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Machiavelli's Prince: Background and Formation

By Eric Voegelin

THE name of Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), to the public at large, still lies in the shadow of moralistic condemnation. The anti-Machiavellian propaganda of the Counter-Reformation concentrated on the principles of political craftsmanship, developed in the Prince, as its target; and, apart from a narrower circle of historians, Machiavelli has ever since remained the author of the famous work, while the morality of his advice to rulers has remained the great issue of evaluation. It is hardly necessary to say that such preoccupations with moralistic propaganda cannot form the basis for a critical analysis of Machiavelli's ideas. All we can retain from the caricature is the consciousness that something extraordinary has occurred, a severe break with the traditions of treating political questions, the consciousness that with the author of the Prince we are on the threshold of a new, "modern" era. Even this element of the caricature, however, needs qualification. The furious concentration on the evil book has created the illusion that its author was a solitary figure, something like a moral freak. That, of course, is not so. There is nothing solitary or enigmatic about Machiavelli. His ideas, like everybody's, have a solid pre-history stretching over generations; and they were shared in his time by others. Historically unique, however, is the genius of Machiavelli as well as the strange disposition of circumstances directing his genius toward the crystallization of the ideas of the age in the symbol of the Prince who, through fortuna and virtù, will be the savior and restorer of Italy.¹

I. Biographical Circumstances — Machiavelli and Guicciardini.

The convergence of genius and circumstance was unique. Let us reflect for a moment on this accident. As far as the history of political ideas is concerned, the year 1494 would perhaps be best

¹ This study of "Machiavelli's Prince" is taken from the writer's History of Political Ideas to be published by the Macmillan Company of New York. It is a section from the chapter on "Machiavelli" in Volume III.
honored as the opening year of the modern period. It was the year in which Charles VIII of France responded to the appeal of Ludovico Sforza and started the invasion of Italy. Toward the end of the year, Piero de’ Medici was expelled from Florence and the city embarked on its republican interlude. Under the republican regime, Machiavelli was secretary of the signory from 1498 until the restoration of the Medici in 1512; and under Piero Sodrini who was elected gonfaloniere for life in 1502 he had occasion to realize his plans for a popular militia. The republicanism of these years was a precarious affair. The de facto monarchy of the Medici had arisen in the wake of the internal struggles of Florence as the politically stable form of government; the return to republicanism reopened the factional strife, aggravated by the fact that sixty years of Medici rule had broken the continuity of institutional traditions. Hence, the new era became a period of constitutional experimentation, considerably heated as a result of the activity of Savonarola. The institutions of Florence which had grown in the struggle of contending political forces became suddenly a topic for doctrinaire, constitutional debate; hitherto the struggles themselves had furnished the topic for historical narration. The historical accident of the republican interlude created interest in a systematic, theoretical occupation with politics distinguishing Machiavelli from his predecessors in Florentine historiography.

The second circumstance that must be taken into consideration is Machiavelli’s age. He was born in 1469; when he became secretary, he was thirty; when his political career under the republic reached its end, he was forty-three. A very important period of his life had been engaged in the republican experiment. During the enforced leisure, in which he began to write the Prince in 1513, this period did not sink back to the level of the episode that it actually was in the development of Florence toward the hereditary monarchy of the Medici. It remained the motivation of his political reflections, of his search for the typical in politics, for rules of action that could become the basis for success in the desired direction. At this point, however, the responsibilities of genius and biographical circumstances cannot be separated clearly. It would be rash to say that Machiavelli’s political work would not have taken the direction it did unless the enforced removal from political action had lifted the experience of his middle years to a dubious level of absoluteness and generality.
But we know that in the case of his younger contemporary Guicciardini (born in 1483) the same basic republicanism, the same contemptuous pessimism about the nature of man, and an even more keenly disillusioned insight into the motivations of political action did not at all lead to a theorization of politics but, on the contrary, to an acceptance of the flux of history as a moving present of action, so intimately differentiated by circumstances that no room is left for the typical as the basis for determining choice. For Guicciardini politics is thus reduced to the day-to-day struggle for power in diplomatic and military action, with no breathing space for such dreams as Machiavelli's unification of Italy. As a consequence, the younger diplomat and historian is frequently accused of a "cynicism" worse than that of his older friend; particularly because he engaged actively in the political game, in the service of the Curia, under a man whom he despised both as a Pope and a Medici. Such moralistic clichés, as we have indicated, are not very helpful in theoretical analysis. We are inclined to explain the difference of attitude between the two men by the fact that Guicciardini was too young to be deeply engaged in the republican period of Florence, but he was an aristocrat and through his family connections had the guaranty of a splendid career either in religion or politics, that he actually had a great career as diplomat and administrator, that before he reached the age of thirty he had taken the psychological leap into an acceptance of the new Italian situation\(^2\) and that, as a consequence, he was free from the doctrinaire encumbrances of Machiavelli. In Guicciardini's view, as revealed in his observations on the _Diacorsi_, Machiavelli appeared as a somewhat unrealistic enthusiast and optimist in politics. This judgment of a great contemporary who, in contrast to the denouncers of Machiavelli in the time of the Counter-Reformation, was thoroughly acquainted with his ideas and knew what he was talking about, should

\(^2\) I would base this judgment on the _Storia Fiorentina_ which Guicciardini wrote in 1509 for his own clarification. (The existence of the work became known only after the middle of the nineteenth century.) At this time, his active political planning was still directed towards an aristocratic republic. His republicanism, however, was not doctrinaire. He wrote as a party-man who detested both the Medici and the Popolani. His interests were still strictly Florentine; there was no sign yet of an understanding of the greater Italian problem which he masterfully unfolded in his late _Istoria d'Italia_. One may say that even more than for Machiavelli the republicanism following the French invasion was his school of thought. But his attitude is already that of the analyst of action; and the theory of human nature which he employs in weighing the wisdom of actions is already radically "realistic," far more than Machiavelli's, making no allowance whatsoever for motivations of a spiritual, moral or traditionalist nature that would disturb the strict rationality of power politics.
weigh more heavily in a critical interpretation of the author of the
Prince than almost everything that was said by the later moralistic
detractors.

II. The Problems of the Age. The Trauma of 1494.

While genius and biographical circumstances conspired to make
Machiavelli's response to the events of his time unique, while he
was the only thinker of his age who raised the new problems of
power politics to the level of generalizing speculation, the problems
themselves were not of his invention. They are likewise found—
treated perhaps even more realistically—in the works of the younger
Guicciardini, or in the Memoires of the older Philippe de Commynes
(c.1447—c.1511). Let us turn now to these problems of the age.

The mediaeval Christianitas was falling apart into the Church
and the national states. This overall characterization seems to be
more adequate than any speaking of the end of the feudal age, or
the rise of the absolute monarchy, because these latter characteriza-
tions restrict the problem already to specific developments and put
accents on the politics of the fifteenth century which stem from the
secularistic historiography of later periods. The disintegration of
the Christianitas affected both the spiritual and the temporal orders
insofar as in both spheres the common spirit, inducing effective
cooperation between persons in spite of divergence of interests as
well as the sense of an obligation to compromise in the spirit of the
whole, was seeping out. The "falling apart" means literally the
breaking up of a spiritually animated whole into legal jurisdictions;
it means the inflexible insistence on rights, and the pursuit of per-
sonal and institutional interests without regard to the destruction of
the total order.

