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Histories and historiographies in Niccolò Machiavelli: different forms to reestablish virtù for defending a vivere libero

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The relevance of History in the systematization of political thought and the emulation of virtuous actions intertwines with the importance of rhetoric in historiographical writing in Machiavelli (Cochrane, 1981, p. 265). His works unveil ways of interpreting historical events without the methodological necessity of a meticulous comparison of sources, models, and discursive forms. Instead, they emphasize insights into how "political laws" can be inferred and emulated, even if they involve "distortions" of more factual accounts (p. 266-269). Indeed, historical precepts assist in pedagogical endeavors to reintroduce Virtù through direct confrontation with corruption, relying on good examples to be imitated in civil occasions and everyday circumstances (D.I.10)[1]. The multiple historiographical traditions within civic humanism, although more complex than republican reconstructions, underscore the presence of ongoing moral and civic reforms upon which social formations and governmental institutions are grounded in human education. This education is not perceived as a static model but rather as subject to perpetual crises, syncretisms, developments, and transformations (Hankins, 2019, p. xi-xxi; 499-506).

Thus, there is a dominance of literature in shaping Renaissance courts and in the education of their citizens, influencing habits, customs, literary productions, artistic executions, and historiographic methods. The traditions of classical antiquity, in their aesthetic, ethical, philosophical, and linguistic perspectives, inform the local constitutions of Renaissance city-states. These are incorporated across various social levels, including within forms of political regimes or particular types of government through historical, philological, and intellectual investigations. In this way, linguistic discussions, especially those concerning the values of the Latin language and the importance of vernacular expressions, become integral to literary and historical debates within courtly life. The foundations of civil society, even in their economic aspects, gradually unveil the relevance of techniques acquired in humanist circles. Thus, the pedagogical models of Renaissance courts present an image of a complete human, engaged in various social,

[1] The following works were utilized for an exegetical analysis: The Prince (P); Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy (D); Florentine Histories (IF); The Art of War (AG); The Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca (CC); The Mandrake (Mand.); Clizia (Cl); The Decennali (Dec.). The works, for reference, are: Complete Works of Niccolò Machiavelli edited by Francesco Flora and Carlo Cordiè – 2 volumes. Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1949. Complete Works. Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1952. Machiavelli: The Chief Works and Others 3 v. Durham: Duke University Press, 1989.

cultural, and political levels. On the other hand, given the multitude of Renaissance movements throughout European territory, the ensuing criticisms of courtly luxuries and abuses of power also link humanist works to the decay of traditional customs. The emphasis on active life, as opposed to contemplative life, highlights both earthly glory and love for the homeland (Duggan, 2016, p. 86). Intrigues, instabilities, disputes, and debauchery are some of the attributes associated with urban centers of the period, contributing to the gradual control of populations and the monarchical transformations of the 16th and 17th centuries. In Burckhardt's words, Renaissance legacies sought both glory and their subversion through hierarchical inversions (Burckhardt, 2009, p. 140-144).

Peter Burke associates Burckhardt's works with intuition, relativism, and skepticism. Similar to some humanists, History, an imaginative literature, is seen as Art (Burke, 2009, p. 19). Rather than exhaustively collecting facts, historical narrative focuses on those that characterize an era or constitute an idea, resembling the creation of a painting, as analogies to pictorial arts reveal: choice, perspective, and presentation (Burke, 2009, p. 20). The impacts of antiquity's revival on different social strata over time are notable, as courtiers, artists, and urban patricians held differing interests that didn't necessarily align with ruling elites who quickly appropriated these movements in each city-state's unique context (Burke, 2014, p. 48-49). Prominent families and ecclesiastical courts gathered artists, artisans, and intellectuals around them, utilizing resources in various ways. Gradually, humanist movements solidified and became integral parts of educational systems in Italian cities and across Europe (Burke, 2014, p. 50-51).

The Renaissance conceptions of History express a profound reverence for antiquity while also revealing their deeper social needs across various levels of discourse. Consequently, the interplay between Justice, Liberty, and human ambition, along with emerging historiographical trends that rejuvenate ancient world traditions, demands personal and public commitment to extolling both the potentialities and limitations of humanity[2]. The potential mediations between utopian considerations and historical realities necessitate a new theoretical framework in which the ruin and reinvention of modes of understanding are paramount (Bignotto, 1991, p. 38-42). To achieve this, these authors delve into the depths of the past in pursuit of a present transformation and an

[2] A presumed harmony achieved by the ancients could be re-established through the study of their literary and artistic works, requiring the desire and openness of contemporaries to reclaim the riches and treasures expressed by classical thought (Garin, 1978, p. 16-28).

openness to the new. In the words of Eugenio Garin, "the ancient world is not merely a curious field of research", but rather a possibility to discover "fullness and harmony" that are accessible[3]. Therefore, this Italian thinker proposes a comprehensive understanding of the nexus between technique, science, and art, where the leading intellectual figures of the period are not confined to being mere precursors of modern advancements or examples of a supposed medieval backwardness (Garin, 1975, p. 89-95). He exemplifies, through discussions of the art and knowledge of Leonardo da Vinci, how history reveals a unique thirst for knowledge, expressing, in various visible ways, the human spirit through systematic organizations of experience (Garin, 1975, p. 59).

