

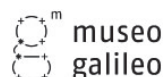


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Florence: Following Machiavelli's footsteps

Itinerary

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Following Machiavelli's footsteps

Machiavelli and Florence

The itinerary we are about to follow traces events in the life of Machiavelli, touching on places in Florence that are in some way connected to important stages in the life of the Secretary. The places we will visit have enormous historical and artistic value, and Machiavelli represents only one possible visual angle - significant, but not necessarily the most important, and certainly not the best known - from which to view them. The stages of this itinerary are intended, however, to serve as entry point for a broader view of the Renaissance seen as a phenomenon lying at the roots of our European culture. Accordingly, each stage has been considered within the context of conceptual categories - harmony, conflict, the reason-imagination dialectics and that of innovation-stagnation, the relationship between the center and the periphery, and between identity and diversity - themes developed in parallel in other itineraries as well, so as to represent the Florentine and Italian aspect, distinct in its particularity but not separated from the rest, of a moment in European history and culture.

The Machiavelli itinerary starts under the sign of Girolamo Savonarola, from his seat in San Marco, since the friar represents a basic reference point for Machiavelli. In one of his first recorded "political", but unofficial, writings, a letter to Ricciardo Becchi in 1498, Machiavelli furnishes information on the Friar's activity. Machiavelli, in interpreting the actions of Savonarola, reveals the tension existing between the moment of reason, incarnated by his analyses, and the religious-imaginary side represented by Savonarola's acts, which however, insofar as efficacious, are fully consonant with reason.

In the second stage, moving forward to the time of the Medicean government, we will go to Palazzo Medici Riccardi where *The Mandrake (Mandragola)*, the famous play by Machiavelli, may have been performed on a solemn occasion. On the one hand, the symbolic representation of Medicean political power will emerge, while on the other we will see how Machiavelli's political ambition is linked to the creation of a little masterpiece of literature.

In the third stage we will visit the Basilica of San Lorenzo and return to the letter to Ricciardo Becchi to examine the image of woman (and hence the most emblematic of diversities, that of gender) in Machiavelli and his Florence.

The next four stages, Piazza della Signoria, Palazzo Vecchio, the Loggia dei Lanzi and the Bargello, will be devoted to the years when Machiavelli worked for the Florentine Republic, confronting the problem of the new regime's symbolic-imaginary representation of power, the role of a "citizens' militia" in the conflicts that embroiled Florence, and the relationship between the central power and the Florentine countryside. Lastly, we will visit the Tabernacle of the Stinche, recalling the return of the Medici to Florence and the incarceration and torture of Machiavelli for political motives.

At the Casa Buonarroti and Santa Croce we will recall the last moments in the life of Machiavelli and his death. Here we will pause to examine the fortifications of Florence, on which both Machiavelli and Michelangelo Buonarroti worked for a few brief years, and the dramatic conflicts embroiling Florence at the time.

The itinerary ends at Palazzo Strozzi, seat of a Machiavellian Archive that projects us toward Machiavelli's European dimension and shows us the concrete dissemination of his works, starting already in the 16th century, through Spain, France, Poland and the rest of Europe.



Monastery of San Marco: Machiavelli's Savonarola



An itinerary devoted to Niccolò Machiavelli must give due importance to the figure of Girolamo Savonarola, not only a reference point for any reflection on Machiavelli but also the specific subject of one of his earliest extant writings, the letter to Ricciardo Becchi dated 9 March 1498 - shortly before Machiavelli began his career as official of the Florentine Republic. The itinerary thus starts from the area north of the city's center, site of the Church of San Marco and the Dominican Monastery of the same name, whose Prior was Girolamo Savonarola.

The church and monastery of San Marco were occupied by the Dominicans in 1435, after having been the seat of the Silvestrini since 1418. In 1437 Cosimo the Elder decided to rebuild the complex - as mentioned also by Machiavelli in the *Florentine Histories* (*Istorie fiorentine*) (VII, 5) - with Michelozzo as architect; the frescoes were entrusted to Fra Angelico. Michelozzo remodelled the existing structure (dating from the 14th century) in the sacristy and the apse, while further changes were made by Giambologna in the mid-sixteenth century and by Pier Francesco Silvani in 1678. Such outstanding figures in the city's cultural life as Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Agnolo Poliziano are buried in San Marco.

Part of the Monastery has now become the Museum of San Marco, with its splendid Hospice Hall, originally dedicated to Fra Angelico, while the other rooms display works by the finest Florentine artists of the 15th and 16th centuries. The Portrait of Girolamo Savonarola by Fra Bartolomeo clearly shows what a striking impression the Friar must have made at the time of Machiavelli.

On 9 March 1498 Machiavelli wrote a letter to Ricciardo Becchi, Florentine ambassador to the papal court, informing him of Girolamo Savonarola's activity. Savonarola - writes Machiavelli - was intending to pray for a sign that would confirm his prophecies, "to unite those on his side and strengthen them in defending him". Just at this time the Signoria, Florence's highest governing body, had been elected, with a majority that opposed Savonarola. Aware of this difficult political situation, the Friar decided not to speak in the city's most prestigious church, the Duomo - still called "Sancta Reparata" by Machiavelli - but



to content himself with preaching to the men in the Monastery of San Marco, while the women would listen to Fra' Domenico da Pescia in the Basilica of San Lorenzo.

In those sermons - reports Machiavelli - Savonarola sustained that "God had told him" that someone in Florence intended to become a tyrant, thus managing to unite his followers against a common enemy. However, "the Signoria having then written to the Pope in his favour" and no longer fearing his Florentine adversaries, Savonarola made no further mention of any tyrant.

For Machiavelli, Savonarola "speaks according to the times" - that is, adapting his sermons to the circumstances of the moment - "and colouring his lies". However, Machiavelli was not interested in the truth or falsehood of Savonarola's words, but in their political impact. Savonarola - in Machiavelli's opinion - managed to express politically what could be called today the complex relationship between reason and imagination, utilizing the latter to pursue objectives established by the former. In this perspective, Machiavelli is obliged to appreciate the policy of Savonarola, so quick at understanding the spirit of the times and unscrupulously adapting to different situations.

In Machiavelli's later reflections on Savonarola, the role of religion as civil restraint emerges. Religion is not merely an *instrumentum regni* useful for governing a coarse, ignorant population - the people of Florence, "neither ignorant nor coarse", were persuaded by Savonarola that he could speak with God (*Discourses* I, 11) - but is an element indispensable to the foundation and conservation of States.

Fra' Bartolomeo's Portraits of Savonarola

In the Museum of San Marco can be seen two portraits of Girolamo Savonarola painted by Fra' Bartolomeo, known as Baccio della Porta. Born at Sofignano in the Province of Prato in 1472, the young painter was so impressed by Savonarola's preachings that he participated both times, in 1496 and 1497, in the bonfires of vanities held in Piazza della Signoria to destroy works of irreligious subject. In 1500 Fra' Bartolomeo seems to have become a novice in Prato, moving the following year to the Monastery of San Marco in Florence.

His first portrait painted on a panel probably dates to 1497, when Bartolomeo would have had a sharp, vivid image of Savonarola. At the bottom of the painting appears the inscription HIERONYMI FERRARIENSIS A DEO/ MISSI PROPHETAE EFFIGIES. Against a dark background emerges the severe profile of Savonarola, with the strongly-marked features accentuated by the hood that partially covers his face. The austerity of the portrait and the proud gaze of Savonarola evoke the striking impression made on his contemporaries by his virulent, fiery sermons. Machiavelli too, although very different in character from Fra' Bartolomeo, was struck by the sermons of the Friar from Ferrara, and especially by his hold over the Florentine people, "neither ignorant nor coarse" but nonetheless convinced by Savonarola that he spoke with God.

