggiati i loro cittadini, arebbono scoperto il pericolo più tosto e sarebbonse ne ritirati, e arebbono poi potuto più animosamente resistere allo impeto francioso co' sudditi amici senza fortezza, che con quelli inimici con la fortezza (...) E per isperienza si è visto come questa fortezza di Milano né agli Sforzeschi né a' Franciosi, ne' tempi avversi dell'uno e dell'altro, non ha fatto a alcuno di loro utile alcuno (...) ²⁹.

In the sentence following the one in which he speaks of «figliuoli», moreover, he goes on to speak of Francesco Sforza's titular heirs («eredi»), using the term as a synonym for «figliuoli» (II.XXIV.17) and so proving absolutely that «figliuoli» meant descendants, not sons. In fact, the whole sentence about the Sforza in *Prince* 14 has the appearance of an interpolation. The paragraph (14.1-7) is otherwise an entirely abstract and theoretical discussion, without examples. Machiavelli moves from discussing two reasons, then interrupts the flow of the argument with the Sforza examples, only to return to discussing a further reason, three times using the same word («cagione»). Massimiliano's defeat at Marignano, paired with his father's similar fate, seems to have been an example of Machiavelli's theoretical point too good to omit.

So Machiavelli took up the completed text of *The Prince* in the four months between 13-14 September 1515 and 23 January 1516. Presumably at the same time he made another renowned – and problematic – interpolation. Ch. 1 divides the treatise's subject matter into two categories: hereditary and new principalities. But Ch. 2, entitled *De principatibus hereditariis*, opens with a reference to republics, before turning to the actual topic of the chapter:

Io lascerò indreto il ragionare delle republiche, perché altra volta ne ragionai a lungo. Volterommi solo al principato e andrò ritessendo gli orditi soprascritti, e disputerò come questi principati si possino governare e mantenere. Dico adunque che, nelli stati ereditari e assuefatti al sangue del loro principe, sono assai minore difficoltà a mantenergli che ne' nuovi ³⁰.

The opening sentence of this chapter has generated almost endless speculation, since the only extant and general work in which Machiavelli wrote at length ³¹ on republics was the *Discourses*, a text in which Machiavelli refers

²⁹ *Discorsi*, II.XXIV.18-21, p. 467-468.

³⁰ *Il Principe*, p. 7-8 (ch. 2.1-2).

³¹ «A lungo» for Machiavelli could mean a full discussion within a broader context: in the

several times to *The Prince*. Chronological problems with regard to *The Prince* are lessened if it is assumed that this sentence was interpolated at the time that Machiavelli is now known to have inserted the above reference to the Sforza into the text. It is clear that Machiavelli was working on the *Discourses* (or a primitive version of the text) no earlier than 1515³² and apparently no later than the same year³³; this project was well known in

Discourses (II.xx.2) he describes his treatment of mercenaries and auxiliaries in *The Prince* as a discussion «a lungo». Mercenaries and auxiliaries were a preeminent but not the exclusive subject of *The Prince*, and the same could be said for republics in the *Discourses* or indeed in that work's first eighteen chapters (often regarded as a relict of an earlier treatment of republics: see F. Gilbert, *The composition and structure of Machiavelli's Discorsi*, in his *History. Choice and Commitment*, Cambridge Mass. 1977, p. 115 ff; Baron, *The Principe*, p. 405 ff). Alternatively, «a lungo» could mean a full treatment in a single chapter: see *Discourses* II.1.29, where he refers to his treatment of composite principalities, discussed «a lungo» only in *Prince* 3; or where he says in *Discourses* II.viii.22 that he will complete a discussion «a lungo» in the following chapter. «Largamente», a synonym for «a lungo», is used by Machiavelli to refer to discussions elsewhere in parts or chapters: *Discourses* III.xix.12 and III.xlii.8.