By incorporating classical legacies into the traditions inherited from medieval thought, breaking away from any existing dichotomy between the "contemplative way and active way", these thinkers embed their ideas into political frameworks of a period marked by divisions, factions, and wars[4]; a time perceived by many as in need of restoration to safeguard order, freedom, and well-being[5]. In the following words, in a letter to Francesco Vettori, Machiavelli confirms this observation by Eugenio Garin in a famous passage of his correspondences. He also emphasizes, in a passage immediately following this excerpt, how the reception of ancient ideas must be retained for them to be characterized by secure knowledge. Machiavelli, Guicciardini, and other Italians distinguish themselves from the prevalence of textual criticism that seeks to exhaust the causes of events in historiographic labor, as they opt for a cyclical historiography that proves useful in their contemporary interpretations[6]. The Florentine author, in his famous

[3] The emphasis on the active path for understanding and action promotes not only the privilege of a discipline but also the continuous personal and collective creation (Garin, 1978, p. 16-25). Thus, there exists a clear relationship between studia humanitatis and homo faber that permeates various intellectual disciplines, artistic expressions, urban organizations, and subsequently encompasses numerous modes of understanding (Garin, 1954, p. 199-102).

[4] Baron demonstrates how the incessant Italic wars nourish desires and sentiments of Liberty, into which the various manifestations of Italian humanism integrate educational, political, and social processes throughout the peninsula (Baron, 1966, p. 443-445). Maquiavel expresses his discontent with the factions in the city of Florence, primarily because he believes that these divisions hindered the prosperity of a suitable civil order for the political needs both within and outside the city. The ancient Romans were able, through their tumultuous periods, to promote civility and defend liberty. In contrast, the Italic cities erode order and destabilize the foundations upon which they depend (IF III.1; D. I 4-6)

[5] Notable are crises in social modes of organization that enable new orders and perceptions. The transformations resulting from these battles did not prevent vital adaptations from occurring in the composition of a civic humanism that gradually departs from universal concepts of governments with imperial characteristics, evolving towards constitutions of civil forms inspired by republicanism (Baron, 1966, p. 443-451).

[6] Here lie the distinctions between "annals" and "histories", as well as the intricate relationships between historical activity, philosophical thought, and morality. Considerations of cyclical conceptions of history, in which the repetitions of actions stem from unchanging notions about humanity throughout the changes of time, must be taken into account. In Machiavelli's writings, examples are reconstructed from historical agents and events, in which reflections on their respective activities, learning from past records, indicate

and widely cited letter to the diplomat in Rome, describes his activity as follows:

> With the coming of the evening, I return to my house and go into my study. At the door, I take off my clothes of the day, covered with mud and dirt, and put on regal and courtly garments. Fitted out appropriately, I step inside the venerable courts of the ancients, where, solicitously received by them, I nourish myself on the food that alone is mine and for which I was born. There I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they, out of their human kindness, answer me. And for four hours at a time, I feel no boredom, I forget all my troubles, I do not dread poverty, and I am not terrified by death. I absorb myself into them completely (Maquiavel, 2002, p. 103).

Machiavelli's modes of understanding history reveal to us the constant ascents and declines in human events, offering the possibility of learning from human archetypes and their examples, particularly due to the persistence of similar traits in the present. History is thus integrated into rhetorical and poetic considerations[7] from which Virtù can be nurtured in response to Fortune's actions. Engaging in a cyclical conception of history[8], the Florentine author scrutinizes human actions, political decisions, and successions in the civic orders of Italian cities, highlighting the noble Virtù of both ancients and contemporaries, which must be comprehended and emulated. The rich discussions in the political thought of the period demonstrate how classical antiquity merges with contemporary events through poetic imaginings[9], historiographic

possible repetitions of specific situations, thus highlighting the importance of historiography (Aylmer, 1997, p. 249-280).

[7] The rhetorical and poetic devices in Machiavelli's texts pervade examples of individuals, e.g., Romulus, Numa, Moses, but also cities, e.g., Rome and Florence. Differently from critical historical thought in its scientific nuances, symbols, actions, and cities are considered for their updates of a civil order (Jacobitti, 2000, p. 176-192). The didactic and pedagogical characteristics of history propel individuals and institutions to reclaim the necessary vigor for public life (Marchand, 1975, p. 323-325). Various means by which the poetic, rhetorical, historical, and political aspects are intensely and intimately intertwined in the receptions of Machiavelli's work by his contemporaries stand out (Sasso, 1984, p. 3-130).