The attempt at reforming the Church through Councils, and the
further attempt at giving the Church a permanent representative
constitution, proved abortive because the personal and national
interests could no longer be effectively subordinated to the general
interest. If the universal Church were not to sink into parliamentary
paralysis, or to break up into national Churches, effective representa-
tion had to be assumed by the monarchical head. From the failure
of the Councils as the carriers of the spirit emerged the monarchical
Pope as the representative of the institutions. In the realm of ideas,
correspondingly, men like Guliano Cesarini, Enea Silvio Piccolomini
and Nicholas Cusanus changed from their early conciliarism to a position which Dempf has characterized as that of Monarchioptants—that is of men who would prefer a representative constitution but bow to the historically inevitable and become monarchists.

In the temporal field we can observe a similar consolidation of institutions and concentration of the representative function in a monarchical head. The Hundred Years War between England and France was the great process in which the field of personal, feudal associations was disentangled in Western Europe and the old political units were transformed into the national, territorial realms of England and France. The disentanglement was followed by internal consolidation. The Wars of the Roses were the last feudal struggle over the head of the nation and ended in 1485 with the establishment of the Tudor monarchy. At the same time, Louis XI consolidated the French absolute monarchy through government by decree after 1469; and in 1480 the royal power was considerably strengthened when by the extinction of the Anjou their possessions fell to the crown. At the same time, the marriage of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile brought the political unification of Spain, while the victory of Granada in 1492 secured the territory of the new monarchy.

The consolidation of the three Western monarchies was substantially completed when the storm broke over Italy in 1494. At the time, the balance of power between the five major political units in the peninsula—that is, between Milan, Venice, Florence, the Church State and Naples—was the political system of Italy. At the heart of this system was the closer understanding among Naples, Florence and Milan which, about the middle of the fifteenth century, Cosimo de' Medici had engineered for the purpose of balancing the power of the Papacy and Venice. The balance was precarious; and after 1474 we find a realignment of Milan, Florence and Venice against the Papacy and Naples. The resulting bloody disturbances were ended in 1480 through the diplomatic efforts of Lorenzo Magnifico; the old system, with the triple alliance of Cosimo at its core, was restored and lasted until the death of Lorenzo in 1492. The subsequent secret alliance between Naples and Florence for the spoliation of Milan led to Ludovico Sforza's appeal for help to France and the invasion. The balance of power had been in fact the national political organization of Italy. In spite of frequent minor and occa-
sional major disturbances, it might have lasted and become the basis for an internal development toward a more stable national organization. This point must be considered in gauging the revolutionary effects of the invasion in the realm of ideas.

The success of the French, Spanish and German invaders and the reduction of the Italian states to political impotence was an event without sense beyond the sphere of naked power. Italy, at the time, was a prosperous, wealthy country; and it was the most highly civilized area of Europe. The upheaval did not make sense in terms of a reduction of a poor, backward colonial region by economically progressive countries; neither did it make sense in terms of a social revolution, perhaps of the rise of a third estate, or of a populist uprising; neither were any issues of moral or political principles involved; neither was there any question of a religious movement, as later in the wars of the Reformation. In brief: economics, morals, principles of social justice, ideas concerning political organization, spiritual movements or religious factions had nothing to do with the event; it was a clear case of stronger power and better military organization in ruthless victory over a weaker and militarily less well-equipped power.

We must realize — and perhaps we can realize it better than we could even twenty years ago — that the generation witnessing such events experiences a trauma. The more intelligent and sensitive members of such a generation have seen the reality of power at the moment of its existential starkness when it destroys an order, when the destruction is a brute fact without sense, reason or ideas. It is difficult to tell such men any stories about morality in politics. With the experienced eye of the moraliste they will diagnose the moralist in politics as the profiteer of the status quo, as the hypocrite who wants everybody to be moral and peace-loving after his own power drive has carried him into a position he would retain. The psychological diagnosis is fundamentally correct and will apply frequently. In this aspect a man like Machiavelli, who theorizes on the basis of his stark experience of power, is a healthy and honest figure, most certainly preferable as a man to the contractualists who try to cover the reality of power underneath an established order by the moral, or should we say immoral, swindle of consent.

Nevertheless, the experience is traumatic since it is apt to blind a man to the fact that the mystery of power is not the whole of politics,
for the pertinent reason that lust of power is not all there is to human nature. While Machiavelli was not blinded to other factors in politics, his picture of political reality is certainly out of focus; and it is this distortion which we must understand historically as caused by the violent distortion of political reality in the events of his time. From this trauma (setting aside other causes which we shall discuss presently) stems the concentration, first, on the rationality of political action without regard to principles, moral or otherwise, and secondly, on the importance of an effective military organization. Italy had been broken by the overwhelming power of the consolidated national monarchies. The necessary resolution of this problem would be the equally ruthless construction of a consolidated Italian national power that would eject the invader and protect the country against a repetition of the disaster. The technical instruments of the French conquest had been the artillery which destroyed the fortress and the Swiss infantry which smashed the cavalry contingents of the condottieri. A second necessary resolution would be military reform, in particular the creation of a national militia—which hardly could be created as an effective instrument without a republican patriotism of the masses. At this point, the ideas of Machiavelli concerning military reform merge with his vision of a united national republic.  

III. The Italian Tradition.

The superiority of post-medieval, institutionalized and rationalized power was on the side of the new national monarchies; and Italy became the first victim of the outbreak of modern pleonexia. The process of institutionalization and rationalization itself, however, had started in Italy more than a century before. While Machiavelli was willing to learn from Louis XI, the French king himself had learned from his friend Francesco Sforza. The invasion, with its

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3 On Machiavelli's Arte della Guerra (1520) see the study by Felix Gilbert, "Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War," in Makers of Modern Strategy, ed. E. M. Earle (Princeton 1943). Machiavelli was not too much impressed by the merely technological problem of the artillery and made the national militia the center of his military reform. The idea of a national militia, however, was out of season. In the centuries up to the French Revolution, the art of war developed the instruments of the professional army. The national army became the effective instrument of warfare indeed only with the development of republican virtù (in the sense of Montesquieu) in the broad masses. While the idea was historically out of place, it is nevertheless important for us as the convincing symptom of Machiavelli's basic nationalism and republicanism.
consequences, was the revolutionary event that offered the more immediate topics for Machiavelli's speculation; but he brought to bear on it a tradition of secular statecraft that was peculiarly Italian. Let us consider the most important elements that went into the making of this tradition.

a. Cardinal Albornoz.

In 1354, after the end of Cola di Rienzo, the baronage of the Papal States had resumed political control; and since the Pope himself was in Avignon, the area had become a somewhat anarchic, independent feudal realm. Already in 1353, however, there had arrived Cardinal Albornoz, the Papal legate, entrusted with the task of pacification that would ultimately make possible the return of the Pope to Rome. In the course of this pacification were promulgated, in 1357, at the Parliament of Fano, the *Constitutiones Egidinae*, the new constitution for the Church State that was to last through the centuries and was formally abolished only in 1816.

