

New light on Machiavelli's letter to Vettori, 10 December 1513

by William J. Connell

The letter that Niccolò Machiavelli sent to Francesco Vettori on 10 December 1513, announcing that he has written a treatise «on principalities», has become modern history's best known private letter¹. Its fame is comparable with or possibly surpasses that of such earlier epistolary texts as Plato's Seventh Letter, the letters between Peter Abelard and Héloïse, Dante's Letter to Can Grande, and Petrarch's *Ascent of Mont Ventoux* and his *Ad posteritatem epistola*. Machiavelli's correspondence, moreover, is recognizably "private" and "modern" in ways that earlier and contemporary collections of «familiares» are not. Readers of Machiavelli's letter will recall how Machiavelli described to Vettori his life at the family farm («in villa») at Sant'Andrea in Percussina: how he enjoyed trapping birds in the fall; how, with winter coming, he was having a stand of trees cut down for firewood; how in the morning he read poetry; how he walked down the road to talk with passersby; how he took his midday meal with his family; how went to the «hosteria» next door to play games of «criccha» and «triche-tach» with his neighbors; how in the evening he donned «royal and courtly clothes» to «speak» with the ancient authors; how he said that had written a small work «de principatibus»; how he wondered whether to present it to Giuliano de' Medici; how he expressed doubt about visiting his friend Vettori in Rome; how he hoped that his fifteen years spent studying «l'arte dello stato» as a chancery official and his lifetime of faithful service to the Medici family might be rewarded with a job².

An epistolary and rhetorical masterpiece, Machiavelli's letter has been published, translated and anthologized countless times. It continues to inspire reflection and study in all who are interested in Machiavelli's thought and writings. Among other things, the letter offers a fascinating view of the

¹ I am especially grateful to A.E. Baldini, Francesca Klein, Jean-Jacques Marchand, Carlo Alessandro Pisoni, Marcello Simonetta and Corrado Vivanti for their suggestions and assistance, and to the principi Borromeo-Arese for access to their private archive on Isola Bella.

² N. Machiavelli, *Opere*, ed. C. Vivanti, 3 vols., Torino 1997-2005 [henceforth: *Opere* (Vivanti)], II, p. 294-297; N. Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere*, ed. M. Martelli, Firenze 1971 [henceforth: *Tutte le opere* (Martelli)], p. 1158-1160.

circumstances, both material and psychological, in which Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*. Yet for all of the attention the letter to Vettori has received, the nature of the underlying text remains unclear. Discovered and published for the first time in 1810, the letter has never received a proper critical edition³. A series of cruxes and textual problems has led to frequent suggestions that the manuscript copy on which modern editions are based must be flawed. The study that follows sheds new light on Machiavelli's famous missive and the circumstances in which it was composed. Although the original of the letter is probably lost, new evidence suggests that the copy that we have is more reliable than generally supposed.

Another question involves the accuracy not of the copyist but of the letter-writer. A series of problems in the text, most of them involving sticky questions of chronology, has encouraged the idea that Machiavelli exaggerated or otherwise tailored the description of his daily activities in order to better impress Vettori or possibly other readers to whom Vettori might have shown the letter in Rome. Closer examination of these issues leads to the conclusion that while Machiavelli may have exaggerated here and there, the letter does not contradict in an unseemly way all that we know from other sources.

A third matter regards the invitation from Vettori of 23 November 1513 that prompted Machiavelli's famous response. Clearly Vettori invited Machiavelli to visit him in Rome after the term of the latter's confinement had been completed, but there has been much confusion concerning the nature of Machiavelli's *relegatio*. Moreover, the correspondence of the two friends had ended on 25 and 26 August, when Machiavelli sent letters to which Vettori did not respond. Hitherto we have not known what specifically prompted Vettori to take up the correspondence again after a silence of three months, but a newly discovered letter to Vettori from Florence offers a possible explanation.

Finally, what precisely the 10 December 1513 letter tells us about the progress Machiavelli had made in writing *The Prince* has been a matter of controversy. Some scholars have argued that only the first eleven chapters were completed by December 1513, while others have thought that the letter shows that *The Prince* was complete or nearly complete⁴. Machiavelli probably made final corrections to *The Prince* in 1515, as I have argued elsewhere, but there are indications in the letter to Vettori that the work was substantially complete through Chapter 25 by December 1513⁵.

³ The letter was first published in A. Ridolfi, *Pensieri intorno allo scopo di Nicolò [sic] Machiavelli nel libro «Il Principe»*, Milano 1810, p. 61-66.

⁴ Particularly helpful on this question is G. Sasso, *Il «Principe» ebbe due redazioni?*, in G. Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi*, 4 vols., Milano-Napoli 1987-1997, II, p. 197-276.

⁵ W.J. Connell, *Introduction: The Puzzle of «The Prince»*, in N. Machiavelli, *«The Prince» with Related Documents*, ed. W.J. Connell, Boston 2005 [henceforth: *The Prince* (Connell)], p. 19 and 29 n. 46. These later additions included Chapter 26, the reference to the *Discourses on Livy* in Chapter 2 and some alterations to Chapter 3 made after the death of Louis XII.

1. The Machiavelli-Vettori Correspondence in the *Apografo Ricci*

The modern textual tradition for the publication of Machiavelli's private correspondence began with Edoardo Alvisi's edition of the *Letteere familiari* in 1883, which, although marred by lacunae and the censorship of some material for reasons having to do with morals, was based on the transcription and comparison of the surviving manuscripts⁶. This was followed by biographical studies of Machiavelli that relied on ample archival research that were written by Pasquale Villari and Oreste Tommasini⁷. Subsequently manuscripts of the private letters were re-examined in the editions by Guido Mazzoni and Mario Casella (1929), Sergio Bertelli (1969), and Mario Martelli (1971)—the last of whom undertook an exacting retranscription of all of the known letters⁸. Further commentary was provided in Roberto Ridolfi's biography, in the two editions of the letters done by Franco Gaeta, and in Corrado Vivanti's now-standard edition of the *Opere*⁹. In addition Giorgio Inglese offered a rich commentary on Machiavelli's correspondence with Vettori and Francesco Guicciardini, Giovanni Bardazzi commented on ten of Machiavelli's private letters, including the one of 10 December 1513, and John Najemy published a fine study of Machiavelli's correspondence with Vettori from 1513 to 1515¹⁰.

The original of the letter that was sent by Machiavelli to Vettori on 10 December 1513 is not known to survive, although a few such originals from the Machiavelli-Vettori correspondence of 1513-1515 do exist. Nor is there a surviving draft or «minute» of the letter. Modern editions of the famous letter are based on a copy that was made at the behest of Machiavelli's grandson, Giuliano de' Ricci (1543-1606) in a large manuscript volume or «regesto» of Machiavelli material that Ricci compiled between the 1570s and the 1590s, now preserved in the Fondo Palatino of the Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze and known to scholars as the *Apografo Ricci*¹¹. Over the

⁶ N. Machiavelli, *Letteere familiari*, ed. E. Alvisi, Firenze 1883, with the 10 December 1513 letter on p. 305-310. For an overview, see S. Bertelli, *Appunti e osservazioni in margine all'edizione di un nuovo Epistolario machiavelliano*, in «Il Pensiero politico», 2 (1969), p. 536-579.

⁷ P. Villari, *Niccolò Machiavelli e i suoi tempi*, 3 vols., Milano 1895-1897² [henceforth: Villari, *Machiavelli*]; O. Tommasini, *La vita e gli scritti di Niccolò Machiavelli nella loro relazione col machiavellismo*, 2 vols. in 3, Bologna 1994-2003³ [henceforth: Tommasini, *La vita*].

⁸ N. Machiavelli, *Tutte le opere storiche e letterarie*, ed. G. Mazzoni and M. Casella, Firenze 1929, which included 37 selected letters; N. Machiavelli, *Epistolario*, in Machiavelli, *Opere*, 11 vols., ed. S. Bertelli, Milano and Verona 1968-1982, vol. V, which added many letters and gave the manuscript locations; *Tutte le opere* (Martelli).

⁹ R. Ridolfi, *Vita di Niccolò Machiavelli*, Firenze 1978⁷ [henceforth: Ridolfi, *Vita*]; N. Machiavelli, *Letteere*, ed. F. Gaeta, Milano 1961; N. Machiavelli, *Letteere*, ed. F. Gaeta, in N. Machiavelli, *Opere*, 4 vols. in 5, Torino 1984-1999, vol. III [henceforth: *Letteere* (Gaeta 1984)], p. 423-428; *Opere* (Vivanti).

¹⁰ N. Machiavelli, *Letteere a Francesco Vettori e a Francesco Guicciardini*, ed. G. Inglese, Milano 1989 [henceforth: *Letteere* (Inglese)]; N. Machiavelli, *Dieci lettere private*, ed. G. Bardazzi, Roma 1992; J. M. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters of 1513-1515*, Princeton 1993 [henceforth: Najemy, *Between Friends*].

¹¹ For the *Apografo Ricci* [henceforth: AR], see Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze [hence-

years it has become commonplace for scholars to criticize Ricci's skills as a copyist and editor. His decision not to transcribe Machiavelli's lost play, *Le maschere*, is unforgivable. Ridolfi described Ricci as a copyist who «read “lightning bugs” for “lanterns”» («lesse lucciole per lanterne»)¹². There is no question but that Ricci made a mess of the draft letter known as the *Ghiribizzi to Soderini*. Yet it is worth noting that Ricci was himself apologetic about his copy¹³. When it was discovered in modern times by Jean-Jacques Marchand, the autograph of the *Ghiribizzi*, which is a very sloppy draft with numerous corrections and cancellations and confusing marginalia, gave trouble to modern scholars, too¹⁴. Perhaps it has become too easy to attribute problems in the texts as we have them to Ricci's presumptive failings as a copyist and editor. Ridolfi's very remark about «lightning bugs» and «lanterns» is indicative of a certain laxity, since he referred to a text, the 10 December letter to Vettori in fact, that was copied not by Ricci but by someone else with a different hand¹⁵. A fresh examination of Ricci's manuscript provides new information concerning the reliability of Ricci's copies of an important group of letters sent by Machiavelli to Vettori, including the letter of 10 December 1513. What has been known hitherto about Ricci's treatment of the Machiavelli-Vettori correspondence has been determined largely by two passages that appear relatively early in the pages of the *Apografo* and were published by Tommasini. The first of these reads as follows:

Giuliano de' Ricci a chi legge. Io ho sempre (humanissimi lettori) tenuto gran conto delle memorie antiche, et sempre mi è parso officio debito di ciascuno il cercare di mantenere le cose dei suoi il più che sia possibile, et anco risuscitarle et metterle in luce et in considerazione alli posteri (non si partendo mai della verità). Et di questo mi sono in testimonio le fatiche che ho durato nella investigatione [canc.: delli huomini, et] delle actioni, et delli huomini della famiglia de' Ricci. Testimonio non piccolo ne rende ancora la presente fatica attorno alle cose di Niccolò Machiavelli mio avolo, et questa è la cagione che havendo trovato una lettera scritta dal decto Machiavello a Francesco Vettori sopra la triegua fatta l'anno 1513 infra il re de Francia et quello di Spagna, ricerando io di quella che discorresse sopra questa materia gli scrisse il Vettori, mi sono capitato alle mani molte lettere sue, le quali, parendomi che in esse, oltre alla piacevolezza et garbatezza, vi sia la notitia di molte cose seguite in quelli tempi, non narrate

forth: BNCF], Ms. Palatino, E.B.15.10. The letter of 10 December 1513 is copied on fol. 150v-151v.

¹² Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 545 n. 19.

¹³ Concerning the *Ghiribizzi*, Ricci wrote, *AR*, fol. 57v: «Se e' mi fosse lecito, o per meglio dire, possibile conservare l'originale di donde io traggio la infrascritta lettera del Machiavello, credo certo che chi la vedesse in un medesimo tempo si maraviglierebbe della diligentia mia, mi scuserebbe delli errori che nel copiarla havessi fatto, mi harebbe compassione della fatica che ci ho durato, et in ultimo mi harebbe un grande obbligo, ché io l'havessi ridotta in modo che si possa vedere. Et perché là è piena di cassi, di rimessi consumata, non tanto dal tempo, quanto dalla straccurataggine, et inoltre vi sono molte chiose, io, per poterle notare, et anco per potere fare mentione di alcune diversità, lascio, contro al solito, le margini del libro larghe. Leggetela dunque, humanissimi lettori, ché in essa riconoscerete lo ingegno del Machiavello non meno che vi habbiate fatto, o siate per fare, in altra cosa sua». See also Tommasini, *La vita*, I, p. 631-632.

¹⁴ R. Ridolfi and P. Ghiglieri, *I «Ghiribizzi» al Soderini*, in «La bibliofilia», 72 (1970), p. 52-72.