[8] Discourses on Livy, Book I, Chapter 2. While discussing forms of political regimes, Machiavelli engages with the concept of anacyclosis, as seen in antiquity through various examples, such as Polybius, Plato, and Aristotle. These conceptions extend through biblical, patristic, and medieval traditions (Trompf, 1979, p. 179-243). It should be noted, as discussed in Machiavelli's texts, that this cyclical return is never a regression to previously witnessed conditions, but an innovative transformation impossible to predict, yet possible to analyze (Collingwood, 1994, p. 61-69).

[9] Let's take the illustrative example of the reception of Dante Alighieri's thought in Florence and other cities on the peninsula. The discussions and receptions of monarchical thought, as well as the political images spread in the works of this famous Florentine figure, are significant examples of conflicts between traditions, interpretations, and propositions that traverse the entire cultural fabric (Gilson, 2005, p. 1-20). The glorious descriptions of Caesar, and consequently the Roman empire, are juxtaposed against discourses that valued the ancient republican regime and thus praised the assassination of Caesar (Baron, 1966, p. 47-54).

conceptions,[10] and political systematizations[11], rejecting tyrannical intentions while promoting civic enthusiasm. However, this enthusiasm wanes due to a "classicism divorced from reality"[12]. Therefore, the connections between educational and cultural approaches become essential for promoting the city's freedom, through the active actions of its citizens[13]. The intrinsic means by which images of the ancient past and perceptions of the present are presented in Italian civic humanism are evident. Not only intense wars for political dominance, but also intense conflicts spanning civil understandings, cultural identities, and forms of governance come to the fore.

Since his time in the chancellery, Machiavelli considers History a teacher guiding human actions, comparing present events with Roman narratives[14]. Furthermore, recognizing the didactic value of ancient stories, he incorporates the lessons learned in the hope of achieving better results in political and military actions[15]. The various ways

[10] The rigid structure of a "static reality" is shattered by a plan of practical possibilities (Garin, 1986, p. 9-12). History, as an educator of humanity, a source of knowledge derived from the memory of human actions, integrates the formation of a civilità within its immediate political insertions. There is a renewal of ancient Hellenic and Latin historiographic ideals, emphasizing the constant social conflicts between the nobility and the people, combining historical erudition and practical proposals, not only through document consultation but also incorporating popular legacies and cultural constitutions (Drake, 2005, p. 633-635; Philipps, 1979, p. 86-105).

[11] As seen in the reception of Cicero's thought and life, reconsidered in light of debates surrounding monarchy, republic, and tyranny. Historiographic and political frameworks are reimagined together, as descriptions of ancients and contemporaries provide rational support for political actions (Baron, 1966, p. 121-128; Fryde, 1980, p. 533-552).

[12] The famous text by Hans Baron describes the decline of civic spirit due to the persistence of classical models in academies that had no reference to the social reality of the population. This indicates the gradual path towards the popularization of knowledge, along with an opposition between tyrannical regimes that provide social unification and searches for republican balance in the Italian communes (Baron, 1966, p. 315-329).

[13] The conceptualization of a cultural mission deeply intertwines with a political perspective of civil liberty in the constitution of a civilità, permeating all administrative and military offices (Baron, 1966, p. 414-428; 430-438). The ideal of freedom, even within principalities, integrates rhetorical and educational elements in accordance with political events. Skinner seeks to describe the formation of this idea parallel to historical occurrences (Skinner, 2007, p. 3-68).

[14] Some theses that would receive greater attention and systematization in his subsequent discursive works are highlighted, such as quick deliberations for the city's decision-making, the relationship of trust between leadership and citizens, ambition, Occasion, and the limits of benefits given to subjugated peoples, and the issue of fidelity among the powerful. Thus, by comparing present and ancient circumstances, he attests: "If it is true that histories are the teacher of our actions". Without developing the reasons why the Romans should be imitated for their Virtù, he considers that their actions should be adapted to the situations presented in Valdichiana.

[15] The nuances of this development can be seen in the chancellery writings where the impossibility of recovering past events gives way to descriptions of similar circumstances; thus, didactic characteristics are observed for better decision-making based on ancient and recent examples (Marchand, 1975, p. 323-325). Events are no longer seen for illustrative purposes only; they assume pragmatic values due to the repetitions observed throughout historical transformations.

of employing his historiographic techniques reveal a preservation of past events that brings to memory what may have been forgotten, favoring the transmission of forms and modes of action that were acceptable in earlier conditions – examples to be followed in direct relation to political praxis[16]. Thus, the past is presented through its ethical, political, and moral interconnections with the present. Continuous transformations in civil orders arise due to human appetites, which in turn fuel these changes. One must therefore learn from the Virtù of ancestors in their foundations and in the means used to maintain orders, in their tireless battles to contain the effects of inevitable corruptions in political regimes[17]. Education, preparation, and the desire for glory are among the means of cultivating Virtù, even in the face of uncontrolled ambitions and unrestrained human desires[18]. In "The Art of War", how History is used as a didactic instrument to promote Virtù and preserve civility is evidenced in Fabrizio's military arguments, especially in the examples of ancients and contemporaries, their tactical arrangements[19], their choices of weaponry[20], and their interactions with religious fervor (AG II). These cases should be studied and adapted according to necessity, as they provide suitable wisdom for similar circumstances. Additionally, the weakening of human spirits throughout history is noted, contributing to the decline of ancient orders by models incapable of carrying out military actions, exalting patriotic fervor, and establishing civil orders in accordance with the present situation[21].