The Museum also contains a *Portrait of Fra' Girolamo Savonarola in the Guise of St. Peter the Martyr* painted a few years later, again by Fra' Bartolomeo. In this oil on wood, Savonarola is represented as the thirteenth-century Dominican Pietro da Verona. As compared to the earlier work, the portrait appears softer, the realism of the features less exaggerated. Savonarola is no longer depicted with the fierce gaze that emphasizes his strength of character, but in a more detached (and less striking) manner, through his transfiguration into the image of Peter the Martyr.



The First Performance of “The Mandrake” at Palazzo Medici Riccardi

Niccolò Machiavelli, after the fall of the Florentine Republic in which he had played a major role - although not always acknowledged as such - and with the return of the Medici, was dismissed from all his political offices. From then on, he was driven by the aim of resuming an active role in public affairs and serving his homeland, but to do so he would have to enter into the graces of the current (and firmly established) lords of Florence. A lucky chance was offered him by the Florentine festivities, celebrated in Palazzo Medici, for the wedding of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, the nephew of Pope Leo X, who had married in France Madeleine de La Tour d'Auvergne, cousin to King Francis I.

Palazzo Medici Riccardi is situated about five hundred meters from Piazza San Marco. Cosimo the Elder had commissioned its design to Michelozzo di Bartolomeo, who built it from 1444 to 1462, although the work was definitively completed only in 1543. Generally considered the prototype of the Florentine noble residence, with its imposing presence and austerity it symbolized the political and cultural role held by the Medici in Florence for at least a century.

The Florentine festivities for the wedding of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici (6-8 September 1518) were described in detail in the chronicles of the time. It played an important symbolic/political role, so much so that even Pope Leo X, unable to attend in person, presided in effigy with a portrait by Raphael depicting him beside Giulio de' Medici, the future Pope Clement VII, a portrait now displayed at the Uffizi Gallery. On that occasion three plays were performed, which some scholars - albeit in the lack of direct documentation - tend to identify as *The Mandrake* (*Mandragola*) by Machiavelli, the *Filargio* by Giovanni Manetti and perhaps *La Pisana* by Lorenzo Strozzi. The plays were performed on platforms furnished with set designs commissioned of Franciabigio - he probably worked on *The Mandrake* - of Ghirlandaio and Bastiano da Sangallo.



The date of composition of *The Mandrake* - the famous play by Niccolò Machiavelli - has not been established with certainty. It is set in 1504 - as we learn from the prologue narrated by Callimaco - but was most likely *post res perditas*, that is, after the return of the Medici to Florence and Machiavelli's dismissal from public office. It is certainly no later than 1519 (according to the Florentine calendar, which runs from 25 March 1519 to 24 March 1520), since this date appears on the oldest manuscript of the work, now at the Medicean Laurentian Library in Florence; it probably indicates the time when the codex was recopied, and not when the text was first written. Although it has not been demonstrated with certainty that *The Mandrake* was performed at the wedding of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici in Palazzo Medici Riccardi, the hypothesis remains entirely possible.

In the early Sixties, *The Mandrake* was read by Parronchi as a political allegory, where Callimaco, who aspires to the love of Lucrezia, is to be identified with Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, who became Lord of Florence (represented by Lucrezia), while the old fool Nicia may represent Pier Soderini. Although this interpretation has often been contested, Bausi has recently noted that the allegorical/political dimension was almost compulsory in a sixteenth-century theatrical work. Accordingly, he seems to accept the pro-Medicean allegorical context, but rejects the identification of Nicia with Soderini, by now excluded from Florentine politics, and sees the foolish Nicia instead as a projection of the old oligarchical class, relegated to second place by the Medicean primacy.

Bastiano da Sangallo and the Mandrake

In the *Life of Bastiano da San Gallo*, called *Aristotile* (*Vita di Bastiano, detto Aristotile, da San Gallo*) by Giorgio Vasari, we read that Bastiano da Sangallo was highly praised for the beautiful triumphal arch decorated "with many stories" he built for the visit to Florence of the Medici Pope, Leo X, in the year 1515. For this reason Bastiano was involved three years later in the festivities for the wedding of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici held at Palazzo Medici, later Riccardi. Bastiano "was of great assistance" - as Vasari tells us - "in all the festive preparations, and particularly in some prospect-views for comedies, to Franciabigio and Ridolfo Ghirlandajo, who had charge of everything". In Vasari's *Life of Franciabigio* (*Vita del Francia Bigio*) the perspective sets for the plays recited at the wedding of Piero di Lorenzo de' Medici, in whose design Bastiano da Sangallo specialized, are given special praise. One of these plays was probably Machiavelli's *Mandrake*, although certain proof of this is still lacking. However, in the final part of the "Life of Bastiano", Vasari informs us that the artist had begun to frequent Andrea del Sarto, "from whom he learned to do many things to perfection, attending with much study to perspective", and that he worked on many festivities, including the one held at the home of Bernardino di Giordano at Canto di Monteloro. On that occasion, it was expressly *The Mandrake* to be performed, "a most amusing comedy", continues Vasari; for this play, Andrea del Sarto and Bastiano da Sangallo "executed the scenery, which was very beautiful".



The Basilica of San Lorenzo Preaching to the Women

In the Letter to Ricciardo Becchi dated 9 March 1498, one of the first direct documents of the life of the future Secretary of the Florentine Republic, Niccolò Machiavelli informed him of the activity of Friar Girolamo Savonarola. Machiavelli reported that, since it was unadvisable to preach in the Duomo - the most prestigious seat - for political reasons, Savonarola announced that he had decided not to do so “to avoid scandal and to serve the honour of God”. He then arranged for the men to attend his sermon at San Marco, “and for the women to go to San Lorenzo to hear Fra Domenico”. Machiavelli thus notes a diversity - for him, entirely natural - between preaching addressed to men and to women, in this case at the Basilica of San Lorenzo.

The Basilica of San Lorenzo, situated some hundred meters from Palazzo Medici Riccardi, is one of Florence's most ancient churches, having been first consecrated by St. Ambrose in 393, but then rebuilt in the Romanesque age. In 1418 the Medici - San Lorenzo was their church - commissioned Filippo Brunelleschi to remodel the ancient basilica. The work was completed only after his death by Antonio Manetti. On the outside, the facade of the basilica is faced in rough stone with three portals and an arched niche, while the right side is faced in smooth stone. The interior is striking for its harmonious serenity, deriving from the precise proportional relationships of Brunelleschi's project. The floor plan is a Latin cross, divided into three naves by two rows of Corinthian columns with high carved dossierets supporting rounded arches. Michelangelo Buonarroti was commissioned to design and build the inner facade, the balcony for displaying relics, the Laurentian Library, and the New Sacristy. The latter, and the Chapel of the Princes, are known as the Medici Chapels. Although the context was not lacking in prestige, it was deemed suitable for women to listen to sermons in a separate place.



In Machiavelli's now famous letter to Ricciardo Becchi we find an "on-the-spot" interpretation by Machiavelli of Savonarola's last days, and most notably of his decision, having reflected on the inadvisability of preaching in the Duomo, to have the men attend his sermons at San Marco and the women those of Fra Domenico in the Basilica of San Lorenzo. This same episode is reported by Jacopo Nardi in his *Istorie della città di Firenze* [Stories of the city of Florence] but with some differences. Nardi specifies that, due to the great crowds of people, it became necessary to preach only to the men, while the women - in his account - went to the Monastery of San Niccolò, today the site of the Opificio delle Pietre Dure. Machiavelli instead felt it unnecessary to report this information.

The preacher who took the place of Savonarola was Fra Domenico Buonvicini, or Fra Domenico da Pescia, one of the Prior's closest collaborators. Known to his contemporaries for his childish gullibility, Fra Domenico was also rumoured to know little doctrine. Roberto Ubaldini, the chronicler of the Monastery of San Marco, recalls him as a "man of good purity, but thick-headed, and too quick to believe in revelations and the dreams of women". To this faithful executor of Savonarola's orders, who acted as his replacement on several occasions, the Friar from Ferrara entrusted the organization and guidance of the company of boys. And here we can note how Fra Domenico resembles a "feminine" figure, close to the dreams of women, and hence suitable for preaching to less "rational" persons such as boys, as well as women.