³² It is improbable that Machiavelli could have been preparing a work of such weight and importance as the *Discourses* without a single mention or allusion in his extensive correspondence with Francesco Vettori between March 1513 and January 1515. «The political issues about which he and Vettori wrote to each other in 1513 and 1514 are almost exclusively those of foreign policy, diplomacy, and the international scene, not the problems of civil constitutions and social classes that fill the pages of the *Discourses*». (Najemy, *Between Friends*, p. 336). There is good evidence that Machiavelli wrote the first eighteen chapters of *Discourses* I – and indeed the entire work – no earlier than 1515. A famous series of literary discussions took place in the gardens of the Rucellai family in Florence; these occurred in two phases: from 1502 to 1506 Bernardo Rucellai acted as host (Gilbert, *History*, p. 229). After his death on 7 October 1514 (G. Pellegrini, *L'umanista Bernardo Rucellai e le sue opere storiche*, Livorno 1920, p. 22), the gatherings met through the hospitality of his grandson, Cosimo Rucellai (Gilbert, *History*, p. 128-29). It was the second phase in which Machiavelli participated. Filippo de' Nerli, a fellow interlocutor there and close friend of Machiavelli's, described how the *Discourses* grew out of these discussions: «che avendo convenuto assai tempo nell'orto de' Rucellai una certa scuola di giovani letterati e d'elevato ingegno, mentreché visse Cosimo Rucellai, che morì molto giovane ed era in grande aspettazione di letterato, infra' quali praticava continuamente Niccolò Machiavelli (e io ero di Niccolò, e di tutti loro amicissimo, e molto spesso con loro conversato) s'esercitavano costoro assai, mediante le lettere, nelle lezioni dell'istorie e sopra di esse, ed a loro istanza compose il Machiavello quel suo libro de' discorsi sopra Tito Livio» (F. de' Nerli, *Commentarj dei fatti civili occorsi dentro la città di Firenze dall'anno 1215 al 1537*, vol. II, Trieste 1859, p. 12). So, on the evidence of Nerli, the *Discourses* developed from discussions in the Rucellai gardens – discussions which could in all probability not have begun before 1515, given the recent death of Bernardo Rucellai and the consequent change in the gardens' ownership. During the second half of 1514, moreover, Machiavelli was involved in an intense love affair, which he first wrote about to Vettori on 3 August 1514, when he explicitly stated that he had forsaken serious study in favour of amorous pursuits: «Ho lasciato dunque i pensieri delle cose grandi e gravi; non mi diletta più leggere le cose antiche, né ragionare delle moderne; tutte si sono converse in ragionamenti dolci; di che ringrazio Venere e tutta Cipri» (*Lettere*, p. 465-466). As Ridolfi confirms, «Né si trova di fatto che in questo tempo conducesse opera alcuna» (Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 249). So the evidence points to 1515 as the *terminus ex quo* of the *Discourses*.

³³ If Inglese (*Per Machiavelli*, p. 244 n. 5) is correct – as I think he must be – that the passage in II.xix.2 (*Discorsi*, p. 431) needs be emended to «Quando sarebbe potuto persuadere a uno italiano, da tre anni indietro [text: da trenta anni indietro] [...] a Novara», then Machiavelli is revealed to have reached this point in the text no earlier than 25 March 1516 (when the year changed according to the Florentine calendar *ab incarnatione*) or June 1516, the third anniversary of the battle of Novara, no later than June 1517, and probably no later than 25 March 1517; it is widely agreed that the *Discourses* developed from a sequential commentary to Livy's first

Florence and encouraged by a number of prominent Florentines³⁴. So the interpolation of this first sentence of *The Prince's* second chapter would have been, at the end of 1515 or early in 1516, a topical and appropriate addition, explaining why Machiavelli was limiting himself to principates. Indeed, the text would flow more naturally if, after devoting the previous chapter to principates in general, he then went on to discuss hereditary principalities in detail, opening with a summary of the argument in the previous chapter, namely that hereditary principalities posed fewer problems:

Acquistonsi [principati nuovi] o con l'arme d'altri o con le proprie, o per fortuna o per virtù.

II. DE PRINCIPATIBUS HEREDITARIIS.

Dico adunque che, nelli stati ereditari e assuefatti al sangue del loro principe, sono assai minore difficoltà a mantenergli che ne' nuovi³⁵.