[16] It is argued that for the Florentine author, human passions remain the same, and understanding the past assists in decisions in a present considered declining and lacking the necessary strength to defend the homeland and libertà (freedom) (Ménissier, 2002, p. 33-35).

[17] Unable to contain changes, humans can attempt to recognize how orders degenerate, seeking to mitigate the harmful effects of social disarray (Burnham, 1943, p. 62).

[18] D. III. 43. In his increasing use of exempla to scrutinize the best possibilities for present action, Machiavelli acknowledges the persistence of change but also similar circumstances and the same human passions. Thus, studying the past allows one to be more prepared for the vicissitudes of Fortune.

[19] AG I; III. In the first passage, the convenience of contracted militias and standing armies is debated; in the following, the best means for strategic retreats in certain battle situations are evaluated. There are exemplifications and reflections on both ancient and contemporary events in both cases.

[20]AG II. Various armaments for each battle situation, their advantages and disadvantages, are described in direct comparison with the wars experienced by contemporaries.

[21] AG II. The extinction of ancient Virtù is a result of a gradual abandonment of enthusiasm for the homeland. On the other hand, actions to maintain their orders and libertà require the cultivation of Virtù, drawing from ancient examples. Thus, there are civil and religious ways that propagate a weakening of humanity, but there are also those that foster the strengthening of courage and weapons, the insertion of Virtù.

The choice of weapons for each battle condition is important, as well as discipline and Virtù. In this way, the condottiere Fabrizio embodies Machiavelli's historiographical work by describing the activities of the ancients and contemporaries, such as physical battles, means of sustaining the army, military and civil formations, but also by indicating how these examples should guide present conduct according to the situations faced. Thus, he compares the successes of the Romans with the wars that took place in Italy and with the German armies, noting that the ancient infantry had an advantage due to the materials used in battle and should therefore instruct their contemporaries in similar conflicts. Fabrizio's battlefield experiences, combined with his observations of past and present events, guide the character in this dialogue in his historiographical procedure, revealing Machiavelli's methodology, procedure, and thinking throughout his entire body of work[22].

Similar themes and analogous techniques are presented throughout the argumentative development of "Il Principe" ("The Prince"). When discussing, for example, the advantages and disadvantages of militias or standing armies, he cites various cases from antiquity and his historical present[23]. In this sense, he echoes Fabrizio's words, reasoning that only war and its formations should be on the ruler's mind[24]; even in times of peace, they must always train for battles[25]. In his mental training, the prince must read histories and consider the actions of excellent individuals, learning from their victories and defeats, imitating their successes, and avoiding their mistakes[26]. Thus, a wise commander should imitate those who achieved glory, as they are examples of Virtù to be followed.

[22] Discussions on militias, battlefield armaments, the use of military formations, religious fervor, continuous training of armies, and various other cases where this technique is observed stand out.
[23] P. XIII. In this particular case, it describes how the request for auxiliary troops from external powers results in difficulties that are hard to overcome, regardless of the victorious or unfavorable outcome. It mentions ancient cases and recalls the actions of Pope Julius II. In the case of arming citizens in new civil orders, the argument that some historical accounts attest to this procedure is also used (P. XX).
[24] P. XIV. It states that no other Art is expected of those in command, other than to assert that those who focus more on luxuries or relegate war to a secondary position tend to lose their command positions.
[25] P. XIV, AG II. A thesis advocated by Fabrizio and supported by Flavius Josephus, who indicated that the skill of Roman troops resulted from the constant training done within their ranks.
[26] P. XIV. It describes how the ancients followed this course of action, imitating the glory of their ancestors and seeking to achieve it in their respective presents.

Throughout the "Discorsi" ("Discourses"), the exemplifications of ancient and contemporary figures also assist in Machiavelli's argumentation. Highlighting the reasons why the Virtù of the ancients is extinct in his contemporary world[27], he reflects on the possible learning from the highlighted examples; he also contemplates how exemplary values and actions can be inserted and cultivated in Italian cities[28]. In this way, ancient and contemporary figures are compared to extract something useful and practical for overcoming crises caused by divisions and political factions in Italian lands[29]. He combines his personal experiences and his knowledge of the ancients to express the best ways to establish and defend public orders against the infamies of tyranny[30]. Individuals, collectivities, and cities are investigated, compared, and presented in a historical panorama so that their successes and failures assist humans in better acting in circumstances similar to those described in the texts and observed in Italian communes.

