

## ARTICLE

# A WAR OF ONE'S OWN: MERCENARIES AND THE THEME OF *ARMA ALIENA* IN MACHIAVELLI'S *IL PRINCIPE*

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### I. INTRODUCTION

Treatments of the status of mercenary arms in Machiavelli typically concentrate on Machiavelli's discussions of the theme of the 'arms of others' in Chapters XII and XIII of the *Principe*, headed respectively: '*Quot sint genera militiae et de mercenariis militibus*' and '*De militibus auxiliariis mixtis et propriis*.' Generally, they place special importance on the exaggerated disdain Machiavelli voices for mercenary arms,<sup>1</sup> sometimes entirely passing

<sup>1</sup>Interestingly, those who write on the current market for force and the industry of military contracting that has emerged since the end of the Cold War clearly recognize the similarities between the Renaissance market for condottieri and the post-Cold War expansion in markets for force. Their studies begin with analyses of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and always include careful readings of Machiavelli's critique of mercenary forces. For instance, in one of the finest studies on the subject, Deborah Avant, *The Market for Force*, clearly parallels the periods when she states: 'The corporate form, relative openness, acceptance, and transnational spread of today's security industry bear many similarities to the late Middle Ages and early Modern period.' However, though these researchers also recognize and take their bearings from Machiavelli's analyses of mercenaries and the dynamics of the privately contracted market for force in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries they, too, adopt the traditional reading of Machiavelli's analyses of mercenary forces; as Avant states: 'Machiavelli's disdain for the unreliability of the condottieri should prevent too rosy a reading of the Italian mercenaries . . .' [1, 249]. However, unlike the majority of commentators who simply dismiss Machiavelli's contempt for the condottieri, Avant recognizes the potency of Machiavelli's analysis of the Italian mercenary but she fails to perceive the nuances of Machiavelli's treatment that make Machiavelli's *synoptic* assessment of the Italian industry in condottieri very close to her conclusions concerning the current market for force. Thus, it is a powerful experience to read Avant's work together with the fine work of Daniel Waley, 'The Army of the Florentine Republic from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century', which details the emergence of this Renaissance market in force, tracing the evolving dependence of the Florentines on mercenary forces in the period from 1250 to 1350; Waley, too, though fails to perceive the subtleties of Machiavelli's treatment of the Florentine involvement with mercenaries. See also, Eliot Cohen, 'A Revolution in Warfare', P. W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors*, 22–6, and C. C. Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, especially Chapter 1.

over the related issue of auxiliaries,<sup>2</sup> and sometimes grouping this issue together with Machiavelli's treatment of mercenaries as constituting essentially the same issue – *the arms of others*. Further, though the importance of this distinction between one's own arms and the arms of others in Machiavelli is nearly universally recognized by commentators, the distinction receives unequal treatment. Commentators tend to place great emphasis on the theme and implications of 'having one's own arms' while either adopting Machiavelli's criticism of mercenary and auxiliary arms verbatim or simply passing over this related issue. As a result, no sustained analyses of Machiavelli's reasoning on the arms of 'others' have appeared.<sup>3</sup> Thus, a real gap exists in the tradition of commentary on Machiavelli's works, since most commentators do not consider the subject of mercenary

<sup>2</sup>Auxiliary arms are essentially soldiers loaned to some prince or Republic by another prince or Republic. Machiavelli describes them as being 'more dangerous' than mercenary soldiers: '*In somma, nelle mercenarie è più pericolosa la ignavia, nelle ausiliare, la virtù.*' See *Il Principe*, ch. XIII.

<sup>3</sup>Most commentators concentrate on the apparently single-minded importance the militia project had for Machiavelli, seeing his critique of the employment of mercenaries entirely within that light. Typical in this regard is the assessment given by Michael Mallett in his essay, 'The Theory and Practice of Warfare' in *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, 173–80. In this essay Mallett argues that Machiavelli is important not for his practical ideas about war but for his 'concern to re-create the links between the civilian and military spheres, to draw the military world of war back into the heart of political and civic life, to use military training to encourage civic virtue and patriotism'. The focus of Mallett's essay concentrates on Machiavelli's focus on the development of a Florentine militia. For Mallett the problem of the condottieri is that their presence weakens citizens. Therefore, in order to counter their influence, the condottieri need to be made objects of ridicule. Machiavelli's critique of mercenary arms makes that objective its aim. For other commentators who assess Machiavelli's critique of the condottieri similarly see also Althusser, *Machiavelli and Us*, 84–6; Feld, 'Machiavelli's Militia and Machiavelli's Mercenaries', in *The Military, Militarism, and the Polity*, 79–92; Fontana, *Hegemony & Power*, 137; Dotti, *La fenomenologia del potere*, 70–3; Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 131 and 163, and 'Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War', in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 12–13; Hulliung, *Citizen Machiavelli*, 39–40 and 93–4; Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 200–4; Prezzolini, *Machiavelli*, 39–42 and 125–6; Skinner *Machiavelli*, 31–4, 75–7 and *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, chs 4 and 5; Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 63–4; Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes*, 27–8, 198–9 nn22–4; Taylor, *The Art of War in Italy, 1494–1529*, 167–77; Vatter, *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom*, 111; Waley, 'The Army of the Florentine Republic from the Twelfth to the Fourteenth Century', in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 108. Each of these commentators emphasizes Machiavelli's negative assessment of the condottieri. Commentators who do recognize Machiavelli's nuanced treatment of the condottieri are Lefort, *Le travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel*, 562–3; Mansfield *Machiavelli's Virtue*, esp. 266–7, and Mockler, *The Mercenaries*, 47–53. We must include with these the treatments of the condottieri by Jacob Burckhardt and C. C. Bayley. Jacob Burckhardt in his, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, uses the condottieri for some of his principal examples when he shows 'by what steps the art of war assumed the character of a product of reflection'. For Burckhardt the condottieri were 'the highest and most admired form of illegitimacy in the fifteenth century' (c.f. esp. 11–15 and 53) C. C. Bayley, though reading Machiavelli's critique of the condottiere as essentially a call for a return to the militia project, provides a thorough and revealing account of the political and military reasons behind the increasing Florentine reliance on the *forestieri*; see, especially, Chapters I, II and V.

arms important enough to merit systematic reflection,<sup>4</sup> and yet, a deeper understanding of this topic is clearly important for texts like the *Principe* and the *Discorsi*, addressed as they are to 'potential princes'.<sup>5</sup> Given the crucial role that gaining arms of 'one's own' plays for Machiavelli in transforming the potential into an actual prince, the use of mercenary or auxiliary arms would clearly constitute a necessary and logical first stage for many potential princes in that process.<sup>6</sup> Added to this, the only text published by Machiavelli during his lifetime, the *Arte della guerra*, contains sustained discussions of the efficacy of mercenary arms and is, in fact, staged

<sup>4</sup>Quentin Skinner in his *Machiavelli* addresses the subject of mercenaries in the *Principe* in a way different than most commentators. He states here that Machiavelli's attack on the mercenary system of his day was less an attack on that system than a critique of the failings of Florentine diplomacy. As Skinner states:

[Machiavelli] may have been thinking in particular about the misfortunes of his native city, which undoubtedly suffered a series of humiliations at the hands of its mercenary commanders in the course of the protracted war against Pisa. Not only was the campaign of 1500 a complete disaster, but a similar fiasco resulted when Florence launched a fresh offensive in 1505: the Captains of 10 mercenary companies mutinied as soon as the assault began, and within a week it had to be abandoned.

(*Machiavelli*, 32; see also 'The Idea of Negative Liberty; Philosophical and Historical Perspectives,' in *Philosophy in History*, 209–10)

Certainly, Florentine politics during the latter half of the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries showed a marked reliance on mercenary forces, and these campaigns sometimes ended in success and sometimes in failure. That these troops showed success on the battlefield and were a force for expelling foreign forces when they first showed themselves, even Machiavelli acknowledges in many places throughout his works; but, as we shall see, their success or failure in the campaigns that mercenary captains fought between one another was not the central issue for Machiavelli.

<sup>5</sup>*Il Principe* is dedicated to Lorenzo de Medici, grandson of Lorenzo *il Magnifico*. From the historical evidence and from a careful reading of the Dedicatory Letter at the commencement of the *Principe*, it is clear that Machiavelli considers Lorenzo to be someone who has assumed a role that in some sense exceeds his abilities to execute effectively. On the other hand, Machiavelli dedicates the *Discorsi* to Zanobi and Cosimo Buondelmonte, both of whom he addresses as potential princes who, apparently like Hiero of Syracuse, would be actual princes, i.e. actually deserving the name of prince, had they only the station, the allies, the proper intentionalities to correspond to their talents *and* if Cosimo were not dead and Zanobi not in exile by the time the first manuscript version of the *Discorsi* was dedicated to them in 1521.

<sup>6</sup>There are clearly at least two types of new prince. Despite Machiavelli's apparent lack of attention to the hereditary prince, a hereditary prince who, like Louis XII of France, acquires new territories would be both a hereditary prince and a new prince. Such a prince would not need to begin with the arms of others. On the other hand, the new prince who is new both to their territory and to their station would, at the outset, need to begin their career with the arms of others. The figures of Cesare Borgia and Hiero of Syracuse, who are singled out for so much attention by Machiavelli in the *Principe*, are notable as examples of this kind because they both began their careers by using the arms of others. Of these two, Machiavelli describes Hiero as transitioning to arms of his own, but if by 'arms of his own' is meant 'non-mercenary arms', then Machiavelli's use of the example of Hiero itself underlines the need to consider more critically this theme in his works. Polybius clearly recounts that Hiero stabilizes his regime by hiring *mercenaries of his own* after destroying his old, unruly mercenaries. See Polybius, *Histories*, I. 9; Machiavelli, *Principe*, V–VII and XII; and n56 below.

as an extended dialogue with Fabrizio Colonna, a mercenary captain.<sup>7</sup> As if to underline the importance that mercenary arms can play in making a private individual into a ruler, the very first proper name introduced by Machiavelli in the body of the *Principe* is that of the mercenary captain, Francesco Sforza, referred to in the first paragraph of Chapter I as the example of the new prince.<sup>8</sup> Thus, grappling with this theme, ‘*the arms of others*’, can only enhance our understanding of these other texts where the theme, ‘*one’s own arms*’, and the whole process by which a new prince comes into his own, figures so centrally.<sup>9</sup> Once the theme of mercenary and auxiliary arms is taken seriously, it quickly becomes clear that this theme is at the heart of the *Principe*, the *Discorsi*, the *Arte della guerra* and certainly the *Istorie fiorentine*. Ultimately, dealing with this theme in each of these books requires its own, separate treatment. Thus, I have limited the scope of this paper to investigating Machiavelli’s treatment of the theme of mercenary arms in the *Principe*.<sup>10</sup> For the sake of conciseness, I first outline the theme of ‘having one’s own arms’, as this theme was debated among some of the foremost exponents of Italian civic humanism, among whom Machiavelli is regularly grouped; I will then turn to Machiavelli’s explicit development of this theme in Chapters VI and VII of the *Principe* before turning attention to Chapter XII where the theme of having *arms of one’s own* is treated in an explicit and sustained fashion.

## II. CITIZEN MILITIA VERSUS CONDOTTIERE

Most commentators concentrate on Machiavelli’s critique of mercenaries as a corrupting influence on civic virtue, seeing Machiavelli’s thoughts on warfare as clearly a projection of a long and established tradition in Italian civic humanism. This tradition argued for the restoration and extension of

<sup>7</sup>Further, several sections of the *Istorie fiorentine* could appropriately be seen as an extended description of the careers of mercenary commanders in Italy – particularly sections IV, V and the beginning of VI, which describe in detail the ongoing conflict between Francesco Sforza and Niccolò Piccinino.