Machiavelli and Women

In the works of Niccolò Machiavelli, the image of woman as a possession of man emerges repeatedly. A prince must avoid arousing hatred, by refraining from taking the "property of his citizens" and "their women" (*The Prince*, 17). Violating a woman meant offending the man she belonged to. Above all, Machiavelli compares fortune - the real force that every man, and first of all a new prince, must dominate - to woman: like a woman, fortune is voluble, and to have her on your side you must "beat and ill-use her". Like a woman, fortune is the friend of the young, who are "more violent, and with more audacity command her" (*The Prince*, 25). The submission of woman is taken for granted, as is her desire to be boldly commanded, even to the point of brutal violence.

In the *Discourses* (III, 6) Machiavelli speaks of Princess Caterina Sforza. Endowed with the unscrupulous cruelty of an audacious prince, she is ready to sacrifice her own children held hostage to save herself and the State. Caterina cares nothing for her children, since she can have others, and to prove it - proudly proclaiming her femininity - she displays "her genital member" to her enemies. Machiavelli reports this episode - not confirmed by historical sources - without prejudice; but he is unable to go one step further, as might seem obvious, and that is, to take her as model of behaviour for a new prince, side-by-side with Cesare Borgia known as Il Valentino.



Piazza della Signoria A Citizens' Militia

The happiest years in the life of Niccolò Machiavelli were undoubtedly those in which he served his homeland as Secretary and Chancellor of a republican government. During that period, he also dealt with strictly military problems. Machiavelli sustained the importance of having an army made up of citizens of the State rather than foreign mercenaries (contrary to the custom of the time); for this reason, he personally endeavoured to recruit soldiers from the Florentine countryside. On 15 February 1506 (1505 according to the Florentine calendar) the troops he had recruited (and above all, organized) paraded through Piazza della Signoria.

Piazza della Signoria lies a few hundred meters from Palazzo Medici Riccardi and the Basilica of San Lorenzo. One of the most fascinating sites in Florence, it is also the one that best "represents" the political activity of Machiavelli for the Florentine Republic in the years 1498-1512. Structurally linked to Palazzo Vecchio - where the Gonfalonier for life Pier Soderini (with whom Machiavelli closely collaborated) lived in the early 16th century, and where Machiavelli himself worked - Piazza della Signoria was the material and symbolic seat of political power and Florentine civic life, as opposed to the nearby Piazza del Duomo, symbol of ecclesiastical power. The buildings facing on the Piazza include, in addition to Palazzo Vecchio, the Loggia della Signoria (or Loggia dei Lanzi). Closely associated to the life of the republic in Machiavelli's time are artworks such as the copy of the bronze group portraying Judith and Holofernes (the original by Donatello is in Palazzo Vecchio) and above all, the copy of Michelangelo's great statue of David.

In his political activity Niccolò Machiavelli was always guided (and clearly, not in any abstract manner) by profound convictions of theoretical nature - always deeply pondered - which he consistently applied. The clearest example of this is the utilization of a citizens' militias, as Machiavelli constantly promoted in his practical activity and consistently theorized in his writings during the years *post res perditas*, subsequent to his dismissal from public office.



In the *Discourses on Livy* (*Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*), Niccolò Machiavelli deals fully and profoundly with the problem of utilizing foreign mercenary troops rather than a local army. “Those princes and republics of the present day who lack forces of their own, whether for attack or defence, should take shame to themselves”, since this is not due to a lack of men able to bear arms, but because they have not been able “to make their subjects good soldiers” (*Discourses* I, 21). It is not enough to have “moneys” to pay foreign mercenaries, because without a faithful army it is easy to fall prey to one who has arms instead: not only princes and foreign powers, but even the very mercenary troops paid to defend the principality or republic, who can easily decide to betray it.

A few years before, Machiavelli had personally assembled an army of men from the Florentine countryside and in February 1506 had paraded them through Piazza della Signoria. This episode aroused a vast echo, being reported by both Luca Landucci and Agostino Lapini, each in his Florentine Dairy, describing in detail the equipment given the soldiers by the Gonfalonier Pier Soderini. It consisted - writes Landucci - of “a white waistcoat, a pair of stockings half red and half white, a white cap, shoes, and an iron breastplate, and lances, and to some of the men, muskets”. Both Landucci and Lapini take note of Machiavelli’s innovation, emphasizing that the militia was composed of “our peasants” so as to have no need of foreigners. The reports written by Landucci and Lapini are very similar, but present some different aspects. While the former emphasizes that the parade was considered “the finest thing that had ever been arranged for Florence”, Lapini bitterly notes that the idea of not using foreign soldiers was considered by all “a whimsical caprice, a fine order”, but “never again adopted here for us”.

Michelangelo’s David

In 1501 Michelangelo Buonarroti, barely twenty-six at the time, was commissioned by the Opera di Santa Maria del Fiore - the administrative body of the Cathedral - to sculpt a statue of great size representing David and Goliath, utilizing a block of marble that had been badly roughed out forty years before by the sculptor Agostino di Duccio in a failed attempt to depict the same subject. Although the commission was an ecclesiastical one at first, with the statue originally destined to the Cathedral of Santa Maria del Fiore, it was later taken over by the Government of the Florentine Republic. When the work was almost finished, a committee of artists including, among others, Leonardo, Botticelli, Perugino and Andrea della Robbia, decided that the David should be placed in Piazza della Signoria next to Palazzo Vecchio. Although a Biblical subject, the David was also entitled to occupy a strictly civic position, as it could symbolize the defence of the homeland and the virtue of good government in a city that had recently driven out the Medici ‘tyrants’. The sculpture was finished in 1504, at the height of the republican epoch, when Pier Soderini was Gonfalonier for life and Machiavelli Secretary of the Florentine Chancery. When the 400 infantrymen from the Florentine countryside recruited by Machiavelli paraded through Piazza della Signoria, it was dominated by the David, placed there only a short time before, and we can easily imagine the symbolic value it possessed and the emotion it must have aroused.

In Piazza della Signoria today stands a copy of the David. The original was moved in 1873 to the Galleria dell’Accademia (a few hundred meters away from the Piazza) which also displays the “Captives” and the “St. Matthew” by Michelangelo as well as various Florentine Renaissance works that immerse the visitor in the figurative world of Machiavelli’s time.



Palazzo Vecchio Machiavelli and the Florentine Chancery



From 1498 until the return of the Medici in 1512, Niccolò Machiavelli acted as Secretary to the Florentine Republic, but was in fact head of the Second Chancery. The main seat of his activity was Palazzo Vecchio, in Piazza della Signoria. Palazzo Vecchio (or Palazzo dei Priori or della Signoria) was the symbol of civic power in the city of Florence, and is the seat of the municipal government today. During the republican period the authorities attempted to evince, on the imaginary level as well, the transition to a free regime (that is, a republic) and the end of Medicean tyranny by enriching Palazzo Vecchio with artworks previously acquired by the Medici for their own residence (Palazzo Medici Riccardi). In the courtyard of Palazzo Vecchio were placed the David (now at the Bargello Museum) and the Judith and Holofernes (now inside the Palazzo, in the Hall of Lilies), both sculpted by Donatello. Even more important for the symbolic/imaginary representation of republican power was the construction of the Salone dei Cinquecento (Hall of the Five Hundred) as a meeting place for the Great Council, the body that collaborated with Savonarola in governing the city after the expulsion of the Medici. In the first decade of the 16th century, the task of decorating the Salone was entrusted to no other than Michelangelo Buonarroti and Leonardo da Vinci - although the work was never finished - with representations of the Battle of Cascina and the Battle of Anghiari. This process of symbolic representation of the Republic included the construction in 1511 of the Hall of the Chancery which, although built to house the first Chancellor, displays today a bust of the second one, Niccolò Machiavelli.