Thus, throughout the entirety of the "Discorsi", the stories of the ancients and human affairs (cose umane) are presented together as the foundation for the writer's political evaluations, covering various topics: difficulties in enacting laws due to individual ambitions of humans[31] or due to corruptions of orders and changes in customs[32]; ways to encourage and mediate public denunciations for the good of civil

[27] D I. proem. The cause of weakness lies in religious rites that distance humans from imitating the Virtù of the ancients, but also in ignorance of history, which prevents humans from experiencing and savoring the genuine flavor of past events.

[28] D I., proem. It indicates the reasons for comparing the ancients and the contemporaries: to have greater knowledge that allows one to perceive the utility of historical reflection and to update the necessary good actions.

[29] D. I proem. The author emphasizes that there is insufficient experience of human affairs and of the past, but he believes that in his investigations, observations, and suggestions, those who possess greater Virtù, Occasion, Fortune, better speeches, and judgments may have their intentions satisfied. The past and the present are scrutinized to be more prepared for the necessary actions presented.

[30] 30 D. ded. D I.10. In the dedication of the "Discorsi", Maquiavel reiterates that his writings bring together what he knows and has learned from his experience and studies of worldly matters. In choosing a theme he wouldn't have chosen for himself, he presents the writing to those who should be princes but are not. However, he warns them not to be deceived by the deceptive glimmers of regimes and characters that establish tyrannies, for these leaders lack a clear perception that their activities will result in revolts, infamy, failures, and disorders.

[31] D. I.3 The perversity of humans and their actions is highlighted in promoting order and laws that sustain social institutions since they only act in response to the necessity of dangers or the imposition of legal coercion.

[32] D. I. 49. The difficulties of maintaining laws that preserve the principle of civil libertà are seen in all forms of regimes, from ancient Rome to the models used by Florence, especially in the face of needs that require reforms and new creations.

life[33]; means to inhibit slander, as it damages public order by creating factions[34]; how religion can instill love for the homeland and be used for social cohesion and military motivation[35]; the inherent challenges of transitioning political regimes in maintaining libertà[36]; methods of publicly rewarding and punishing citizens[37]; assessments of the repercussions of human ingratitude for public orders[38]; debates about successions, merits, and functions of public magistracies[39]; resistance against servitude and rejection of tyrannical monarchies[40]; ways in which republican regimes are transformed and expanded[41]; the erasure of the memory of Virtù in subjugated peoples due to social, linguistic, and religious changes[42]; the unity, courage, and Virtù of soldiers being more

[33] D. I.7. Civil accusations lead to punishments against those who seek to undermine the security of public orders. These promote the satisfaction of citizens' humors, preventing extraordinary means from creating divisions and factions in the Republic.

[34] D. I.8. Thus, it distinguishes accusations from calumnies, showing how the latter are harmful because, by dispensing with coherent arguments and evidence, they create disorders. Calumny is a recurring element in the history of cities and is widely used in power struggles, resulting in divisions, disunity, and factions: the ruin of order.

[35] D. I.9-15. The praises of the founders of order are highlighted, as well as the need to be solitary for the reformulation of civilità, and the ease of greater maintenance by the community. Numa is compared to the Christian religious processes of his time. In contrast, Christendom only witnesses weakness and disorder D. I. proem.

[36] D. I.16-18. It shows the transformations of regimes and the difficulties of a people in maintaining their libertà, whether in creating a republican order or in a monarchical situation. In both cases, disorders must be fought, and orders restored, immediately or gradually, even in the face of the greatest difficulties. Thus, it emphasizes learning and adaptation to Occasion, according to context and population.

[37] D. I. 24. Public orders prescribe rewards and penalties for citizens. Historical examples show that merits are not canceled out by demerits, and faults are not covered by good actions.

[38] D I. 29-32. Among the constant comparisons between the people and the prince, discussions of ingratitude stand out for echoing the eternal mistrust of monarchs, who know the ambitions and infidelities of humans. Thus, by revealing historical examples, the desire for expansion and maintenance of libertà leads republics and princes to offend those who deserved trust due to constant suspicions. There's a demand for individuals to establish orders, but the people are more constant and wise in their maintenance. D.I.58.

[39] D I. 60. Merits and how magistracies are granted cannot inhibit the Virtù of their subjects, regardless of their ages.

[40] D II.2 The determination of people who fought against Rome stands out due to their fear of death, servitude, and the disastrous consequences for the homelands of those peoples. The lessons of history demonstrate the destruction of peoples and cities previously subjugated by servitude.