<sup>8</sup>*Principe*, ch. I. See also *IF*, particularly books IV–VI.

<sup>9</sup>Thus, the principal interlocutor present throughout the *Arte de la Guerra* is the condottiere, Fabrizio Colonna, who himself strongly opposes the use of mercenaries and expresses moral concerns about following the art of war as a profession. As Colonna states in his dialogue with Cosimo Rucellai in Book I:

Being that this is an art [War] by means of which men at all times can not live honestly [*non possono vivere onestamente*]. Only a republic or a kingdom can make use of this art and both of these, when well ordered, never allow any citizens or soldiers to use it as an art; nor has a good man [*alcuno uomo buono*] ever exercised it as his particular art.

(*Arte della Guerra*, 108).

<sup>10</sup>Of course, I will be referring to the *Discorsi*, *Arte della guerra*, and the *Istorie fiorentine* both for support and to indicate the breadth of Machiavelli’s involvement with this topic throughout his works.

the institutions of the citizen-militia and the encouragement of a renewed focus on martial discipline as a crucial part of the project for the revival and strengthening of republican institutions.<sup>11</sup> Hans Baron, in his analysis of the Florentine Republic in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, includes a very useful account of the early supporters of the project of a citizen militia, chief among whom was Leonardo Bruni.<sup>12</sup> Bruni clearly sees the use of foreign fighters and *condottieri* as the ultimate cause for the series of defeats suffered by the Florentine Republic in the early 1400s.<sup>13</sup> Bruni's funeral oration of 1428 for the Florentine commander and diplomat, Nanni degli Strozzi, relates the events leading to his death in an ambush with Milanese troops, and then states:

now it quickly became clear how great the difference is between the sense of honor in a foreign soldier and a citizen. For the others, prizing nothing higher than their own salvation, gave way instantly; this man [Nanni degli Strozzi], however, holding the love up for his patria higher than his own salvation, threw himself into the fray immediately, attempted to block the way of the enemies, and, by inciting and admonishing his companions in resisting the enemy with his own body, checked for a while the general onslaught.<sup>14</sup>

As many other writers both before and after him, Bruni saw the commutation of compulsory militia service in 1351 by the Republic as a decisive mistake and the origin for the ongoing instability suffered by Florence in the century that followed. The direct consequence of this action was the disarming of the Florentine citizen who subsequently would have to look to others for their defence. For Bruni, republican liberty had no defence when citizens were barred from developing the competencies that

<sup>11</sup>For treatments of 'republican' civic humanism see Hans Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*; Mark Hulliung *Citizen Machiavelli*; John M. Najemy's 'Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics', in *Renaissance Civic Humanism* (223–46); also, Jacob Burckhardt's, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*. On an interesting comparison of the treatments of this period by Bruni and Burckhardt, see Harvey Mansfield's 'Bruni and Machiavelli on Civic Humanism', in *Renaissance Civic Humanism* (75–104).

<sup>12</sup>Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*. For further discussions of the key historical figures of this period, see also Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, 200–4, and Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, ch. 4.

<sup>13</sup>As he states concerning the Florentine decision to allow exemptions from military service in exchange for payments to the state for hiring foreign and outside soldiers [*pecunia reipublicae soluta qua peregrini externique conducerentur milites*]:

The only sure effect of this was the to render the city's own population unwarlike, so that the citizens would look to others to defend their own fortunes, and would not know how to defend themselves or fight for their country. These and many similar mistakes are committed by governors who lack experience, and though small in the beginning, such errors later give birth to massive harms.

(*Historiarum florentini populi*, VII, 101; also book VIII, 1–4 and 22–35)

<sup>14</sup>Quoted from *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 432; see also 430–1.

came with intellectual mastery of and extensive experience in the art of war.<sup>15</sup>

In Bruni's eyes, evasion of militia service by the citizens was the prelude to military disasters and civic upheavals; it was also the prelude to a spirit of servitude diffusing itself throughout the political body. Thus, Bruni's critique of the Florentine dependence on stipendiaries is done on psychological, social and historical bases. Bruni saw the increased Florentine dependence on stipendiaries to be due to a shift in the internal balance of power between the *populares* and the *optimates* in favour of the *optimates*.<sup>16</sup> The *optimates* enjoyed power over the military due to the size of their contributions to the public treasury. The ongoing dependence of the republic on condottieri allowed the *optimates* to dominate the Florentine middle and lower classes whose direct participation in Florentine political life was effectively checked.<sup>17</sup> A host of writers such as Matteo Palmieri, Stefano Porcari, Benedetto Accolti, Giovanni Villani and Francesco Patrizi, followed Bruni and were, like him, deeply critical of the reliance and use of mercenary arms by the Florentines in particular, and by Italian republics and principalities in general. They understood themselves in their criticisms as clearly basing their observations on similar assessments of the ineffectiveness and dangers of the employment of mercenaries by Plato, Aristotle, Vegetius, Thomas Aquinas, Petrarch and

<sup>15</sup>Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 430–1 and Bruni, *History of the Florentine People* IX, 1–11.

<sup>16</sup>Najemy ('Civic Humanism and Florentine Politics' in *Renaissance Civic Humanism*, 223–46) convincingly describes this power shift as the consequence of a conflict, not between despotism and republicanism, but between

two very different kinds of republicanism [which] confronted each other in this period of transformation, and civic humanism was the intellectual expression and ideological product of the ascendancy and triumph of the newer form of Florentine republicanism ... civic humanism's real antagonist – the enemy it sought to defeat – was less the duke of Milan than the popular, guild republicanism that had periodically surfaced to challenge the hegemony of the elite in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

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For the meaning of terms like *optimati*, *nobili*, *popolani*, *plebei* in the context of Florentine political life, see H. C. Butters' treatment, *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth Century Florence*, esp. ch. 1.

<sup>17</sup>Bayley, in his analysis of the military context framing the composition of *De militia*, sees the increasing Florentine reliance on the *forestieri* as the inevitable adaptation of Florentine military and diplomatic strategy to a host of factors whose coincidence made the citizen militia an increasingly less attractive, and decidedly less effective, option. Bayley contests Bruni's argument that psychological factors were really to blame in the Republic's increasing reliance on the *forestieri*. The increasing domestic constraints on the traditional war-making class – the nobility – in Florence made them as unreliable protectors of the Florentine regime as the farmers and peasants who, as the backbone of the rural militia, found themselves increasingly bound to more and more burdensome contracts to the great landowning urban families whose own rivalries made effective cooperation in the field questionable. The territorial expansion of Florentine territory made extended campaigns necessary, but fighting these campaigns with Florentine citizens proved supremely disruptive to industrial and agricultural necessities. See Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, esp. chs 1 and 4.

Boccaccio.<sup>18</sup> And yet, these humanist writers were compelled to acknowledge the need, in the light of the loss of a functional militia, for the ongoing employment of stipendiaries in the Republic's defence.<sup>19</sup> As chancellor of the Florentine Republic, Coluccio Salutati, like his disciple, Bruni, after him, voiced great concerns over the increasing reliance of the republic on stipendiary troops. However, Salutati fully acknowledged the difficulty of doing without mercenary troops entirely, especially in the light of the Ciompi rebellion of 1378 in Florence.<sup>20</sup> The issue was further complicated even among militia supporters when popular riots broke out again in 1382 and were followed over the next twenty years with numerous popular conspiracies.<sup>21</sup>

Given this military and political history, it is clear that Machiavelli's critique of the condottieri, far from being on the fringe of speculative trends on this topic,<sup>22</sup> was responding to a current of thought at the heart of the assessment of the proper conditions for civic life among Italian humanists in Florence and elsewhere. What remains to be seen is whether his critique of the condottieri is as patently negative as it appears on the surface, or whether Machiavelli does not greatly exaggerate the case against the condottiere as a way of drawing attention to the usefulness they might have for the potential prince.

### III. ONE'S OWN ARMS

Chapter XII is the only chapter in the *Prince* where the term *mercenary* occurs in the chapter title.<sup>23</sup> This chapter, though, is set up by two other,

<sup>18</sup>Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 178–89. Bayley's analysis of the classical sources for this tradition indicates how the issue of the value and effectiveness of the citizen militia is linked by later writers such as Petrarch and Boccaccio around the theme of the survival of Roman virtues in the face of Italy's inundation by the barbaric, 'Germanic', condottiere whose 'attributes of *levitas, feritas, perfidia* were constantly threatening to inundate the ancient Roman qualities of *gravitas, humanitas, fides*' (Bayley, 188).

<sup>19</sup>As Bayley observes:

Amid these converging problems, it was fatally easy for Florence to turn to the large bodies of foreign professional troops, who, appearing at the critical juncture of the mid-fourteenth century, pressed their services upon her with such persistence. In the hard logic of military affairs, it was arguable that, if these formidable experts were not employed by Florence, they would be engaged by her foes, by Milan or Pisa.

(Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 50–2).

<sup>20</sup>During this rebellion the citizen militia failed to muster, and the military suppression of the revolt was only achieved through the energies of Michele di Lando and the arrival of a large force of condottieri. See Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence* and Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, bk III.

<sup>21</sup>Bayley, 194.

<sup>22</sup>In his study, Bayley outlines the arguments of an anonymous text, *Pulcher tractatus de materia belli*, which, while affirming the value of the citizen militia, nevertheless doubted the militia's competence and capacity to engage in the exacting standards of the 'new art of war' without endangering the entire life of the state through each engagement. See *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 183–4.

<sup>23</sup>*Principe*, XII.

earlier chapters – Chapters VI and VII – in which Machiavelli introduces and develops the related theme of having ‘one’s own arms’ in his discussion of the new prince. In Chapter VI, the new prince is the kind of ruler who achieved his position not through hereditary succession, but from having once been a private individual before assuming the role of prince. In that chapter, Machiavelli gives both *virtù* and *fortuna* as causes for this change of status. Those princes having relied more on *virtù* and less on *fortuna*<sup>24</sup> ‘have maintained themselves more’ in the regimes whose rule they usurped or founded. Machiavelli singles out the figures of Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus as having been among the ‘most excellent’ of new princes, having arrived at their position through their own virtue and not through reliance on fortune. After excusing himself from reasoning about Moses ‘as he was a mere executor of things that had been ordered for him by God’, Machiavelli goes on to reason about the others. He concludes that their virtue was so great that each one<sup>25</sup> needed only the ‘opportunity [to become prince], which gave them the matter allowing them to introduce any form they pleased’. Moses needed to find the Hebrews enslaved in Egypt; Romulus needed to be abandoned at birth; Cyrus needed to find the Persians discontented with the Medes; Theseus needed only to find the Athenians dispersed. These new princes then acquired their regimes with difficulty but, because of their great *virtù*, they held them with ease. Machiavelli also contrasts here the careers of Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus as new princes who successfully introduced new ‘modes and orders’ with that of Girolamo Savanorola, who failed because he could not force men to obey him when they no longer believed in his divine inspiration. From this, Machiavelli concludes that armed prophets conquer and unarmed ones fail, a conclusion that contrasts the different outcomes experienced by Moses and Savanorola. The difference in the outcome of their ventures did not depend on some difference in the quality of their belief in God, but in how readily each one

<sup>24</sup>Because of the dense interpretive tradition behind these terms, I prefer to leave them untranslated. Provisionally, I understand the relationship between them to be that of the conflict between action and circumstances. For Machiavelli, human action has the power to change circumstances and, because of this, is not simply limited to prudentially accommodating itself to them. Against Leo Strauss, who sees Machiavelli’s articulation of this relationship as forwarding a *technical* solution to the ancient distinction between the ideal and real where politics is reduced to a technique for establishing a given political order (Strauss, ‘Three Waves of Modernity’, in *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays* 86–7); or Sasso who ascribes the experience of *fortuna* to the limits of human nature and the incapacity of human beings with respect to their understanding to always grasp the situation, finding themselves exceeded when confronted with a change of times (Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli*, 436); I find myself, on the other hand, much more sympathetic to the treatment that Vatter (*Between Form and Event*, II, chs 3 and 4) gives to this relation, seeing Machiavelli’s account of *virtù* and *fortuna* as a conflict between action and circumstances in which emerges the possibility for human action to withdraw from a given political order the appearance of its necessity and, in doing so, confronting all political order with its contingent origins; see n56 below.