Although Palazzo Vecchio was undoubtedly Niccolò Machiavelli's main place of work, he also travelled extensively, as unofficial envoy to various parts of Italy and Europe. Machiavelli traveled on missions to the King of France Louis XII, to the Pope and to several Italian principalities. Moreover, he moved throughout the Florentine territory (and the territories subject to Florence) as emissary of the government - and not least, to garner soldiers - playing an indispensable role in relating the central power of Florence to the



people and interests of the surrounding rural areas. In December of 1505 Machiavelli was sent to the Florentine countryside to recruit as many men able to bear arms as he deemed necessary. Machiavelli was personally involved, as he wrote to his superiors in February 1506, in the problems of exacting obedience from peasants unaccustomed to discipline, and of uniting men from neighbouring villages that were, just for this reason, hostile to each other. The operations conducted by Machiavelli followed a precise political strategy, and the refusal to use mercenary troops was only one element. The strategy was more complex, based on principles explicitly stated in the texts on military organization, *Cagione dell'ordinanza* and *Provisione dell'ordinanza*. Machiavelli believed that, in forming an army, it was essential to know where to recruit the soldiers, from the city of Florence, the countryside or other independent districts such as Arezzo, Volterra, Pistoia, and so on. The Florentine Secretary firmly sustained that the latter should not be armed, since they might then have rebelled; and at the same time, he stated that only commanders, and not those who had to obey orders, should be taken from the city - implicitly excluding the possibility of arming the proletarians, viewed as a threat by the Florentines. Clearly then, for Machiavelli, a new army should be recruited from among peasants, more docile and less likely to rebel, confirming the hierarchical relationship between the center and the periphery, that is, between the city and the countryside.

Judith and Holofernes

In the Hall of Lilies in Palazzo Vecchio we can admire Donatello's great bronze statue depicting *Judith and Holofernes*. According to the Biblical story, the widow Judith saved her village from the Assyrian army by seducing their general, Holofernes, and beheading him after having made him drunk. This work, one of Donatello's greatest masterpieces, has striking visual and emotional impact insofar as it represents a drama that is actually happening, an action caught at its culminating points. It had been sculpted between 1457 and 1464 for Piero de' Medici, the father of Lorenzo the Magnificent, and placed in the garden of Palazzo Medici. In 1495, a year after the expulsion of the Medici from Florence, the Judith, like the David, was confiscated and taken to Piazza della Signoria, seat and symbol of the new republican power. In this new setting, exposed to the admiration of all, the Judith took on new symbolic meaning. The earlier inscriptions of Medicean flavour were deleted, and replaced by words extolling the freedom of Florence. The group was reinterpreted as an allegory of the Florentine people driving out the tyrant. In the meantime, the new republican regime showed itself equal to its predecessors in making Florence a capital of art. With the end of the Republic and the return of the Medici in the second decade of the 16th century, it was decreed that Donatello's statues of Judith and Holofernes and of David be returned to their owners but, for political reasons, this was not done. The Judith was moved several times between Piazza della Signoria and the Loggia dei Lanzi, where it was transferred in 1504 to make room for the David of Michelangelo. Only in the 1980s was it restored and moved to its current place in Palazzo Vecchio.



The Loggia della Signoria [or “dei Lanzi”] - Machiavelli, the Republic and the Medicean Signoria

In Piazza della Signoria, near Palazzo Vecchio and beside the Uffizi Gallery, is the Loggia della Signoria, also known as the Loggia dei Lanzi. In the early 16th century Niccolò Machiavelli passed through these places every day on his way to the Chancery where he worked as a political official, but this is not the main reason why the Loggia interests us. It possesses special symbolic value, representing on the imaginary level the conflict between the Republic and Medicean domination, which played a decisive role not only in Machiavelli's works but also in his personal life.

In 1350 it was decided to build a Loggia, “beautiful and impressive” to house public ceremonies and assemblies, although the work began only in 1376; the Loggia della Signoria was thus solemnly inaugurated in 1382. In view of its strictly “civic” function, we can understand the significance it assumed in Florence in the first decade of the 16th century, the time when Machiavelli could fully express his political vocation, and when Michelangelo's David was moved from the apartments of the Medici to Piazza della Signoria to exalt the Republic on the symbolic-imaginary level.

With the fall of the Republic the function of the Loggia abruptly declined. It was even used as quarters for the Lansquenets, the mercenary troops - so deplored by Machiavelli - of Alessandro I de' Medici. From this episode it acquired the appellation of Loggia dei Lanzi. After the last short-lived republic of 1527-30 and the definitive return of the Medici, the Loggia was embellished with statues, most notably that of Benvenuto Cellini - placed here in 1554 - representing Perseus with the severed head of the Medusa, symbol of the dissension the republican regime was accused of.

Niccolò Machiavelli is often recalled as an unscrupulous theoretician of ‘political intrigue’ who with his *Prince* (*Il Principe*) furnished valid methods to the new princes, with no concern for their legitimacy. However, this image is totally foreign to the historical figure of Machiavelli, who is the author of a work - perhaps even more important than *The Prince* - such as the *Discourses on Livy* (*Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*), revealing his ardent enthusiasm for republican government and his great admiration of the



Roman Republic. Above all, Machiavelli was personally active in political life in the Florentine Republic, in the period between the death of Savonarola and the return of the Medici in 1512, although subsequently purged by the latter as a man of the previous regime. After this moment, Machiavelli lost what was most important to him, the chance to live a politically active life. Even his theoretical and literary works had for him the purpose, nearly always frustrated, of bringing him back into public life. Machiavelli was and remained a republican, despite the fact that the concept of “Machiavellism” has frequently been associated with tyranny over the centuries. The Loggia della Signoria (or dei Lanzi) reflects on a strictly public level - that of a great monument at the city's center - the public-private drama of Machiavelli. On the imaginary level, the Loggia della Signoria represents the “libertas” of Florence so dearly cherished by Machiavelli; but in spite of this, it was there that Alessandro de' Medici's mercenary troops were quartered - giving rise to the name Loggia dei Lanzi. This was at the furthest possible extreme from Machiavelli's teachings. However, these disastrous events led to the fall of the principality and the rise of another short-lived Republic - ironically enough, Machiavelli died in those very years, under the type of regime most consonant to his ideas. The radical conflict between these two political forms - for Machiavelli a real existential conflict - was to be represented by the *Perseus* of Benvenuto Cellini, which symbolized the victory of the Medicean Signoria over the Republic with its inner discord incarnated by the Medusa's head. This magnificent statue, which exalts the new regime, is a graphic representation of the downfall of republican ideals and their most famous and unfortunate promoter.

The *Perseus* of Benvenuto Cellini

Under the left arcade of the Loggia dei Lanzi stands the monumental bronze *Perseus* by Benvenuto Cellini. The statue represents the Greek hero Perseus standing on the slain body of the Medusa, displaying her head writhing with snakes to the public gaze. The statue, commissioned by Duke Cosimo I de' Medici and sculpted between 1545 and 1554, was designed to be placed in the Loggia, ambitiously confronting such great masterpieces as Donatello's *Judith and Holofernes* and Michelangelo's *David*, which stood nearby at the time and had become a symbol of republican liberty over the years. The *Perseus* instead evoked Duke Cosimo I himself, who like Perseus had managed through his own valour to take possession of a domain that was rightly due to him. Displaying the Medusa's head, with the serpents almost symbolizing the discord of the Republican regime, seemed a warning against any who might resist legitimate Medicean rule. The *Perseus*, aimed to consolidate and legitimate Medicean power, thus acquired a symbolic-imaginary value that was symmetrical to and opposed to the sculptures of Michelangelo and Donatello. On the expressive level, Cellini's masterpiece forcefully displays the conflict between the Republic and the Medicean Signoria, which had such dramatic consequences on the life of Machiavelli.