[41] D.II.4 From his observations of ancient history, he deduces that republics are expanded in three ways: by forming leagues without a centralizing power; by associating allies while maintaining a centralizing power; and by subjugating subjects. The difficulties in all cases are immense due to constant struggles for sovereignty. Thus, conquests of disorderly republics result in disasters for civil orders. Hence, a careful study of history aims to eliminate bad examples and beliefs that lead such cities to perdition (D.II.19). One learns about means of battles, but also about the evils of expanding poorly ordered republics.

[42] D.II. 5. There are beautiful passages in this section where the extinction of public orders is followed by social, religious, customary, and linguistic eradication. For Maquiavel, the complete erasure of Tuscan memory and the utter elimination of ancient Virtù was not possible due to monuments and the use of Latin. Poets, historical records, and statues are eliminated. Only traces and remnants remain that do not inspire confidence.

valuable than money and fortresses[43]; the blindness of humans that Fortune desires to destroy[44]; alliances aren't won by tribute money but by Virtù, strength, and reputation[45]; the impossibility of trusting given word due to human fickleness and the necessity of strength and reputation[46]; commanders of armies and cities must have the freedom to act as required, avoiding discord and insecurity[47]; sects and republics must return to their principles if they wish to endure[48]; ways to counter conspiracies in monarchies and principalities[49]; the bloody or peaceful means by which changes in public orders occur[50]; critical assessments of times, occasions, and states of a republic that seeks modification[51]; the need for joint Virtù of both the commander and soldiers[52]; the imperative of Virtù in times of crisis and its decline in times of prosperity due to personal ambition in protecting family or faction members[53]; acts of mercy can have greater influence on decisions than

[43] D. II. 10; D. II.24 This theme is also discussed in "Del'arte della Guerra", "Il Principe", and in the descriptions of the actions of Cesare Borgia and Castruccio Castracani. It highlights the greater value of well-trained soldiers and their commanders over gold and fortresses.

[44] D II. 29. The accounts of Cesare Borgia and Castruccio Castracani exemplify this observation in other parts of Maquiavel's corpus, as despite these characters seeking to be prepared for all possible circumstances, Fortune robbed them of glory.

[45] D. II. 30. A famous theme exemplified by ancient and recent historical examples throughout Maquiavel's corpus. Thus, to evaluate the power of an individual and a city, one must analyze how they interact with their peers. Historical examples show the urgency of Virtù in the face of Fortune to overcome the present weakness in the face of powerful events.

[46] D. II, 31. A widely spread thesis throughout Maquiavel's works, but this particular passage refers to historical examples of those who trusted bandits and exiles, yet failed to heed their personal passions and ambitions.

[47] D. II. 33. This theme is also seen concerning factions in Italian cities and their weaknesses in decision-making. Thus, to avoid insecurities and uncertainties, it is advocated that commanders have free authority in matters of public security, without constant consultations with civilian leadership. Personal glories were maintained, and errors were avoided by those who could not be aware of all circumstances.

[48] D. III.1. Changes in civil orders are inevitable, and attempts to maintain healthy organisms, and constant struggles against the corruption of order, require returns to principles so that humans can incorporate these fundamental values, and extraordinary measures are not necessary.

[49] D. III. 6. In a lengthy chapter, compared to others in this work, it reiterates how conspiracies are terrible for both princes and republics. They must be circumvented as quickly as possible; however, they require careful handling to not ruin the established order. They may require deceit, force, violence, and drastic measures. Therefore, they must be combated with cunning and caution.

[50] D. III. 7. There are various ways in which transformations between libertà and servitude are observed, and all examples should be examined.

[51] D. III. 8. Humans must adjust their conduct to the time and situations in which political regimes find themselves. Otherwise, all their actions are ineffective.

[52] 52 D. III. 13. With significant repercussions for civil institutions, specific individuals may be called upon to carry out particular activities while public institutions must also be well-ordered to realize their greatest potential. Just as in an army, competent soldiers and commanders are mandatory.

[53] D. III, 16. Times of peace and prosperity breed contempt for Virtù in humans, favoring those who are less capable, leading to discontent and disorder. This theme is expanded and emphasized in many points of the "Istorie Fiorentine".

constant use of force[54]; abuses against women and rulers' inattention to these actions can destroy civil orders[55]; monarchs cannot complain about the bad customs of their people, as they bear great responsibility for their conduct[56]; the army must trust itself and its commander to win a battle[57]; promises, enforced by force or made without reason, should not be obeyed[58].

In these various argumentative contexts, and throughout his entire work, the author combines recent and ancient examples, describing the similarities between these historical assessments and indicating the means by which actions aimed at the common good and the preservation of civil liberty should be imitated—even if it requires reformulating the decadent intellectual notions of his present and reintegrating the Virtù of the ancients. There is a constancy in human desires and a pendular persistence in the forms of political regimes. Thus, Machiavelli does not advocate a return to an idealized past but underscores that civil institutions must, imperatively and repeatedly, be restored to their guiding principles[59].