<sup>25</sup>Including Moses.



was able to use force to compel belief in their project from their followers in the absence of their enthusiasm.<sup>26</sup>

At the very end of Chapter VI and, apparently, almost as an afterthought, Machiavelli includes the person of Hiero II (306–215 BC) who became King of Syracuse from having been a private individual in 270 BC. Machiavelli adds him here for consideration with the others because he holds a certain 'proportion' (*qualche proporzione*) with the rest. However, it is only here, in the discussion of Hiero, that Machiavelli even refers to the phrase, *one's own arms* – the phrase that figured so prominently in the chapter title, *De principibus novis qui armis propriis et virtute acquiruntur*.<sup>27</sup> Like the others to whom he is likened, Hiero, too, only received the apparently 'bare' opportunity to become a new prince from *fortuna*. His success in transitioning from a private individual to prince of Syracuse stemmed nearly entirely from his *virtù*. From being chosen captain of the Syracusan army, Hiero 'proved worthy' to be made their prince. The famous phrase, *having one's own arms*, then appears for the first time in Chapter VI in connection with Machiavelli's conclusions about Hiero and in literally the chapter's final line:

Hiero eliminated the old military and organized a new one; he left his old friendships and made new ones; and when he had friendships and soldiers that were his own, he could erect on such a foundation any building; so that he endured much fatigue acquiring, and little in maintaining.<sup>28</sup>

When Machiavelli again discusses the career of Hiero II in Chapter XIII, his remarks there focus directly on the theme of mercenary arms. Hiero knew immediately upon becoming captain of the mostly mercenary Syracusan army that he would need to get rid of it because he could neither 'keep them [the soldiers] nor let them go'. He destroyed his former soldiers and replaced them with new ones. With these new ones he was able to fight effectively, since these soldiers were 'his arms' and not alien arms.<sup>29</sup> Machiavelli

<sup>26</sup>Maury Feld ('Machiavelli's Militia and Machiavelli's Mercenaries' in *Military, Militarism and the Polity*, 72–92) takes this to be the principal feature distinguishing mercenaries from militia in the thought of Machiavelli. For Feld, Machiavelli equates popular religion with popular government and, thus:

Military service is the popular cult of the state. The people assembled under arms represent the active presence of divinity in a civic context . . . The purchase of military service is a simoniacal practice, a traffic in what is holy. In hiring its defenders, the state both profanes itself and corrupts its citizens and its servants.

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<sup>27</sup>*Principe*, VI, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Costui spense la milizia vecchi, ordinò la nuova; lasciò le amicizie antiche, prese delle nuove; e come ebbe amicizie e soldati che *fussero suoi*, potette in su tale fondamento edificare ogni edificio, tanto che egli durò assai fatica in acquistare e poca in mantenere.

(My emphasis, *Principe*, VI, 43).

<sup>29</sup>See n6 above, n56 below.

expressly states here that the mercenary soldiers Hiero possessed originally were not useful ‘because they were *condottieri* set up like our Italians’. In Chapter XIII Machiavelli estimates that these mercenary soldiers would have made Hiero’s transition from private individual to prince much more difficult if not impossible. At the same time he leaves unsaid whether these mercenary arms, though useless to Hiero, could have been considered useful to someone else. Moreover, in neither passage does he specify in what specific and special sense we are meant to understand how Hiero’s former mercenary arms were ‘not his own’, nor in what specific sense his new soldiers were ‘his own’. This is especially telling if we recall that Machiavelli, in recounting the story of Hiero, silently glosses over a key detail in Polybius’s account of Hiero’s ascendancy. Hiero certainly did have his former mercenaries cut to pieces by strategically retreating at a key point in a battle with the Campanians. However, having freed himself from his ‘old, unruly mercenaries’, Hiero returned to Syracuse and subsequently secured his regime by hiring *new mercenaries* of his own.<sup>30</sup>

Machiavelli poses the theme of one’s own arms and the arms of others more directly and more thematically in Chapter VII, the following chapter, which deals with the issue of principalities acquired through the ‘arms and fortune of others’.<sup>31</sup> This chapter appears to focus mainly on the career of Cesare Borgia. Machiavelli seems<sup>32</sup> to raise Cesare’s career in central Italy as a pattern for imitation for anyone who receives a state from someone else. Such princes come to be: ‘... when a state is given to someone either for money or by the favor of whoever gives it’.<sup>33</sup> Machiavelli explains this statement through the use of two examples: (a) Darius I and (b) those Roman emperors who attained their empire by corrupting the soldiers.

<sup>30</sup>Polybius, *The Histories*, I.9.

<sup>31</sup>The title of Chapter VI contains the phrase ‘own arms and virtue’ [*armis propriis et virtute*]; the entirety of the title of Chapter VII differs only by the phrase ‘other’s arms and fortuna’ [*alienis armis et fortuna*]. Here Machiavelli makes a tacit identification of *virtù* with having one’s own arms and *fortuna* with the condition of having to make use of ‘alien arms’.

<sup>32</sup>I do not believe that Machiavelli means the example of this chapter to be Cesare Borgia, though this has been the customary reading of Chapter VII. I believe this for two reasons: (a) on the basis of the ambiguous relationship between Alexander VI and Duke Valentino/Cesare Borgia, discussed in detail below; (b) the statement by Machiavelli that appears to recommend the actions of *the Duke* in this chapter could refer with equal grammatical right to either one of two Dukes mentioned in that same paragraph – the Duke of Milan, i.e. Francesco Sforza, or Duke Valentino, i.e. Cesare Borgia. Both are discussed in the same paragraph and, before Machiavelli makes the statement customarily taken to imply the career of Borgia as being worthy of imitation, he makes reference to ‘what was said above’ concerning the laying of foundations. Sforza’s career is the one discussed in the passage ‘above’. Given the way Machiavelli mentions the career of Sforza throughout the *Principe* and elsewhere, it would seem just as plausible a reading that the Duke being referred to as worthy of imitation is, in fact, Francesco Sforza and that it is Pope Alexander VI who is being held up as worthy of imitation to then Pope Leo X, Giovanni de’ Medici.

<sup>33</sup>‘E questi tali sono quando è concesso ad alcuno uno stato o per danari o per grazia di chi lo concede’ (*Principe*, VII, 43).

Machiavelli explains how Darius I (521–486 BC) gave cities to private individuals for the sake of maintaining his own security and glory; and through his ‘gift’ of a city to them he made, through the same action, many new princes. Made by Darius, these new princes directly owed their change in status and their continued ‘good fortune’ to the *virtù* and *fortuna* of Darius. Even though Darius I is not again mentioned in the *Principe*, Machiavelli again mentions the Persian Empire in referring to its defeat earlier in Chapter IV when he describes the ease with which Alexander the Great held the Persian kingdom after overcoming a successor of the first Darius, Darius III. The Persian kingdom posed a peculiar set of difficulties for Alexander, and those difficulties had nothing to do with the brilliance of the Persian generals or the readiness of the Persian army. The Persian Empire, like the empire of the Ottoman Turks, both posed the same challenge – a prince who sought to acquire such a kingdom could not depend on the assistance of other princes within it. Unlike the kingdom of France, where each of the French barons within the kingdom enjoyed the allegiance and loyalty of his subjects, the Turkish and Persian ‘princes’ were slaves of their sovereign.<sup>34</sup> In describing such new princes who held their position through the power of another, Machiavelli clearly describes their relationship in terms of dominance and obedience and, as he clarifies, such princes: ‘rest simply on the will and fortune of whoever has given it [a state] to them, which are two most inconstant and unstable things . . .’.<sup>35</sup> This kind of principality, gifted to a private person, has a clear-cut cost – it is held ‘in service’ to that one or those from whom the gift originated. This state of affairs makes the role of this kind of new prince a form of clear-cut dependency. Such new princes:

Do not know how to hold and they cannot hold that rank: they do not know how, because if one is not a man of great ingenuity and virtue, it is not reasonable, that having always been in private fortune, he would know how to command [*sappia comandare*]; they are not able [to hold the rank] because they do not have forces that can be friendly and faithful to them.<sup>36</sup>

This kind of new prince is literally a slave to their changed fortune, since they act as an intermediary between the one who exercises and manages the actual conditions of power and those who are ruled. For Machiavelli, the

<sup>34</sup>Dividing his kingdom into sanjaks, he [the Turkish monarch] sends different administrators to them and he changes and varies them as he pleases.’ Then, further in the same chapter: ‘The cause of the difficulties in being able to seize the kingdom of the Turk are that one cannot be called in by the princes of that kingdom . . . since all are slaves and bound by obligation . . .’. See Goodwin’s vivid description of the relationship between the Sultan and his administrators in *Lords of the Horizons*, chs 6 and 7.

<sup>35</sup>Questi stanno semplicemente in su la volontà e fortuna di chi lo ha concesso loro, che sono dua cose volubilissime e instabili . . .’ (*Principe*, VII, 44).

<sup>36</sup>*Principe* VII, 44.

principal prince is *principal* because he or she ‘knows how to command’ and has friendly and faithful forces. Their subjects accord allegiance to their principal ruler, whom they obey, and they feel no particular allegiance to their new ‘administrative’ prince.<sup>37</sup> The distinction between the prince who rules through his own *virtù* and *fortuna* and those who rule through the *virtù* and *fortuna* of another depends on whether that prince ‘would know how to command’ [*sappia comandare*] and whether he has at his disposal friendly and faithful forces. Machiavelli expresses his high assessment for this art of command in Chapter XIV where he states: ‘And it is of such *virtù* that not only does it maintain those that are born princes, but many times it makes those of private *fortuna* rise up to that grade.’<sup>38</sup> For a prince ‘to be armed’ is not determined simply by whether he has his own standing army, obedient subjects<sup>39</sup> or is even a legitimate prince with official status. For a prince to be ‘armed’ depends most immediately on whether he possesses and exercises himself in the art of command, i.e. the art of war.<sup>40</sup>

Understanding the importance of the art of command to the function of the new prince makes the apparent error Machiavelli commits in Chapter VII much less surprising. The very next example Machiavelli cites in Chapter VII is that of Francesco Sforza who, from private individual, acquired his state through his own *virtù*. This example raises difficulties here because, strictly speaking, Sforza’s career and his rise took place independently of the virtue and fortune of others.<sup>41</sup> His example does not belong in this chapter, addressed as it is to a discussion of those who gained principalities through ‘the arms and fortune of others’. Sforza is noteworthy because ‘through proper means [*per li debiti mezzi*] and with a great virtue of his own, from private individual he became Duke of Milan’. Having acquired Milan, he held it with little difficulty. In Chapter XIV Machiavelli tells us that Sforza’s transition happened through his being armed [*per essere armato*].<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup>At the same time, such an ‘intermediate’ or administrative principate is not without its rewards, the principal one being that without the immediate presence of the prince the administrator has a free hand within certain bounds to enrich himself at the expense of the public and the prince.