The Bargello Machiavelli and the War



A few dozen meters from Piazza della Signoria, in Via del Proconsolo, stands the Palazzo del Bargello (formerly Palazzo del Capitano del Popolo), one of the most ancient public buildings in Florence, today the seat of the National Museum. During the time when Machiavelli was Second Chancellor, and more precisely in 1502, the Bargello became the seat of the Council of Justice, a magistrature operating in the field of civil justice, appeals, and minor criminal causes. However, the Bargello is most interesting today for its Museum, whose works by such great artists as Michelangelo and Donatello make it one of the city's richest and most splendid.

In the National Museum of the Bargello is a marble bust attributed to Antonio del Pollaiuolo that may represent Machiavelli, although this identification is dubious. It is not for this bust, in fact, that the Bargello is included in the Machiavellian itinerary, but primarily because it contains an important collection of weapons, both military and hunting arms, dating also from Machiavelli's time. Here we can see with our own eyes not only the weapons used by Machiavelli's soldiers in the Pisan wars, but also the instruments Machiavelli was thinking of when, *post res perditas* (after having been purged from political office) he suggested that princes should always be ready for war, training for it by hunting. In addition, the Museum houses such masterpieces as Donatello's *David* and Michelangelo's *Brutus*, powerfully representing the conflict between republican liberty and Medicean servitude, so important to understanding the drama of Machiavelli. The *David* was probably commissioned by Cosimo the Elder for his palace, but was moved several times in connection with the changing political relations between the Medicean Signoria and the Republic, which also affected its 'symbolic' value. The figure of Brutus, instead, possesses striking republican and anti-tyrannical significance, and in fact the work was commissioned by an adversary of the Medici a few years after the assassination of Alessandro de' Medici in 1537.



War is one of the key elements for understanding Machiavelli's experience, both his strictly political activity and his 'theoretical' work *post res perditas*. Machiavelli is not only the author of a highly successful *The Art of War* (*Arte della Guerra*), widely disseminated and imitated, mainly in France but in other European countries as well, but had also personally organized an army composed of Florentines (from the countryside) and not mercenaries. The army created by Machiavelli had paraded through Piazza della Signoria in 1506, and in January 1507 Machiavelli was appointed Chancellor of the magistrature responsible for the militia. In the years 1508-09, with the intensifying conflict between Florence and Pisa, Machiavelli assumed a role of absolute priority in guiding - as civil director - the Florentine troops, entering the conquered city at their head. This experience can make us reflect still today on the role of a national army for a policy of independence, and the role that should pertain to national armies in a Europe striving for increasingly closer unification. Returning to our itinerary, in the Armoury Room of the Bargello Museum we can admire a vast collection of historic weapons, some dating from Machiavelli's time, both parade arms and real military equipment (firearms). In the same room is a fine collection of hunting arms, recalling Machiavelli's recommendations to the Prince: he should always keep firmly in mind the thought of war and its possibility. Even in times of peace, he should not only keep an army on the alert, but also devote himself to "hunts", to become used to enduring hardship and, above all, to learn the geographical nature of territories, knowledge that will help him to understand even unfamiliar places.

The David of Donatello

In the National Museum of the Bargello we can admire the bronze statue of *David* by Donatello, one of the greatest sculptors of the Florentine Quattrocento. The *David* was probably commissioned by Cosimo il Vecchio de' Medici and completed between 1435 and 1440. The statue represents the Biblical theme of the shepherd-boy David, who has just slain the giant Goliath, although some "pagan" interpretations have identified the hero as the God Mercury. Although the statue may now seem almost feminine, in its original collocation - standing on a column - it appeared in all its heroic splendour. While the first collocation of the work was presumably the Medici's Casa Vecchia, in the following years it stood at the center of the courtyard in Palazzo Medici. Since the front gate was nearly always open, in its new position the *David* could be admired by all the citizens, enhancing the family's prestige. Although the Medici were the de facto rulers of the city, the republican institutions still existed. Anti-tyrannical symbolism such as that of David slaying Goliath was intended to suggest that the Medici were the defenders of Florentine liberty. When in 1495, after the expulsion of Piero di Lorenzo il Magnifico, the new republican regime confiscated the *David* (along with other works such as the *Judith and Holofernes*, also by Donatello) and placed it in the courtyard of Palazzo della Signoria (Palazzo Vecchio), its symbolic-imaginary meaning took on new vigour, coming to represent not only the freedom of the Florentine Republic, but also opposition to Medicean tyranny.

After the return of the Medici and the downfall of the Republic, it was decreed that the statue should be returned to the Medici, but for political motives this was never done. Over the centuries the *David* was moved several times before being transferred to the newly founded Bargello Museum in 1865.



Michelangelo's Brutus

In the Hall of Michelangelo and 16th century sculpture at the Bargello Museum is the only marble bust by the great Florentine sculptor, depicting Brutus, who had slain Julius Caesar in a conspiracy. Michelangelo Buonarroti did not design a classic Renaissance portrait bust, relatively static, gazing straight ahead, but a more animated work, with the head turning forcefully to one side. Although the *Brutus* has no precise, distinctive characteristics, his determined gaze shows him to be an 'ideal' tyrannicide. The Brutus has a powerful political connotation. It was commissioned of Michelangelo, a sculptor openly sympathetic to republican ideals, by a client hostile to the Medici a few years after Duke Alessandro de' Medici had been assassinated by Lorenzino de' Medici in 1537. The latter, a member of the cadet branch of the family with republican leanings, was often called the Tuscan Brutus. In the mid-sixteenth century the conditions for establishing a republic in Florence were lacking, and the conspiracy had no real effect on the political situation in the city. But still today, the *Brutus* superbly represents the tension between republican ideals, still vitally present at the time, and the increasingly stronger Medicean Signoria.

A few years later the *Brutus* was acquired by the Medici family but, considering the subject it represented, it could not easily be reinterpreted in some other way on the symbolic or imaginary level. But like many other works by Michelangelo, the *Brutus* had not been finished, and so a base was added with a little inscription stating that the artist had stopped working on it when he realized that it might seem connected with the assassination of Duke Alessandro.



The Tabernacle of the Stinche

Machiavelli as Prisoner



A few hundred meters from the Bargello, on the corner between Via Ghibellina and Via Isola delle Stinche, is the Tabernacle of the Stinche, so-called because, being situated in the vicinity of the ancient Stinche Prison, it was one of the stages where prisoners on their way to the execution place paused to receive the comforts of religion. In 1616 Giovanni Mannozi, known also as Giovanni da San Giovanni, frescoed on it a *Visit to the prisoners*, representing the bars of a jail with Jesus Christ in glory blessing the alms distributed by a senator. Machiavelli, after the sack of Prato and the ensuing downfall of the republican regime and return of the Medici, was imprisoned just here, in the Isola delle Stinche prison, being accused - in all probability, unjustly - of having conspired against the recently returned lords of Florence. The Stinche Prison was built in the late 13th-early 14th century as an enormous rectangular block, with the cells and rooms inside it enclosed by a wall. In 1838 the area occupied by the Isola delle Stinche was converted into a riding school, while in the early 20th century part of it was rebuilt as the Teatro Pagliano (today's Teatro Verdi).

A few hundred meters from the Tabernacle of the Stinche stands the Murate, representing one of the most interesting urban renewal projects of recent years. Originally, in the 15th-16th century, the building complex was a Monastery, but after its suppression in the early 19th century it was remodelled and used as a prison. The Murate, like the Stinche before it, had become the prison par excellence of Florence. It is now sadly remembered for having served during World War II as the main detention center for prisoners who, like Machiavelli centuries before, were incarcerated for political reasons.