The *Constitutiones* organized the Church State as an exclusively temporal lordship of the Holy See; and their provisions were a model for transforming a pluralistic field of feudal powers into a rational, centrally controlled institution. They provided sweepingly that no emperor, king, prince, marquis, duke, count or baron, and no near relative of any such person, nor any other nobleman, must be chosen as rector, podestà, captain, protector, guardian or magistrate anywhere in the Church State. That provision would break the power of the baronage. The states, then, were divided into provinces with rectors at their head. In order to prevent these provincial divisions from developing into independent power units under the administrators with the aid of their family connections, the *Constitutiones* provides that nobody could hold office in the town of his birth or residence. The most crucial offices of rector and podestà were limited to six months; the incumbent could hold the same offices again only after two years; though he could hold office of the same rank elsewhere in the meanwhile. Moreover, all leagues and confederations between the sub-units of the Church State were prohibited.

Here we see Albornoz, with his *Constitutiones* and skilful diplomatic activities (which actually made possible the temporary return of Urban V to Rome in 1362), in the very role of a Machiavellian prince as the pacificator and unifier of a disordered Italian territory
—though with the un-Machiavellian result of a monarchy as the remedial constitution.4

b. Coluccio Salutati.

Not long afterwards there began the theorization of the great problem, that is, of establishing order through a monarchical leader at a time when the older representative forces became incapable of self-government. The occasion was offered by the disturbances in Florence at the time of the ciompi revolt; the thinker who grappled with the problem was Coluccio Salutati, the chancellor of Florence from 1375. His treatise De Tyranno (written in 1400) is the earliest instance of the Monarchioptant position which appears on the larger European scene only in the wake of the Council of Basle. The Florentine disorders had shown the profundity of the conflict between the ruling oligarchy and the people, as well as the danger of demagogues using the restlessness of the people for their own ends. The situation tended already toward the monarchical solution found through the Medici in 1434. The great theoretical obstacle was the stigma of tyranny that attached to an absolute temporal rule. For the solution of his problem, the humanist Salutati developed the new “realistic” analysis of politics. He removed the Christianitas, hitherto the legitimizing environment of politics; Pope and Emperor disappeared from his argument. A sphere of secular politics was isolated against the larger context; all theological reflections were abandoned; and the theorist treated the state as an autonomous, absolute, historical phenomenon, without relation to a legitimizing environment of meaning. The problem of tyranny itself was discussed in a case-study of Caesar’s rise to power. The question whether Caesar was a tyrant—as he still was for John of Salisbury and as he would again be for Machiavelli—was answered by Salutati in the negative. Caesar was no tyrant because the political situation made the principeate historically inevitable. The struggle of the Civil War did not concern the alternative of republic or dictatorship; the issue was which of the contenders should be the absolute ruler (uter regeret et rerum summan et moderamen assumeret). Who else could have saved the situation? Neither the senate, nor the estate of the equites, nor the plebs could do it, for they all were torn by factions

4 For Albornoz and the Constitutiones Egidianeae see Ephraim Emerton, Humanism and Tyranny, Studies in the Italian Trecento (Cambridge, 1925).
and incapable of concerted action. The only outcome to be hoped for was the clemency and justice of the victor; and in this hope the helpless onlookers were not disappointed for Caesar atoned for the horrors of the civil strife by his wonderful magnanimity. The sequel to Caesar’s death showed the criminality of the assassination and the historical justice of the monarchy.

In this analysis of the problem of tyranny, we should especially note Salutati’s uncompromising, historical realism; as with Guicciardini, his judgment is never affected by his personal, political preferences. Compared with the realism of a Salutati, Machiavelli must appear, in von Martin’s characterization, as the “unhistorical mind.” Only when we see Machiavelli in the context of the Italian tradition do we become aware how strong is the touch of dogmatism and enthusiasm in his composition.\(^5\)

c. Humanistic Historiography.

With Salutati, the new humanistic learning entered the chancellery of Florence. The humanistic style began to determine the form of diplomatic relations; and the development of an official humanistic historiography became part of the activities, we would say today, of the foreign service. Its purpose was the presentation of the history of the republic so as to impress the governments abroad and increase the prestige of the state. In the wake of Salutati we find the series of Florentine chancellors who were at the same time more or less eminent historians, men like Leonardo Bruni, Poggio Bracciolini, Benedetto de’Accolti and Bartolomeo della Scala. The propaganda value of a work like Bruni’s Historiae Florentinae (published from 1416-1449) did not escape the other Italian states. The governments of the peninsula from Naples to Milan began to employ official historiographers in order to match the glory of Florence with the fame of their own histories. The movement began in the middle of the fifteenth century and intensified itself well into the sixteenth century. Of this group we shall mention only one of the latest historians, Donato Gianotti (1492-1573), because his work, and in particular his Republica de’ Viniziani, exerted a considerable influence on the ideas of Harrington’s Oceana.

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5 Alfred von Martin, Coluccio Salutati’s Traktat “Vom Tyrannen” (Berlin-Leipzig, 1913). See also the same author’s Coluccio Salutati und das humanistische Lebensideal (Leipzig, 1916); also Ephraim Emerton, op. cit.
The new style of historiography was established by the Florentine History of Bruni, and certain characteristics of the model still determined the treatment of political history in Machiavelli's Istorie Florentine, as well as his delimitation of political subject-matter in general. Let us enumerate these characteristics briefly. The humanists used Livy as their model. This choice had certain consequences insofar as the treatment of history was concentrated on such exciting events as wars and revolutions, and excluded the permanent factors and long-range developments which determine the texture of history. Moreover, in the interest of rhetorical and dramatic effectiveness, the individual had to become the center of action to such a degree that the permanent determinants, leaving in fact little room for heroic freedom, were again obscured. The Roman model had, furthermore, the effect of a radical secularization of political problems. The humanistic concentration on the history of the republic in the Roman manner entailed the break with the Christian view of history. The rigidly closed stream of secular state history did not admit a divine Providence governing a universal history. Such problems as the translatio imperii and the speculation on the four world-monarchies disappeared without a word of discussion. Whereas in the eighteenth century, with Voltaire's secularization of history, the polemic against the Christian position of Bossuet was of absorbing interest, the humanists of the fifteenth century ignored the Christian problem as if it did not exist. The Pope, a somewhat inevitable figure in mediaeval history, became a territorial prince like the others. To what extent this attitude was enforced by the classic model, and to what extent it reflected an anti-ecclesiastic policy of the writers, is not always easily to be discerned. Certainly, the statesman and the military leader are the two classic types determining the course of action; while the priest, as a third type, has no function in the picture. The Emperor suffered the same fate as the Pope; he simply disappeared. History was written from the point of view of the territorial state; the criterion for judging political action was the advantage of the country; and these restrictions implied, in fact, a theory of national sovereignty independent of the Empire. These are characteristics continuing into the work of Machiavelli and Guicciardini. Their existence and long-enduring cultivation must be taken into account in a critical interpretation of Machiavelli; for otherwise we run the risk of painting him as the creator of a new secular, "anti-religious" realism in politics which, indeed, did not originate with
him but belonged to a well-established tradition in which he had
grown up.6

IV. The Asiatic Background.

The historiography of Western political ideas has many curiosi-
ties. One of them is the bland complacency with which historians
ignore the fact that Western civilization does not unfold in a vacuum
but leads a dangerous existence in the shadow of Asiatic events.
Let us survey the points of contact and the traces which they left,
for one of these contacts has strongly influenced the idea of the
prince as it was formed in the fifteenth century.

a. The Shadow of Asia.