<sup>38</sup>... ed è di tanta virtù, che non solamente mantiene quelli che sono nati principi, ma molte volte fa gli uomini di privata fortuna salire a quel grado’ (*Il Principe*, 65).

<sup>39</sup>See Alfredo Bonadeo, ‘The Role of the People in the Works and Times of Machiavelli,’ esp. 363–4, for a discussion of the project to implement a *renovatio militiae*.

<sup>40</sup>See Mansfield, *Machiavelli’s Virtue*, 192.

<sup>41</sup>The argument could be made that Sforza owed his rise to the assistance of Filippo Maria Visconti (1392–1447), then Duke of Milan, marriage to whose daughter, Bianca Maria, legitimized Sforza’s accession to the title of Duke. At the same time, Machiavelli’s account of their relationship in the *Istorie fiorentine* clearly shows that he believed Sforza ascended to the Duchy *despite* all the machinations of Filippo Maria.

<sup>42</sup>However, as stated above (n6), the *Principe* is also, of course, addressed to the ‘acquisitive’, or ‘mixed’, prince. Machiavelli refers to this kind of new prince in Chapter I when he speaks of those princes that have ‘acquired dominions’ (*Sono questi domini così acquistati*...). These ‘acquisitive princes’, or *conquerors*, are established princes who are ‘new’ in the sense of having

Earlier in the *Principe*, Machiavelli tells us that Sforza's change of role with the Milanese resulted from his hire as a mercenary captain for that city.<sup>43</sup> For the same reason, Sforza's heirs lose Milan through not being armed.<sup>44</sup> Thus, using the examples furnished by Machiavelli as a guide here, whether a private individual transitions to the role of prince depends on whether that individual possesses the know-how of command and obedient forces. However, whether these obedient, i.e. *friendly and faithful forces*, are an Ottoman army of converted boy slaves, a troop of Macedonian regulars, Swiss auxiliaries or a sufficiently organized northern Italian mercenary force stands in second place to the one factor predictive of whether the private individual becomes an apparently independent new prince or a dependently slavish new prince: *the know-how of command*.<sup>45</sup> Even mercenary arms can

acquired a new people through the territory they have occupied, as Louis XII was to Milan the second time he took it from Ludovico Sforza in 1500. Gennaro Sasso (*Studi su Machiavelli*) rightly indicates that the possibilities open to the wholly new prince were markedly different than those of those new princes whose principalities were mixed:

Nel primer caso [the mixed state] il principe è *ereditario* in tutto, salvo che per la parte aggiunta al suo stato *antiquo*: se perdesse la parte *nuova* gli rimarebbe quella *antiqua* e non per questo, quindi, cesserebbe di essere *principe*. Nel secondo caso [Francesco Sforza], il principe è *al tutto nuovo*, perché il suo esser principe dipende unicamente dal principato nuovo da lui conquistato: se lo perdesse, tornerebbe ad essere, *di principe, privato*.

(87–8)

Again, my focus in this study is not on the 'acquisitive new prince' who is established and legitimate prior to acquiring a new people; rather, my focus here is on the type of prince for whom even the status of being a prince is 'wholly new'.

<sup>43</sup>*Principe*, XII.

<sup>44</sup>Or because their father made the error of building a fortress there: 'Alla casa Sforzesca ha fatto e farà più guerra el castello di Milano, che vi edificò Francesco Sforza, che veruno altro disordine di quell stato' (*Principe* XX).

<sup>45</sup>By this phrase, *the know-how of command*, I do not mean to contend that there exists for Machiavelli some general, *scientific* body of knowledge abstracted from time and respect, mastery of which would be among the necessary first conditions for effecting this translation of an individual from private to public realm. I am very sympathetic to Fontana's reading in *Hegemony and Power* of Machiavelli's intentions in the *Arte della guerra* where Fontana discusses the nature of the knowledge Fabrizio Colonna professes in the dialogue. Fontana states:

Both Gramsci and Machiavelli attempt to formulate a form of knowledge that will bring into the open the political and power bases of the Crocean and Guicciardinian conceptions of knowledge. Such a knowledge [that of Gramsci and Machiavelli], therefore, as it uproots the preexisting and accepted conceptions of the world, presupposes simultaneously rooting itself within a historically specific subject, whose very emergence will represent the negation of the established knowledge. If the latter understands itself as the product of thought and contemplation, and since the new knowledge, which attempts to oppose and overcome it, understands itself as the continual product of an active interaction with social reality – then this new knowledge is necessarily compelled to address a subject existing within the social reality.

On the other hand, I do not agree with Fontana's tendency to make the addressee of Machiavelli's texts a single, intended, unitary subject, i.e. that there is some appointed 'one', or

function as ‘arms of one’s own’ if one happens to be Francesco Sforza.<sup>46</sup>

Chapter VII then continues with a description of the career of Cesare Borgia, the career that Machiavelli is apparently holding up as paradigmatic for princes. However, exploring the relationship between Pope Alexander VI and his son Duke Valentino, i.e. Cesare Borgia, really serves to muddy the distinction just now drawn between independently acting and slavishly dependent new princes. Machiavelli tells the entire story of Alexander VI and Duke Valentino to show that the career, successes and ultimate failure of Borgia were due not simply to *fortuna* but depend greatly on how the relationship between the Duke and Alexander VI is interpreted. Beginning with the very first statement describing Borgia’s career, ‘Alexander VI, when he decided to make his son, the Duke, great, had very many difficulties, both present and future.’<sup>47</sup> Machiavelli structures the entire story of Borgia’s rise and fall to indicate how Alexander’s powers of deception were so great that they lent his son the appearance of autonomy when, in fact, he was directly being employed in the systematic execution of his father’s goals.<sup>48</sup> Later, in Chapter XI, during his discussion of ecclesiastical principalities, Machiavelli unambiguously states the relationship between father and son in his discussion of the temporal successes of the pontiffs:

Then Alexander VI arose who, of all the pontiffs that have ever been, he showed how far a pope could prevail who had both money and forces. Using the instrument of Duke Valentino [*con lo instrumento del duco Valentino*] and the occasion of the invasion of the French, he did all the things discussed above in the actions of the duke.<sup>49</sup>

In Machiavelli’s retelling of Borgia’s career, Duke Valentino maintains the same relationship to Alexander VI that (apparently) pertained between Duke Valentino and Remirro de Orco. Remirro de Orco was a captain of Cesare’s whom Cesare (or, indirectly, Alexander?) appointed to rule the

even ‘ones’, to whom Machiavelli’s texts are addressed. Thus, in the *Principe*, there are any number of beneficiaries to the trajectories of thought expressed there that range from various Italian condottieri, Pope Leo X, Lorenzo de Medici, to the French, the Swiss, the Spanish—even the Ottoman Sultan! For a formulation sensitive to the multi-intentionality of Machiavelli’s texts, see Strauss’s *immoral* reading of Machiavelli in *Thoughts on Machiavelli*, 115–16, 141–2, 143–4.

<sup>46</sup>Or the Carthaginian general, Hannibal or even Hiero II. Cf. *Principe*, XVII.

<sup>47</sup>*Principe*, VII, 44.

<sup>48</sup>Oliverotto da Fermo, a mercenary captain whom Machiavelli describes as owing his rise to crime, clearly saw the relationship between the two; Machiavelli has him describing the ‘greatness of Pope Alexander and of Cesare Borgia, his son, and of their undertakings’ prior to the very crime that will seal his momentary accession to power (*Principe*, VIII) Oliverotto was shortly thereafter strangled at Sinigaglia on the orders of the Duke (or the Pope?) in 1502.

<sup>49</sup>*Principe XI*, 57.

Romagna after the events of Sinigaglia.<sup>50</sup> During his tenure Remirro reduced the Romagna to peace, restored it to unity and earned a great reputation for himself in the process. Duke Valentino then convened a court whose aim was to convince the Romagnese that any cruelty committed in the province was the responsibility of de Orco and not the Duke. One morning, Remirro is found cut in half, left in the piazza 'with a piece of wood and a bloody knife beside him'. The anonymous and ambiguous scapegoating of Remirro allows Valentino to exert the inevitable cruelty needed to bring this region to order and unity, himself evading a direct imputation for cruelty in the process. At the same time, Machiavelli in Chapter XVII ascribes the unity and orderliness of the Romagna to Borgia's *own* cruelty, and not to that of his appointee – Remirro, whose name does not even occur in the passage.<sup>51</sup> The principal actor in this drama that entirely escapes direct attribution for cruelty is, of course, Alexander VI and this despite the fact that in his telling of Cesare's story, up to the death of Alexander, Machiavelli consistently describes the advances and successes of Duke Valentino with either a direct or oblique reference to the interests and direction of Alexander VI.<sup>52</sup>

This dependency emerges even more fully with the reasons Machiavelli gives for Borgia's downfall. Machiavelli gives four reasons to explain why Borgia lost everything acquired during the papal tenure of his father: (a) Borgia had not acquired enough empire to withstand attack; (b) the sudden death of Alexander; (c) the sickness that afflicted Borgia himself at the time of Alexander's death; (d) the danger that Alexander's replacement on the papal throne would prove an adversary to Borgia. In the concluding paragraph of Chapter VII, Machiavelli strikes out each of these causes but one. The remaining cause for Borgia's downfall is the truly poor choice that Borgia made on his own when he allowed the election of Julius II as pontiff – a person whom Borgia had harmed in the past – and whom he allowed then to become the successor to his father.<sup>53</sup> In Machiavelli's telling

<sup>50</sup>Machiavelli gives a narration of this episode in 'A Description of the Method Used by Duke Valentino in Killing Vitellozzo Vitelli, Oliverotto da Fermo, and Others', in *Chief Works of Machiavelli*, translated by Allan Gilbert, vol. I, 163–9.

<sup>51</sup>*Principe*, XVII: 'Cesare Borgia was held to be cruel; nonetheless his cruelty restored the Romagna, united it, and reduced it to peace and to faith.' At this point one, of course, has to wonder whether Duke Valentino might not also, after unifying central Italy, have found himself one morning similarly divided. Notice also, later in this chapter, how Hiero II managed his army, who were also organized like the condottieri, by having it cut to pieces.

<sup>52</sup>Ultimately, though, there is the issue of just how far, in reality, Cesare came to act without influence from his father. C. H. Clough ('Niccolo Machiavelli, Cesare Borgia, and the Francesco Troche Affair', esp. 131–5) makes a convincing argument that Cesare became increasingly motivated to act independently, if covertly, from Alexander VI whose overall goals became increasingly divergent from Cesare's own.

<sup>53</sup>Machiavelli also makes it clear that Borgia could easily have chosen a candidate sponsored by either the Spanish or the French and that from neither of these would he have had as much cause to fear.

of the end of Cesare's political career,<sup>54</sup> that Borgia could have chosen any successor to his father and made so clearly bad a choice critically exposes Borgia's direct dependence on Alexander for the successful decisions he made and successful strategies employed throughout his career. Said another way: in so far as Machiavelli consistently reminds us of Alexander's presence in the career of Borgia; and in so far as the first decision Borgia clearly had to make on his own brings about his complete downfall, Borgia's 'dependence on the *fortuna* of others' needs to be read as his thoroughgoing reliance on the acuity of Alexander VI for whatever success he did enjoy.<sup>55</sup>

Thus, Machiavelli's distinction between independently acting new prince and dependently slavish new prince itself depends on clearly recognizing the source(s) of the *effectual authority*<sup>56</sup> through which princes exercise their position. Ultimately, the meaningfulness of the very term, *principe*, in

<sup>54</sup>Commentators put a great deal of emphasis on Machiavelli's apparent admiration for the figure of Cesare, but it is important to remember here that, historically speaking, Cesare was not a hero a Machiavelli; as C. H. Clough rightly states:

Machiavelli as a Florentine official had taken part consistently in blocking Cesare's moves at the expense of Florentine territory; territory which had little love for Florence itself, it should be remembered. Cesare Borgia was not a hero for Machiavelli at this time but an antagonist that Machiavelli with some justifiable pride could believe he had outwitted. It is against this experience that Machiavelli's comments on Cesare in the *Prince* should be judged.