¹⁵ The *Apografo Ricci* is mentioned just five times in Ridolfi's *Vita*, and in those instances Ridolfi seems to have been following Tommasini's analysis rather than taking a look for himself. See Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 434 n. 9, 472 n. 2, 539 n. 34, 541 n. 34.

semplicemente, ma discorsovi [sic] sopra fondatamente et con bellissimo giuditio, mi sono risoluto a registrarle tutte per ordine, inserendovi le risposte del Machiavello dove le troverrò, che saranno poche, perché non se ne salvava registro. Non voglio già mancare di dire che queste lettere sono scritte da l'uno amico all'altro, senza alcuno ornamento di parole, et senza mettervi alcuno studio, ma solo tirato giù secondo che veniva loro alla mente. Serviranno anco queste lettere, oltre a quanto ho detto di sopra, per dimostrare lo stato nel quale doppo il 1512 si ritrovava il Machiavello, et il giuditio che ne faceva il Vettori, persona reputatissimo, giuditiosissimo, et in quelli tempi favorito, et molto adoperato dalli Ill.^{mi} Medici, sotto il governo de' quali si reggeva all' hora la città doppo la cacciata del Soderini, al cui tempo, sendo stato assai adoperato il Machiavello, et particolarmente nelli ultimi mesi, quando lo exercito spagnuolo passò in Toscana, et saccheggiò Prato, non è maraviglio se dalli inimici suoi (che non gliene avanzava), fu trovata occasione di farlo incarcerare, come nella seguente lettera del Vettori, scrittali pochi giorni doppo la creatione di Leone X^{mo}, s'intenderà¹⁶.

[Giuliano de' Ricci to the reader. I have always, most humane readers, taken great care of old records, and I have always thought it everyone's proper obligation to try to preserve one's ancestors' things insofar as possible, and also to revive them and bring them into the light and into the consideration of those who have come afterward, albeit never departing from the truth. And evidence of this is the labor that I have endured in the investigation of the deeds and men of the Ricci family. Further and not trivial evidence of this is my present effort concerning the affairs of Niccolò Machiavelli, my grandfather. And this is the reason why, when I found a letter written by the said Machiavello to Francesco Vettori about the truce that was made in 1513 between the kings of France and Spain, and then when I looked for the letter that Vettori wrote to him discussing this matter, there came into my hands many of his [Vettori's] letters, which, since it appeared to me, apart from the pleasure and style they offered, that they contained notice of many things that happened in those times, not simply narrated, but treated in a well-founded way, with the best judgment, I decided to copy them out all in order, inserting Machiavello's responses wherever I find them, although these will be few because no register of them was kept. I don't want to forget to say, of course, that these letters are written from one friend to another, without fancy wording, and without putting much effort in them, just written down as matters came to mind. These letters will also be useful, in addition to what I have said above, to illustrate the state in which Machiavello found himself after 1512, and what was thought of it by Vettori, who was a person of the highest reputation and most judicious, and in those times favored and put to much use by the most illustrious Medici, under whose rule the city was then governed after the fall of Soderini, during whose time, since Machiavello was much employed then, and especially during the last month, when the Spanish army passed into Tuscany and sacked Prato, it is no wonder if an occasion was found by his enemies (of which he had no lack), for putting him in prison, as may be understood in the following letter of Vettori's, written to him a few days after the election of Leo X].

As can be seen, the passage emphasizes Ricci's partiality toward Machiavelli, which was certainly genuine. It has caused modern critics, not without reason, to be suspicious of Ricci's role as an apologist for his grandfather. It is also worth noting that at the time of writing, which is to say in the early 1570s, Ricci seems to have thought that very few of Machiavelli's letters to Vettori had survived.

A second passage, also known to scholars, comments again on these letters of Vettori's to Machiavelli, and it has encouraged speculation about the censorship to which Ricci may have subjected the correspondence. It reads as follows:

¹⁶ AR, fol. 44r. My transcription. See also Tommasini, *La vita*, I, p. 633; Bertelli, *Appunti e osservazioni* cit., p. 38. Translations in brackets [] are my own.

Giuliano de' Ricci a chi legge. Passarono infra questi tempi tra il Vettori et il Machiavello molte lettere appartenenti a loro innamoramenti, et a loro piacevolezze et burle, le quali, non mi essendo capitata alle mani, non sono state da me registrate, come anco ho lassato di registrare qualche parte delle lettere da me copiate dove il Vettori tratta di simili intrattenimenti, et solo ho scritto quella parte dove si tratta di stati et di maneggi d'importanza, sì come ho fatto nella seguente lettera, nella quale ho lasciato il principio et il fine, trattandosi in que' luoghi di uno amorazzo del Vettori. Et solamente ho scritto quello che egli risponde a quanto dal Machiavello gli fu scritto in materia di quello che andava attorno circa la resolutione del re di Spagna di guerra o d'accordo con quello di Franzia [cane.: il che è]. Et chi vuole vedere quanto sopra questo scrisse il Machiavello, legga il discorso, o lettera, la quale è copiata qui addrieto a ccarte [sic] sette¹⁷.

[Giuliano de' Ricci to the reader. During this time many letters were exchanged between Vettori and Machiavello that pertained to their love affairs, and to their pastimes and jokes, which, not having come into my hands, I have not copied down, just as I have also left out some portion of the letters I have copied in which Vettori treats of similar amusements, and I have only written down that part in which states and affairs of importance are treated, just as I have done in the following letter, in which I have left out the beginning and the end, since in those places it is a question of a love affair (*amorazzo*) of Vettori's. And I have only written down what he writes in reply to Machiavello regarding what was happening concerning the choice of the king of Spain, whether for war or for an agreement with the king of France. And whoever wants to see what Machiavello wrote about this should read the discourse or letter that was copied here above on page seven].

Ricci thus acknowledges that he has suppressed material deemed indecent or extraneous, and there has thus been ample reason to wonder about the content of the letters that survive only in Ricci's copies. As Guido Ruggiero put it recently, «Unfortunately, however, the letters that we have were for the most part those collected and copied in the sixteenth century by Giuliano de' Ricci, Machiavelli's grandson, who admits that he "did not copy" some of the material that dealt with the "loves" and "pleasures" of Machiavelli and his friends and instead focused on copying letters that dealt with "states" and "matters of importance"»¹⁸. Confirming that Ricci left out a good deal of the Vettori material, John Najemy points out that the *Apografo* «contains only nine of Vettori's eighteen extant letters to Machiavelli between March 1513 and January 1515»¹⁹.

It is interesting to note that both of the statements by Ricci that have been quoted appear in the first part of his manuscripts volume. Ricci's *Apografo* was a work in progress, which meant that it was possible that he would have access at a later date to new material, and also that he might choose to treat it differently. Another interesting element is that the censorship mentioned in the second statement seems specifically to regard Vettori's letters. It leaves us wondering about the other half of the correspondence, which is to say the letters that Machiavelli sent to Vettori, and whether they too were censored.

¹⁷ AR, fol. 54r. My transcription. See also Tommasini, *La vita*, I, p. 638.

¹⁸ G. Ruggiero, *Machiavelli in Love: Sex, Self, and Society in the Italian Renaissance*, Baltimore 2006, p. 129.

¹⁹ Najemy, *Between Friends*, p. 12.

How Machiavelli's letters to Vettori came into Ricci's hands is a matter that has not yet been studied, although the *Apografo* sheds much light on the question. At a certain point, after a series of initial documentary finds, including the ones discussed above, Ricci began copying into his register the contents of journals of Machiavelli's that contained extracts of Florentine history beginning from the death of Cosimo de' Medici²⁰. When a new document or set of documents came his way, he interrupted the work on these extracts in order to insert the new discoveries in his register. One such instance occurred with the discovery of the *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, which came to Ricci's attention in a manner described on folio 133r of the *Apografo*:

Giuliano de' Ricci a chi legge. Havevo disegnato d'andare seguitando di copiare questi giornaletti d'historie del Machiavello, quando mi è capitato alle mani un discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua, dicono fatto dal medesimo Niccolò, et se bene lo stile è alquanto diverso dall'altre cose sue, et io in questi fragmenti che ho ritrovati non ho visto né originale, né bozza, né parte alcuna di detto dialogo, nondimeno credo si possa credere indubbiamente che sia dello stesso Machiavello, atteso che li concepti appariscono suoi, che per molti anni per ciascuno in mano di chi hoggia trova si tiene suo, et quello che più di altro importa è che Bernardo Machiavelli, figlio di detto Niccolò, hoggia di età di anni 74, afferma ricordarsi haverne sentito ragionare a suo padre, et vedutogliene fra le mani molte volte. Il dialogo è questo che seguita²¹.

[Giuliano de' Ricci to the reader. I had planned to go on copying these notebooks of the histories of Machiavello when there came into my hands a discourse or dialogue about our language that they say was done by our same Niccolò. And although the style is somewhat different from his other things, and although I, among the literary remains that I have found, have seen neither the original nor a draft nor even a part of the said dialogue, nonetheless I believe it can be believed without a doubt to be by the same Machiavello, seeing as the ideas appear to be his, and as all of the current owners maintain that it is his; and, what counts most of all, is that Bernardo Machiavelli, the son of the said Niccolò, who is today 74 years old, affirms that he remembers hearing it discussed with his father and seeing it in his hands many times. The dialogue is this one that follows].

This particular passage was much discussed in the debates concerning the authorship of the *Discorso o dialogo* that erupted in the 1970s. Of interest is not only what it tells us about the course of Ricci's work, but also the indication of an evolving critical caution concerning the documents copied into the register. Ricci hesitates between the terms «discorso» and «dialogo» in discussing the untitled work. He acknowledges the difficulty in securing a firm attribution. He even admits that the style is «alquanto diverso» from that of his grandfather. Since Ricci took the trouble to give «74» as the age of his uncle Bernardo, who was born in 1503, Ricci's copying of the text can

²⁰ AR, fol. 85r.: «Fragmenti, ricordi, et giornali appartenenti a historia, autore Niccolò Machiavelli. Copieránno si con quel maggiore ordine che si potrà, levandole da quadernucci et stracciafogli di sua mano...». See also Tommasini, *La vita*, I, p. 651.

²¹ AR, fol. 133r. My transcription. See also Tommasini, *La vita*, I, p. 663. The text of the *Discorso o dialogo* continues to AR, fol. 138r.

been dated firmly to 1577²². One could wish for more information, but it is doubtful that Ricci was being intentionally opaque or stingy²³.

But let us return to the correspondence with Vettori. After inserting the *Discorso o dialogo*, Ricci went back to copying historical extracts²⁴. But then a new find came his way. It is surprising, considering the patient work on the Machiavelli-Vettori correspondence that has been done by so many scholars, many of whom state that they have consulted the *Apografo Ricci*, that the important passage that follows has not yet been remarked on or published²⁵. Probably it dates from 1577 or shortly thereafter, since it appears only a few folios after the 1577 interruption for the copying of the *Discorso o dialogo*, although the only firm *terminus ante quem* is a reference to «1594» appearing later in the *Apografo*²⁶. The important passage reads as follows:

Giuliano de' Ricci a chi legge. Di nuovo sono forzato a intralasciare l'ordine dell'andare copiando scritture appartenenti ad historie, havendo havuto di Casa li heredi di Francesco Vettori le stesse lettere che dal Machiavello furono scritte al decto Vettori in più tempi, le quali io copierò tutte, senza alterare niente, et se ad alcuno paresse, che ce ne fosse qualcuna, che havesse del licentioso, o, del lascivo, pássila, et legga le altre dove egli maravigliosamente discorre delle cose del mondo. Scúsime che, forse ingannato dalla molta affezione che io porto alla memoria di questo huomo, mi lascio trasportare a scrivere tutto quello che di lui trovo, sia come si voglia, il che fo con più ragione, havendo disegnato che questo libro sia comune a pochi altri che a me stesso²⁷.

[Giuliano de' Ricci to the reader. Again I am forced to interrupt the order of my copying writings pertaining to histories, since I have had from the house of the heirs of Francesco Vettori the very letters that were written by Machiavelli to the said Vettori at different times. I shall copy them all, without altering anything, and if anyone should think that there is a letter that has something licentious or lascivious in it, he should pass it over and read the others where he [Machiavelli] discourses marvelously on the affairs of the world. Excuse me that, perhaps deceived by the great affection that I feel for the memory of this man, I allow myself to be moved to write down all that I find that is his, be what it may. I do it with more justification since I have planned that this book should be shared with few others besides myself].

Unfortunately, Ricci's notice concerning these letters from Machiavelli to Vettori escaped the attention of Tommasini, who did not include it in his «analisi» of the *Apografo Ricci*. Subsequent scholars have commonly used

²² B.T. Tommaso Sozzi, *Introduzione*, a N. Machiavelli, *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*, Torino 1976 [henceforth: *Discorso* (Sozzi)], p. xi.

²³ Even if one modern scholar may have thought so: M. Martelli, *Una giarda fiorentina. Il «Dialogo» della lingua attribuita a Niccolò Machiavelli*, Roma 1978.

²⁴ AR, fol. 138v: «+. Seguitano Memorie appartenenti a historie del 1495 scritte da Niccolò Machiavelli». These continue to fol. 141r.