The very foundation of Western civilization on the ethnic basis
of the Germanic tribes of the Great Migration was intimately con-
Nected with Asiatic events. The great drive which carried the
Vandals into Africa and the Visigoths to the sack of Rome in 410
was the most Westernly effect of a chain of events which started with
the unification of China through Ch’in Shi Huang Ti in 221 B.C.
The formation of the Chinese Empire was followed by the counter-
formation of a Hiung-nu empire north of the Great Wall. The in-
termittent war between the two empires ended, toward the end of the
first century of our era, with the destruction of the Hiung-nu or-
ganization; this was the beginning of the slow westward movement of
the northern Hiung-nu, carrying the Germanic tribes before it, and
running out only with the defeat of Attila in the battle of Chalons,
in 451. The great literary result in the West was the Civitas Dei.
St. Augustine began to write it as an intervention in the political
debate that had been aroused by the fall of Rome in 410; and he
died in Hippo, in 431, while the city was being besieged by the
Vandals.

After the end of the Roman Empire, the Asiatic pressure on the
newly established Germanic realms continued intermittently well into
the tenth century; the last of the formidable waves, the Magyaric,
was finally broken only in the Battle of the Lechfeld in 955. The
ordeal of the migration, in which whole peoples, like the Ostrogoths,
disappeared without leaving a trace, crystallized in the traumatic epic
of the Germanic peoples, in the Nibelungenlied; the first version of

6 I am summarizing these characteristics from the account given of humanistic histori-
graphy in Eduard Fueter, Geschichte der neueren Historiographie (3rd edition, Munich-
Berlin, 1936), pp. 9-55.
the oldest parts of this poem must probably be placed toward the end of the tenth century, shortly after the defeat of the Magyars.

The next Asiatic movement, threatening the existence of Western civilization, came with the expansion of the Mongol Empire in the thirteenth century. By 1241, the Mongols had advanced in three columns to Silesia, western Hungary and the Adriatic. In the Battle of Liegnitz the last Western organized armies had been defeated when the news of the death of Ogodai Khan reached the victorious army; and the Mongol leaders hurried back in order to participate in the election of the successor. The shock had been severe, and in the following years the Western powers, who could not know whether the expansion would be resumed or not, sent embassies to Karakorum in order to negotiate a peace. As far as the history of ideas is concerned, the foundation of these embassies resulted in a number of travel reports and the transmission of Mongol diplomatic documents which give a good insight into Mongol institutions and political ideas.\(^7\) Into this class of literature belong the Itinerarium of William of Rubruk, the Historia Mongolorum of Giovanni di Piano Carpini, the report by Simon of Saint-Quentin on the mission of Ascelin, as well as the sections on the Mongol invasion and the subsequent negotiations in the Speculum Historiale of Vincent of Beauvais, the Chronica of Matthew of Paris and the Chronica Parmensia of Fra Salimbene. The diplomatic documents transmitted by the ambassadors and historians made the West acquainted with the Order of God on which the Mongol imperial expansion was based, that is, with the principle "In Heaven there is God, the eternal, the most-high; on Earth Genghis Khan is the only and supreme lord." In view of the intensity of this literary circulation in the second half of the thirteenth century, we must consider it a possibility that the Mongol ideas regarding the imperial position influenced, as one element anyway, the corresponding conception of Dante's Monarchia.

Toward the end of the thirteenth century there began the rise of the Ottoman Turks. In 1354, the first Turkish settlement was established in Europe; the conquest of Constantinople, in 1453, disposed of the last remnant of the Byzantine Empire; in 1529, the Turkish expansion reached Vienna. This relentless advance had been inter-

rupted only for a brief period by the rise of Timur (1369-1405). At the height of his drive, he defeated Bayazid I in the Battle of Ankara, in 1402; and the Ottoman Empire was on the verge of disintegration. The victory, however, did not lead to the establishment of a permanent Mongol rule over Anatolia; Timur retreated, and after his death the Timurid empire was restricted to eastern Persia. Under Mohammed I (1413-1421) the Ottoman Empire was reorganized; and his successors carried the expansion into Central Europe.

The fall of Byzantium and the rise of the Ottoman Empire, accompanied by the threat to the West, were enough to capture the imagination of contemporaries. These were changes on the political scene of a magnitude which by comparison reduced the struggle between Western princes to small domestic affairs; here was power without tradition, on a scale of rational organization and effectiveness in empire-building beyond the possibilities of any single Western power unit. Against this background of dark threat, now appeared the meteoric figure of Timur—as far as the Westerners were concerned, another power out of nowhere—stopping abruptly the Turkish, victorious advance, which at the time had already eaten deep into Bulgaria and Macedonia, destroying the danger to Byzantium and the West, and then receding as inexplicably as it had risen. Such an outburst of power in the raw, with its ups and downs of threat and salvation, was as fascinating as it was unsettling. The Italian historians of the fifteenth century, who were closest to the events and felt their repercussions at first hand through the Greek emigration, were indeed preoccupied with the new phenomenon of power on the world scale; and in particular the dramatic intervention of Timur, the almost-savior, provided the chance to evoke the image of the man of destiny, of the fateful conquering prince. While Machiavelli himself did not reflect on Asiatic events, the image of Timur, shaped by the preceding generations is very noticeable as an influence in the formation of his own image of the Prince. Hence, we shall now consider more in detail the formation of the image of Timur in the humanistic literature.8

8 The shadow of Asia continued to fall on the West. The elimination of the Turkish danger in the eighteenth century, was immediately followed by the rise of Russia that has developed into the most formidable menace to the existence of the West. For a late transformation of the image of Timur, and its transfer to Napoleon in Russia, the reader should see Goethe's "Der Winter und Timur" in the West-Ostlicher Divan.
b. Poggio Bracciolini.

The earliest traces of a preoccupation with Timur are to be found in the letters and works of Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) who in the last years of his life, beginning with 1453, was chancellor and historiographer of Florence. His life paralleled the rise of Turkish power. When the Crusaders were defeated at Nicopolis in 1396, he was sixteen years of age; when Bayazid in his turn was defeated by Timur in 1402, he was twenty-two. What he had to say in his later years about the Mongol conqueror, he professed to have learned from soldiers of Timur’s army.