In fact, Machiavelli later writes in *The Prince* as though the generic treatment of republics in the *Discourses* had not yet been written: «ancora che dell'uno [quando uno privato cittadino con el favore degli altri sua cittadini diventa principe della sua patria] si possa più diffusamente ragionare dove si trattassi delle repubbliche»³⁶. Grammatically, this is a potential imperfect construction with the meaning of “eventually”³⁷, suggesting that the main text of *The Prince* was written before the *Discourses* had been begun.

The principal revision to *The Prince*, presumably in readiness for its rededication to Lorenzo, was not the last chapter but arguably chapter 3. This chapter, with its comparison of contemporary France and republican Rome based on a detailed reading of Livy XXVI and XXXI-XXXIV³⁸, is uncharacteristic of *The Prince*, whose sources were, in the main, not primarily classical and humanist: the sole ancient source relied on intensively and at length is Herodian's *History* as translated by Poliziano in Chapter 19; otherwise, there are a couple of direct quotations from Vergil and Livy, and intermittent recourse to other ancient authors and to a humanist such as Biondo³⁹. The

decade (see e.g. Gilbert *History* [first published in 1953]; H. Baron, *In search of Florentine civic humanism: essays on the transition from medieval to modern thought*, Princeton N.J. 1956; Inglese, *Per Machiavelli*), and II.xix corresponds to VII.38 in Livy (Gilbert, *History*, p. 120; Inglese, *Per Machiavelli*, p. 201). Having reached such an advanced stage in the project by 1516, it would be hard to believe that he had not begun the preliminary commentary upon which the *Discourses* are based sometime in 1515.

³⁴ See the remarks by Nerli cited above.

³⁵ *Il principe*, p. 7-8 (ch. 1.4; 2.3). See Baron, *In search of Florentine civic humanism*, p. 409-411.

³⁶ *Il principe*, p. 54 (ch. 8.1).

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 54, [1] n. 2.

³⁸ See Inglese, *Per Machiavelli*, p. 77.

³⁹ N. Machiavelli, *Il principe*, ed. by L. A. Burd, Oxford 1891, provided an intensive and lengthy analysis of Machiavelli's sources, but he tended to exaggerate Machiavelli's reliance on the classics in *The Prince* and many of his references are vague and unconvincing; for an up-to-date and more measured analysis, see the commentary in *Il principe*, cit., as well as Inglese, *Per Machiavelli*, p. 77 ff, where, in my view, however, he does not recognize the differing approach and attitude to the ancients in *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.

most significant role of the ancients and the humanists in *The Prince* was to reject their heritage: Machiavelli would challenge the idealism of a Plato in Chapter 15⁴⁰ and overturned Cicero's moral philosophy as transmitted via *De officiis* and via humanists such as Platina or Pontano in their treatment of the virtues⁴¹. It is striking that in *The Prince* the only extended example of lessons taken from paradigmatic Roman procedures and cited in order to correct deficiencies in present-day practices occurs in Chapter 3, where Machiavelli contrasts the expansionist policies of Louis XII unfavourably with those practised by the republican Romans. This treatment is so much more characteristic of the *Discourses*, that it is possibly arguable that this chapter was rewritten later, when the *Discourses* were well under way⁴²; other arguments

⁴⁰ «La immaginata bontà de' non mai veduti in terra cittadini, i quali da Platone et più altri nobilissimi ingegni considerati et finiti di virtù et sapientia perfecti, più tosto sono per specie et figura dipinti che mai in carne veduti» had been referred to by Matteo Palmieri in the preface to *Della vita civile*, a work that Machiavelli used in the *Discourses*: cited by *Il principe*, p. 102.