²⁵ See, in addition to the works cited in notes 6-10 above, R. Ridolfi, *Per un'edizione critica dell'epistolario machiavelliano. La lettera al Vettori del 29 aprile 1513*, in «La bibliofilia», 68 (1966), p. 31-50; R. Ridolfi, *Le carte del Machiavelli*, in «La bibliofilia», 71 (1969), p. 1-23; E. Niccolini, *Ventiquattro lettere di Francesco Vettori*, in «Giornale storico della letteratura italiana», 107 (1990), p. 547-589; and J.-J. Marchand, *Gli autografi di otto lettere di Francesco Vettori al Machiavelli (e una lettera inedita a Paolo Vettori)*, in «Interpres», 12 (1992), p. 223-269.

²⁶ For «1594» in the ms., see below at note 29.

²⁷ AR, fol. 141v [with «142» at the upper left]. My transcription.

Tommasini's description as a guide to the Ricci manuscript, which is why, one suspects, that the passage has not been known to Machiavelli scholarship.

The folios that come after this important passage contain the texts of no fewer than twenty-one of Machiavelli's letters to Vettori, and they include the famous letter of 10 December 1513. Ricci preserved the group's chronological order (and presumably this was how they were arranged among the Vettori papers), with the exception of the first two letters copied, dated 16 April 1514 and 20 December 1514 respectively, which he seems to have studied and transcribed first because they were related to letters that Ricci already knew from other versions preserved among Machiavelli's papers²⁸. The letters that followed—and they include many of the most important of the correspondence – were those of 13 March 1513, 18 March 1513, 9 April 1513, 16 April 1513, 20 June 1513, 10 August 1513, 26 August 1513, 10 December 1513 (the letter that concerns us especially), 19 December 1513, 5 January 1514, 4 February 1514, 25 February 1514, 10 June 1514, 4 December 1514, 31 January 1515, 5 April 1527, 14 April 1527, 16 April 1527, and 18 April 1527.

Ricci's comment tells us much that is new about the texts of the above-mentioned letters to Vettori. To begin with, the copies were made from Machiavelli's «originals», which is to say they were made from the physical autographs that were received by Vettori and preserved with Vettori's papers. The copies that Ricci worked from were thus cleaner and more legible than Machiavelli's drafts, and they represented the writer's final versions. They were also the texts to which Vettori's letters actually responded, not the approximate versions found in drafts.

Of great interest is Ricci's claim to have copied these particular letters in their entirety. Censorship was no longer an issue.. «[F]orse ingannato dalla molta affezione», he copied this group of letters without omitting licentious content.

Also worth noting are Ricci's changed intentions for the *Apografo* volume. In his initial statement, quoted above, Ricci had spoken of reviving and bringing into the light lost work. In the past scholars have reasonably associated the *Apografo* with a project to publish Machiavelli's writings. But Ricci now states that he intends for his volume to be shared with «pochi altri che a me stesso». Times were changing. Certain forms of literature were in the process of going underground. Machiavelli's letters were best enjoyed in private.

²⁸ The texts of these two letters have given editors trouble in recent decades, and each is perhaps worth revisiting. On the letter of 16 April 1514, see *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 235. About this letter, Ricci writes in AR, fol. 141v: «Questo che seguìa è il fine di una lettera scritta dal Machiavello al Vettori addi 16 di aprile 1514 che è differente da il fine della copia trovata fra le scritture sue che è registrato in questo a carte 7 et notatevi le diversità sino a tanto che ha riscontro in qualche parte». On the letter of 20 December 1514, see J.-J. Marchand, *Contributi all'Epistolario machiavelliano: la lettera al Vettori del 10 dicembre 1514 nel testo originale inedito*, in «La bibliofilia», 72 (1970), p. 265-266; and compare *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 265-266. About this letter Ricci writes in AR at fol. 142r: «Giuliano de' Ricci a chi legge. La lettera che seguìa fu scritto dal Machiavello per compilre a un discorso fatto che è copiato in questo a carte 4, 5, 6, non li paren- do in quello havere a bastanza dechiarato la intentione sua nel dannare la neutralità».

Unfortunately, none of these twenty-one letters survives today as an «original», which is to say in the physical version that was sent to Vettori and later copied into the *Apografo*. We do not have the precise texts to compare with Ricci's copies. Considering the effort that has gone into hunting down Machiavelli's autographs over the past century, one imagines these missing letters were lost or destroyed as a group, or, if they have survived (although that seems increasingly unlikely), they survive together. A similar fate seems to have befallen nineteen letters from Machiavelli to Francesco Guicciardini that were given to Ricci for copying in 1594 by the heirs of Francesco Guicciardini. Those letters, too, survive only in Ricci's copies²⁹.

2. Ricci's Corrections to the Letter of 10 December 1513

Since copies are all that we have, it makes sense to inquire whether these are «good» copies. In the course of transcription Ricci undoubtedly introduced errors into the texts that we have. Yet, as has been seen, he tried to treat this group of letters sent to Vettori with particular care. By now, moreover, Ricci had acquired a good deal of experience in the reading of Machiavelli's script. Certainly he was better off than when, eighty-four folios earlier, he had struggled with the *Ghiribizzi to Soderini*³⁰. A few of the letters, including the famous letter of 10 December 1513, were copied in a hand other than Ricci's, but Ricci corrected these himself against the originals.

In particular, is the text of the 10 December letter reliable? It helps to know that the source was the original letter as sent. It was once argued that Ricci had the text of the 10 December letter copied either from Machiavelli's surviving draft or from a copy made from the draft³¹. To be sure, it was already clear, from the measured way in which the letter of 10 December replied to Vettori's of 23 November, that Machiavelli must have sent something like the letter whose text we have had all along³². Moreover, Vettori's letter of 24 December 1513 discusses Machiavelli's of the 10th, acknowledging the earlier letter's queries about employment and about the dedication of

²⁹ Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 574 n. 9, writes that there were twenty of them, now lost, but Ricci's text, *AR*, c. 162r, states «diciannove». See also Tommasini, *La vita*, I, p. 641. On these letters and the Guicciardini correspondence see G. Masi, «Saper ragionar di questo mondo». *Il carteggio fra Machiavelli e Guicciardini*, in *Cultura e scrittura di Machiavelli*, Atti del Convegno di Firenze-Pisa 27-30 ottobre 1997, Roma 1998, p. 487-522, and especially 492 on Ricci.

³⁰ See above at notes 13-14.

³¹ C.H. Clough, *Machiavelli's «Epistolario» and Again What Did Machiavelli Wear in the Country*, in «Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies», 1 (1983), 3, p. 7-18 [henceforth: Clough, Machiavelli's *«Epistolario»*], p.11: «Moreover what emerges is the very strong likelihood that the text of the famous letter in the *Regesto* derived from a draft which the writer had retained among his papers».

³² FV to NM, 23 November 1513, in Machiavelli, *Opere* (Vivanti), II, p. 291-293; and on the way Machiavelli matched Vettori's letter point by point see G. Ferroni, *Le «cose vane» nelle «Lettere» di Machiavelli*, in «Rassegna della letteratura italiana», 76 (1972), p. 215-264 (231-232).

Machiavelli's «trattato»³³. But now we can speak of this letter and also of the other letters in this group with greater confidence as copies from the author's final versions.

The copying of the 10 December letter does seem now and then to have given difficulty to Ricci's scribe. He left two blank spots where Ricci himself supplied the missing words from the original, and there were also a few other interventions of Ricci's. So, about two-thirds of the way through the letter, when Machiavelli discusses his evenings with the ancients, there appears a small group of corrections. After the words «Et quelli per loro humanità mi rispondono:», the scribe left a blank that Ricci filled with the words «et non»: «*Et non* sento per 4 hore...» [the words in Ricci's hand are here in italics]. On the next line Ricci corrected the scribe's «non sento la povertà» to read «non *temo* la povertà» – a correction that caused Ricci himself some initial difficulty, since the «s» of the canceled «sento» was initially overwritten as an «f». The next line, too, in which Machiavelli quotes from the *Paradiso*, also required Ricci's intervention. The scribe had left a blank, writing: «perché Dante dice che non fa scienza sanza [...] lo havere inteso», so Ricci first supplied the missing «*lo ritenere*». Then he canceled the words «ritenere lo havere», leaving the initial «*lo*». Finally he supplied in the margin the words that give the proper text from *Paradiso* V.41-42: «perché Dante dice che non fa scienza sanza *lo ritenere*, *lo havere* inteso». Possibly Ricci consulted a printed Dante in his effort to set matters straight. Ricci's last correction appears toward the end of the letter, where he canceled the scribe's «che io non diventi per povertà contendendo» and wrote in the margin «*contennendo*». In modern editions the passage thus reads «che io non diventi per povertà *contennendo*»³⁴.

«Contennendo» is a somewhat recondite term, and Ricci's apposite correction becomes possibly more significant when one realizes that Machiavelli used the word no fewer than four times in Chapter 19 of *The Prince*³⁵. The word's appearance at the end of the 10 December 1513 letter may suggest that at the time the letter was written Machiavelli's treatise «on principalities» already comprised Chapter 19. Moreover, since Chapter 19 is the concluding chapter of Machiavelli's section on the moral qualities of the prince, comprising Chapters 15-19, it would make sense if this entire section of *The Prince* had been completed by the time Machiavelli wrote to Vettori. The evidence is slender, but it is there. And we owe some thanks to Ricci for preserving this small clue.

The foregoing suggests that Ricci was a reasonably careful editor of this group of Machiavelli's letters, and in particular, of the letter of 10 December 1513. Readers of Machiavelli's correspondence will find this somewhat reassuring. Yet there remain a number of problems with the text.

³³ FV to NM, 24 December 1513, in Machiavelli, *Opere* (Vivanti), II, p. 300-303.

³⁴ AR, fol. 151v.

³⁵ N. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. M. Martelli, Roma 2006 [henceforth: *Il Principe* (Martelli)] p. 243 (19.1), 244 (19.4), 263 (19.55), 264 (19.57).

3. «*Settembre*», *Thrushes and «I tordi»*

A longstanding crux in the famous letter to Vettori involves the season for trapping birds, or «fowling». Near the letter's beginning Machiavelli states that «up until now» he has been catching thrushes, that he has passed all «September» this way, and that now he is sorry that trapping is over. «Ho infino a qui uccellato a' tordi di mia mano... E così stetti tutto settembre; dipoi questo badalucco... è mancato con mio dispiacere». With his usual attention to Tuscan detail, Roberto Ridolfi noted that the season for thrushes begins in October and ends at the end of November. He thus proposed emending «settembre» to «novembre»³⁶.

And the emendation makes perfect sense. Ornithologists confirm that the thrush (*turdus philomelos*), which migrates between the Baltic and Africa and passes through Italy in October and November, travels in accordance with a seasonal pattern that has been fixed for at least five millennia³⁷. According to one source,

...il passo intensivo e regolare, in base alla media delle osservazioni e relative registrazioni effettuate per circa un decennio, si può calcolare che inizi il 10-11 ottobre: esso procede con regolare aumento per tutta la 2^a quindicina del mese, raggiungendo il massimo nell'ultima decade, si mantiene ancora sensibile ma in costante diminuzione nella 1^a quindicina di novembre, e continua a decrescere nella 2^a quindicina di detto mese. Con la fine di novembre il passo, almeno nella fase normale, può darsi esaurito³⁸.

[...the dense and regular migration, based on the mean of observations and their related recording over about a decade, can be calculated to begin at 10-11 October. It continues to augment regularly throughout the second half of the month, reaching a peak in the last ten days. It is still detectable but in steady decline in the first half of the month and it continues to decrease in the month's second half. With the end of November the migration, at least in its normal phase, can be said to be finished].

For Folgore da San Gimignano, writing in the early fourteenth century, October was the month for fowling and November the month for eating birds and game³⁹. The first day of October marks the beginning of the Italian hunting season today, as is known to anyone who has heard (and smelled) the birdshot of hunters in the Tuscan hills – or been asked by the Lega Abolizione Caccia to sign a petition. Thus Ridolfi's emendation, from «settembre» to «novembre» should be accepted. Although Ridolfi doesn't say so, possibly Ricci's copyist read an abbreviated «9bre» as «7bre», a slip that could have happened easily enough.

But there is a related question about Machiavelli and thrush migration that deserves to be addressed at the same time, for there is, as yet, no firm date for a sonnet by Machiavelli entitled “The Thrushes” (*I tordi*). Dedicated

³⁶ Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 515 n. 19.

³⁷ T. Alerstam, *Bird Migration*, Cambridge 1990 (Lund 1982), p. 226.

³⁸ M. Rotondi, *Migratori alati*, Roma 1962, p. 204.

³⁹ Folgore da San Gimignano, *Ottobre* and *Novembre*, in *Poeti del Duecento*, ed. G. Contini, 2 vols., Milano-Napoli 1960, II, p. 416-417.

to Giuliano de' Medici, the prospective dedicatee of *The Prince* according to the letter of 10 December 1513, the poem states that it accompanies a gift of thrushes. Giuliano is urged not to pay attention to Machiavelli's critics but to judge for himself the worth of the thrushes and of the poem's author. Ridolfi believed that the poem accompanied an actual gift of thrushes – «un mazzo di tordi presi al suo uccellare di Sant'Andrea» – sent to thank Giuliano for his help in securing Machiavelli's release from prison in March 1513⁴⁰. Earlier, Villari had taken as a sarcastic expression of Machiavelli's bile, writing «Ora nessuno vorrà credere che il Machiavelli mandasse veramente un dono di tordi a Giuliano de' Medici»⁴¹. More recently Hugo Jaeckel advanced the idea that the sonnet *I tordi* was composed as a possible dedicatory poem for *The Prince*⁴².