The curiously tentative attitude of a humanist toward the problem of power in his time is revealed in a letter of Poggio written probably before the middle of the century. The letter reflects on the relative value of military action and the cultivation of letters for the acquisition of lasting fame with posterity. Poggio does not wish to decide which of the two is intrinsically the more valuable; he simply finds that solid fame can no longer be acquired by a military life because the most grandiose feats of rulers and generals are forgotten within a generation for lack of historians to record and praise them properly. As evidence for this state of things he refers to the deeds of Timur which are practically forgotten though his victories date back fewer than fifty years. His military conquests surpass anything achieved in antiquity; nevertheless their memory has all but vanished. Hence the most laudable activity will be one that does not depend on the aid of others to be preserved for posterity; and the reflections conclude with an exhortation to cultivate letters.9

A reflection of this kind was in part professional propaganda. We find innumerable similar instances at this time, a time when humanists tried to persuade (and persuaded successfully) the princes and statesmen that all their glorious actions were worthless unless they were incorporated into the memory of mankind through well-paid historiographers. Hence the remark about a general amnesia respecting Timur must not be taken too lightly. Poggio himself apparently remembered him quite well; and he was not the only one. It has been doubted that he gained his knowledge from soldiers of Timur’s army;10 more probably he could draw upon a floating stock of lore.

9 Poggii Florentini Oratoris et Philosophi Opera (Basle, 1538), pp. 344 ff.
10 The doubt has been raised by Joannes Oliva, an editor of Poggio’s De varietate fortunae (Paris, 1713). Poggio consistently calls Timur Tambellanus. If he had received
That such a stock existed is proved by the fact that the later Timur picture of Enea Silvio Piccolomini embodied incidents not to be found in Poggio. What remains, nevertheless, is the appeal to fame that must have struck a responsive chord. By the time of Poggio, we had gone a long way already toward the dissolution of the Christian concern about the destiny of the soul in eternal beatitude and its replacement by concern about an intramundane meaning of life. Ever since the thirteenth century, the desire for developing such an intramundane meaning had been growing; and now, by the middle of the fifteenth century, fame had become the first generally accepted symbol for expressing the sentiment. The intramundane after-life of fame is substituted for the life beyond.

Salvation by fame, however, is precarious just as is salvation by grace; many are called, but few are the elect. The world itself reveals now a stratification into one region of unstable and another of saving achievement. In the upper region of guaranteed salvation through fame we find the humanist with his eternally remembered literary achievement; he can bestow the grace of fame on himself. In the lower region of political and military action fame may also be acquired, but only through the commemoration of great deeds by the historian. In addition, however, to the disadvantage of grace through historiographic mediation, this lower realm is governed by an order that makes it intrinsically a realm of misery. For in this

his information from soldiers qui suere in ejus castris, these soldiers probably would have at least known the name of their captain. To Oliva it seems entirely incredible that a humanist should not have displayed his knowledge of the correct name if he had possessed it. Op. cit., Preface, p. xvi.

11 On the problem of fame see Jakob Burckhardt, Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien, Part II, Chapter 3: "Der moderne Ruhm." One of the earliest suggestions of the problem of intramundane fame may be found in Dante, De Monarchia, I, 1: "Omniun hominum in quos amorem veritatis natura superior impressit, hoc maxime interesse videtur, ut quemadmodum de labore antiquorum ditati sunt, ita et ipsi posteris prolaborent, quatenus ab eis posteritas habeat quo diteur." The passage is of interest not only because it shows Dante’s anxiety to enrich posterity, to “contribute” something to the intramundane stream of meaning, but also because of the pronounced rivalry with the ancients in this endeavor. The paragraph goes on to ask: what sense could there be to demonstrate again what the ancients have demonstrated already? We have to do something new. And the new in his case was the exploration of the idea of the universal, temporal monarchy. In these beginnings we see the close relation between the idea of an intramundane stream of meaning, the notion of a memory of mankind in history, the interpretation of civilized achievement as a “contribution,” the rivalry between the ancients and moderns, the feeling of an obligation to add one’s own “contribution” to the stream, and the idea of a progressive accumulation of meaning. With Poggio, fame has already the function of the immortalitas which, in the nineteenth century, was dogmatized by Comte into immortality through life in the memory of the Grand-Etre.
realm, the man who is successful achieves his glory at the expense of the opponent who goes down in defeat, and the fate of the vanquished may be in the future the fate of the victor of the moment. This realm of action is governed by fortuna, the unpredictable goddess who may favor one man as the secunda, and break another man as the adversa; and there is no preestablished harmony between good and bad fortune and the merits of a man and his aims.  

There is a certain pagan nobility in this early conception of fame and fortuna. Under the impact of the Reformation and of urban, competitive society it disappeared in the later speculation on the structure of intramundane meaning. By the nineteenth century the biological formula of the survival of the fittest replaced the Renaissance speculation on the fortuna secunda et adversa, and the survival of the fittest implied the plebeian assumption that the survivor was the better man. Poggio, however, was still aware of the tension between fate and value. He was sensitive to the tragedy in a clash between two powers like those of Timur and Bayazid; and there was something alive in him of the Polybian shudder in the face of victory. This sense of tragedy was still living in Machiavelli’s tension between virtù and fortuna; but it was dead already in Thomas More, due to the perversion of Christianity into idealism. In the later adoration of success, the two dimensions of action, victory and value, were made to coincide and the flow of action became untragically progressive—the plebeian victor does not like to see the shadow of fortuna; he wants to be victor by his merit. Poggio’s pessimism with regard to the misery of human life gave way, first to the hypocritical optimism of competitive society which ignored the victims of progress, and later to the frank brutality of the collective era which acknowledged with a shrug that shavings will fly when planing is going on.

Thus, in spite of his humanistic foibles and his self-salvation through the cultivation of letters Poggio is not a megalomaniac intellectual. He is a diplomatist and administrator; he not only knows that even the historian cannot achieve the immortality of fame unless the man of action furnishes the story, but he is passionately fascinated

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12 Poggii Bracciolini Florentini Historiae de varietate fortuam Libri quatuor (Paris, 1713), pp. 25 ff. See on this question Ernst Walser, Poggius Florentinus, Leben und Werke (1914), pp. 237 ff., and Werner Kaegi in his Introduction to Ernst Walser, Gesammelte Studien zur Geistesgeschichte der Renaissance (Basel, 1932), p. xxvi. For the incorrectness of the fortuna secunda of the victor with the fortuna adversa of the defeated see Poggio’s De humanae conditionis miseria, in Opera (Strassburg, 1513), fol. 45 ro.
by the fatality of power in his age. As a consequence, we find an inclination in his work rather unexpected in a man who, in his fanatical hunt for the treasures of antiquity, goes to the extreme of bribing librarians and of practically stealing manuscripts. His state of feeling can be expressed succinctly: Poggio is fed up with antiquity and the classics. The humanist cannot achieve fame by rehearsing the glory that was Greece and Rome; he must achieve it by praising the greatness of his own age. Belligerently he announces: “I am not one of those whose remembrance of the past has made them forget the present; I am not so much engrossed by antiquity that I depend on it wholly and despise the men of our age, that I believe no deeds of our time to be comparable with those of the ancients.”