('Niccolo Machiavelli, 'Cesare Borgia, and the Francesco Troche Affair', 142)

<sup>55</sup>At the same time, the relationship between Alexander VI and Duke Valentino would serve as an excellent model for any other pope who might find himself in such an instrumental relationship with a well-placed relative. Thus, the final line of Chapter XI exhorts the then Medici Pope, Leo X, to build on the successes of those popes before him who had expanded the temporal power of the papacy through the successful use of arms. As Alexander VI was to Duke Valentino, so could the apparent addressee of the *Prince*, the inexperienced Lorenzo de Medici, be assisted/directed through the 'guidance' of an astute relative.

<sup>56</sup>Machiavelli does not encourage us to think of authority as a final, hierarchically arranged summit at the top of which would be a prince for whom there is not a 'more principal' prince. For Machiavelli, knowing when, how and to whom to submit is itself an indication of *virtù*, cf. *Prince*, XXI and *Discorsi* II, 15. Further, certainly passages in Machiavelli encourage us to think of princes as individual actors but even a cursory reading of the *Discorsi* shows us that there are bodies, like the Roman senate, that are in fact composed of *many* princes and which are noteworthy because their history is a show of the *virtù* – not of individual, atomic actors – but of a composite body's antagonisms discharging its effects. Thus, by this phrase, *effectual authority*, I intend an understanding of authority structured as the consequence of the successful and ongoing expression of indefinitely many, energetically deployed, modes of violence and fraud (i.e. forces) whose convergence for a time is successful, i.e. *is authoritative*, for a certain group or groups of people when, and to the extent, that their appetites, or desires, are determined through, i.e. coerced by, the appearances this authority assumes. At the same time, such an articulation of *virtù* recognizes that the ongoing success of political orders hinges on stabilizing the 'routine-ness' of obedience, a 'routine-ness' which grounds orders and institutions in the modality of the necessary. Where *virtù* describes the political processes and civil bodies involved with 'routinizing' structures of authority, granting them the appearance of necessity, understanding *virtù* in this way also indicates the possibility for retrieving the necessity of political orders back into the modality of contingency – i.e. *fortuna*. See my forthcoming work on the *Discorsi*, 'Authentic (?) Authority in Machiavelli's *Discorsi*,



Machiavelli's usage clearly does not depend on someone holding a publicly visible, much less legitimate, office.<sup>57</sup> Thus, in the *Discorsi*, Machiavelli discusses the dispute that arose in Syracuse upon the death of Hieronymus, successor of Hiero II. By doing so Machiavelli reminds his reader that the same Hiero who had exhibited a certain proportionality with the likes of those 'emblematically independent' new princes – Moses, Theseus, Cyrus and Romulus – was throughout his career one of Rome's most loyal allies, i.e. Hiero was a Roman pawn.<sup>58</sup> The message of Chapters VI and VII of the *Principe* is that those who rely on the arms of others become the instrument of those arms whose intentions they serve and accomplish. This instrumentality holds whether the relationship is a direct one, as it was with both Darius I and his provincial governors and the early Ottoman emperors with their *kul*, or is an indirect one, as it was with both the relationship between Duke Valentino and Alexander VI and Hiero II with the Roman senate.<sup>59</sup> The other message of Chapters VI and VII, together with those other passages in the *Principe* which refer back to them, is that determining the quality of the autonomy of a prince's decisions and actions is not settled simply by answering the question whether the arms they employed were bought or were organized out of their own obedient subjects, i.e. whether these arms are slave or free. The crucial issue of the quality of a new prince's autonomy is not decided by whether the prince employs mercenary arms or obedient subjects; it is determined by who or what, in the final analysis, is in a broader sense the 'author' of the intentions of those who have arms in hand.<sup>60</sup>

M. Vatter (*Between Form and Event*, II, chs 3 and 4), and the *Principe*, XVIII, especially the pre-eminence Machiavelli accords to the *fox* and the nature of the promise.

<sup>57</sup>Thus, in the *Discorsi*, I, 14, Machiavelli relates that, before the consul, Papirius wished to engage the Samnites in the pivotal conflict of the struggle between the Romans and the Samnites, Papirius consulted the *prince of the chicken men* for the sake of knowing the auguries. This 'prince' is later killed in the battle from a spear in the back after having been placed in the front ranks of the army by Papirius for having seemingly lied about the pecking of the chickens. See also Machiavelli's description of the role of Cosimo de Medici in Florentine politics, *Istorie fiorentine*, V–VII.

<sup>58</sup>Cf. *Discorsi*, II, 15. See also Livy, *History of Rome*, XX, 37; XXIII, 30; XXIV, 28. Machiavelli shows in the *Discorsi* that the Romans used their allies so successfully to augment Rome that their allies subsequently became servants (clients?) in all but name. This alliance was so important to Hiero II that when his son, Gelo, advocates an alliance with the Cathaginians, he dies so quickly afterward that suspicion for his death falls even upon Hiero himself. As Livy states: '... movissetque in Sicilia res, nisi mors adeo opportune ut patrem quoque suspicione aspergeret, armantem eum multitudinem sollicitantemque socios absumpisset'.

<sup>59</sup>And as it was, potentially, between Pope Leo X and the younger Lorenzo, addressee of the *Principe*.

<sup>60</sup>Mansfield terms this ambiguity that surrounds the quality of princely autonomy as a regime by *indirect government*. He invokes this as an alternative to the framework of direct government he sees articulated by classical thinkers in the classical regime. For Mansfield, Machiavelli's critique of the classical regime involves a re-determination of the Aristotelian understanding of the ruling part of society considered by the ancients the *most visible* part of society:

## IV. THE ARMS OF OTHERS

If the factor determining princely autonomy and heteronomy is not simply reducible to whether a prince contracts for arms or employs obedient subjects, then Machiavelli's whole discourse on mercenary arms in the *Principe* must play a different role than that it appears to play. Machiavelli's critique of mercenary arms seems to operate as a warning to princes of what *not* to do, of how *not* to protect themselves and of how *not* to increase their states. Relying on mercenary arms seems to be *the* way to compromise princely autonomy, and yet, for Francesco Sforza, employment of mercenary arms was *the royal road* to achieving the duchy of Milan. Thus, Machiavelli's critique of mercenary arms demands careful analysis to see in what ways this distinction, *the arms of others*, really does operate in his text. Chapter XII is the only chapter in the *Principe* where the term *mercenary* occurs in the chapter title. However, Chapter XII does not open with a discussion of the mercenary army. Instead the opening passages of Chapter XII discuss the nature of sovereign authority and its relationship to law, on the one hand, and armed force on the other. These paragraphs finish with the famous formulation describing the relationship between the three terms:

The principal foundations that all the states have, both new states as well as old and mixed, are good laws and good arms [le buone legge e le buone arme]: and because there cannot be good laws where there are not good arms, and where there are good arms there also happen to be good laws, I will leave to the side the reasoning about laws and will speak of arms.<sup>61</sup>

Following this introduction, his discussion of *mercenario* and the status of the condottieri in the passages that follow is the often-quoted one that frames the question of arms in terms of the 'ownership' of those arms. A prince either defends his state with his own arms [*armis propriis*] – arms that he *genuinely* owns – or with mercenary or auxiliary arms [*armis alienis*] – arms that are *not* his own. There are apparently two kinds of 'dis-owned' army, mercenary forces and auxiliary forces, but both types threaten the security of the patron.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the security of the patron and the stability of

Classical political science takes the fact that any society that is most obvious to any member or observer of the society, who rules, and designate it the most important fact. It considers most important what seems most important to the citizen or statesman. Machiavelli proposed to replace this notion of direct government with indirect government carried on by a hidden power. Instead of ruling in open light, government would be *management*. Machiavelli speaks frequently of managing (*manneggiare*) men in the up-to-date, business-school sense of the term: ruling without seeming too.

(Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue*, 235–8)

<sup>61</sup>*Il Principe*, XII, 58.

<sup>62</sup>Mockler gives an interesting, and accurate, twist on this assessment when he states: 'if mercenaries were faithless, it is at least arguable that they were mere amateurs in treachery when compared with their employers' (Mockler, *The Mercenaries*, 48). See also Gilbert's account of

the prince depends on having his *own* armies. Yet by introducing this distinction between mercenaries and auxiliaries, Machiavelli re-orientes the distinction between one's own arms and the arms of others according to a different trajectory that introduces a new criterion. We begin with the apparently straightforward criterion of whether the arms belong to the prince (or state) in question or somehow belong to some other(s). The introduction of the critique of mercenary arms centres the question around the *usefulness or uselessness*, i.e. the inherent dangers, of the arms in question. This change is an important one since it introduces much greater flexibility into the discussion of having arms in general and the arms of others in particular, since it is quite conceivable that even mercenary arms could be considered useful to someone, though perhaps not to the patron who employs them; or that they could even be employed usefully by a patron who was not naive to the dangers of this kind of army; or that they could be usefully employed by some captain, like Hannibal,<sup>63</sup> who was able to rein in the bad qualities these arms exhibit through some feature of that captain's character.

On the surface, Machiavelli appears to criticize both kinds of army, mercenary and auxiliary, as useless and dangerous, but even these two kinds of 'contracted' army are not both dangerous or threatening to the stability of regimes in the same way. Silently by-passing in effect the discussion of auxiliary arms<sup>64</sup> Machiavelli begins to enumerate the qualities of mercenary arms:

for they are disunited, ambitious, without discipline, unfaithful; bold among friends; among enemies, cowardly: they have no fear of God, no faith with other men; ruin is postponed only so long as the assault is postponed; and in peace you are despoiled by them; in war, by the enemy.<sup>65</sup>

These difficulties with mercenary armies stem from the fact that the small stipend received by these men do not make them 'want to give their lives' for the patron state. These men do, indeed, need a patron, since their livelihood and way of life depends on their continued employment which is only assured through the continuing threat of war.<sup>66</sup> Without at least the threat

the Florentine reasoning on Vitelli's fate, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 43; Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 9–15; and Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, esp. 75–84.

<sup>63</sup>As Machiavelli indicates in Chapter XVII, the *inhuman cruelty* [*sua inumana crudeltà*] of Hannibal bound together his army composed of *infinite kinds of men* so effectively that for a long time he effectively overcame the citizen army of the Romans. This would parallel the effectiveness of Remirro da Orco in unifying the Romagna through his cruelty (*Principe*, 67).

<sup>64</sup>The discussion of auxiliaries begins in Chapter XIII.

<sup>65</sup>*Principe*, VII, 48.