By expounding on the benefits of studying history, Machiavelli asserts that it is possible to seek glory in everyday civil actions but to do so, it is necessary to learn from the victories and defeats of our remote ancestors and those who lived before us. While caution against glorifying a glorious past at the expense of a miserable present is important, critically evaluating the contexts and values of both ancient and contemporary

[54] D. III. 20. This theme is also explored in "Il Principe" regarding the appearance of actions, describing ancient cases where honorable actions, e.g., charity and mercy, garnered affection from the people and victory for generals.
[55] D. III. 26. The classic examples of Lucretia and Virginia are mixed with disputes between different social strata over marriage in Ardea, highlighting how monarchs, tyrants, and magistrates must not forget the harmful impacts that such abuses can cause to their regimes.
[56] D. III. 29. Once again, the images of rulers and their reputations are brought to the forefront, pondering that subjects have their eyes on the actions of their leaders, who have the authority to organize civilità but are often hindered by their own vices.
[57] D. III. 33. Such attitudes promote overcoming incidents in military campaigns, but they mirror civil organizations in their processes of inexorable deterioration.
[58] D. III. 42. Maquiavel mentions in this passage, Il Principe (The Prince), highlighting its treatment of the subject. He emphasizes that glory can be achieved through various actions depending on the occasion. Many examples demonstrate the unnecessary nature of maintaining promises.
[59] D. I. 18; I.55; III.1. A return to the exact foundations of past civil orders, both in form and substance, is impossible. Therefore, civil orders must be formed and reformed based on guiding principles learned from experiences, actions, and studies, considering the similarity of contexts and the enduring nature of human desires.

matters is also essential. He highlights the importance of reintroducing the Virtù of the ancients to combat the degeneration in political organizations, as perceived through his experiences[60]. This involves blending recent experiences with historical learning to combat various forms of tyranny and corruption within civil orders[61].

This fervent struggle against the corruption of civil order, as manifested publicly in the divisions and factions within the various forms of governance across the Italian peninsula, is meticulously laid out in Machiavelli's "Istorie Fiorentine" (Florentine Histories). In the unfolding narrative of this work, the intrigues and disorders of the Florentine government are presented alongside the political maneuverings of the Roman Church, the disputes among Italian principalities, the advances of the Frankish kingdom, and diplomatic relations with the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, when addressing the specific question of one city, particularly in the context of ancestors directly connected to the Medici, Machiavelli incorporates a contextualization of the unstable and belligerent social conditions in Europe during this period into the exposition of events vital to Florentine civic actions. He unveils his primary theses on the governance of republics in light of the Roman predecessors, evaluating past Florentine events and diagnosing the potentialities of political actions in his own time, always emphasizing the utility of historical examples.

Because he desires to elucidate how Florence rose and established itself within the political context of Italian communes, enduring numerous wars and external interferences, Machiavelli portrays the ruin of Roman dominion and the destruction of ancient political unity by various populations. As emphasized in the dedication of the work to Clement VII, the historian aspires to depict all the destruction that followed the Roman Empire (IF. ded.). Thus, readers of the work learn how pontiffs, Venetians, the

[60] D. I. proem; II. proem. In the proem of the first book, Maquiavel emphasizes the importance of avoiding the mistake of approaching history merely as a collection of past events. In the following book, he reinforces this assertion by stating that it is impossible to fully know the truth about ancient things, but it is possible to extract what may be useful. He compares ancient Virtù with the decadence he has experienced, aiming for the former to be emulated and the latter to be neglected.

[61] D. I. 10. These passages contain significant insights into the differences between a well-ordered principality and a tyrannical regime, personified by Romulus and Caesar, respectively. The essence of order does not require abuses of laws, customs, or civility. Thus, the lessons of history teach how to establish and maintain public order.

Kingdom of Naples, and the Duchy of Milan vied for power in the Italian province, but also how Florence, despite its divisions, found success in the reforms promoted by the Medici family[62]. This reveals the constant interplay between internal considerations in Florence amid political and territorial disputes involving other Italian cities, the French kingdom, the papacy, and the Empire.

However, while acknowledging these events and in direct relation to the argumentation about forms of governance, Machiavelli reflects on customs, divisions, and factions in a Republic in the face of vicissitudes and necessary decision-making[63]. He uses the Roman example to diagnose essential differences between the Florentine mode and that existing in the ancient city. The former preserved order and libertà, while the latter destroyed civil arrangements in constant factional and individual strife[64]. Such considerations are underscored in the satisfaction of the Umori of the population[65] and the constant divisions into factions that fight for privileges without considering the common good (DRSF XXIII-XXIV)[66].