The problem with Ridolfi's argument has to do with the proposed March timing for the gift. It is true that there is a return migration of thrushes in the spring that takes place in March and early April, but the number of birds in the *ripasso* is smaller, and the volume of the catch would have been diminished. Autumn, moreover, is a pleasant time for fowling, while March is often a cold month. By May 1513 Giuliano de' Medici had left Florence for Rome. A gift of real thrushes could not have coincided with the autumnal fowling season, unless the impoverished Machiavelli went to the unlikely trouble and expense of sending the birds all the way to Rome. Telling further against Ridolfi's argument is the likelihood that Machiavelli remained in Florence immediately after his release from prison. His letters of 13 and 18 March and of 9 and 16 April were signed «in Firenze». The first secure evidence of Machiavelli's presence at Sant'Andrea does not appear until his letter of 29 April, when there would have been no more thrushes about to catch⁴³. To be sure, the distance to Sant'Andrea was not far, and it is still possible that Machiavelli visited Sant'Andrea shortly after his liberation. But he is not likely to have trapped the birds personally given his recent experience of torture. And according to contracts they signed with Machiavelli's father, Bernardo, the tenants at Sant'Andrea had been prohibited from fowling.

Machiavelli's December letter describes bird-trapping as something that to him seemed «dispettoso e strano»: it was new to him. It thus seems probable that the sonnet «The Thrushes» refers not to an out-of-season gift of birds made in March, but to *The Prince*, and that it was Machiavelli's newly discovered pleasure in trapping thrushes in October and November, as reported in the famous letter to Vettori, that inspired the poem's conceit.

⁴⁰ Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 222.

⁴¹ Villari, *Machiavelli*, II, p. 208.

⁴² H. Jaeckel, *I «tordi» e il «principe nuovo»*. Note sulle dediche del Principe di Machiavelli a Giuliano e Lorenzo de' Medici, in «Archivio storico italiano» [henceforth: «ASI»], 156 (1998), p. 73-92. For a further endorsement see R. Fubini, *Postilla ai «Tordi»*, in «ASI», 156 (1998), p. 93-96.

⁴³ NM to FV, 29 April 1513, in *Lettere* (Gaeta), p. 383: «...come ne fa fede lo essermi ridutto in villa...»

4. But «ottobre» or «dicembre»? And, again, «settembre»?

A further problem involving chronology internal to the letter of 10 December 1513 regards the date that appears next to Machiavelli's signature, which all of the modern editions give as «Die x Decembris 1513», although in fact the *Apografo* has it thus: «Die x D oct.bris 1513». [See Figure 1]. Another manuscript version of the famous letter, copied into a Barberini volume now in the Vatican Library, gives the date as «Die x octobris 1513». Since the Barberini volume is usually considered as dependent upon the *Apografo*, it simply confirms our reading of the *Apografo*'s «octobris», although Barberini version lacks the puzzling «D»⁴⁴. Thus Ridolfi was mistaken when he wrote that the *Apografo* has the «correct date of 10 December»⁴⁵. But neither was Cecil Clough correct, when, in a discussion of the letter's manuscript tradition, he wrote that «In both Ricci's *Regesto* and the Barberini manuscript the letter is dated: 'die X Octobris in villa'», since Clough failed to mention the «D» of the Ricci codex (which also clearly states «In Firenze», not «in villa»)⁴⁶.

Thus what stands out is the mysterious capitalized «D». Presumably it indicates the word «Decembris», since, apart from the «settembre» already discussed, the other elements of the correspondence agree that Machiavelli must have sent the letter to Vettori in December. But what were the sources of the contradictory «D[ecembris?]» and «oct[o]bris» that are found in the *Apografo*'s text? By itself, the «D» is meaningless, which would explain why it was omitted in the Barberini version, which most scholars consider a copy made from the *Apografo*. Moreover, Ricci's scribe is unlikely to have introduced a meaningless «D» without there having been a referent in the text he was copying. Thus it would appear that there really was a «D» in the original, which would almost certainly have been part of a full «Decembris». But instead of writing «Decembris», Ricci's scribe lifted his pen, and, without cancelling the «D», he wrote «oct.bris». Whether this was done on his own initiative or on Ricci's is not certain.

Two factors seem likely to have prompted the decision to alter the original's «Decembris» to «oct.bris» in the copy. The first of these was the error,

⁴⁴ Vatican Library, MS Barberini lat. 5368, also dating from the late sixteenth century. J. E. Law and M. Davies, *What Did Machiavelli Wear in the Country?*, in «Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance Studies», 1 (1983), 2, p. 12-18, argued that the Barberini volume may preserve variants for the text of the 10 December 1513 letter that still require careful study. Interestingly, B.T. Sozzi argued that while the Barberini volume was dependent on the *Apografo*, it also contained a few significant variants in its text of the *Discorso o dialogo intorno alla nostra lingua*; see Machiavelli, *Discorso* (Sozzi), p. XIV-XVI. Clough, *Machiavelli's Epistolario*, p. 7-18, discounted the variants in the version of the 10 December 1513 letter and followed Tommasini in maintaining that the Barberini text is entirely dependent on the *Apografo*.

⁴⁵ Ridolfi, *Vita*, p. 515 n. 18.

⁴⁶ Clough, *Machiavelli's Epistolario* cit., p. 12. Like Clough, Inglese, in *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 197 n. 11, noticed the *Apografo*'s «oct.bris» although he missed the «D» that appears in the ms. Inglese gives the proper place: «In Firenze».

already discussed, by which the word «novembre» had been substituted with «settembre» earlier in the letter. A correction of the famous letter's date from December to early October would accord well with Machiavelli's earlier statements that «Ho infino a qui [uccellato...] E così stetti tutto settembre; dipoi questo badalucco... è mancato con mio dispiacere». Thus a date emended to October will have supported the prior (but mistaken) date for thrush-snaring that had already been copied into the text.

Yet there is another item in Machiavelli's prior correspondence that is likely to have contributed to, or, more likely, to have been the source of the chronological confusion evident in the *Apografo*'s copy of the 10 December missive. Machiavelli's letter to Vettori of 9 April 1513 speaks of his confinement to Florentine territory, which remained a running theme of the correspondence. Toward the end of the 9 April letter, referring to his sentence of confinement, Machiavelli writes:

Se io potessi sbucare del dominio, io verrei pure anch'io sino costi a domandare se il papa è in casa; ma fra tante grazie, la mia per mia stracurataggine, restò in terra. Aspetterò il settembre⁴⁷.

[If I could just get out of the dominion, I too would go right there to ask if the Pope was «at home»; but among so many requests that have been launched at him, mine, on account of my own negligence, fell to earth. I shall wait for September].

The «September» date has escaped notice: neither Ridolfi, nor Gaeta nor Inglese nor Najemy remarks on it⁴⁸. In the immediate context it seems to allude to an anticipated end of Machiavelli's confinement within the Florentine dominion. Certainly there is every reason to believe that is how Ricci would have understood the sentence «Aspetterò il settembre». The 9 April letter is copied in Ricci's own hand⁴⁹. Since the letters to Vettori letters were copied in chronological order, Ricci's knowledge of the 9 April letter probably preceded his knowledge of the 10 December 1513 letter.

Ricci probably did not know that Machiavelli's confinement ended in November but believed it ended in September. The actual sentence, as determined by the Signoria, established a *relegatio* that would end on 10 November 1513, but Ricci nowhere cites this information, which in all likelihood he did not possess⁵⁰. The correspondence known to Ricci offers nothing that would correct the notion that beginning in September 1513 Machiavelli would be free to travel. Machiavelli's epistolary exchange with Vettori came to what now seems a strange halt after 26 August, and it lasted until 23 November. And Vettori's elegant letter of 23 November, which was clearly an

⁴⁷ NM to FV, 9 April 1513, in *Letttere* (Inglese), p. 110-111.

⁴⁸ Najemy, *Between Friends*, p. 103-110, offers an especially fine discussion of the letter, although this point eludes him.

⁴⁹ AR, fol. 144v.

⁵⁰ N. Machiavelli, *Opere*, 6 vols., ed. P. Fanfani, L. Passerini and G. Milanesi, Firenze 1873-1877 [henceforth *Opere* (Fanfani)], I, p. LXXXIV.

invitation to Machiavelli to come to Rome after the completion of the *relegatio*, seems not to have been known to Ricci, since it was not copied into the *Apografo*. Presumably it was among those letters of Vettori's «that pertained to their love affairs, and to their pastimes and jokes, which, *not having come into my hands*, I have not copied down»⁵¹.

Machiavelli's letter of 10 December, which, from its opening words, was plainly written after the expiration of the sentence of confinement, was a letter that Ricci would have expected to be dated in early October. And the *Apografo*'s copies of the 9 April and 10 December 1513 letters agree in giving «settembre» where «novembre» would be appropriate. Possibly in one or both cases an original «9bre» was read as «7bre». The errors thus supported one another in confirming a putative end of Machiavelli's confinement in September-October rather than in November-December.

Three emendations to the texts that we now have from the Ricci manuscript would seem to be required. In Machiavelli's letter to Vettori of 9 April 1513, «settembre» should be changed to «novembre». In Machiavelli's letter to Vettori of 10 December 1513, «settembre» should again be changed to «novembre». And in the same letter «Die x D octbris 1513» should be emended to «Die x Decembris 1513».

5. Machiavelli's «exile»

There has been much confusion about the terms of Machiavelli's «confinement» or «*relegatio*». Mindful of the classical and twentieth-century literary traditions concerning political exile, modern writers have tended to portray the period after Machiavelli's release from prison as a time of forced, Ovidian (or Nerudian) isolation. Removed from the commerce and friendships of urban life, finding companionship among the rustics at the Albergaccio, Machiavelli gave himself over to his own thoughts and to his writing. To be sure, these ideas correspond more or less with how Machiavelli felt at the time, and sometimes – particularly in the work of a great writer – psychological truth may count for more than the «verità effettuale». Yet the practical aspects of the circumstances in which Machiavelli found himself warrant further investigation and clarification, especially since he describes them himself in some of his letters.

Machiavelli's suffering did not descend all at once, rather it came in a series of moments. After the sack of Prato on 29 August 1512, after the removal of Pier Soderini as Standardbearer for Life, and after the return of the Medici to Florence, Machiavelli remained in his position as Second Chancellor and Secretary to the Ten of Liberty and Peace, although the Nine of the Militia, whose Chancellor he had been, were immediately dismissed. He was able to remain in office until 7 November 1512, when he was fired

⁵¹ See above at note 17.

from his positions as Second Chancellor and Secretary to the Ten⁵². On that same date, the Ten declared that their account with Machiavelli was paid and closed. Interestingly, the Ten said nothing that could be read as critical of Machiavelli or his service. They did not state that he had been fired⁵³. As we shall see, it is possible that he remained on reasonably good terms with the magistracy he had served for so long.

Three days later, on 12 November 1512, the Signoria passed a deliberation that prevented Machiavelli from leaving Florentine territory for one year's time. The *relegatio* to Florentine territory put Machiavelli on a leash, but it did not exile him to a distant place. Machiavelli was able to stay in Florence, and he could come and go as he pleased so long as he remained in the Florentine dominion. Thus, to cite one common misunderstanding, the chronology in Giorgio Inglese's popular Einaudi edition of *The Prince* – possibly compiled by someone other than Inglese – errs when it states that after his release from prison in March 1513 Machiavelli was «confinato all'Albergaccio, a Sant' Andrea in Percussina», and that a «ritorno» took place in February 1514⁵⁴.

The *relegatio* also imposed a penalty of 1000 gold florins should Machiavelli leave the dominion, and it required that he find three guarantors («fideiussores») who pledged to pay the sum if he violated the terms, although it did not require that the sum be placed on deposit, as some have imagined⁵⁵. The three guarantors, each responsible for one third of the amount, were Filippo and Giovanni Machiavelli and Francesco Vettori, who thus had a material interest in his friend's standing and whereabouts.

On 17 November there was a third deliberation of the Signoria concerning Machiavelli by which he was forbidden to enter the Palace of the Signoria for one year's time⁵⁶. Yet already on 27 November there was business that required that Machiavelli meet with the Ten of Liberty and Peace, and the Signoria lifted its ban, possibly to the end of the month⁵⁷. On 4 December the Ten again needed to meet with him, and the Priors voted to allow him to enter and leave the Palace until the terms of the then-sitting Ten had ended⁵⁸.

⁵² The Signoria's deliberation was published in *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXIII.

⁵³ This document, Archivio di Stato di Firenze [henceforth: ASF], *Dieci di Balia, Deliberazioni, condotte e stanziamenti*, 59, fol. 63v, 7 December 1512, has not been published. It reads: «Prefati domini X^m etc. approbaverunt computum et rationes [canc.: habitas] redditus dicto eorum magistratui per Nicolaum domini Bernardi de Machiavellis in omnibus et per omnia prout per Mag.^{cum} dominum Pellegrinum de Lorinis, eorum collegam, firmatum et conclusum est, et propter ea stantiaverunt, etc. Mandantes, etc.».