And where does he find this greatness of the age? Not in the disorders of Europe, not in the paralysis of the Councils, not in the disintegration of the Christianitas—but in the rise of Timur. In the opinion of Poggio, the victories of Timur surpass the most famous battles of antiquity by their magnitude as well as by their generalship. Nevertheless, the world is filled with the fame of Marathon and Alexander, while Timur is an almost forgotten figure. This state of things reopens the question of fame. Why should the fame of antiquity, conferred by the ancient historians, be final? If so much greater actions are close at hand, why should we admire the lesser feats of the ancients? And why should we set so much store by the ancient authors, if all we have to do to equal them in greatness is to tell the story of our own time? The pride of the age breaks through and revolts against oppression by the ancient model. It is a desperate pride, since the time may be miserable. But at least in the grandeur of its misery it is superior to antiquity.

The ironical touch in Poggio’s characterization of Hellenic and Roman military prowess, as well as in the praise of Timur, is not a

13 De varietate fortunae, p. 36.

14 For the attack on the achievements of antiquity and on the ancient historians see De varietate fortunae, p. 77 and pp. 37 ff. For the tone of the attack is characteristic in the passage, op. cit., p. 38, where Poggio rattles off the clichés of Roman war reports in order to praise Timur: “Nunquam, cum toties acie pugnasset, non victoriam reportavit: castris semper tutissimum elegit locum: acie instructa omnibus copiis saepe confluxit: plures hostium exercitus ad internecionem fudit ac delevit: Scythas, Persas, Medos, Armenios, Arabas, Assyriam, Asiamque subjectit: Reges multos proelio fusos fugatosque prostravit, delevit, cepit: urbes multas praesidios et natura loci munitas, vi militum expugnavit, nihilque ei defuit quod in summum imperatorem requiratur.” All that stuff and nonsense Timur did as well as any of the ancient conquerors and, thus, “nothing was missing in him that goes into the making of a supreme war-lord.”
symptom of an undervaluation of the importance of brute power. Irony in such matters guards the soul against attributing to power a dignity of meaning which it does not have; but it does not abolish the effectiveness of power in crushing realms of civilized meaning by destroying the men and materials which bear them. Poggio’s irony is the symptom of his pessimistic insight into the fact that civilization’s splendor, Greek or Western, can be snuffed out by power. Precisely because Poggio was a humanist and knew his classics, he realized that a blight would fall on the literary production of antiquity when it was no longer seen aesthetically as a civilized heritage of model-value. The blight would surely fall when the eye penetrated to the realities reported in the works of ancient historians. Then the old European-Asiatic struggle would come into view, as recorded since Herodotus, and the reality of the present would be experienced as a continuation of Graeco-Roman reality on a vaster scale. Timur would move into the position of Xerxes.\textsuperscript{15} The West would emerge from its enclosure of imperial finality into the openness of a world-scene on which mightier emperors threatened the existence of European civilization. So Asia became a determinant in the meaning of history and politics.\textsuperscript{16} A European-Asiatic historical relation was reactivated which had been dormant in the Hellenistic-Roman time and again in the centuries of imperial Christianity following the migration period. The Roman-Christian universalism with its linear construction of history was now seriously disturbed by the emergence of Asiatic powers and of an Asiatic “parallel” history.

Poggio’s picture of Timur himself is not of major importance as far as its details are concerned; it was soon superseded by a more elaborate standard construction. It is of interest through the principles of its construction as well as through the fact that it is the first of its kind. The selection of facts and their organization into

\textsuperscript{15} See Poggio’s Letter in \textit{Opera}, (Basle, 1538), pp. 344 ff.

\textsuperscript{16} Precisely the same situation recurs in the eighteenth century under the impression of the rise of Russia. The parallel between Poggio and Voltaire could be carried further, insofar as both men were intensely aware of the existence of China and let their reflections on the Chinese Empire influence their sense of proportion with regard to the importance of the West on the world scene. As Book IV of his \textit{De varietate fortunae}, Poggio published Nicolo de’ Conti’s report of his Asiatic travels in 1414-1439, which contain (from other sources) intelligences about China. See on this question Waldemar Sensburg, \textit{Poggio Bracciolini und Nicolo de Conti in ihrer Bedeutung für die Geographie des Renais-\textsuperscript{s}sancezeitalters} (Mitteilungen der k.k. Geographischen Gesellschaft in Wien, Volume 49, 1906) and Mario Longhena, \textit{I, manoscritti del IV libro del De Varietate Fortunae di Poggio Bracciolini} (Bollettino della Societa Geographica Italiana, \textit{Ser. VI}, Vol. 2, 1925).
a picture is determined by Poggio's revolt against antiquity. Timur must prove that the present is at least as grandiose in the quality of its heroes as antiquity; hence, the selection of materials is determined by classic categories, only heightening the figure quantitatively. The result is the picture of a conquering hero who first gains ascendency at home, then conquers the neighboring peoples, who advances with a giant army into Anatolia, defeats Bayazid (also equipped with a giant army), who is distinguished by his art of building camps, the discipline of his soldiers, and efficiency in maintaining the flow of materiel and food-stuffs; then follows an enumeration of victorious battles and conquered cities, reflections on his art of siege, a comparison with Hannibal; and the account closes with the happy end of the victor returning to Samarkand, richly laden with plunder, and the splendid enlargement of the city with new buildings. This is the image of the new hero—of the conqueror and destroyer, the plunderer and the cultivated builder of the city that will be the monument of his own glory. The meaning of history in the Christian sense, and even the pathos of national existence, have disappeared. Cities, peoples and mankind at large are a raw material that finds its meaning when it is built into the career of the heroic individual with its power drive. This is the first "Mirror of the Prince" of an age in which the meaning of power and politics is demoniacally narrowed down to the self-expression of the individual. An intimation of this image is certainly also to be found in Machiavelli's image of the Prince; but again we must note that in Machiavelli we do not find the ruthlessness of power, characteristic of the age, at its worst; in his conception, the conqueror and his virtù are already toned down by the limitation of the career of the Prince to the salvation of his nation.  

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The image of Timur is to be found in Poggio's *De varietate fortunae*, pp. 36 ff. The later presentation of Timur in *De humanae conditionis miseria* (Opera, Strassburg, 1513), fol. 44 vo - 45 ro, is briefer.
originator of the standardized *Vita* was Enea Silvio Piccolomini (1405-1464, Pius II from 1458).