In August of 1512 the Spanish troops of the Holy League, the alliance formed by Pope Julius II, entered Prato, ruthlessly pillaging and looting the city. On that occasion the Florentine militia organized by Machiavelli proved totally inadequate. Subsequent to this disastrous episode, the Gonfalonier for life Pier Soderini, with whom Machiavelli closely collaborated, was forced to abdicate and flee from Florence, where the Medici returned. Shortly thereafter, on November 7 of that same year, a resolution passed by the Signoria "dismissed, deprived, and totally relieved" Machiavelli of his roles as Second Chancellor and Secretary. This was undoubtedly the bitterest, most tragic event in the life of Machiavelli, who described his existence in later years as *post res perditas*. But his misfortunes were not over, since a few days later he was sentenced to pay a large fine - the money was provided by some of his friends - and to a year in exile. And some time later, in the following February, a conspiracy against the Medici - in reality rather faint-hearted - was discovered, headed by Agostino Capponi and Pietro Paolo Boscoli. One of the two had lost a note listing twenty or so names of 'suspected' persons; when interrogated, all of them soon confessed. Among those names was that of Niccolò Machiavelli - but there were only two other names of persons close to Machiavelli. It is unsurprising that the conspirators wished to involve Machiavelli, one of the persons most closely linked to the previous Gonfalonier - he was ironically called the "mannerino" (minion) of Pier Soderini - but he was probably totally unaware of the plot. Machiavelli was arrested and brought to the Stinche Prison where he was tortured with six whiplashes, but without breaking down. Fortunately, his detention was not long, since in the following March an amnesty was proclaimed to celebrate the election to the Papal seat of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici under the name of Leo X.



Casa Buonarroti

The Fortifications of Florence

In the 1520s, Niccolò Machiavelli managed to approach the Medicean government and obtain some rather important posts. Most notably, during the formation of the League of Cognac, the anti-imperial alliance promoted by King Francis I of France which included Florence and the Rome of Pope Clement VII/Giulio de' Medici, Machiavelli was chosen to preside over the fortifications of Florence's city walls. Shortly thereafter came the defeat of the League, the downfall of Medicean rule with the ensuing return of the republican regime, and the death of Niccolò, so that the work remained unfinished. The project was then resumed by the new government, and such an eminent personage as Michelangelo Buonarroti was appointed director of the fortifications. Although these new fortifications were never built, due to Michelangelo's overly complex projects and the short duration of the new republic, important preparatory plans have remained, now to be found at the Casa Buonarroti.

The Casa Buonarroti is situated not far from the Tabernacle of the Stinche (and from the Murate), still on Via Ghibellina. It occupies a site on which stood three houses bought by Michelangelo Buonarroti in 1508, where he lived from 1515 to 1526. The Casa Buonarroti displays many fascinating objects, starting with the sculptures collected over the years by Michelangelo's descendants, but what is most interesting for us here are the sixteen drawings done by the artist and his assistants for strengthening the Florentine defensive structures. In the fortification projects emerges a close interconnection between the artistic dimension and practical requisites, those of military defence at a time when firearms were becoming increasingly important. Particularly representative is the drawing on Folio 13 A, a *Study for the fortification of Porta al Prato di Ognissanti*. With great expertise - and the finest aesthetic results - it proposes a pincer-like structure enhanced by re-entrants where the bombardiers are withdrawn to multiply the posts of attack. A simple image clearly reveals the decline of the medieval fortresses - designed for defence against traditional weapons, and made obsolete by the advent of gunpowder - and the need for architectural innovations able to meet the imminent threats of military nature.



After having been dismissed from public office at the fall of the Florentine Republic in 1512, Niccolò Machiavelli tried in every way to gain the favour of the new lords of Florence, hoping to re-enter political life and make himself useful to his homeland. In 1518 came a chance to attract attention for his literary ability - the talent he was most appreciated for at this time - with the festivities for the wedding of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, where *The Mandrake (Mandragola)*, Machiavelli's famous play, may have been performed. It was however in the 1520s that he managed to approach the Medicean government more closely, obtaining posts of some prestige but without entering so deeply into the beating heart of Florentine political activity as before, with the previous regime. During those years he was assigned to write the *Florentine Histories (Istorie fiorentine)* whose first eight books were then consigned to Clement VII (the second Medici pope after Leo X) in 1525. In the meantime, the political situation was 'heating up' with Francis I of France - who had been captured by the army of Charles V and then freed - organizing the League of Cognac, which included Rome and Florence, against the Emperor. In this intricate political climate Machiavelli managed to obtain an important assignment, not literary in this case, from Pope Clement VII. He was delegated - perhaps due to the fame brought him by his book *The Art of War (Arte della Guerra)* - to accompany the engineer Pietro Navarra in inspecting the Florentine defensive structures and planning improvements. Machiavelli wrote the *Relazione di una visita fatta per fortificare Firenze* [Report on a visit made to fortify Florence]. He was then appointed Chancellor and Director of the Magistrate of the Five Supervisors of the walls. During this same period he tried to persuade the pope, through Francesco Guicciardini, to staunchly support the cause of war against Charles V; but soon afterward the situation worsened drastically, as the armies of the League performed poorly and the Lansquenets of Charles V invaded Rome and sacked it mercilessly. In Florence the Medicean government fell, and Machiavelli was again removed from office.

Machiavelli and the Medici: the Florentine Histories

Niccolò Machiavelli had an irresistible political vocation, which clearly emerges in most of the pages he wrote, whether private or official letters, historical works or other. His dismissal from public office with the downfall of the Republic and the return of the Medici to Florence was a heavy blow, which he tried to mitigate in the following years. His first important chance to approach the new lords of Florence occurred with the wedding of Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, where his play *The Mandrake (Mandragola)* may have been performed. But a real glimmer of hope in Machiavelli's situation came after the death of Lorenzo, when Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, the future Pope Clement VII, assumed a leading role in the city. Cardinal Giulio immediately promoted several reforms in the Florentine institutions, to which Machiavelli contributed with his *Discourse on Reforming the Government of Florence (Discorso sopra il riformare lo Stato di Firenze)*. In November 1520 the Studio Fiorentino, at the recommendation of Cardinal Giulio, assigned Machiavelli the task of writing a history of the city. Although this was a literary, not a political, activity, it was the first major public assignment given him by the Medici. In 1525 Machiavelli consigned to Clement VII, who had become pope in 1523, the eight books of the *Florentine Histories (Istorie fiorentine)*.

In writing the *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli was not, and had no intention of being, a courtier. He strove to write an honest history, although conditioned at times by his political theories, as when he discusses the role of mercenary troops, in general excessively deplored. Machiavelli was however aware of the power of his clients, of the impossibility of harshly criticizing the conduct of the Medici, and even less of considering them tyrants. In a letter to Francesco Guicciardini, Machiavelli requests his diplomatic advice in regard to the *Histories*, asking him to decide whether, in his intellectual honesty, he had been too offensive in criticizing someone close to the new lords, or in praising one of their old enemies. Even at the moment when he was closest to the Medici, Machiavelli remained independent in his politics and his judgements, although fully aware of power relationships and the effective political reality.



Santa Croce the Death of Niccolò Machiavelli

In the first months of 1527 the political situation in Italy, and especially in Florence, was dramatic. The League of Cognac - organized in opposition to the Emperor by Francis I of France, and including Medicean Florence and the Rome of Pope Clement VII, he too a Medici - had suffered crushing defeat. On May 6 Rome was actually put to the sack, while a few days later, on May 17, the Medici were driven out of Florence and the Republic was restored. But even with the new regime Niccolò Machiavelli was not reassigned the post in the Chancery that had been taken from him fifteen years before, and the Medicean Francesco Tarugi was instead named Chancellor. A little later Machiavelli died, on 21 June 1527, surrounded by a few friends, and was buried next day in Santa Croce.

The Basilica of Santa Croce stands in the piazza of the same name, at a distance of about two hundred metres from the Casa Buonarroti. The Basilica is one of the most important Florentine monuments, not only for its splendid Gothic architecture and its cycles of frescoes, but also for the sepulchres of illustrious Italians, made famous in the 19th century by such authors as Stendhal and the Italian Ugo Foscolo. In the Basilica of Santa Croce we find, in fact, the funerary monuments of many men who have bestowed glory on Italy - regardless of their acceptance of the Catholic religion - from Dante Alighieri to Galileo Galilei, from Gioacchino Rossini to Michelangelo Buonarroti, and from Ugo Foscolo to Niccolò Machiavelli. It is a unique site of historical memory, an authentic symbol of cultural roots not only Italian but also European. Following in the footsteps of the Florentine Secretary, we are obliged to pause at the Sepulchre of Niccolò Machiavelli sculpted by Innocenzo Spinazzi in 1787 with an allegorical representation of Politics: In the *Dei Sepolcri*, Ugo Foscolo wrote precisely of this monument, suggesting an interpretation of Machiavelli as "that Great man" who revealed to all the dark secrets of politics. This is an interpretation opposed to - and equally unilateral - that of Machiavelli as one who furnished princes with the theoretical arms for political ruthlessness.