⁵⁴ N. Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, ed. G. Inglese, Torino 1995 [henceforth: *Il Principe* (Inglese)], p. LXVIII.

⁵⁵ *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXIV: «et quod pro observantiis ... dicte relegationis [Machiavelli] debeat dare [...] fideiussores [...] qui se, [...] sub dicta eadem pena florenorum mille largorum, [...] in forma valida se obligent, quod predictos fines in totum servabit; alias de eorum solvere debeant, ut supra, Communi Florentie quantitatem predictam [...]». R. Devonshire Jones, *Francesco Vettori: Florentine Citizen and Medici Servant*, London 1972, p. 104, believed the large sum was actually deposited.

⁵⁶ *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXIV.

⁵⁷ *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXIV-LXXXV.

⁵⁸ *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXV.

The story of Machiavelli's arrest, torture, imprisonment and release in February and March 1513 has been told many times. Pertinent here is that Machiavelli's release on 12 or 13 March appears to have been unconditional, save that the *relegatio* of the preceding November remained in effect, as did the prohibition on entering the Palace of the Signoria. But soon the latter prohibition on entering the Palace was again temporarily lifted. On 21 March it was raised until 21 April, «pro nonnullis Communi Florentie et sibi necessariis»⁵⁹. Again on 10 July it was deemed necessary («opus est») for Machiavelli to be permitted to enter the Palace until 31 July⁶⁰. The reason for the series of four exemptions from the ban on entering the Palace has never been explained, although, as Ridolfi notes, there were two outstanding financial questions, both involving expenditures that Machiavelli had made on behalf of the Ten in 1512, that were cleared up, respectively, on 10 December 1512 and 28 July 1513⁶¹. Both issues were thus resolved during periods when Machiavelli was permitted to enter the Palace.

These exemptions, which were granted by the Signoria, meant that Machiavelli could be summoned to the Palace for a total of nearly four months, for what seems consistently to have been business with the Ten, for whom he had formerly worked. He was, in effect, «on call», and, in addition to the questions regarding his expenses there may have been other business, perhaps related to the reorganization of the Chancery's business under his successor, Niccolò Michelozzi, that required his availability⁶². To give one example, a deliberation of the Ten, dated 27 August 1513, awarded two of Machiavelli's former *coadiutori* in the Chancery, Ser Luca Fabiani and Ser Giovanni da Poppi, seven gold florins each, for copying into a register «quam plura et plura instrumenta indutiarum et pacum et aliorum pertinentium ad eorum tempora sparsim in pluribus et pluribus membranis descriptorum, ne perirent [...]»⁶³. During Machiavelli's last several years in the Second Chancery he was frequently away on foreign missions and on recruiting trips for the *militia*, and his *coadiutori* were also frequently involved in outside business. Michelozzi's job involved restoring order to an office that had come close to spinning out of control⁶⁴. Whatever the precise reasons for these exemptions, it is reasonable to conclude that even during his so-called «exile» Machiavelli was in contact with the Ten and its chancery staff in the Palace of the Signoria at various times between March and July of 1513.

⁵⁹ *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXV.

⁶⁰ *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXV.

⁶¹ *Opere* (Fanfani), I, p. LXXXII-LXXXII.

⁶² For changes in the Second Chancery in this period, see V. Arrighi and F. Klein, *Aspetti della cancelleria fiorentina tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento, in Istituzioni e società in Toscana nell'età moderna*, Atti delle giornate di studio dedicate a Giuseppe Pansini, Firenze, 4-5 dicembre 1992, 2 vols., Roma 1994, I, p. 148-164 (153-155).

⁶³ ASF, *Dieci di Balia, Deliberazioni, condotte, stanziamimenti*, 60, fols. 47v-48r, 27 August 1513.

⁶⁴ Note the series of crises described by A. Guidi, *Un segretario militante. Politica, diplomazia e armi nel cancelliere Machiavelli*, Bologna 2009, p. 159-386, especially after the creation of the Nine for the Militia.

Just how Machiavelli may have divided his time between Florence and the farm at Sant'Andrea in Percussina is not easy to judge. Machiavelli famously wrote to Vettori on 10 December:

Io mi sto in villa, et poi che seguirno quelli miei ultimi casi, non sono stato, ad accozarli tutti, 20 di a Firenze⁶⁵.

[I am staying at my farm, and since these last misfortunes of mine I have not been in Florence twenty days if they are counted all together].

Yet, as we have seen, the very same letter was signed «In Firenze»⁶⁶.

Machiavelli probably did spend more than the «20 days» in Florence reported in the letter. Of his twelve surviving letters dating from 13 March to 10 December 1513, eleven, including the letter of 10 December, are signed either «In Firenze» or «Florentie». Only the letter of 10 August 1513 is actually signed «in villa»⁶⁷. Of the letters signed from Florence there are two, those of 29 April and 10 December, whose texts nonetheless place Machiavelli at his farm. Since Sant'Andrea was located along the post road to Rome, there was no need for Machiavelli to return to Florence to post his letters to Vettori. In those two instances (29 April and 10 December) he is likely to have returned to Florence for other reasons. In the periods when Machiavelli was permitted to enter the Palace in Florence, 21 March-21 April and 10-31 July, there is nothing that would place Machiavelli at Sant'Andrea, so he is likely to have stayed in Florence, «on call», as previously suggested, for those weeks. What is important is the realization that Machiavelli was not living in forced isolation but instead moving back and forth between Florence and his farm.

Although not strictly in rural solitude, Machiavelli was in all likelihood present at Sant'Andrea for two extended periods in 1513. One of these was in the spring, when the letter of 29 April gives the first indication of his presence of the farm, and two letters in the second half of June signed «Florentie» and «In Firenze», after more than a month of epistolary silence, suggest that he had returned to the city. A second period at Sant'Andrea seems to have lasted from August through to the December letter to Vettori. In a letter to Giovanni Vernacci of 4 August, sent from Florence, Machiavelli reported the death of a newborn – an event that surely added to his misery. Since the letter of 10 August to Vettori (to whom he did not report the death) is signed «in villa»

⁶⁵ *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 193.

⁶⁶ See note 46 above.

⁶⁷ The twelve letters are as follows: NM from Florence to FV, 13 March; NM from Florence to FV, 18 March; NM from Florence to FV, 9 April; NM from Florence to FV, 16 April; NM from Florence (but stating that he is at S. Andrea) to FV, 29 April; NM from Florence to FV, 20 June; NM from Florence to Giovanni Vernacci, 26 June; NM from Florence to Giovanni Vernacci, 4 August; NM from S. Andrea to FV, 10 August; NM from Florence to FV 25 August; NM from Florence to FV, 26 August; NM from Florence (but stating that he is at S. Andrea) to FV, 10 December.

from Sant'Andrea, it seems probable that Machiavelli (perhaps with his recuperating wife) spent most of August there as would have been customary, and that he returned to Florence only briefly at the end of the month, when he sent two letters to Vettori signed «In Firenze» dated 25 and 26 August. From 26 August to 10 December 1513, we have no letters at all of Machiavelli's, and the account given in the 10 December letter indeed suggests that Machiavelli spent those months at his farm. Thus he and his family did not return to the city in September as would have been customary. Although the famous letter to Vettori may have exaggerated somewhat the extent to which Machiavelli was removed from Florence, the letter's overall accounting for his time in these months seems sincere and authentic.

When pondering the circumstances in which Machiavelli composed his treatise, it should also be noted that Sant'Andrea in Percussina was not really the isolated spot it is sometimes imagined as being – or that it is today. The farm, with its *osteria* known as the «Albergaccio», stood close by the Strada Regia Romana. This was the road that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries had gradually displaced the Via Francigena (whose undoing was that it avoided Florence) as the principal route for messengers, pilgrims and merchants traveling between Rome and all of Northern Europe from the Rhine basin westward. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a normal day's journey for a pilgrim would have begun in Florence and ended at San Casciano, which was described by a pilgrim from Douai in 1518 as «a small town, but with good lodgings»⁶⁸. In the 10 December letter San Casciano appears as the «next town over», where Machiavelli imagined that the «cries» of his friends at the Albergaccio could be heard⁶⁹. San Casciano was where Vettori knew Machiavelli could easily get the news of the world⁷⁰.

And even at Sant'Andrea, Machiavelli was able to stay abreast of major events. To be sure, in the mid-fifteenth century a deviation put the Albergaccio somewhat off of the main road, and its function as an overnight inn went into decline, so that by the time of Machiavelli's will of 1522 it appears to have closed⁷¹. Yet in 1513 the tavern (*osteria*) continued to offer a midday meal, and there was a small road that connected the tavern to the Strada Regia. It was at this intersection with the Strada Regia that Machiavelli would talk with travelers. In the letter to Vettori Machiavelli writes that after reading poetry in the late morning:

⁶⁸ *Voyage de Jacques le Saige, de Douai à Rome, Notre-Dame-Lorette, Venise et autres saints lieux*, ed. H.-R. Duthiloeul, Douai 1851, p. 20: «De Flourensse à Saincte Cachenne a huit mille. C'est une petite ville; mais il y a des bons logis...».

⁶⁹ NM to FV, 10 December 1513, in *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 194: «...et siamo sentiti nondimanco gridare da San Casciano».

⁷⁰ FV to NM, 20 August 1513, in *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 169: «et vi dirò come le cose al presente stanno, benché, se voi andate qualche volta, ora che siate in villa, a San Casciano, lo dovete intendere qui vi».

⁷¹ R. Stopani, «Io mi sto in villa ...»: L'Albergaccio del Machiavelli a Sant'Andrea in Percussina, Firenze 1998, p. 47-52.

Transferiscomi poi in su la strada nell'hosteria, parlo con quelli che passono, dimando delle nuove de' paesi loro, intendo varie cose et noto vari gusti et diverse fantasie d'huomini⁷².

[I then move on to the road that leads up to the *osteria*, I speak with the people who pass by, I ask for the news of their countries, I learn various things and take note of the differing tastes and diverse fantasies of men].

Sometimes the word «paesi» has been read as «villages», but in this context it means «countries». Machiavelli was chatting not with villagers (*pae-sani*) of the Val di Pesa, but rather with travelers from foreign lands who were going to and from Rome. Thus Machiavelli's protests to Vettori that he was now uninformed about major events ring true to the extent that Machiavelli was now cut off from diplomatic correspondence. But even at his farm he was able to keep up with the news that was coming from all over Europe.

6. A New Letter from the Ten to Vettori

One of the unanswered questions concerning the Machiavelli-Vettori correspondence involves the silence that followed Machiavelli's letter of 26 August 1513. The correspondence of the two friends had been regular to that point, but after Machiavelli's of 25 August, which requested a favor for Donato del Corno, and a second of 26 August, which replied to Vettori's of 20 August, Vettori stopped writing. With no response to the previous two letters, Machiavelli did not write a third, and meanwhile Vettori remained silent until on 23 November he sent his warm invitation to visit Rome. There are any number of reasons why Vettori may have failed to reply to Machiavelli after 26 August. The two letters sent on 25 and 26 August may have been seen as excessive or asking for more than Vettori could help with. The friends' exchanges concerning France and Spain in previous letters may have run their course. Vettori may have decided to wait for Machiavelli's *relegatio* to end – and to be sure that it ended and that his friend was in the clear – before writing again. A puzzling chancery subscription on a recently discovered letter, sent by the Ten of Balia in Florence to Vettori and dated 12 November 1513, may have a bearing on this latter possibility.

The letter, preserved in the private archive of the Borromeo family on Isola Bella, belonged to the ordinary correspondence of the Ten with Vettori, who was serving as Florentine ambassador to the papal court in Rome⁷³. [See

⁷² NM to FV, 10 December 1513, *Lettore* (Inglese), p. 194.

⁷³ Archivio privato Borromeo di Isola Bella, Acquisizioni diverse, «F», Firenze, Ten of Balia to Francesco Vettori, 10 November 1513. The first published mention appears in P.O. Kristeller, *Iter italicum*, 7 voll., Leiden 1963-2007, VI, p. 14. The letter was brought to my attention by M. Simonetta, *Lettore «in luogo di oraculi». Quattro autografi dispersi di Luigi Pulci e di (e a) Niccolò Machiavelli*, in «Interpres», 21 (2002), p. 291-301 (293n.8), where he mentioned it as follows: «... e un'altra dei Dieci a Francesco Vettori oratore in Roma, attribuita alla mano di Marcello Virgilio Adriani, Ex Palatio Florentino, 12 novembre 1513, pure siglata N. Mach».

Figures 2 and 3]. The letter bears the usual corporate «signature» of the magistracy of the Ten. At bottom, again following ordinary practice, there is a chancery subscription. But the subscription reads «N. Mach(e)l.» – a tag that is hard not to read as standing for «Niccolò Machiavelli». [Figure 4]. On the *verso* [Figure 3] one sees that the letter was sealed before being sent, and that it was marked by Vettori as received. The hand of the letter is not Machiavelli's. This was known in the nineteenth century, when, according to a notice on the *verso*, it was identified (mistakenly) as belonging to the First Chancellor, Marcello Virgilio Adriani⁷⁴. It is highly unlikely that Machiavelli had a role in the physical production of the document, since on 12 November there were still five days remaining in the prohibition against his entering the Palace where the letter was written.