Since Enea Silvio, the *Vita Tamerlani* has the following main parts: (1) insistence on the lowly origin of Timur; (2) his early skill in winning the first followers at home; (3) an account of the expansion from Transoxiana to Anatolia; (4) the victory of Ankara and the fate of Bayazid; (5) information concerning the military discipline in his army and the technique of siege; (6) an account of the second expansion into Syria and Egypt; (7) a series of anecdotes which show his cruelty in conquest, his unscrupulous tricks in gaining an advantage, and the systematic use of terror to weaken the resistance of the enemy; (8) an anecdote in which Timur designates himself as a superhuman force, as the *ira Dei* and the *ultror peccatorum*; (9) a comparison with Hannibal; (10) the enrichment of Samarkand.18

The broader elaboration serves the purpose of sharpening the issues that we find already in Poggio. The image is deliberately mythical. The materials are historical, but they are used for the creation of an unhistorical image. The *Vita* has no historical background. If it contained a detailed account of battles, reflections on strategy, informations on Mongol history and political organization, the effect of the mythical image would have been damaged. Timur is a pure appearance out of nothing, a *terror gentium* and an *ira Dei*, symbolizing the naked fanaticism of expanding power, the lust and horror of destruction, the blindness of a fate which crushes one existence in its march and thereby perhaps saves another one. Anecdotes and materials are selected or omitted according to their function in heightening the effect. Hence, the *Vita* always contains a feature that we may call the "parade of names," that is, a lengthy catalogue of peoples conquered and cities reduced and destroyed. If the facts do not quite serve the purpose, they are twisted somewhat. The strategically necessary campaign against Syria and Egypt is deprived of its *raison d'être*, and appears as the expression of an inexhaustible, expansive drive. The retreat from Arabia, forced by the difficulties of desert warfare and diseases, is interpreted as hesitation to penetrate

18 Enea Silvio tried has hand twice at a *Vita Tamerlani*. One is to be found in his *Historia rerum ubique gestarum quam alii Cosmographiam et mundi universi historiam appellant*, in the section on *Asia, Opera Omnia* (Basle, 1571), p. 313. A second *Vita* is contained in the section on *Europa, op. cit.*, p. 395. A briefer reference to Timur is contained in his *De ritu, situ, moribus et conditione Germaniae, descriptio, op. cit.*, p. 1060.
to the holy sites of Islam. The not at all miraculous rise of Timur is deprived of its social setting and transformed into the mythical rise from social insignificance to world power. Throughout the \textit{Vita}, Timur is a man without purpose beyond conquest. His actions are oriented with strict rationality toward the aim of his expansion without regard to the cost in destruction, criminality and human misery. The result of these principles of presentation is a glowing symbol of the nihilistic grandeur of power without ulterior meaning.\footnote{The more important \textit{Vitae Tamerlani} after Enea Silvio are those of Cambini in his \textit{Commentario della origine de'Turchi et imperio della casa Ottomana} (1538), fol. 4 ro-7 vo; of Paolo Giovio in his \textit{Elogia virorum bellica virtute illustrium} (Basle, 1561), pp. 165-173; of Pero Mexia in his \textit{Silva de varia lecion} (Venice, 1553), fol. 187 vo - 192 vo. The title of Mexia's \textit{Vita} is of interest because it stresses the points which seemed relevant to contemporaries: \textit{Del excellentissimo Capitan y muy poderoso rey el gran Tamoral, delos reynos y provincias que conquistro, y de su disciplina e arte militar}. Very elaborate, finally, is Perondino's \textit{Magni Tamerlanis Seytharum Imperatoris Vita} (printed with the \textit{Opera} of Chalcocondylas [1556], pp. 235-248). Perondino's \textit{Vita} is the basis for Louis LeRoy's.}

Several times we have referred to the standardization of an image, the deliberate selection and distortion of materials and the conscious creation of a myth; moreover, we have cut the \textit{Vita} into segments and numbered the composing elements as if it were intentionally constructed out of such segments. We now want to assure the reader that we have not indulged in wilfull interpretation, but that the construction of the image actually proceeded in this manner. The humanists of the fifteenth century were highly conscious artists; and they knew, as a matter of craftsmanship, the typical elements they had to employ in order to create the desired effect. Most illuminating for this aspect of the problem is a work by Battista Fregoso (1453-1504), the Duke of Genoa. After he had lost his duchy in 1483, he wrote the \textit{Memorabilia} in imitation of Valerium Maximus, a collection of memorable incidents from the lives of famous men.\footnote{Bap. Fulgorii Factorum dictorumque memorabilium Libri IX (Paris, 1578).} Fregosa organized the anecdotal material under 89 categories, such as: On Majesty, On Fortitude, On Poverty, On Piety against Parents, On Military Stratagems, On Unusual Kinds of Death, etc. The work was an imposing encyclopedia of historical elementary materials of the kind that we find in the \textit{Vita Tamerlani} of Enea Silvio and his successors. As a matter of fact, we find these very elements, plus a few that are not in the \textit{Vita} under such headings as: On Military Discipline, On Abstinence and Continence, On Pride (the fate of Bayazid); and we find a lengthy piece, concerning the
rise of Timur, under the title: On Men who Rose from Humble Fortune and Gained a Famous Name. The book was a collection by a moraliste for moralistes, and Tiraboschi characterized it rightly as a Storia delle virtù e de’ vizj.\textsuperscript{20} Out of such classified, typical elements, the standardized typical image of the conqueror was constructed. Insight into this genesis is necessary to understand a treatment of historical materials which from our position may appear as a misuse, or distortion, or falsification of history. The intention in the literature of the Vita type was not the writing of critical history, but precisely the forming of historical materials into an image that would satisfy a type.

d. Conclusion.

From our study of the Asiatic influence in forming the new conception of politics, we arrive at the following results. The rise of Ottoman power and the episode of Timur had traumatic consequences for the Western idea of politics. Even before the shock of 1494 the Italians had formed the idea of nihilistic, rational power as an absolute force cutting its swath blindly across meaningful existence. Moreover, because of the Near Eastern events, Asiatic history had become a fact that no longer could be overlooked; the imperial finality of the West lost its charm of absoluteness when the Turcs were ante portas.\textsuperscript{21} The humanistic secularism in politics was reinforced by the events which pushed aside the Christian meaning of Western history. The structure of the historical situation was understood in classical images. We noted the reactivation of the Homeric and Herodotean mythical conflict of Europe and Asia, as well as the description of the new Xerxes by means of the ancient clichés in order to characterize a great conqueror and destroyer. The search for the typical, furthermore, determined the twisting and selecting of historical materials so as to fit the established system of classification. And behind the use of history for the understanding of the typical in events, we were able, finally, to discern the attempt at penetrating into the mystery of power and destruction through the creation of the mythical image of the terror gentium beyond good and evil.

All these elements were present in the Italian tradition before Machiavelli. A good deal of what conventionally is considered as

\textsuperscript{20} Tiraboschi, Storia della letterature italiana, Vol. VI/2, p. 105.

\textsuperscript{21} See the significant comparisons between Timur and Hannibal.
enigmatic, or unusual, or idiosyncratic, or immortal in his work, loses
this character as soon as we are not compelled to attribute these ele-
ments to Machiavelli himself but can understand them as part of
the intellectual climate in which his ideas were formed.

V. The Vita di Castruccio Castracani.

The experience of crushing power, thus, sharpened awareness of
the fact that an existential force beyond good and evil manifests
itself in the order of a polity. The stronger force will break the
weaker existence, no matter how high its rank in the realm of civilized
values. The response to this experience, however, was not a natural-
istic nihilism that would deny the meaning of power and order. The
weaker order, while physically crushed, still is a meaningful human
order and not a natural phenomenon; and the stronger order, while
physically crushing, is not a natural catastrophe, but the force of
organized human existence. The stronger existence, while crushing
the weaker order, establishes itself as the power that maintains a new
human order. The humanist historians responded to the experience
by heightening the human existence which destroys and creates order
into a mythical image, as we have seen in the development of the
Vita Tamerlani. The virtù of the conquering prince became the
source of order; and since the Christian, transcendental order of
existence had become a dead letter for the Italian thinkers of the
fifteenth century, the virtù ordinata of the prince, the only ordering
force experienced as real, acquired human-divine, heroic proportions.