<sup>66</sup>I generally agree with the assessment made by Claude Lefort (*Le travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel*, 562–3) that Machiavelli's criticism of the *condottieri* actually operates to concentrate attention on how money comes to occupy the political role once occupied by the people; replacing 'real' power, money and mercenary force functions to delimit and occupy the space of imaginary power:

of war there is no opportunity for the mercenary captain or soldier to sell their labour.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, actual war itself threatens their continued employment in a variety of ways, not least of which is the possibility of personal death on the battlefield. Further, the logic of mercenary warfare implied that the decisive, i.e. *total*, loss of a battle could mean the loss of the employer's – their patron's – continued ability to keep forces in the field by depriving the patron of wealth, their state, or both. Even victory over the enemy endangers the next pay cheque, since with the defeat of the opposing forces the patron has a valuable opportunity to stop the drain on their resources by cancelling contracts of the *condottieri* or simply allowing them to expire.<sup>68</sup> However, even on Machiavelli's own estimation, the Italian

il punto la division qui s'est instituée entre le militaire et la politique et l'associe à la fonction que joue l'argent dans la guerre; avec la remarque que des princes sans armes payent des hommes armés et sans subjects il nous contraint à reconnaître que le discrédit actuel de l'infanterie se déduit de cette fonction; il nous laisse le soin de recoller l'argument en cours avec celui du dixième chapitre, c'est-à-dire de conclure que l'argent est venu occuper dans les sociétés modernes la place laissée vide par le peuple. Mais à la même lumière on voit se dessiner une autre chaîne d'éléments substituables dans l'analyse: les condottieri qu'on est tenté de tenir pour responsables de la corruption des institutions militaires n'existent eux-mêmes qu'en raison de l'absence de l'agent réel de la puissance; ils occupent ainsi la position de la force imaginaire qui avait été déjà identifiée à l'argent. Nous ne devons pas seulement admettre que leur stratégie est déterminée par la nécessité où ils se trouvent de se faire payer; la valeur de cette stratégie s'impose comme la valeur de l'argent à l'imagination des principi.

Miguel Vatter (*Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom*) describes this imaginary power as 'negative liberty' which is 'the effect of a political process initiated by the state against the people in order to subsume their desire for freedom as no-rule into its strategy of foundation' (128). Instead of genuinely enduring political freedom the people are reconciled to the demands of the political form through the right to private property, subsuming their desire for freedom ('no-rule') to a civil function within the state. Machiavelli's own emphasis on private property occurs in this same vein as the transformation of the desire of the people for no-rule into the freedom to own, i.e. the right to enjoy property unmolested by the prince. See, especially, *Between Form and Event*, ch. 6.

<sup>67</sup>Thus *condotta* were signed with the condottieri by different states both to fight and also *not* to fight, since it was very much in the interests of the condottieri to stir up business for themselves if there was no enterprise ready at hand. Mockler, *The Mercenaries*, 42–5. Sánchez-Parga expresses well the suspicious extremism of Machiavelli's position on the paid soldier's competency vis-à-vis the citizen-soldier:

Expresamente se pone en contraposición el carácter económico comercial y el político, como si fuera incompatible luchar por un sueldo y hacerlo con el suficiente valor político; más aún, como si nunca quien lucha por un salario pudiera resistir a quien lucha por razones de orden político.

(Poder y política en Maquiavelo, 164)

This last observation is, of course, quite true if we remember that Machiavelli's own militia project ends with the disaster at Arezzo where hired Spanish auxiliaries crushed the Florentine militia.

<sup>68</sup>It was a common occurrence that with the end of hostilities the balance yet owed to their paid professionals would simply be cancelled. Bayley describes four types of *condotta* that the Florentines negotiated with their captains – the *condotta a soldo intero*, *a mezzo soldo*, *in aspetto*

mercenaries were indeed 'successful' for a time: 'they once made some progress for some, and may have appeared bold among themselves; but when the foreigner [il forestiero] came, they showed that which they were'.<sup>69</sup>

For a time, mercenary armies not only *seemed* to work but actually did work in Italy.<sup>70</sup> A logic<sup>71</sup> to mercenary warfare developed that made increasingly larger and more organized bands of condottieri useful to Italian princes and republics; this 'logic' allowed them to maintain and even hope to extend their regimes through the use of this type of soldier.<sup>72</sup>

and *la condotta di garanzia*. For reasons of economy, employers of condottiere attempted to frame short-term contracts, and the condottiere used a variety of techniques to extend the length and amount of their pay, the most effective of which involved a mixture of slowing down the tempo of operations and opening up negotiations with the opposing power, thereby lengthening the term of service and provoking a bidding war to retain them. Bayley shows how the conditions placed upon the condottieri slackened considerably between the end of the fourteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century. By the time of the great condottiere captains, like Francesco Sforza, even the minimal requirement of mustering the mercenary troops for review by the civilian authority before the disbursement of funds would take place had been waived as a matter of practice (*War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 9–15).

<sup>69</sup>*Principe*, XII, 59. This time of the condottieri had its origins from the 1350s onward but saw its height from 1454 to 1494, stretching from the Peace of Lodi – in which the five great Italian powers accepted a balance of power arrangement amongst themselves – to the first invasion by the French in 1494. See Baron, *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, 412–39; Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, chs 1 and 4; Mockler, *The Mercenaries*, 42–73; and Waley, 'The Army of the Florentine Republic', 70–108.

<sup>70</sup>And were feared by the French, Spanish and Germans, especially in the period 1350–1430. See Waley, 'The Army of the Florentine Republic', Mockler, *The Mercenaries*, ch. 3, and Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Italy*, ch. 1.

<sup>71</sup>This logic took certain things as axiomatic. For instance, it took as axiomatic the importance of creating techniques for avoiding the death of individual soldiers; it also took as axiomatic the importance of maintaining the peninsula in a condition where the constant threat of conflict increased the opportunity for and duration of contracts. While these *stateless* soldiers and these armies continued to battle among themselves, the logic of securing and maintaining contracts (and the liveliness necessary to sign, fulfil them and then live to sign another) framed the field of battle; it successfully transformed the art of war into an 'industry' based on contract. Far from being ignorant of these conditions, it is Machiavelli who spells out the dynamics of this logic, even tracing the genealogy of its development at the end of Chapter XII of the *Principe*, thereby enhancing the usefulness of the system to a potential prince in the form of a critique of this industry, its strengths and weaknesses.

<sup>72</sup>For the distinction between 'Italian' and 'Continental' (or *a gorgia*) styles of fighting and the sorts of rules Italian mercenary commanders routinely observed in their conflicts see the excellent study by Cecil Clough, 'The Romagna Campaign of 1494: a significant military encounter.' Clough's study clearly situates the Italian rules of warfare in a certain interpretive tradition of the classical models and clearly identifiable in the actions of figures like Francesco Sforza and not, as Machiavelli claims, in the Italian abdication of the traditions of classical warfare. As Clough points out, the French success in the Romagna campaign was not simply due to the Italian use of mercenaries and the French use of native troops, since

quite apart from the Milanese contingent in the Romagna, the French army there included Bernard Stuart d'Aubigny with Scots who were foreign mercenaries as well as a sizeable company of Swiss, all from beyond the Alps. Hence it was not so much that Italian military ineptitude lay in the employment of mercenaries, as Machiavelli

### The Condottiere – Demonstrable Failures?

Machiavelli claims that his intention in the third paragraph of Chapter XII is to ‘demonstrate more thoroughly why mercenary arms are unhappy [*infelicità*] failures’. Examining the details of this ‘demonstration’ reveals much about the status of Machiavelli’s apparent indictment of the use of mercenaries. Paragraph 3 of Chapter XII contains the statement of a general premise; the following paragraphs elucidate particulars that support it before the argument’s conclusion appears toward the end of the chapter. The general premise that paragraph 3 introduces is the following: *mercenary arms, whether excellent or not, always ruin their patron*. Machiavelli takes this general premise as true for two very different reasons: if such arms are excellent and well ordered, they resist being controlled; they oppress their patron or the citizens themselves, at least when this is contrary to the patron’s intention; or, if the mercenary armies and captains are ineffective and incompetent they ruin their clients through both the cost of their employment and their failures in the field. Thus, the complete *uselessness* of mercenary arms is apparently of two types: *effective* and *ineffective*. In both cases, the danger posed by such arms to their patron remains the same – they threaten the continued stability and even the form of the regime, whether such arms prove successful or a failure. This would truly pose a problem if the *Principe* were a text addressed only to established princes, hereditary princes or stable republics. However, the topic of the text is the *new prince* in the *new principality*,<sup>73</sup> for whom an exemplar is the mercenary captain Francesco Sforza. Given this focus, Machiavelli’s distinction between effective and ineffective mercenary arms proves a useful distinction to make among such ‘useless’ arms.<sup>74</sup>

claimed. Leaving aside the obvious lack of political unity on the peninsula and the self-interest that took its place, the issue was that the French army was not trammelled by the imitation of supposed classical models and the associated chivalry; the French fought to win at all costs with utter ruthlessness.

(214–15)

My contention is that Machiavelli’s exaggerated critique of the mercenary is ultimately a critique of the limits of a certain interpretation of classical traditions, and not the complete absence of the observance of such sources. At times, Machiavelli describes the use of mercenaries as being due to an abandonment of those classical models. At other times, he describes this apparent abandonment as a kind of interpretation of those very same models whose dominance has brought about the present weakness in Italian fighting.

<sup>73</sup>See n42 above.

<sup>74</sup>Burckhardt (*The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 13) argues that the pressures of illegitimacy actually combined to make the *condottieri*, as a class of leader, into one of this period’s most singular type of human being:

They must have been heroes of abnegation, natures like Belisarius himself, not to be cankered by hatred and bitterness . . . At the same time, and through the force of the same conditions the genius and capacity of many among them achieved the highest conceivable development.

Further, still in the third paragraph, Machiavelli himself raises an objection to his own general premise when he states: 'And if one responds that whoever has arms in hand would do this, mercenary or not . . .' He then addresses this anonymous objector by making another distinction, a distinction between kinds of patron. The patrons of arms are either princes or republics. If they are princes, the ineffective prince has effectively replaced himself by allowing some other captain to lead his armies. Machiavelli is clear that a prince should always lead his own armies into battle and should be on the field of battle in person.<sup>75</sup> In the case of the principality, the 'performative' dimension of Machiavelli's point here hints strongly at the earlier point he made in Chapters VI and VII during the discussion of having one's own arms: those who have the know-how of command and obedient arms possess the foundation<sup>76</sup> necessary to make the transition from private individual to new prince. On the other hand, if the patron happens to be a republic, the danger posed by the employment of mercenary arms is equally, if indirectly, clear. A republic should have good and well-observed laws to keep their citizens in bounds. Thus, a republic with good laws never has to worry about any one citizen coming to dominate all the rest, so long as its laws continue to be observed faithfully.<sup>77</sup> If a citizen delegated to head a mercenary army should exhibit suspicious behaviour, in a well-governed republic the citizen-captain would be promptly replaced. Yet, according to Machiavelli's general premise, a republic that employs mercenary arms in the first place would have neither good, or if good, then certainly not well-observed laws. Thus, effective mercenary arms present

<sup>75</sup>Machiavelli suggests here that when a difference exists between the prince and his captain, we have a functional problem in principalities. The gap that appears between the legitimate authority in the regime and the regime's functional power, concentrated in its army, proves a clear-cut source of instability and insecurity for the prince and its regime. In speaking about contemporary defence structures in their reliance on contractual forces, Avant discusses in a way remarkably similar to Machiavelli the *slippage* that occurs in functional political control in regimes that make consistent and even integrated use of military contractors:

Contracting avoids the need to mobilize state machinery and centralizes influence with those in charge of dispersing funds to and overseeing the contractor. The redistribution of power generally favors executives relative to legislators, reduces transparency in a way that advantages the government relative to the electorate, and opens the way (through the provision of information) for private interests to affect policy implementation and goals.