Subscriptions such as the one at the bottom of this letter would normally give the name of Florence's First or Second Chancellor. But the chancellor did not always write his own name. Instead, the *coadiutore* who wrote out the final copy of the letter would generally add the subscription with the Chancellor's name. Alison Brown has shown that a Chancellor's subscription might be used by his staff even when he was away from Florence. Thus the subscription was not a signature but an expression of the Chancellor's official responsibility for the work⁷⁵. What is so odd about the letter in the Borromeo Archive is that while a subscription of «Niccolò Machiavelli» would have been appropriate before 7 November 1512, when Machiavelli was fired, it is highly inappropriate on a letter drawn up the following year. That the Borromeo letter is genuine is beyond doubt. The records of the Ten in the Archivio di Stato di Firenze include both a draft of the 12 November letter preserved in a «minutario» and a copy of the final version, preserved in the magistracy's «copiarario»⁷⁶. Vettori's letters to the Ten are also found in that magistracy's *Responsive*, where his letter of 18 November confirms that he had received theirs of 10 November, which was undoubtedly the Borromeo letter⁷⁷.

Transcription of the 12 November letter reveals a text of little intrinsic interest. [See the full text in the Appendix]. The Ten's opening statement, to

⁷⁴ The notice reads: «Autografo di Marcello Adriani, in nome di Macchiavello [sic]».

⁷⁵ A. Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala, 1430-1497, Chancellor of Florence: The Humanist as Bureaucrat*, Princeton 1979, p. 141 n. 18.

⁷⁶ The version in the «minutario» is in ASF, *Dieci di Balia. Legazioni e commissarie* [henceforth: *DBLC*], 38, fol. 326v (pencil). The version in the «copiarario» is in *DBLC*, 40, fol. 185r (pencil).

⁷⁷ ASF, *Dieci di Balia, Responsive*, 118, fols. 298r-300r, Francesco Vettori to the Ten of Balia, 18 November 1513 (298r): «Mag.ci Domini, etc. Per una mia brieva de' xiiii significai a V.S. come in quella hora partivo et andavo a rincontrare mons.re Gurgense per honorarlo in nome di V.S. come mi era suto ordinato da N.S. Trova' lo a Viterbo, et sono stato in sua compagnia insino a hiersera, ché entrò in Roma a una hora di nocte per riservarsi poi a entrare con ceremonia quando li potrà esser dato el consistorio publico. Tornando, trovai che erano venute da V.S. *tre lettere*, le quali m'erono sute mandate, et non mi havendo rincontro el cavallaro pel cammino, me l'ha questa sera portate indrieto, *le quali sono de' x, xii, et xiii*, et perché N.S. questa sera ha a parlare con Gurgense, che verrà a visitare Sua S.ta secretamente, indugerò a conferire queste lettere a domactina et max.e quella dell'i circa la Carfagnana et scriverò a V.S. subito quello ritrarò...». [Emphasis added].

the effect that although they have nothing important to relate they are writing because good practice requires them to write every few days, situates the letter firmly in Vettori's correspondence of those days. It begins:

Mag.ce Orator etc. Questa fia più per buono uso che per alchuno bisogno che ne occorra, non havendo cosa alchuna da scriverti, né adviso da alchuna banda. Fu l'ultima nostra de' x et l'ultime che habbiamo da te sono de' v, et non havendo dipoi altro da te stimiamo che non habbi havuto che scrivere, come non habbiamo anchor noi. Pure non si vogliono obmettere le buone consuetudini di scrivere spesso, et quando bene non accaggia cosa che importi, scrivere almeno de' 3 o 4 dì una volta, ché serviva questo officio almeno a' privati che scrivono per questa via.

[Magnificent Ambassador etc. This letter is more to keep up with good practice than for any pressing need, since we have nothing to write to you about, nor news from anywhere. Our last was of the 10th and the last we have from you were of the 5th, and since we haven't had any more from you, we imagine you had nothing to write, much like us. But one ought not to omit the good custom of writing frequently, even when there is nothing happening that matters, writing at least once every 3 or 4 days, so that at least this office assists the private persons who send letters in this way].

This may be compared with Vettori's own description of the dull correspondence with the Ten that appears in the letter he wrote just eleven days later to Machiavelli and five days after receiving the letter from the Ten with its puzzling subscription, «N. Mach(e)l.». Vettori wrote to Machiavelli on 23 November:

Scrivo, de' 4 di una volta, una lettera a' Signori X, dico qualche novella stracha et che non rilieva, ché altro non ho che scrivere...⁷⁸

[I write a letter to their Lordships the Ten once every four days. I tell them some tired and unexciting news since I have nothing else to write...]

Perhaps what is most interesting is the reference to certain «private persons» («privati») who used the couriers of the Ten to send their own letters. Possibly Machiavelli used the Ten's couriers for his correspondence with Vettori, which might explain why two of his letters from Sant'Andrea (29 April and 10 December) were signed from Florence⁷⁹.

The letter to Vettori entered the Borromeo archive probably as the result of a purchase by Count Gilberto VI Borromeo (1815-1885), a collector of autograph letters and manuscripts who bought widely on the European market⁸⁰. Already in the nineteenth century it was known that the letter was not an autograph of Machiavelli's, and Count Gilberto could himself have judged this by comparing it with the genuine Machiavelli autographs in his possession⁸¹. The early attribution of the hand to Marcello Virgilio Adriani is best

⁷⁸ FV to NM, 23 November 1513, *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 189-190.

⁷⁹ See note 67 above.

⁸⁰ C.A. Pisoni, *À céléberrime bibliophile conte Gilberto Borroméo...*, in *Capolavori da scoprire. La collezione Borromeo*, a cura di M. Natale, Milano 2006, p. 221-231.

⁸¹ Simonetta, *Lettere* cit., p. 291-301.

explained by the existence of other letters from the Florentine chancery in which this same scribe, working under Adriani, used Adriani's subscription, «Marcellus»⁸². A person who did not understand the difference between a chancery subscription and a signature, and who saw this scribe's hand on a letter subscribed «Marcellus», might easily believe that it was Adriani who wrote out the letter from the Ten to Vettori on 12 November 1513, although that would still not explain the puzzling subscription «N. Mach(e)l.».

The letters Vettori received from Florentine magistracies are preserved in several thick and nearly complete *filze*, now among the archive's *Acquisti e doni*, that were acquired in 1968 from Sotheby's as part of the sale of the Phillips Collection⁸³. Among the letters sent to Vettori by the Ten we find missives dated 8, 9, 10, 14 and 18 November and so forth, from both earlier and later dates⁸⁴. It is reasonable to suppose that the letter of 12 November that ended in the Borromeo Archive was at some point removed from the *filza* that contained the other letters. These hundreds of letters to Vettori form a collection that is otherwise remarkably intact. Since there is little in the content of the 12 November letter that would attract anyone's interest, it seems almost certain that the unusual subscription, «N. Mach(e)l.», was what aroused someone's curiosity and resulted in the letter's separation from the Vettori archive, probably in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century.

A closer look at the other letters Vettori received from the Ten reveals that the «N. Mach(e)l.» on the Borromeo letter differs only slightly from what would have been the appropriate chancery subscription. When this same scribe inserted the subscription for Machiavelli's successor as Secretary of the Ten, Niccolò Michelozzi, the subscription was nearly identical but rendered as «N. Mich(e)l.». [See Figures 5-7, and compare Figure 4]⁸⁵. In its abbreviated form, Michelozzi's name was obviously similar to Machiavelli's. Comparison with three of this scribe's Michelozzi subscriptions reveals that all that the scribe did was to fail to dot the «i», and then, at a subsequent moment, he returned his quill to connect the two stems of the «i» at bottom, thus forming an irregular, but unmistakeable «a». Since the third stroke of the «a» did not belong to the natural flow of the subscription, the «a» would appear to be intentional, rather than an accidental turn of the quill pen.

⁸² See, for an example of the same chancery hand, BNCF, *Carte Machiavelliane*, III, n. 76, Ten of Liberty and Balia to NM, 13 October 1502, with the subscription «Marcellus». The letter is published in *Opere* (Vivanti), II, p. 647-648.

⁸³ ASF, *Acquisti e doni* [henceforth: AD], 352-358. Vanna Arrighi kindly supplied this information.

⁸⁴ ASF, AD, 353, c. 159r (8 November 1513), c. 161r (9 November 1513), c. 163r-v (10 November 1513), c. 165r (14 November 1513), c. 169r (18 November 1513).

⁸⁵ ASF, AD, 353, c. 48r, Ten to FV, 7 February 1513/4; c. 51r, Ten to FV, 8 February 1513/4; c. 80r, Ten to FV, 11 March 1513/4. The hypothesis, somewhat farfetched, that the Borromeo letter may have been stolen and tampered with to be made to look like a Machiavelli autograph is all the more unlikely given that these subscriptions, which could have been similarly altered, too, were not separated from the original *filza*.

The difference between a scribe's «i» and an «a», appearing in a single letter, is so small that it might hardly seem worth the trouble of examining. It could have resulted from a psychological, if not a mechanical slip. Possibly it was a small act of rebellion against Michelozzi, the scribe's new boss, who was imposing a rigor in record-keeping evident in the very text of the letter to Vettori, with its emphasis on «good practice». Michelozzi himself had written the draft, preserved in the «minutario», from which this scribe copied out the Borromeo letter⁸⁶.

But we know from other Renaissance contexts that even the slightest marks in chancery letters could be ways of sending messages⁸⁷. Machiavelli was moreover still a person who had come under official suspicion. In his letter of 10 December he feared that if he met the Soderini in Rome, when he returned to Florence he would go straight to prison, «perché... questo stato... è nuovo, e per questo sospettoso»⁸⁸.

What makes the subscription to the Borromeo letter so especially interesting are three factors: (1) The letter's recipient was Machiavelli's friend and patron, Francesco Vettori. (2) The letter was produced in the very chancery office that Machiavelli had directed for 14 years. (3) The date, 12 November 1513, was only two days after the completion of Machiavelli's *relegatio*. Perhaps – just perhaps – the subscription altered to «N. Mach(e)l.» represented a way for one of Machiavelli's chancery friends to confirm to Vettori in Rome that the confinement had ended uneventfully. Machiavelli was in official good standing and able to leave the dominion from 10 November. We know that Vettori received the letter from the Ten with its curious subscription on 18 November⁸⁹. On 23 November Vettori, who had been out of touch with Machiavelli since August, at last sent his friend a long, warm letter, inviting him to visit him in Rome. And, on 10 December 1513, Machiavelli replied with his famous letter. That letter's opening words, «Tarde non furon mai grazie divine» [Divine favors were never late], are a comment not so much on the completion of the *relegatio* (which occurred one month earlier), but on the arrival of Vettori's letter and invitation after more than three months of silence.

7. Machiavelli's coadiutori: Antonio and Girolamo della Valle and Luca Fabiani

The identity of the scribe who wrote the Borromeo letter is thus of some interest. To identify him required compiling a series of autographs of each of the six *coadiutori* serving the Ten of Balìa in the autumn of 1513⁹⁰. It turns out

⁸⁶ ASF, *DBLC*, 38, fol. 326v (pencil), in Michelozzi's hand.

⁸⁷ V. Ilardi, *Crosses and Carets: Renaissance Patronage and Coded Letters of Recommendation*, in «American Historical Review», 92 (1987), p. 1127-1149.

⁸⁸ NM to FV, 10 December 1510, in *Opere* (Vivanti), II, p. 296.

⁸⁹ See note 77 above.

⁹⁰ I am delighted to acknowledge the assistance of Francesca Klein of the Archivio di Stato di Firenze.

that he was not one of the friends in the chancery who are better known from Machiavelli's correspondence. He was not Agostino Vespucci or Giovanni da Poppi⁹¹.

Nor was the scribe of the Borromeo letter the same as the person who wrote a letter to Machiavelli about which there has been much speculation, signed «compater vester» and dated 29 August 1510⁹². Ridolfi once hypothesized that this was Marcello Virgilio Adriani or Pier Soderini⁹³. Bertelli preferred to describe it as a letter from an unknown friend in the chancery⁹⁴. In the first part of the letter the writer tells Machiavelli (away on an embassy in France) about his family:

Carissimo Nicolò. Questi di cancelleria non hanno paura d'una penna, ma l'arebbono bene d'uno remo. E se non ti hanno raguagliato del termine in che si trouono tutte le cose tue, è stato perché non nessuno vuole fare quello che non se li apartiene. Mogliata è qui, et è viva; e' figliuoli vanno al lor piede; della casa non si è visto il fine et al Percussino sarà magra vendemmia. E questo è dove tu ti trovi⁹⁵...

[Dearest Nicolò. These scribes in the chancery are not afraid of a pen, but they would certainly be afraid of an «oar»⁹⁶. If they have not told you about all your affairs, it is because no one wants to do what is not his work. Your wife is here and alive. Your children are walking on their own, your house is not yet finished, and there will be a poor harvest at Percussina...]