This is the situation of Machiavelli. The misery of Italy was not
a fate to be accepted; on the contrary, the depth of political humili-
ation was a challenge to a man of semi-divine, heroic qualities to eject
the barbarians, a challenge to restore the order of Italy through his
virtù that would overcome the adverse fortuna—just as often in the
past a hero had risen from private insignificance to become the
founder of a people and its order. The evocation of the mythical
hero is at the center of Machiavelli’s work in the same sense that
the evocation of the philosopher-king is at the center of Plato’s work.
Machiavelli has created a myth; this fact must be the basis of inter-
pretation if we wish to avoid the misunderstanding of his theory of
politics as the shallow insight that foul means are frequently more
helpful than fair ones in acquiring political power. The elaboration
of the theory in the Discorsi and the Principe presupposes the myth
of the hero. Sketches of a heroic life were even embedded in the \textit{Prince}, such as the life of Cesare Borgia (Chapter 7) and Agathocles (Chapter 8), but they were qualified as imperfect types.\textsuperscript{22} The myth itself was fully and consciously unfolded only in the \textit{Vita di Castruccio Castracani} (1520).\textsuperscript{23}

The \textit{Vita} is ostensibly a biography of Castruccio Castracani (1281-1328), successively lord, imperial vicar and duke of Lucca. In truth, however, Machiavelli used the well-known facts of Castruccio’s life most cavalierly — selecting some, omitting others, and inventing a good deal — for creating the image of an Italian hero who through his \textit{virtù} became the founder of a great state (\textit{stato}), frustrated in his enterprise only by \textit{fortuna}, cutting off his life in the middle of its course and thus ending the ascent toward the glory promised by so many happy successes.\textsuperscript{24} The creation was conscious. In the dedication to his friends Machiavelli reflected that, amazingly, those who have worked great things in this world are frequently of obscure origin. Fortune seems to persecute them in every way. At their birth they are surrendered to wild beasts; or their parentage is so humble that they must pose as sons of Zeus or some other God. Examples of this kind are well known to everybody. Fortune, so it seems, wants to show to the world that she, and not \textit{prudenza}, makes men great; and, therefore, she begins the shaping of a man’s life at a time when there can be no doubt that prudence has no share in it. The life of Castruccio is of this kind; and it should be recalled to the memory of men because it is most instructive (\textit{grandissimo esempla}) for the operation both of \textit{virtù} and \textit{fortuna}.\textsuperscript{25} The irony of the reflection introduces the \textit{Vita} as a conscious play, with the serious purpose of creating a \textit{grandissimo esembla} of the forces which shape the life of the hero.

The \textit{Vita} itself follows the pattern of the myth of the hero that we saw employed in the \textit{Vita Tamerlani}.\textsuperscript{26} The consciousness of the

\textsuperscript{22} The romantic search for the empirical model of the \textit{Prince} (was it Cesare Borgia or the Medici to whom the \textit{Prince} is dedicated?) is futile, in our opinion. Empirically, Machiavelli would welcome anybody as the savior of Italy. A search of this kind disregards the origin of the image in mythical imagination; moreover, it disregards the systematic distinction of various types of \textit{virtù} which are illustrated by the empirical cases of \textit{Prince}, Chapters 6, 7 and 8.


\textsuperscript{24} \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 759.


\textsuperscript{26} We are conducting our analysis strictly on the level of Machiavelli’s self-interpretation. For the larger problems involved in the imaginative creation of the Myth of the
construction appears most clearly when describing (as we did for the Timur image) the sequences of scenes. The main phases of the Vita are the following: (1) an infant of unknown birth is found in the garden by the sister of Antonio Castracani, a clergyman; (2) Castracani adopts the boy and tries to bring him up in the ideals of his estate and to educate him as a future priest; (3) at the age of fourteen, the boy asserts himself, abandons the theological books and turns to the art of arms; (4) he surpasses all his comrades in these exercises; (5) he acquires a kind of royal leadership over the other boys, and commands their confidence and loyalty; (6) the discovery: the boy is observed in his games with his fellows by Francesco Guinigi, a nobleman; (7) Guinigi persuades the clergyman to entrust the future of the boy to him; (8) at the age of eighteen, Castruccio embarks on his career as a military and political leader, with momentous success in expanding the domain of Lucca; (9) in the midst of these most promising enterprises, Fortuna cuts short his life; Castruccio dies from a fever, resulting from exposure to a miasmal evening wind after a victorious battle.

The story combines the story of the Moses and Cyrus type with circumstances which Machiavelli wanted to see in his Italian, national hero. The deviations from history he permitted himself are most illuminating. The historical Castruccio was not at all an esposito but belonged to one of the Ghibelline families of Lucca. Moreover, he was married and left children—a point which Machiavelli omitted; for he wanted a hero who would do his work of political salvation and then, conveniently without family attachments, would leave the state to join the people. The fact that the historical Castruccio was an imperial vicar and duke is again judiciously suppressed; for these honors would not look too good in the savior who liberates Italy from the barbarians, including the Emperor. In the description of the political and military career, on the other hand, we find various data on Castruccio’s organization of infantry and cavalry, as well as on his battle tactics, which happen to coincide with Machiavelli’s own ideas for military reform. And considerable stress is laid on the circumspection with which Castruccio indulges in

Hero, the reader should refer to Otto Rank, Der Mythus von der Geburt des Helden (2nd edition, Leipzig-Wien, 1922). For the special variant of this myth in the case of the biography of artists, see Otto Kurz and Ernst Kris, Die Legende vom Künstler (1934), and Ernst Kris, Zur Psychologie alterer Biographik (Imago, Vol. XXI, 1935).
treacheries and the thorough slaughter of his enemies—rather on the model of Cesare Borgia’s day of Sinigaglia.

The story of Castruccio’s life closes with a summarizing picture of his character: “He was dear to his friends and terrible to his enemies; just to his subjects and faithless toward foreigners; he never tried to conquer by force when he could conquer by fraud; for he used to say that through victory, and not through the method of victory, you acquire fame. Nobody was ever more audacious in approaching dangers, and nobody more skilful in extracting himself from them. He used to say that man should try everything and not shy away; and that God loves strong men, for, as anyone may see, he always castigates the powerless by means of the powerful.”\textsuperscript{27} The closing remark of this characterization is of special interest because it introduces the element of the \textit{ira Dei} that we know from the \textit{Vita Tamerlani}; the victorious prince becomes the \textit{ультor peccatorum}. Neither in the \textit{Principe}, nor in the \textit{Discorsi} has Machiavelli become so explicit in according to power and \textit{virtù} the meaning of a providential order of politics.

\textsuperscript{27} \textit{Vita, op. cit.}, p. 761.