See *The Market for Force*, 60 and ch. 3, esp. 113–38.

<sup>76</sup>They may not possess, though, the requisite intention from a host of causes. Some of these causes stem occasionally from lack of opportunity. However, Machiavelli describes those who prove an obstacle to themselves from experiencing a conflict of intentionalities, i.e. the phenomenon of *conscience*. See *Discorsi*, I, 27 and the story of Giovampagolo Baglioni.

<sup>77</sup>Notice that in this paragraph he violates the dictates he sets out at the beginning of this chapter: (a) at the beginning of the *Principe* Machiavelli states that he is not going to reason on republics; here he obviously not only reasons on but *with* republics. (b) At the beginning of this very chapter he states that good laws take care of themselves if we only have good arms. In the case of republics, good laws, under certain circumstances, safeguard good arms.

themselves as having clear utility for potential new, though perhaps illegitimate, princes whether they find themselves in a principality or a republic. Mercenary arms are clearly useful in replacing ineffective princes and are clearly effective in transforming a republic into a principality.<sup>78</sup> The transition in both cases would be contingent on money, opportunity<sup>79</sup> and an effective authority.

### Milan, Naples, Venice and Florence – A Tale of Four Cities

The paragraphs that follow the general premise of the third paragraph contain two occurrences of '*mercenario*'. These paragraphs propose to continue the argument begun in paragraph 3 by introducing specific examples, ancient and modern, to elucidate the hypothesis that the failure of mercenary arms, and the tendency of such arms to end in disastrous failure for the patron, occur no matter the actual capabilities of the mercenary forces in question. In execution, these paragraphs actually accomplish two things: first, paragraph 4 details the success of the Romans, the Spartans and the Swiss who were successful because they were armed republics. Then, in paragraphs 5 and 6, Machiavelli embarks on a list of modern Italian cities that all employed mercenary arms – Milan, Naples, Venice and Florence. In describing the employment of mercenaries by two of these cities, Venice and Florence, Machiavelli relates how these two cities *successfully employed mercenary arms*. Even in the cases of those two cities, Milan and Naples, whose employment of such arms ended in notable failures, the way Machiavelli relates their stories illustrates the fact that mercenary arms do tend to be useful *to someone*, if not to their employer. In fact, the example of Milan serves only to remind us again of the career of Francesco Sforza who successfully transformed his position as *condottiere* into a dukedom. Further, the example of Naples describes how Queen Giovanna evaded the consequences of the success of Francesco's father, Muzio Attendolo Sforza – also a mercenary captain – only through marriage to the King of Aragon. Thus, the examples of Milan and Naples could be read as both a warning to cities and as subtle encouragement to aspiring new princes since the use of the Sforza captains on both occasions brought about a change in regime.

However, such a change did not occur for Florence and Venice. Machiavelli's analyses of these two examples then merits closer examination. The Florentine Republic is secured from the consequences of mercenary arms 'by chance' (*sono suti favoriti dalla sorte*). Because of

<sup>78</sup>See, especially, *Between Form and Event: Machiavelli's Theory of Political Freedom*, where Vatter discusses the dynamics driving the privatization of public space.

<sup>79</sup>Or an obedient, i.e. *believing*, people.



his failure in the field, mercenary captain Giovanni Acuto just happened *not* to win and thus, the Florentines were spared being left at his discretion (*ma ognuno confesserà che, vincendo, stavano a Fiorentino a sua discrezione*). Similarly, Paolo Vitelli happened *not* to win at Pisa; should he have taken the city, the Florentines would have been at his discretion. However, in the midst of detailing the particulars of these two examples, Machiavelli begins an apparent digression on another aspect of the use of mercenary forces – the known *intentions* of the mercenary commanders themselves. Because rival *condottieri* feared the consequences of the success of a particular commander on the dynamics of the market for force in Italy as a whole, mercenary commanders were often prevented from transitioning into the sovereignty of their patrons *by other mercenary captains*. Machiavelli in these paragraphs gives a genealogy of the rise of the Italian *condottieri* and the Italian peninsula as a province effectively ruled by two students of Alberigo da Conio, the Sforza and the Braccio, who, according to Machiavelli ‘in their times were the arbiters of Italy’.<sup>80</sup> Through the old school opposition of these rival clans the gains of the Sforza were opposed by the Bracchesi, and the successes of the Bracchesi were undermined by the Sforza.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the Florentines did not simply have *chance* to thank for their evading the consequences of their use of mercenary arms. The Florentines escaped the consequences of using mercenary arms by properly gauging, calculating and playing on the ambitions – the signalled intentions – of their *condottieri*: Francesco Sforza ultimately desired Lombardy, not Tuscany; the Braccio desired to possess the Romagna and the Kingdom of Naples, not Florence. Further, both of these captains needed continuous infusions

<sup>80</sup>*Principe*, XII. Alberigo da Conio is also Alberigo da Barbiano. Machiavelli describes the career of Alberigo in the *Istorie fiorentine*:

In these times there were many soldiers in Italy – English, German and Breton – some led by those princes who at various times had come to Italy, and some sent by the pontiffs who were then in Avignon. All the Italian princes made their wars with them for a long time, and how there emerged Ludovico da Conio, from the Romagna, who formed a company of Italian soldiers named for St. George. The virtue and discipline of which in little time took away the reputation of foreign arms and returned it to Italian arms [*la virtù e disciplina del quale in poco tempo tolse la reputazione alle armi forestiere e ridussela negli Italiani*], which the princes of Italy used afterwards in the wars they fought together.

(*Istorie fiorentine*, I, 34–5)

This is an astounding assertion that truly flies in the face of those commentators who paint Machiavelli as someone uncritically dismissive of the possible ‘virtues’ of mercenary arms in Italy. Even in the midst of his exaggerated critique, Machiavelli recognizes the strength Italian mercenary forces originally had. He clearly recognizes here that these forces were successful at a particular time and that later, from various determinate causes, they no longer demonstrated that original effectiveness.

<sup>81</sup>Machiavelli tells the story of the Sforza and the Braccio in his *Istorie fiorentine*, especially books IV–VI. There Machiavelli relates the conflict between Francesco Sforza and Niccolò Piccinino which ends in the defeat of Niccolò and in the legitimation of Francesco who becomes the heir to the throne of Milan when he marries the daughter of Filippo Maria Visconte.

of cash in order to keep their armies mobilized and their soldiers paid.<sup>82</sup> Thus, mercenary captains were subject to easy manipulation by regionally prominent, mercantile powers that had the capital necessary to keep these captains in the field and engaged in campaigns whose success or failure very often did not threaten their own regimes back at home.<sup>83</sup> At the same time, sponsoring such forces on their campaigns in other regions certainly could and did serve as disruptive objects of concern to their rivals in the Italian peninsula. Capital might be lost in the success or failure of a campaign, but capital could be replaced. The Venetians and the Florentines could make use of these captains both by making promises and tendering money to them in a way that ultimately benefited their own regional strategic interests.<sup>84</sup> Even though Machiavelli presents the Florentine and Venetian use of mercenaries as if it were a criticism of their having engaged such forces, attention to the *performance* of this criticism within Machiavelli's text suggests that Machiavelli greatly exaggerates the case against mercenaries here. The degree of his exaggeration intends to highlight the fact that the Florentines and Venetians both knew how to make use of mercenary forces such that their employment for a time proved useful and predictable to them under certain circumstances.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>82</sup>It is interesting to note how Braccio's ambition against the Church as portrayed by Machiavelli does two things: (a) it exposes how the Church is subject to the same dynamics of Italy's mercenary regimes as all the other princes of Italy. (b) The Church is susceptible to external domination, not from an extra worldly source, but from clearly this-worldly force. In fact, on Machiavelli's telling the Church was both the origin and ongoing cause of Italy's domination by mercenary regimes. Mercenary forces were the kind of force with which a priest would fight, since, in the absence of correcting factors, the mercenary force materialized the greatest possible degree of surrender to *fortuna*, exceeded only by dependence on auxiliary force.

<sup>83</sup>That the Florentines knew and calculated correctly Sforza's intentions and knew how critically dependent the regimes of Sforza and Braccio were on external financing, see *Istorie fiorentine*, bks V and VI.

<sup>84</sup>Bayley's treatment of this period makes these dynamics very clear; see *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, chs 1–4.

<sup>85</sup>Thus, mercenary arms did not prove to be the most dangerous arms a prince can use. For Machiavelli, auxiliary arms – the arms that a foreign prince loans to another – proved to be much more dangerous than mercenary arms. In contrasting mercenary with auxiliary arms he states:

Let him, then, who wants to be unable to win make use of these arms, since they are much more dangerous than mercenary arms. For with these, ruin is accomplished; they are all united, all resolved to obey someone else. But mercenary arms, when they have won, need more time and greater opportunity to hurt you, since they are not one whole body and have been found and paid for by you. In them, the third-party whom you may put at their head cannot quickly seize so much authority as to offend you. In sum, in mercenary arms, laziness is more dangerous; in auxiliary arms, virtue is  
(*Insomma nelle mercenarie è più pericolosa la ignavia, nell'ausiliarie la virtù*

(*Principe*, XII)

A detailed reading of this passage reveals as much about mercenary arms, and their nuances, as it does about the dangers of the use of auxiliary arms. Because mercenary arms form their commissions through contracts, their unity is dependent on their patron and not on their captain. The captain of mercenaries, then, can be a kind of 'nominal' head whose skill in the art

### Fear of Success? A Conspiracy of Patrons

Chapter XII suggests that both republics and principalities are potentially made vulnerable through the use of mercenaries; it also suggests that there are indeed situations in which mercenary arms can be astutely employed. These cases would include: (a) if the mercenary captain is neither decisively successful nor entirely unsuccessful in their campaign, maintaining thereby the overall balance of power between their employer, themselves and the other powers in the region; (b) if one employs mercenary captains who, in their trade, are opposed by the ambitions of others plying the same profession, as the Sforza were opposed by the Bracchio; (c) if one knows that the ambitions of a mercenary captain ultimately lie elsewhere. This last (c) also suggests that mercenary captains, like the Bracchio and Sforza, may, indeed, have something like a 'love' or at least a 'cause' to keep them in the field beyond the stipend they receive. Machiavelli clearly attributes to *condottieri* like Sforza and Piccinino the aim of making the transition from being captains of Italian battlefields of questionable status to being legitimate princes in their own right. Their 'desire for legitimacy' was thus a factor that rendered them useful and predictable to others.<sup>86</sup> Factoring in this 'desire for legitimacy' was a clear strategy employed by the regimes of Italian republics and principalities, a strategy which, when successfully utilized, for a time made these mercenary 'arms of others' their own.<sup>87</sup>

Further, if considered with care, the references made to the mercenary captain, Paolo Vitelli, in this chapter not only describe the risk the Florentines took in employing the *condottieri*; they also suggest, by *what is not said* about Vitelli's employment by the Florentines, another stratagem employers of mercenaries could employ against *condottieri* on those occasions when the decisive success of the captains in their engagements threatened the proportion of power between patron and *condottiere*. The Florentines hired

of war, whose technical virtuosity, is itself indirectly dependent on the kind of contractual relationship he has formed with the patron; thus his relationship with his own troops is mediated by and with the patron in the contract. Given a Hannibal-like captain – one of 'inhuman cruelty' – even the slothfulness [*ignavia*] of mercenary arms can be corrected. On the other hand, auxiliary arms do not have this issue, and while they are very dangerous indeed to the prince who employs them, *they can be quite useful to the prince who loans them* as a subtle, or even not-so-subtle, way of increasing influence and empire; see *Principe*, XVI and *Discorsi*, II, 19–21.