In the dramatic period of the war between Emperor Charles V and the French king, Francis I, that involved both Rome and Florence, Machiavelli finally had the chance to follow his true vocation and devote himself to public affairs at the service of his homeland. In 1526 Machiavelli became Chancellor of the Supervisors of the Walls, but when the situation of the League worsened dramatically, he did not hesitate to leave the task of fortifying the Florentine walls to his son Bernardo, allowing him to join Francesco Guicciardini and help him in his attempt to reorganize the troops of the League. These attempts were made in vain, since on 6 May 1527 the Lansquenets entered Rome and ruthlessly sacked it. A few days later, the Medici were driven out of Florence and the republican regime was reinstated. These days can be said to represent the entire drama of Machiavelli's life. He, a convinced republican, had lost all that was dearest to him with the return of the Medicean regime in 1512. Nonetheless, he refused to give up and continued to strive - while writing his great masterpieces, including the plays and *The Art of War* (*Arte della Guerra*), which met with a certain success already in the author's lifetime - to find an 'office' in which to express his 'political' qualities; but just as he was managing to enter political life again, the government he had begun to work with collapsed. In the new republican regime, more congenial to him, there was however no place for a man now paradoxically viewed as linked to the Medici and too far removed from the party of Savonarola's followers now in power. Little more than a month from the establishing of the Republic, Machiavelli, now tired and weak, was to meet his death. Legend has it that, shortly before dying, Machiavelli had dreamed of seeing poor beggars being welcomed to paradise, and the ancient pagan sages - Tacitus and Plutarch among them - directed toward hell, and that he had confessed he would prefer the company of the latter, to be able to continue their imaginary discussions, now the chief comfort to his misfortunes.



Palazzo Strozzi the Fortune of Machiavelli



The last stage of our itinerary takes us far from the biographical events of Niccolò Machiavelli, projecting us into the future to examine the reception of his work in modern Europe. We are, in fact, at Palazzo Strozzi, seat of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento [National Institute for Renaissance Studies], which contains the Machiavelli-Serristori Archive, consisting of books by and about Machiavelli that once belonged to the collection of Sofia Serristori and were then purchased by the Region of Tuscany. Palazzo Strozzi stands in Piazza Strozzi at the center of Florence, about ten minutes by foot from the Basilica of Santa Croce and very close to Piazza della Repubblica. The Palazzo was built at the firm determination of Filippo Strozzi the Elder to represent the newly regained status of his family, which had been severely penalized in the past for having opposed the Medici faction. Filippo was in reality a prudent man, devoted to his work as banker and maintaining good relations with the families that ruled Italy, including the Medici. But in spite of this, on August 6, 1489 - the date was chosen also for astrological reasons - the first stone of this monumental palace was laid. A real fortress in the heart of Florence, it was built to the model of Palazzo Medici but much larger. Palazzo Strozzi appears as a cubic structure with three floors; the facade of cushion-shaped blocks gradually degrading with height, to become almost smooth at the top, is strikingly impressive.

Palazzo Strozzi houses such major cultural institutions as the Palazzo Strozzi Foundation, the Gabinetto Vieusseux, the Florentine seat of the Scuola Normale Superiore, and the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento, which conserves the Machiavelli-Serristori Archive. In the Library of the Institute is a portrait of Niccolò Machiavelli, by some attributed to Rosso Fiorentino which, like the books, comes from Sofia Serristori's collection.



The Machiavelli-Serristori Archive in the Library of the Istituto Nazionale di Studi sul Rinascimento is an excellent starting point for understanding the European scope of Niccolò Machiavelli's renown. It includes, in fact, old publications of books by the Florentine Secretary dating back to the mid-sixteenth century, and up to the 1940s. Noteworthy among the volumes are the *Discursos de Nicolao Machiaveli. Dirigidos al muy alto y poderoso Señor don Philippe Principe de España nuestro Señor*, that is, the first Spanish translation of the *Discourses on Livy* (*Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio*), The translation was done by Juan Lorenzo Ottevant and published on two occasions, in 1552 and again in 1555 by Medina del Campo. It is interesting to note that, some years before Machiavelli was put on the index, the Spanish translation of his masterpiece could be dedicated to the future King Philip II without this seeming improper in the least. Although many erudite Spaniards could read Machiavelli directly in the original, Ottevant's work had some positive effects. A young American scholar, Keith David Howard, has in fact pointed out that Ottevant's translation played a significant role in disseminating Machiavelli's vocabulary of contingency in the Hispanic world.

Ottevant's translation is by no means the only testimonial to the European dissemination of Machiavelli's writings found in the Machiavelli-Serristori Archive. On the contrary, the versions in Italian, and even more the Latin translations, could be easily read by the well-educated of the entire continent - as shown by the fact that John Wolfe published the *Discourses* (*Discorsi*) in Italian in London. Another example can be seen in *Les discours de l'etat de paix et de Guerre, de messire Nicolas Machiavelli*, to which was added a French translation of *The Prince* (*Il Principe*), printed in Paris in 1571. Noteworthy among the Latin editions in the Archive is the Latin translation of the *Discourses* dated 1591 and dedicated "Ad generosum et magnificum D. Ioannem Osmolski, de Praviedniki, Polonorum", testifying to the dissemination of Machiavelli's thought in Poland as well. Most significant, in conclusion, was the European circulation of Machiavelli's thought, through his works read either in the original or in translation, and not merely the generic myth of Machiavelli and the obscure fame of Machiavellism.





Niccolò Machiavelli

Florence 1469

Florence 1527

The son of Bernardo and Bartolomea de Nelli, Machiavelli as a youth studied Latin and transcribed Lucretius's "De rerum natura" and Terence's "Eunucus", but probably did not learn Greek. His public activity began in 1498, when he entered the Florentine Chancery. In the following years Machiavelli was assigned important international posts, but was never appointed ambassador due to his rather modest origins. He was sent on missions to France, to the papal court in Rome and to other principalities in Italy. In the mid-1510s he played a major role in the Pisan wars and worked to organize a citizens' militia in Florence, not formed of mercenaries. In 1506 his troops paraded through Piazza della Signoria, while in 1507 he was appointed Chancellor of the magistrature responsible for the militia. That same year he was sent on a diplomatic mission to Emperor Maximilian I. During the next two years the struggle with Pisa was intensified, until, on 8 June 1509, Machiavelli entered the defeated city at the head of his troops.

Machiavelli's political career was interrupted after August 1512 when Spanish troops allied with Pope Julius II sacked Prato. Subsequent to that defeat, the Gonfalonier for life Pier Soderini was forced to resign, while the Medici returned to Florence. Machiavelli, politically linked to Soderini, was stripped of all his public offices and condemned to a year of exile within the Florentine territory. In the following February Machiavelli was unwillingly involved in a conspiracy against the Medici, and was imprisoned and subjected to torture. But luck was with him, since a few months later an amnesty was granted to celebrate the rise to the pontifical throne of Giovanni de' Medici, under the name of Leo X. Machiavelli withdrew to the countryside, to his villa at Sant'Andrea in Percussina, where he composed his first masterpiece, "Il Principe" [The Prince]. In 1515 he began to frequent the Orti Oricellari, where he read at least part of his "Discorsi sopra la prima Deca di Tito Livio" [Discourses on the first decade of Titus Livius]. During those years he tried to approach the Medici again to obtain a political post, by exploiting his talent as a great writer. He composed important theatrical pieces – "La Mandragola" may have been performed at Palazzo Medici – and published a highly successful "Arte della guerra" [The Art of War]. In 1520 Machiavelli managed to obtain, at the recommendation of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, a commission to write a history of Florence.