⁴¹ Q. Skinner, *Machiavelli. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2000, p. 41 ff. In *The Prince* Machiavelli gives the impression of an erstwhile student of the classics and of humanism who is seeking to move beyond their heritage. The dedication of *The Prince* to Lorenzo de' Medici contains the phrase «non ho trovato, in tra la mia supellettile, cosa quale io abbia più cara o tanto esistimi quanto la cognizione delle azioni delli uomini grandi, imparata da me con una lunga esperienza delle cose moderne e una continua lezione delle antiche» ([Dedica] 3; *Il principe*, p. 4). This implies that *The Prince* is rooted in humanist study, but, on face value, there is no reason to doubt that this dedicatory letter was written for the presentation to Lorenzo in late 1515 or early 1516 and so reflected the humanist direction that Machiavelli had taken as a result of his contacts with the Rucellai gardens circle, rather than his approach when actually composing *The Prince*. The passage in the letter of 10 December 1513 «io ho notato quello di che per la loro conversazione ho fatto capitale» (*Lettere*, p. 426), i.e. «I have taken notes on those passages in ancient authors which I have been able to turn to advantage», describes accurately Machiavelli's cherry-picking the classics for juicy examples, typical of his methods in *The Prince*, rather than the intensive study of Livy and Polybius, characteristic of his approach in the *Discourses*. His stress on reading the classics in this letter is part of his ironic riposte to Vettori's letter of 23 November where the latter had emphasized his nocturnal immersion in the ancients (*Lettere*, p. 421). In his letter of 10 December, Machiavelli's claim to be able to serve the Medici was based on practical experience alone: «quindici anni che io sono stato a studio all'arte dello stato» (*Lettere*, p. 428).

⁴² Thus 3.24-30 – the long digression on the Romans – forms a discrete section which could without difficulty have been interpolated into a text that would read smoothly from 3.23 to 3.31; unlike the theme of Louis XII's failures, which envelops the entire chapter, Machiavelli neither introduces the Roman comparison at the beginning nor alludes to it again after returning to discuss France in 3.31. For different and more complex hypotheses regarding the revisions to this chapter, involving several conjectural emendations to the text, see M. Martelli, *La struttura deformata: sulla diacronia del cap. III del Principe*, in «Studi di filologia italiana», 39 (1981), p. 77-120. Martelli suggestively indicates that the final version of the chapter retains traces of early revisions, particularly in the shifting focus from new to mixed principalities, but his reconstruction of a primitive version of the chapter is not persuasive, involving as it does, for example, the retention of the phrase «cose dette» in 3.31 (p. 105); in the actual text of *The Prince* these «cose dette» refer to the rules for holding «principati misti» spelled out in 3.12, 3.14 and 3.21, preceded by the phrase «come è detto» (3.21) – a verbal echo that Martelli's primitive version eliminates. Moreover, without the preceding general rules as articulated in 3.21, their introduction for the first time in 3.24 seems abrupt; «queste parte» (3.24) reads more naturally as recalling the general rules previously enunciated in 3.21 rather than as introducing them for the first time in 3.24. Entirely unsatisfactory is the abrupt shift in Martelli's reconstructed first paragraph (p. 104-5) from a negative first section, where the problems of holding a new principate are made to

in favour of its revision after the death of Louis XII are its vehement critique of his reign and the insertion of the phrase «vivendo lui»⁴³, as well as the chapter's overall obituarial character, offering what seems to constitute a final, negative verdict on Louis's interventions in Italy. A revised chapter 3 condemning Louis XII's Italian policies would tend to magnify the achievement of Francis I after Marignano – an interpretation that could have been only gratifying to Lorenzo de' Medici, who had favoured the French rapprochement⁴⁴, in contrast to Leo X, who had clung to the anti-French alliance and signed a secret treaty with the king of Spain and the emperor; this turn of events could hardly have been anything but satisfying to Machiavelli, who had recommended France to Leo X at the end of 1514⁴⁵, and it is hard to resist impression that, with his subtle revisions to the text of *The Prince*, he was gloating between the lines.