<sup>86</sup>I believe Jorge Delgado (*Bajo el signo de Circe*) is right to emphasize the importance of *gloria* in the careers of certain *condottieri*:

El *condottieri* era, en efecto, un ser de trazo medieval dominado mayoritariamente por la ambición y la pasión; pero él era también un personaje que entendía que lo único que tiene en sus manos es la heroicidad como medio para lograr la inmortalidad. Tanto el triunfo del guerrero como sus hazañas y leyendas seguramente siempre fueron objeto innegable de una gran admiración por propios y extraños.

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<sup>87</sup>It was also the factor that revealed mercenary commanders as semi-autonomous, political players in their own right.

Paolo Vitelli who, had he taken Pisa, in Machiavelli's estimation would have ruined the Florentines. What Machiavelli does not mention here is that Vitelli was actually beheaded by the Florentines on 1 October 1499 for having been 'overly cautious' in the midst of the siege of Pisa, revealing another stratagem, *betrayal* and the *art of the conspiracy*, that the patrons of mercenaries employed against their captains.<sup>88</sup> Machiavelli describes both the Florentines and Venetians making use of the art of conspiracy as a way of securing themselves against the potentially negative consequences of their use of mercenary arms. Carmagnola, a mercenary captain, defeated the Milanese on behalf of the Venetians in 1432. The Venetians realized that they could not from that moment either win with him or dismiss him, so they tricked and killed him and did so in a grand and thoroughly public manner.<sup>89</sup> In fact, the betrayal of these captains is not, strictly speaking, even *betrayal* if by betrayal we intend to colour these decisions and actions on the part of the regime as somehow immoral. For Machiavelli, the established legitimacy of the patron makes these betrayals a clear case of the patrons – the established republics and princes – conquering over threats through the use of their established authority, i.e. of the spectacular but sanctioned use of fraud in warfare.<sup>90</sup> Effective mercenary captains in this climate thus had most to fear from their own employers, who were clearly and reasonably threatened by the consequences following a captain's overwhelming success.<sup>91</sup>

The closing paragraph of Chapter XII does not again mention the singular, *mercenario*, but it does define mercenaries in the plural as those who 'were men without a state and who lived on industry' (*feciono questo perché, sendo senza stato e in su la industria . . .*)<sup>92</sup> In these closing paragraphs

<sup>88</sup>Given that Machiavelli assisted in the management of this war, he was acutely aware of the circumstances surrounding Vitelli's death. See Bayley, *War and Society in Renaissance Florence*, 243–4, for the truly Byzantine negotiations and conspiracies between Vitelli, the Florentines, the French and Piero de' Medici supported by the Venetians over the specifics of Vitelli's *condotta*, intrigues that ended in Vitelli's execution. See also *Discorsi*, III, 6.

<sup>89</sup>See Mockler, *The Mercenaries*, 48–9.

<sup>90</sup>See *Principe*, Chapters VII and XVIII. In Chapter XVIII 'deception' is named as a mode of force for combating men. Machiavelli famously uses the 'fox' as the image for it, and yet, at least in the paragraph that introduces this mode of force, Machiavelli gives the meaning of 'deception' a specific sense: a prince, to successively combat men in this way, must learn how to use a *promise*. This includes both understanding how to keep and when to break a promise; it also includes knowing how to colour the decision to break a promise with the appearance of necessity.

<sup>91</sup>See Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 11–15. With the technically unskilful mercenary captains this proportion is reversed for the simple reason that they practise their art so poorly. Through their incompetence they literally rob their patrons of what they do not deserve. They receive money and supplies, yet they frequently lose the lands and empire of their patrons as, indeed, befell the Venetians at the battle of Vailà in 1509.

<sup>92</sup>L'ordine che egli hanno tenuto è stato, prima, per dare reputazione a loro proprii, avere tolto reputazione alle fanterie: feciono questo perché, sendo senza stato e in sulla industria, e' pochi fanti non davono loro reputazione e gli assai non potevano nutrire.

(*Principe*, XII)

Machiavelli gives a genealogy of the condottiere industry. He tells us here that in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy, war had become an 'industry of mercenaries' because those in positions of governance no longer had or practised the art of war. Machiavelli describes the process by which the Italian noble families were overthrown by their citizens with the support of the Church. In other Italian cities, the republican form of government was overthrown when private citizens became princes. The story that Machiavelli tells here is interesting, both because it throws light on Machiavelli's understanding of the origins of this system,<sup>93</sup> and because it suggests that simple possession of the art of war is not by itself a sufficient condition for retaining a regime. As Machiavelli tells it here, the nobles, who are nobles through their possession of the art of war, lose in their contest with the newly empowered mercantile class who, with the support of the Church, overcome their former rulers. Those who possess the art of war are overcome by those who do not: private citizens manage to overcome their, presumably, *legitimate* rulers; citizens allied with the Church manage to overcome their nobility; the priests conquered the warriors. Through the support of the church and the capital of the dominant mercantile families an industry of conflict develops in the Italian peninsula, and this industry is of sufficient force to suppress the consequences simple possession of the art of war had previously entailed. Chapter XIV, the very chapter in which Machiavelli discusses the importance of the art of war, opens with yet another reference to the career of Francesco Sforza who, 'through his being armed (*per essere armato*), from a private individual became Duke of Milan; and his sons, by fleeing and shunning arms, from being Dukes became private individuals'. In this chapter just the fact of the mercenary Sforza's 'being armed' (*per essere armato*) establishes a certain proportion between him and the esteemed figure of Philopoemon whom Machiavelli will praise in the following paragraph as someone who did nothing but think on the art of war.<sup>94</sup> With these varied statements Machiavelli signals both the importance of the art of war and suggests that this art, too, has its limits.<sup>95</sup> Generally speaking, the exaggerated character of Machiavelli's criticism of Italian mercenaries draws attention to the development of the reliance on mercenary forces by Italian princes and republics, and the history itself can

<sup>93</sup>This story is much more exhaustively developed in the second section of the *Discorsi* and especially in bks IV–VI of the *Istorie fiorentine*.

<sup>94</sup>As strange as it may seem, given the amount of praise Machiavelli assigns to Philopoemon and the importance he appears to accord to the art of war, this is the only mention Machiavelli makes of him in any of his published writings, including the *Arte della guerra*. Besides this one reference to the 'Socratically-minded' head of the Achaean league Philopoemon literally vanishes from further consideration from Machiavelli's writings, including his letters. This can hardly be said of Francesco Sforza whose name and example appears throughout the *Principe*, the *Discorsi*, the *Arte della guerra*, and, of course, the *Istorie fiorentine* which can easily be read as the story/comedy of his transition from being an illegitimate mercenary captain to the 'by marriage' made-legitimate prince of Milan.

<sup>95</sup>To be supplemented by the art of the *condotta*?

be seen as a veiled response to an obvious question arising in the light of his overall criticism of mercenary forces: ‘why, if the Italian mercenaries are so awful and uncertain in the field would any prince or republic seriously depend on them?’ The history Machiavelli tells of the genesis of the importance of the mercenary system describes its rise as a strategy to circumscribe the power of those who possessed the art of war. On his telling, the adoption, support and encouragement of mercenary forces was the expression of the *will-to-power*, so to speak, of a particular alliance of Italy’s commercial and ecclesiastical interests. Thus, Machiavelli’s history of the use of mercenaries in the wars of the Italian peninsula is an interpretation of the multiple ways in which mercenaries were deployed to extend and routinize the power arrangements of peculiar interests requiring forces having the particular set of features mercenary arms exhibited. Employment of mercenary forces was not simply a bad decision on the part of republicans and princes who made their selection from among an array of choices available to them. The character of the arms directly reflect the character of the power(s) whose interests they were intended to secure.<sup>96</sup> Thus, Machiavelli’s criticism of mercenary arms is at the same time a critique of the very criteria guiding the decisions leading to the employment of such arms and is, thus, meant as a critique of the employers, *themselves*, who were *constrained* to choose such arms as an extension of their particular brand of state, foregoing other apparently more fruitful alternatives as, *for one*, the development of a citizen militia that would have necessitated the sustained empowerment of a prince’s or a republic’s own people.

## V. CONCLUSION

It is clear that Machiavelli’s critique of the condottieri in the *Principe* is deliberately exaggerated by him and has not been perceived by commentators in a sufficiently nuanced way. The hard and sharp distinction usually made in Machiavelli scholarship between having ‘one’s own arms’ and employing the ‘arms of others’ needs to be rethought, since these topics problematize the significance of effectual authority but also the phenomenon of obedience, and thereby the *relationship between desire and belief* in the texts of Machiavelli.<sup>97</sup> Further, the particularly exaggerated rhetoric

<sup>96</sup>Consider his description of Alexander VI in *Principe*, Chapter XVII, and the family history of the addressee(s) of the *Principe*. See also the *Discorsi*, II, 2 and the distinction made there between ancient and modern religion.

<sup>97</sup>As Hannah Arendt states in part II of, *On Violence*:

If we would trust our own experiences in these matters, we should know that the instinct of submission, an ardent desire to obey and be ruled by some strong man, is at least as prominent in human psychology as the will to power, and, politically, perhaps more relevant.

Machiavelli employs in the critique of such arms compels his reader to attend to the sort of thinking – the character of the decision-making processes – that could have led anyone to employ mercenary forces in the first place. Thus, his critique of this sort of arms is at the same time a critique of those institutional alliances and policy trends through which such arms could be viewed as so compellingly attractive.<sup>98</sup> The fact that Machiavelli dwells on how these condottieri were not useful for repelling the French and Spanish armies from their incursions into the Italian peninsula after 1494 should not be read as a simple dismissal of them. In different passages throughout his works, Machiavelli points out limitations and defects possessed by the French, Spanish and even Swiss arms. Each of these differently organized and equipped armies proved useful and effective in certain contexts while in other cases they proved easily overwhelmed and defeated.<sup>99</sup> Thus, in Machiavelli, there are clearly certain contexts in which the use of the condottieri by acquisitive princes rendered their employment predictable, even effective, and their negatives manageable. As in the case of Francesco Sforza, mercenary forces clearly could perform a key function in the transformation of a potential prince into an actual prince by translating them across the divide of illegitimacy. The condottieri could perform a key function for those wishing to transform a republic into a principality. Mercenaries were very useful for destabilizing a province, when a foreign prince or republic wished to disrupt or preserve the proportion of regional forces without directly engaging forces of their own. Mercenary soldiers were a way for those actually versed in the *know-how of command* and the art of war to take away the regimes of others not so similarly versed. In his conflicting critique of the employment of such forces, Machiavelli at the same time illuminates the genuine, if limited, potential that mercenary forces did possess in certain contexts. In fixing their limitations and the specific contexts where these forces exhibited effectiveness, Machiavelli's critique then subsequently foregrounds the ideological commitments that compelled continued reliance on such forces even in circumstances that clearly exceeded them.

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On the distinction of authority from violence and simple submission, see also, 'What was Authority', 82–3.

<sup>98</sup>Ultimately such a critique must lead one to ask, 'what are the *grounds* upon which such decision-making processes depend' that would lead someone, or some group, to secure themselves through such force?

<sup>99</sup>Machiavelli himself indicates the distinct fatal weaknesses of Spanish and French arms in his evaluation of them at *Principe*, XXVI. He evaluates the Swiss limitations at both *Discorsi* II, 12 and *Principe* XXVI where they are described as being 'ruined by Spanish infantry'.

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