In 1525 Machiavelli consigned his "Istorie fiorentine" to Giulio de' Medici, who had become Pope Clement VII, while the following year, due to the war between the Empire and the League of Cognac which included Florence, he was delegated to supervise the fortification of the Florentine walls. Consequent to the defeat of the League, and even more to the Sack of Rome, the Medici were driven out of Florence and a Republic was established. Machiavelli was again dismissed from his posts, this time because of being linked to the Medici, and died a few months later, on 21 June 1527.



Girolamo Savonarola

Ferrara 1452

Florence 1498

The son of Niccolò and Elena Bonaccorsi, Girolamo was brought up according to severe moral and religious principles by his grandfather Michele, a renowned physician from Padua. In 1475 Savonarola left his birthplace and his medical studies to follow a religious vocation. In Bologna he entered the preachers' order and perfected his theological education in Ferrara. In 1482 he was transferred for the first time to the Monastery of San Marco in Florence. His sermons were not greatly appreciated, but in 1485-86 at San Gimignano he proclaimed "that the Church must be flagellated, renewed, and soon". In 1487 Savonarola travelled outside of Florence, preaching in various Italian cities until 1490 when, thanks to the interest of Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, he was called back to San Marco by Lorenzo the Magnificent. In 1491 he became Prior of the Monastery.

During those years Savonarola tried to impose on his monastery the old rigor of the Dominicans, and to do so he promoted the separation of San Marco from the Lombard Congregation to which it belonged. San Marco subsequently absorbed the monasteries in Prato, Fiesole and Pisa. In 1494, two years after Piero de' Medici had succeeded his father Lorenzo, Savonarola convinced the King of France Charles VIII, who had arrived in Florence with his army, not to sack the city. After this Savonarola became one of the main inspirers of constitutional reform in Florence in favour of the people. During the following years, Savonarola's prophetic preaching met with great success. His sermons called for the moralization of customs in the city, but also attacked the papal court of Alexander VI. The Pope took various measures, such as trying to promote Savonarola to the rank of cardinal, and dissolving the Congregation of San Marco, before going so far as to excommunicate the friar in 1497. The excommunication, deemed illegitimate insofar as formally incorrect, did not affect his political role until February 1498, when the faction opposed to Savonarola attained a majority in the Florentine Signoria. In the following months, also in connection with papal measures taken against the Florentine merchants in Rome, Savonarola was arrested and subjected to trial by an ecclesiastical court. At the end of May, judged heretical and schismatic, he was sentenced to death by hanging. His body was burned and the ashes thrown into the Arno.



Michelangelo Buonarroti

Caprese [Arezzo] 1475

Rome 1564

The son of Ludovico di Leonardo Buonarroti Simoni and Francesca di Neri di Miniato del Sera, Michelangelo entered the art workshop of Domenico Ghirlandaio in 1487 and was admitted the following year to the school founded by Lorenzo de' Medici in the Garden of San Marco. He soon came into contact with Lorenzo the Magnificent's circle, where he met eminent intellectuals and humanists. Michelangelo remained on good terms with the Medici family even after the death of Lorenzo; for this reason, when Piero dei Medici was driven out of the city in 1494 he preferred to leave Florence, heading first for Bologna and then settling in Rome where, only a little over the age of twenty, he sculpted the Pietà now in St. Peter's.

In 1501 Michelangelo returned to his city, where he was assigned important commissions, including the David, which was placed in Piazza della Signoria to symbolize republican liberty. In 1505 he was summoned back to Rome by Pope Julius II, where he created such masterpieces as the frescoes in the Sistine Chapel. Back in Florence under the papacy of Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici), Michelangelo created the famous Medici Chapels for the Basilica of San Lorenzo. But after the expulsion of the Medici in 1527, it was his republicanism to triumph. Under the republican regime he was delegated public responsibilities, such as that of Governor General of the city's fortifications, for which he developed projects still visible today at the Casa Buonarroti. At the restoration of the Signoria in 1530, Michelangelo was officially pardoned by Giulio de' Medici/Pope Clement VII. The last thirty years of the artist's life abounded in major projects and works, while his stylistic experimentation also bears witness to an artistic personality that was anything but 'senile'.



Leone X

Florence 1475
Rome 1521

The second-born son of Lorenzo the Magnificent and Beatrice Orsini, Giovanni de' Medici received an education of the highest level, with such outstanding teachers as Angelo Poliziano. Addressed to an ecclesiastical career since early boyhood, he was ordained a priest when only eight years old, and was secretly elected cardinal at the age of thirteen. In 1494 Giovanni was in Florence when the Medici were driven out of the city government, but managed to flee from the city disguised as a monk. Finding it impossible to return to Florence, and unwilling to go to Rome due to the hostility of Pope Alexander VI, Giovanni undertook a voyage through Europe together with other family members, among them Giulio de' Medici, the future Pope Clement VII. Returning to Rome in 1500, Giovanni promoted literature and the arts, in an ideal continuation of the work of his father, Lorenzo the Magnificent. He also became a reference point for the adversaries of the republican regime in Florence. Giovanni's destiny changed radically with the election of the new Pope Julius II, whose anti-French policy was to have the effect, after the Sack of Prato, of bringing the Medici back to Florence in 1512. As head of the Medici family, Giovanni showed moderation in healing the city's internal conflicts. Even the harsh repression of the conspiracy led by Pier Paolo Boscoli, in which Machiavelli was involved against his will, was probably ordered by the extremists in the Medicean party. After a few months, Giovanni managed to be elected pope under the name of Leo X, and in Florence an amnesty was declared, to the benefit of Machiavelli. In the years of his papacy, Florence was governed by his nephew, Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici (until the death of the latter in 1519), but the authority of Pope Leo was always present in the city's life. During the festivities for Lorenzo's wedding in 1518, Leo X was unable to preside, but the famous portrait by Raphael was displayed in his stead. Leo X died suddenly in 1521.



Clement VII

Florence 1478

Rome 1534

The natural son of Giuliano de' Medici, after having been entrusted to the care of Antonio da Sangallo for seven years, was welcomed by Lorenzo the Magnificent into his family. His first years of life were lived in the shadow of his cousin, Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici, the future Pope Leo X. After the expulsion of the Medici from Florence, he undertook a long journey through Europe with his cousin. Upon returning to Italy he collaborated, in a rather subordinate position, in the "diplomatic" initiatives of the head of the family, Piero de' Medici and, after his death, in those of Cardinal Giovanni. After the Sack of Prato and the return of the family to Florence, he collaborated in reorganizing Medicean power, showing a rather moderate attitude. With the election to the papal throne of his cousin Giovanni, he soon managed to become Archbishop of Florence and then to be named cardinal. Giulio accumulated numerous ecclesiastical benefices, and over the years became one of the new pope's most influential advisers. He played a significant role in major international issues – also interwoven with Luther's movement – but the deaths of many family members, from Lorenzo di Piero to Alfonsina Orsini and up to that of Leo X, obliged him to reside always more stably in Florence. In the late 1510s, Giulio promoted new projects for institutional reform in Florence, to which Machiavelli contributed. The Cardinal also assigned Machiavelli the task of compiling a history of Florence.

After the papacy of Hadrian VI, Giulio was elected pope in 1523, under the name of Clement VII. Politically, he was very close to King Francis I of France, and participated in the League of Cognac opposed to the Emperor. The outcome of the war was devastating for Rome, which was put to the Sack in 1527; subsequent to this event, the Republic was restored in Florence. Allying himself with Emperor Charles V, Clement VII obtained support for reconquering Florence, which took place in 1530. In the following years Clement VII worked persistently to reinforce the Papal States, but he failed to estimate the importance of the great religious schisms then taking place. He died in 1534 after a severe illness.

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