The second part of the letter discusses political matters (hence Ridolfi's suggestion that the writer might have been Soderini) and the political section is in cipher. A comparison of this hand with the hands of the chancery *coadiutori* in 1513 reveals that the scribe was a young man who in 1510 was not yet employed in the chancery but who would soon have a job there. The scribe of the «compater vester» letter was Girolamo della Valle, the son of the long-time chancery *coadiutore* Antonio della Valle⁹⁷. The sender, which is to say the «compater» of the signature, must have been Girolamo's father, Antonio, who would have dictated the letter to his son. Antonio della Valle had been in the Florentine chancery since the 1480s, where he was a protégé of Bartolomeo Scala and thus one of the «new men» whom Scala promoted in Florentine society⁹⁸. Della Valle had worked closely with Machiavelli for many years, and he is mentioned frequently in Machiavelli's letters. When Antonio died in 1511, his son Girolamo

⁹¹ On Machiavelli's friendship with Vespucci, see J. M. Najemy, *The Controversy Surrounding Machiavelli's Service to the Republic*, in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. G. Bock, Q. Skinner, M. Viroli, Cambridge 1990, p. 101-117 (112, 114-5). On Giovanni da Poppi, see Guidi, *Un segretario cit.*, p. 145, 345-347; and Arrighi and Klein, *Aspetti cit.*, p. 154.

⁹² The original is in BNCF, *Nuovi acquisti*, 1004, fol. 66r. See also *Lettere* (Gaeta 1984), p. 339-340; *Opere* (Vivanti), II, p. 219-220.

⁹³ R. Ridolfi, *Le carte cit.*, p. 9 n. 19.

⁹⁴ Bertelli, *Appunti cit.*, p. 549: «un amico di Cancelleria».

⁹⁵ *Opere* (Vivanti), II, p. 219.

⁹⁶ Of being sentenced to row in a galley.

⁹⁷ For Girolamo della Valle's hand, see ASF, *Notarile antecosimiano* [henceforth: NA], 9869.

⁹⁸ Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala cit.*, p. 205 et passim; V. Arrighi, *Della Valle, Antonio*, in *Dizionario biografico degli italiani*, Roma 1961-, XXXVII, p. 724-726.

was hired in his place one week later, presumably on Machiavelli's recommendation⁹⁹. It is likely that Antonio either dictated the letter to his son, or that he provided him with a draft so that he could make a fair copy, including the large section in cipher. It was a way of preparing Girolamo for chancery work and of demonstrating to Machiavelli how the young man could be put to use.

But the scribe whose hand appears on the letter from the Ten to Vettori of 12 November 1513 was *not* Girolamo della Valle, even though this same Della Valle was, for instance, the scribe who copied the letter from the Ten to Vettori that immediately preceded the Borromeo letter and was sent from Florence on 10 November 1513¹⁰⁰. The copyist of the letter to Vettori of 12 November was instead a longtime *coadiutore* of the Ten named Luca Fabiani¹⁰¹.

Like the older Antonio della Valle, Ser Luca Fabiani had been brought into the chancery under the auspices of Bartolomeo Scala¹⁰². Originally from the town of Montegonzi, near Montevarchi, Fabiani had worked from his youth as one of the principal copyists of Marsilio Ficino, in whose house he lived down to the latter's death. Fabiani was recorded affectionately in Ficino's testament¹⁰³, and so closely was he associated with him that he used the surname «de Ficinis» or «Fecino», although there is no firm evidence of kinship with the Ficino family¹⁰⁴. Among the chancery's *coadiutori* Fabiani gives the impression of being an especially efficient a copyist. Thus, on 20 October 1500, in a letter from Agostino Vespucci to Machiavelli, there is a humorous passage about some troubles that Fabiani had been having, but Vespucci concludes with high praise: «Scis etenim ipse quantopere fide et taciturnitate valeat, quantumve in scribendo velociter et concinne literarum characteres exprimat...»¹⁰⁵. [You know yourself his trustworthiness and tact, and how quickly and elegantly he makes his letters. On 22 November 1511, Ser Luca was one of the chancery scribes who witnessed Machiavelli's testament.]

Fabiani has so far attracted little attention from historians of the chancery, but he fits splendidly the pattern described by Robert Black, whereby non-Florentine citizens from the dominion, who had strong humanistic skills and background but little interest in factional politics, became dominant in the chancery in the second half of the fifteenth century¹⁰⁶. It is not

⁹⁹ Arrighi, *Della Valle* cit., p. 724-726.

¹⁰⁰ ASF, AD, 353, fol. 163r-v.

¹⁰¹ For autographs of Fabiani's, see ASF, NA, 21350, no. 23, 2 September 1516; and the illustration in P.O. Kristeller, *Studies in Renaissance Thought and Letters*, 4 vols., Roma 1956-1996, III, plate XVI.

¹⁰² Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala* cit., p. 189, 297n.

¹⁰³ P.O. Kristeller, *Supplementum Ficinianum*, 2 vols. Firenze 1937, II, p. 195-196.

¹⁰⁴ For his career and biographical information, see S. Gentile, *Note sullo «scrittorio» di Marsilio Ficino*, in *Supplementum Festivum: Studies in Honor of Paul Oskar Kristeller*, ed. J. Hankins, J. Monfasani, F. Purnell, Jr., Binghamton 1987, p. 33-397 (361-397). «Fabiano» was the name of Luca's father, and it appears from recent research that the name of the family in Montegonzi was «Capuccioni».

¹⁰⁵ Agostino Vespucci to NM, 30 October 1500, in *Opere* (Vivanti), II, p. 30.

¹⁰⁶ R. Black, *Machiavelli, Servant of the Florentine Republic*, in *Machiavelli and Republicanism* cit., p. 71-99.

known that Fabiani had any special reason for sending Vettori a message about the completion of the term of Machiavelli's *relegatio*. All that can be said is that he had worked under Machiavelli for many years and undoubtedly knew him quite well. By 1513 he was probably the oldest of the Ten's *coadiutori*. As we have already seen, in 1513 he was one of two chancery scribes charged with compiling a register of the Republic's treaties and agreements¹⁰⁷. Certainly he had the experience and the skill to manage something like the discreet changing of an «i» to an «a» in a way that was barely noticeable.

Yet it need not have been the case that Fabiani acted on his own initiative. We have already noticed the letter's reference to «private persons» («privati») who made use of the Ten's couriers for their correspondence. The passage may well have been an oblique way of referring to none other than Machiavelli, who would have been one of these «privati». And if that was what was intended, then it matters that the letter, which in its draft form in the chancery «minutario» already included the phrase about «privati», was composed not by Fabiani, but by his boss, who was none other than Niccolò Michelozzi. (See above at note 86). There is no evidence of hard feelings between Machiavelli and Michelozzi. Machiavelli's letter to Vettori of 19 December 1513, written only shortly afterward, mentions Michelozzi in a way that indicates possible familiarity. Perhaps Machiavelli's friends in the chancery of the Ten were trying to do him a favor by encouraging Vettori to write.

8. Ovid as a «minor poet»

One final puzzle in the series of puzzles addressed by this study concerns Machiavelli's mention of the poets that he liked to read during his mornings at Sant'Andrea. Machiavelli writes:

Partitomi del bosco, io me ne vo a una fonte, et di qui in un mio uccellare. Ho un libro sotto, o Dante o Petrarca, o un di questi poeti minori, come Tibullo, Ovidio et simili: leggo quelle loro amorose passioni et quelli loro amori, ricordomi de' mia, godomi un pezzo in questo pensiero¹⁰⁸.

[When I have left the wood, I go out to a spring, and from there to a birding site of mine. I have a book under my cloak, either Dante or Petrarch, or one of these minor poets: Tibullus and Ovid and ones like them. I read of those amorous passions of theirs and of their loves, I remember my own, and I delight for a while in these thoughts].

The passage is memorable for what it tells us about Machiavelli's taste in poetry, and also for what it does not tell us. The invocation of Dante anticipates the quotation from *Paradiso* that will appear a few sentences later: «ché non fa scienza sanza lo ritener lo aver inteso». The mention of Petrarch looks back to the letter's opening line from the *Triumph of Eternity*: «Tarde non furno mai gracie divine». A possible distinction between «quelle loro

¹⁰⁷ See above at note 63.

¹⁰⁸ *Lettere* (Inglese), p. 194.

amorous passioni» and «quelli loro amori» suggests differentiation between the idealized «loves» of Dante and Petrarch for Beatrice and Laura and the «amorous» trysts and romantic adventures and misadventures of Tibullus and Ovid. The passage seems finely phrased – but for the odd characterization of Ovid as a «minor» poet. Tibullus has always been considered a minor poet, of course, but not Ovid. In the Middle Ages Ovid's reputation was second only to Virgil's. Dante includes Ovid along with the greatest pagan poets – Homer, Horace, and Lucan in Canto IV of the *Inferno*. What Machiavelli does not tell us is why he considered Ovid, one of the poets cited most often in his writings, to be «minor».

Examination of the late fifteenth and sixteenth-century printed editions might be thought to offer a clue. Perhaps Ovid was “minor” only in the sense that volumes of his poetry tended to be smaller in size? But in fact this leads nowhere, since Ovid was published in folio and quarto volumes and the range of formats was no different from those in which Dante and Petrarch were published. John Najemy offers no firm solution, but he points out that Ovid's place in the curriculum declined somewhat during the Renaissance. He also notes that Ovid's poetry was included in the elementary schoolbooks of the young (of *minores*)¹⁰⁹.

Probably a path to the answer is to be found in Machiavelli's unusual placement of Tibullus before Ovid. Machiavelli is suggesting that the Ovid who is «minore» is the Ovid whose verse is most like that of Tibullus. In other words, when Ovid wrote erotic verse that can be compared to Tibullus' compositions he was writing verse that was «minore», that, in the context of the 1513 letter, was lesser than the *volgare* poetry of Dante and Petrarch. What Machiavelli clearly has in mind of Ovid's are his *Amores* and especially the *Ars amatoria*.

Knowing that Machiavelli was reading Tibullus and Ovid at the time he was writing *The Prince*, it is perhaps worth thinking about ways in which these poets may have influenced that work. The passage on «Fortuna» at the end of Chapter 25 comes immediately to mind. There Machiavelli writes:

Io iudico bene questo, che sia meglio essere impetuoso che rispettivo, perché la Fortuna è donna, e è necessario, volendola tenere sotto, batterla e urtarla; e si vede che la si lascia più vincere da questi che da quelli che freddamente procedano e però sempre, come donna, è amica de' giovani, perché sono meno rispettivi, più feroci e con più audacia li comandano¹¹⁰.

[Yet, I judge the following: that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, for Fortune is a lady, and it is necessary, if one wants get on top of her, to beat her and to dash her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by these men than by those who proceed coldly. For this reason, as a lady, she is always the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and the they command her with more audacity].

¹⁰⁹ Najemy, *Between Friends*, p. 231-232 n. 24.

¹¹⁰ *Il Principe* (Martelli), p. 310 (25.26-27).

Scholars commenting on this passage have inevitably turned to the long literary tradition, dating back to the Greeks, that treated Fortune as temperamental woman who could be charmed or seduced¹¹¹. Already in a marginal note to the Ghiribizzi of 1506 Machiavelli advised, «Tentare la Fortuna, che la è amica de' giovani...» [Test Fortune, since she is a friend to the young...]. Commenting on Chapter 25 of *The Prince*, Inglese cites Cicero to the effect that the maxim «fortes Fortuna adiuvat» was already ancient in the orator's day¹¹². Martelli thinks that Machiavelli adheres to the proverbial «Audaces Fortuna iuvat»¹¹³. Yet there is a violent eroticism in Machiavelli's discussion of Fortuna that these scholars overlook. Machiavelli takes up the traditional proverb, to be sure, but he gives it a very hard twist.

Remarkably, there are two passages in the «minor poets» that Machiavelli was reading at Sant'Andrea in Percussina that illuminate what Machiavelli was doing with the image of Fortune in Chapter 25 of *The Prince*.

Thus Tibullus (1.2.15-17) adapts the traditional proverb, «fortes Fortuna adiuvat», so that it is not Fortune but *Venus*, the goddess of erotic love, who aids the strong and favors the young:

audendum est: fortis adiuvat ipsa Venus.
illa favet seu quis iuvenis nova limina temptat
 seu reserat fixa dente puella fores¹¹⁴.

[Be bold! Venus herself aids the strong. She helps whenever a young man crosses a new threshold, or a girl lifts back the bar on her door].

Meanwhile Ovid, in the *Ars amatoria* (1.665-666,669-670,673-678), offered Machiavelli a strong description of the use of violence in love, and how force wins over the beloved:

Pugnabit primo fortassis, et «improbe» dicet:
 Pugnando vinci se tamen illa volet.
 ...
Oscula qui sumpsit, si non et cetera sumet,
 Haec quoque, quae data sunt, perdere dignus erit.
 ...
Vim licet appelles: grata est vis ista pueris:
 Quod iuvat, invitae saepe dedisse volunt.
Quaecumque est veneris subita violata rapina,
 Gaudet, et improbitas numeris instar habet.
At quae cum posset cogi, non tacta necessit,
 Ut simulet vultu gaudia, tristis erit¹¹⁵.