Machiavelli presents his objectives of overcoming the numerous divisions in Florence through the lessons learned from history, diagnosing the causes of the emergence of certain factions and civil disunity in order to identify the means to prevent the destruction of order[67]. In this way, he scrutinizes the reasons why such divisions

[62] 62 IF. Dedication. The tensions around the composition of these commissioned histories are quite well-known and discussed. The recipient of these works can be interpreted as either a friend or an enemy, depending on the context of the reading and the arguments presented by Maquiavel (Najemy, 1982, p. 551-576; Macfarland, 1999, p. 133-146). Maquiavel himself finds himself obliged to include justifications about the fairness of his descriptions due to the directives given by Clement VII and the historiographical proposals of the author. A similar situation is found in the author's "Discourse on the Necessary Reforms in the City of Florence", or "Discursus Florentinarum Rerum".

[63] 63 I.F. II.1; III.11; VII.5. In the various processes of founding, sustaining, and expanding the republican orders, the disunions among the Italian cities are expressed in these and other passages in the "Histories". These passages describe how such divisions posed significant difficulties for the governments.

[64] 64 I.F. 3.1. A thesis defended in the "Discourses" and analyzed previously. The constant human desires for power can lead to legal disputes that either strengthen political regimes or cause their downfall. The effects and consequences differ in Rome and Florence.

[65] 65 P. IX; XIX; D. I.4; II. 37; III.9; IF III.1, 21; VII. 19. Human ambitions and desires must be satisfied in establishing and maintaining public order, minimizing unnecessary conflicts, and maximizing their potential for civil strengthening.

[66] DRSF XXIII-XXIV.

[67] IF. proem. The dangers are learned to be overcome, and it is also noted that division leads a city to ruin. Thus, Florence, having experienced so many divisions over time, was consistently disorganized and on the brink of collapse. However, the Virtù, ingenuity, and spirit of its citizens held back the malignancy of events.

gradually extinguish Virtù, both at the individual and civil levels, enabling the emergence of inadequate political regimes[68]. He reiterates the position discussed in the "Discorsi" regarding the importance of individual action in creating laws for the maintenance of civil order when comparing the ancient Romans and their contemporary Italians[69]. Human ambitions do not change; their Umori must be satisfied at all social levels. The pendulum of history, swinging between order and disorder, demands Virtù that wields letters after weapons, preventing idle idleness from destabilizing the spirits of citizens and eroding their love for the homeland[70]. Therefore, it is necessary to overcome disorders, conspiracies, disunity, and envy that are detrimental to the stability of cities, especially when they perpetuate factional strife[71].

Machiavelli's modes of understanding history reveal the constant rise and fall of human events. Furthermore, with the possibility of understanding human types through examples from antiquity and recent history, the study of human affairs – "cose umane" - assists those who seek to face the vicissitudes of Fortune with Virtù, in the inevitable corruptions of public order. Due to the persistence of similar historical characteristics, as well as the constant ambitions and desires of humans over time, Virtù must be cultivated in the face of Fortune's actions. In dialogue with a cyclical conception of history, Machiavelli scrutinizes human actions, political decisions, and successions in the civil orders of ancient cities and Italian communes, highlighting a disparity between the noble Virtù of the ancients and the decadence of his contemporaries. Therefore, ancient concepts and actions must be understood in their contexts and imitated in the present.

When discussing the methods and historiographical approaches within

[68] IF III. 1. In Rome, a Virtù was cultivated that encouraged greater power. However, in Florence, divisions, disputes over magistracies, and exiles extinguished spirits, customs, and good deeds. Thus, an astute ruler could establish a principality or a form of dominion that pleases the necessary parties to keep them in power.
[69] D. I.11; D.I.58; IF IV.1. Integrates the diagnosis of civil disunity with the possibility of individual organization and collective governance maintenance.
[70] IF V. The theme echoes the failure of an unarmed prophet. Describes how both ancient and new things are useful for learning, as they allow for the proper combat of the deterioration of civil orders in due time through the imitation of Virtù seen in others.
[71] IF VIII.1; D. III. 6. Acknowledges the complexity of the subject and refers to the "Discourses" for a more detailed treatment. However, it reiterates what was seen in the previous book of the "Istorie": the factions present in Florence do not stimulate liberty and the processes of civil organization, but rather cause significant losses to the city and promote instability.

Machiavelli's corpus, we can see the various means of promoting Virtù in harmony and discord with the thinkers of Italian civic humanism. The rich discussions of political thought in the period show how classical antiquity blends with contemporary events among poetic imaginings, historiographical conceptions, and political systematizations. The rhetorical and poetic devices in Machiavelli's texts bring together examples of individuals, e.g., Romulus, Numa, Moses, but also of cities, e.g., Rome and Florence. These images from the past become essential in the associations between educational and cultural modes in defense of a city's libertà through the active actions of its citizens. Intense wars for political dominance are not the only evident conflicts; profound disputes traverse civil understandings, cultural identities, and forms of governance as well.

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