The presentation to Lorenzo must have taken place before he became duke of Urbino on 18 August 1516, because he is addressed without a title and only as «Magnifico Laurentio Medici Iuniori»⁴⁶. Presumably Machiavelli's revisions to the text were made in readiness for the dedication to Lorenzo. After the disappointing and discouraging reception of the text by Francesco Vettori and the rebuff by Giuliano, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici and the pope early in 1515⁴⁷, it is credible that Machiavelli put *The Prince* to one side. Given

seem insuperable, to a second section, where the difficulties are represented as minimal; Martelli fails to notice that, in his reconstructed version, the sentence «E sempre interverrà che via sarà messo (...)» must now refer to the new prince, not to a rival foreign power as it does in *The Prince's* actual text (cf. p. 104-105 with 3.21), since he has eliminated the explicit subject «uno forestiere potente»: Martelli's grafting of 3.21-23 onto 3.1-4 results in a text even less coherent than the actual text of *The Prince*, whose inconsistencies led him, so he asserted, to posit a primitive version subsequently vitiated by the introduction of new material and arguments. Indeed, the reconstructed version's final sentence «E chi non governerà bene questa parte (...)» (p. 105, 3.23) becomes a *non sequitur*, since it now abruptly reverses the hitherto positive argument. Finally, Martelli's historical hypothesis (p. 111 ff: namely that the change from new to mixed principalities was triggered in reaction to the initiative to provide Giuliano de' Medici with a mixed principality in North Italy, as signalled in Machiavelli's letter of 31 January 1515 [*Lettere*, p. 490-491]), is unconvincing, given that there had been discussions about implicitly mixed principalities for the Medici princes since at least July 1513 (see Vettori's letter to Machiavelli, 12 July 1513, in *Lettere*, p. 392-393) and Machiavelli had been preoccupied by this problem since at least June 1513 (see his letter to Vettori, 20 June 1513, in *Lettere*, p. 386); indeed, as early as the winter of 1513-1514, Lorenzo de' Medici was trying to have Piombino annexed to Florence (see R. Devonshire Jones, *Lorenzo de' Medici, Duca d'Urbino, 'Signore' of Florence*, in *Studies on Machiavelli*, ed. by M. Gilmore, Firenze 1972, p. 313), and in March 1514 Alfonsina Orsini, Lorenzo's mother, complained that Cesare Borgia, who had ruled over a mixed state composed of numerous individual elements in the Romagna, had not received from Alexander VI half of what Leo X was proposing to give to Giuliano de' Medici (Marietti, *Machiavel*, p. 389 n. 68).

⁴³ *The Prince*, p. 19, 33, 49.

⁴⁴ Marietti, *Machiavel*, p. 201-202.

⁴⁵ Letter to Vettori of 10 December 1514, *Lettere*, p. 469-78. See Najemy, *Between Friends*, p. 297 ff.

⁴⁶ Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 525 n. 39.

⁴⁷ See the letter from Pietro Ardinghelli to Giuliano de' Medici, first published in part by C. Guasti, *I manoscritti Torrigiani donati al R. Archivio Centrale di Stato di Firenze*, in «Archivio storico italiano», ser. 3, 19 (1874), p. 231 and then in full by O. Tommasini, *La vita e gli scritti*

the overwhelmingly military emphasis of the treatise, it is tempting to think that Machiavelli was inspired to look to Lorenzo as a suitable alternative dedicatee after the latter was appointed Captain General of the Florentine *militia* on 6 June 1515⁴⁸. It has been seen that the Florentine *militia*, once supervised by Machiavelli and then disbanded by the Medici, had been revived by them on 19 May 1514. After the appointment of a new captain and chancellor in mid-September 1514, progress in reconstituting the force had been slow, but in the early months momentum gathered so that, when Lorenzo de' Medici officially assumed command on 12 August 1515, forty-one companies had been organized; the last of these had been created at the beginning of July, preliminary to Lorenzo's ceremonial inauguration as Captain General of the Florentine *militia* the following month. Machiavelli's formulation of the original legislation constituting the republican *militia* had been copied in the new legislation of 1514, and so it is not surprising that he was approached to advise on the organization of the revived force. First there were verbal discussions, and then he submitted a short memorandum, which he later entitled *Ghiribizzi d'ordinanza*. This text was written shortly before the early months of July, because Machiavelli states there that the militia force had already reached thirty-seven of its ultimate forty-one companies⁴⁹. The problem with this document is its addressee. It has been widely believed this was Machiavelli's friend Paolo Vettori, who had shown an interest in the militia since the return of the Medici, having advised against its disbandment in 1512; this attribution has been justified partly on the basis of the title of address used and partly because of Machiavelli's occasionally frank language in finding fault with the militia's reorganization⁵⁰. It has been shown, however, that this form of address was not uniquely appropriate to a high-ranking commander in his own right such as Vettori (as head of the papal galley fleet) but could have been used to address the commander himself, Lorenzo de' Medici⁵¹. The point about Machiavelli's occasionally frank tone is hardly persuasive, given that Machiavelli was prone to give his opinions bluntly to members of the Medici family even loftier than Lorenzo (for example in the two memoranda of late 1512 addressed to the then Cardinal Giovanni⁵²). In fact, Lorenzo must have been the text's addressee: it has been overlooked that

di Niccolò Machiavelli nella loro relazione col machiavellismo. Storia ed esame critico, Torino 1883-1911, t. II, p. 1064-1065.

⁴⁸ H. Butters, *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence*, Oxford 1985, p. 265.

⁴⁹ See J.-J. Marchand, in *L'arte della Guerra. Scritti politici minori*, ed. by J.-J. Marchand, D. Fachard and G. Masi, Roma 2001, p. 585-587.

⁵⁰ Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 522-523; Marchand, *L'arte della Guerra*, p. 587; Najemy, *Between Friends*, p. 312; Bausi, *Machiavelli*, p. 312.

⁵¹ *De principatibus*, p. 9-10, n. 16.

⁵² *Opere*, ed. by A. Panella, Milano and Roma 1938-1939, p. 778 (see J.-J. Marchand, *Niccolò Machiavelli. I primi scritti politici [1499-1512]*, Padova 1976, p. 303-304); Marchand, *I primi scritti politici*, p. 298-301; Marchand, *L'arte della Guerra*, p. 579-581. For Cardinal Giovanni as the addressee of the «Ai Paleschi», see Marchand, *L'arte della Guerra*, p. 579.

in the document Machiavelli writes, «Io lascerò indreto el disputare se questo ordine è utile o no, e se fa per lo stato vostro come per un altro»⁵³. The term «stato», meaning regime in contemporary usage⁵⁴, could refer only to an entity over which someone has personal power; «stato» could never be a synonym for “state” in the modern sense sometimes meaning country. Paolo Vettori did not have a «stato», but Lorenzo de’ Medici did. So Machiavelli had extensive contact with Lorenzo de’ Medici about the militia in the summer of 1515⁵⁵. Of course, it was entirely logical for Lorenzo at this moment to have been in touch with Machiavelli, who had organized the earlier republican *militia*. What is particularly significant is that such contact may have inspired Machiavelli to rededicate *The Prince* to Lorenzo⁵⁶.

So, according to this scenario, Machiavelli would have begun to consider a dedication to Lorenzo in the summer or autumn of 1515, and put the final touches to the text in the late autumn or early winter of 1515/1516. The work could have been presented to Lorenzo at any time after the battle of Marignano, but Machiavelli probably would not have waited too long after January 1516, because, unlike Louis XII, there was no attempt to update the text in the light of Ferdinand’s death.

⁵³ *L'arte della Guerra*, p. 588.

⁵⁴ See N. Rubinstein, *Notes on the word stato in Florence before Machiavelli*, in *Florilegium Historiale. Essays presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, ed. by J. Rowe and W. Stockdale, Toronto 1971, p. 313-326, now reprinted in his *Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, I, *Political Thought and the Language of Politics. Art and Politics*, ed. by G. Ciappelli, Rome 2004, p. 151-163.

⁵⁵ *De principatibus*, p. 9-10; Inglese, *Per Machiavelli*, p. 216.

⁵⁶ The similarities between Machiavelli’s letter of 31 January 1515, in which Giuliano de’ Medici is still seen as the potential new prince, and *The Prince* itself, suggest Machiavelli had then still not hit upon the idea of rededicating the work to Lorenzo de’ Medici: see Marietti, *Machiavel*, p. 200.