¹¹¹ H.R. Patch, *The Goddess Fortuna in Mediaeval Literature*, Cambridge Mass. 1987.

¹¹² *Il Principe* (Inglese), p. 167 note.

¹¹³ *Il Principe* (Martelli), p. 310 n. 56.

¹¹⁴ Tibullus, 1.2.15-17, in *Catullus, Tibullus, Pervigilium Veneris*, ed. G.P. Goold, Cambridge Mass. 1988², p. 198. See also P. Lee-Stecum, *Powerplay in Tibullus: Reading «Elegies» Book One*, Cambridge 1998, p. 72-86.

¹¹⁵ Publius Ovidius Naso, *Ars amatoria*, 1. 665-666, 669-670, 673-678, in Ovid, *The Art of Love and Other Poems*, ed. G.P. Goold, Cambridge Mass. 1979², p. 58.

[Perhaps she will struggle at first, and cry, «You degenerate!». But she will wish to be beaten in the struggle. ... He who has taken kisses, if he does not take the rest, will deserve to lose even the kisses that were given. ... You may use force; women like you to use it; they often wish to give unwillingly what they like to give. She whom a sudden assault has taken by storm is pleased, and counts the audacity as a compliment. But she who, when she might have been compelled, departs untouched, though her looks feign joy, will yet be sad].

In the famous passage concerning Fortune at the end of Chapter 25 of *The Prince* Machiavelli has performed something quite revolutionary by grafting the erotic energy he found in these minor poets onto the far more traditional theme of Fortune as a woman who is changeable.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to conclude this study of a series of problems in the letter of 10 December 1513 by proposing that Machiavelli's pointed mention of Tibullus and Ovid in his letter to Vettori provides a reasonably secure indication that by that date he had already composed his Chapter 25 on the problem of Fortuna. Thus by 10 December 1513 it seems likely that *The Prince* comprised not only chapters 1-11, as Meinecke once argued, but also chapters 15-19 on the moral qualities of the prince, as already suggested above¹¹⁶, and, finally, Chapter 25, which indeed might have been thought – at one stage in the process of composition – a suitable, and powerful conclusion to Machiavelli's famous treatise *De principatibus*.

Much work remains to be done on Machiavelli's *carteggio*, including the famous letter to Vettori. The foregoing study suggests that many of the texts of Machiavelli's letters that we have had are of better quality than scholars have imagined. Detailed study of the letters' contents and context has revealed much new information about Machiavelli and his circumstances in 1513. It suggests that the correspondence may yet have a great deal more to tell us about Machiavelli and the composition of his major works.

¹¹⁶ See above at note 35.

Appendix

Archivio privato Borromeo di Isola Bella, Acquisizioni diverse, «F», Firenze,
Ten of Balia to Francesco Vettori, 12 November 1513.

[*Recto:*]

[*Hand of Luca Fabiani :*]

Mag.ce Orator etc. Questa fia più per buono uso che per alchuno bisogno
che ne occorra, non havendo cosa alchuna da scriverti, né adviso da alchuna
banda. Fu l'ultima nostra de' x et l'ultime che habbiamo da te sono de' v, et
non havendo dipoi altro da te stimiamo che non habbi havuto che scrivere,
come non habbiamo anchor noi. Pure non si vogliono obmettere le buone
consuetudini di scrivere spesso, et quando bene non accaggia cosa che importi,
scrivere almeno de' 3 o 4 dì una volta, che serviva questo offitio almeno a'
privati che scrivono per questa via. Ultimamente ti si scripse il rumore che ne
era capitato alli orecchi delle cose de Carfagnana. Harai havuto la lettera et
factone la diligentia che ti si commisse et che merita la cosa & advisatone.

Per via di Ferrara s'intende che lo exercito spagnuolo viene nel Pulesine
di Rovigo in luogo di andare in Trevisana o Fruoli, & per esser più vicino a
Ferrara sene doverra intendere più spesso advisi.

La Santità di N.S. doverrà esser tornato di verso Civitavecchia & la ricre-
atione & l'aria doverrà haverli giovato. Advisane di questo & d'ogn'altra cosa.

Bene vale. Ex Palatio Florentino. Die xij Novembris MDXiij.

Decemviri}

Balię} Rei p[ubli]cę Florentinę.

N. Mach(e)l.

[*Verso:*]

[*Hand of Luca Fabiani:*]

[Orato]ri Florentino apud

Pont[ificem]. Francisco [de Victorij]

Concivi nostro Char.mo.

Rome.

[*Hand of Francesco Vettori:*]

Die xij novembris.

[*Unknown nineteenth-century hand:*]

Autografo di Marcello Adriani, in nome di Macchiavello.

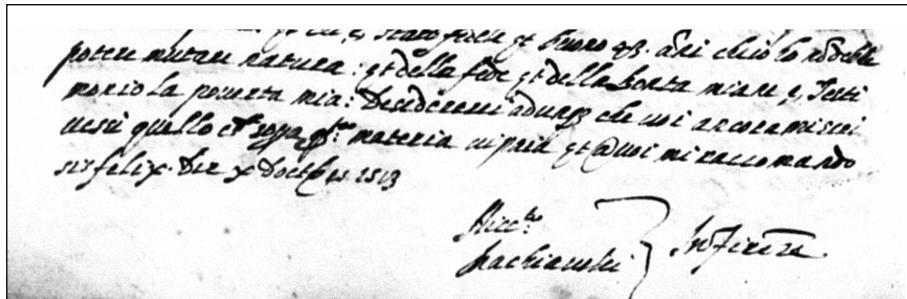


Figure 1. The signature on the copy of Machiavelli's letter to Francesco Vettori, 10 December 1513, preserved in the *Apografo Ricci*, Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Firenze, Ms. Palatino, E.B.15.10, fol. 151v: « ... Die x D octbris 1513. Niccolò Machiavelli. In Firenze ». [Photograph reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali].

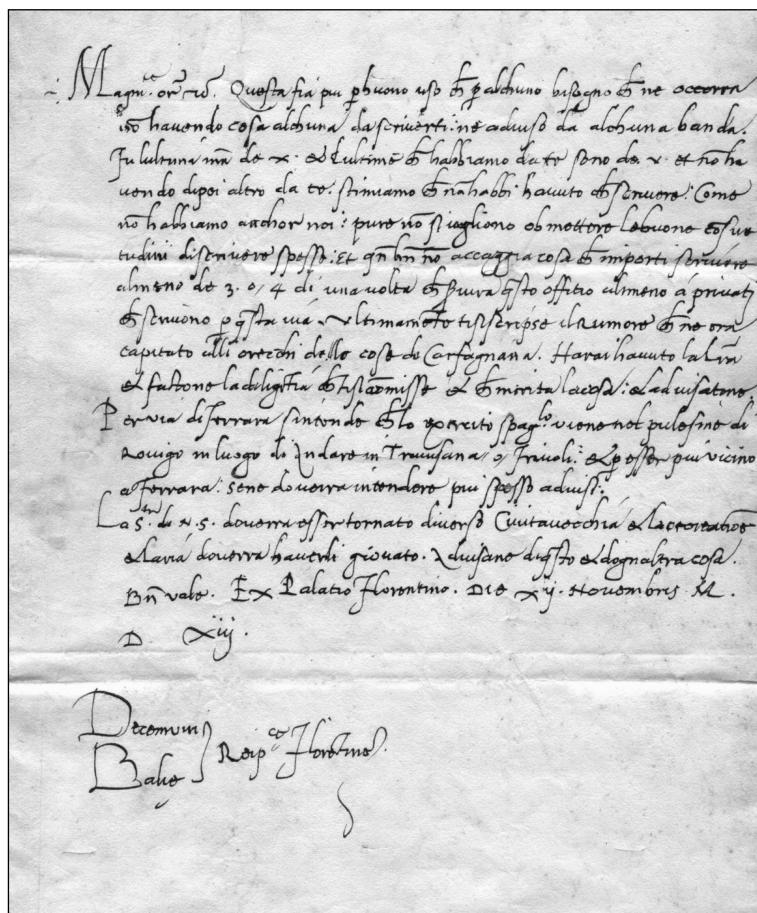


Figure 2. Archivio Borromeo di Isola Bella, Acquisizioni diverse, «F», Firenze, Letter of the Ten of Balia to Francesco Vettori in Rome, 12 November 1513, recto. Hand of Luca Fabiani. [Photograph reproduced by permission of the Principi Borromeo-Arese].

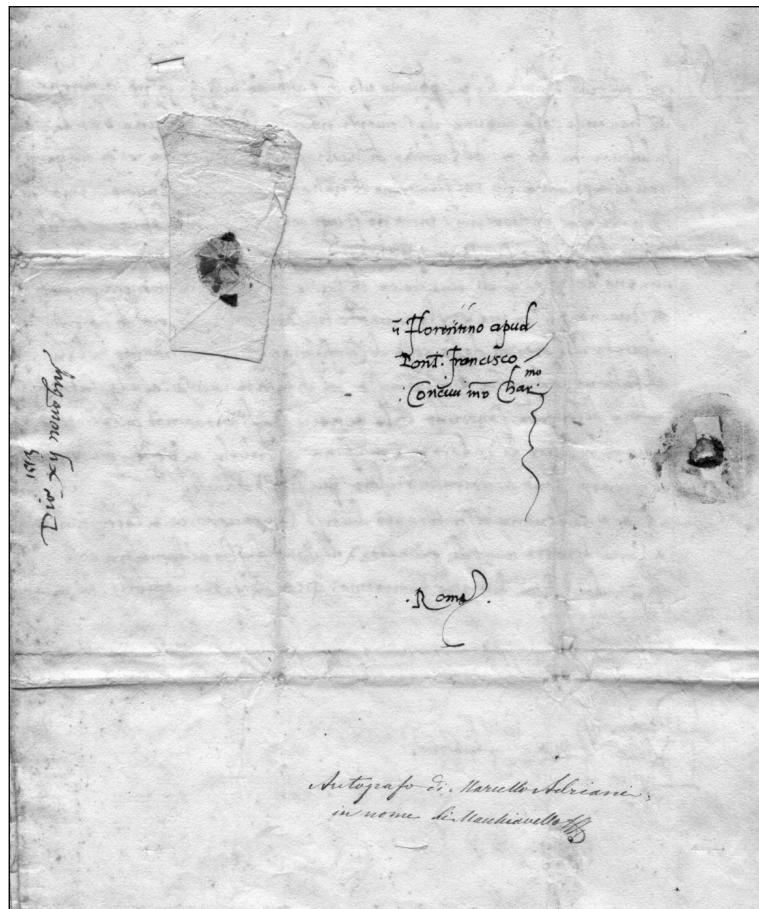


Figure 3. Verso of Figure 2.

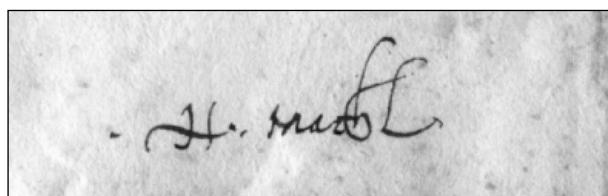


Figure 4. Detail of Figure 2. Subscription: «N. Mach(e)l». Hand of Luca Fabiani.

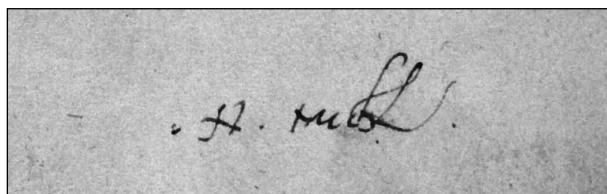


Figure 5. Subscription of Niccolò Michelozzi: «N. Mich(e)l.». Letter of the Ten of Balia to Francesco Vettori, 7 February 1513/4, in ASF, *Acquisti e doni*, 353, fol. 48r. Hand of Luca Fabiani. [Photograph reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali].

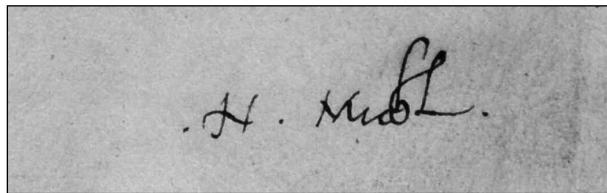


Figure 6. Subscription of Niccolò Michelozzi. Letter of the Ten to Vettori of 8 February 1513/4, ASF, *Acquisti e doni*, 353, fol. 51r. Hand of Luca Fabiani. [Photograph reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali].

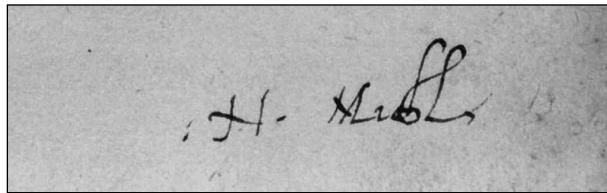


Figure 7. Subscription of Niccolò Michelozzi. Letter of the Ten to Vettori of 11 March 1513/4, ASF, *Acquisti e doni*, 353, fol. 80r. Hand of Luca Fabiani. [Photograph reproduced by permission of the Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali].