After the Fall: Vettori, Machiavelli, and the Refiguring of *Italia* in Sixteenth-Century Political Discourse

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ABSTRACT

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Vettori, Machiavelli, and the Refiguring of *Italia* in Sixteenth-Century Political Discourse (Under the Direction of Melissa M. Bullard)

This thesis tracks changes in political thought in the writings of Niccolò Machiavelli and Francesco Vettori between 1512 and the 1520s. While modern historians have traditionally emphasized the early phase of their correspondence, I examine two often overlooked sources from later years: the letters they exchanged in the 1520s and Vettori's history, the *Sommario della Istoria d'Italia*. By the 1520s, the Italian political terrain had experienced sweeping and devastating transformations. I seek to explore the effects of those changes on these Florentines' thinking by highlighting an idea common to both of their writings—*Italia*. Through contrast with Vettori's thought, I contextualize the nature of Machiavelli's political observations after he had spent a decade and a half in political exile, while also shedding light on the dynamism of *Italia* in early sixteenth-century political discourse and historiography. In a short epilogue I suggest some ways in which a rethinking of early modern perceptions of *Italia* can also contribute to modern theoretical debates about the meaning of "nation."

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Introduction

The correspondence between Niccolò Machiavelli and the Florentine ambassador Francesco Vettori, especially during the year 1513, is well known among scholars of the Italian Renaissance.¹ In those letters, one finds Machiavelli, *post res perditas*, eloquently lamenting his rural life in the wake of political exile by the Medici regime;² the announcement of his undertaking a "little work" on the subject of principalities;³ and, as some modern historians, most recently and comprehensively John Najemy, have pointed out,

¹ For a review of the correspondence see the introduction in Giorgio Inglese, ed., *Niccolò Machiavelli: Lettere a Francesco Vettori e a Francesco Guicciardini*, hereafter cited as *Lettere* (Milan: Biblioteca universale Rizzoli, 1989), 5-91. The most comprehensive work on the epistolary exchanges is John Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli—Vettori Letters of 1513-1515* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). On the status of the correspondence in modern historiography see Najemy, 3-17.

² Especially well known in that regard is the letter of 10 December 1513 in which Machiavelli described his daily routine in Sant'Andrea in Percussina where, he related, with the coming of evening, "I enter into the ancient courts of ancient men, where, having been received affectionately, I feast on that food which alone is mine, and for which I was born, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and ask them the reasons for their actions, and where they, in all their humanity, answer me, and for four hours I feel no boredom, I forget all problems of the world, I do not fear poverty; death does not scare me: I give myself totally over to them" [Venuta la sera, mi ritorno in casa et entro nel mio scrittoio...entro nelle antique corti degli antique huomini, dove, da loro ricevuto amorevolmente, mi pasco di quell cibo, che solum et mio, et che io nacqui per lui; dove io non mi vergogno parlare con loro, et domandarli della ragione delle loro actioni; et quelli per loro humanità mi rispondono; et non sento per quattro hore di tempo alcuna noia, sdimenticho ogni affanno, non temo la povertà, non mi sbigottiscie la morte: tucto mi transferisco in loro], *Lettere*, 195.

³ In the same letter of 10 December: "I have composed a small work *De principatibus*, where I explore the limits of the subject as much as possible, discussing what a principality is, their variations, how they are acquired, how they are maintained, and why they are lost" [et composto uno opuscolo *De principatibus*, dove io mi profondo quanto io posso nelle cogitationi di questo subbietto, disputando che cosa è principato, di quale spetie sono, come e' si acquistono, e' si mantengono, perché e' si perdono], *Lettere*, 195.

a prefiguring of the thematic and discursive contours of *The Prince*, which Machiavelli composed later that same year.⁴

The two Florentines continued their conversations into the next decade, until the year of Machiavelli's death, 1527, but this later period in their ongoing dialogue has received considerably less attention from modern scholars. In the intervening decade and a half, the political terrain of the Italian peninsula underwent swift and substantial change. The foreign invasions that had begun in 1494 when King Charles VIII of France crossed the Alps had developed by the 1520s into a showdown between French monarch Francis I and Holy Roman Emperor and Hapsburg King Charles V, who fought out their continuing struggle for continental hegemony on Italian soil. The presence of foreign armies during those years led to military disasters and the loss of political self-determination for many Italian states, whose own rivalries and small mercenary forces proved an inadequate defense against the advances of the more powerful monarchs and their larger armies. The question remains, did the political upheaval in the subsequent decade significantly alter the intellectual dynamic between the two interlocutors? Did the interplay of ideas between them take a turn in the overlooked final chapter of their dialogue? The answer, to the extent that one is possible, may shed some light on several issues, including the extent to which Machiavelli, having by that time been in exile for over ten years, was able to remain "in touch" with the changing political situation in Italy.

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⁴ See especially Najemy, 176-214. Other insightful works exploring the intertextual continuities between the 1513 letters and *The Prince* include Frederico Chabod, "Sulla Composizione de *Il Principe* di Niccolò Machiavelli," in *Scritti su Machiavelli* (Turin: G. Einaudi, 1964), 195-241; Gennaro Sasso, *Niccolò Machiavelli: Storia del suo pensiero politico* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1980), 293-335; Ugo Dotti, *Niccolò Machiavelli: la fenomenologia del potere* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1979), 17-52, 100-106; and Dotti, *Machiavelli rivoluzionario* (Rome: Carocci, 2003), 243-280.

This essay turns to an idea common to Machiavelli's and Vettori's writings from 1513 through the 1520s, *Italia*, which can serve as a touchstone—a kind of litmus test for evaluating the nature of changes in their political thought. Despite the fierce political divisions within the land South of the Alps, the two friends wrote with a decidedly peninsular focus; the security and future of *Italia*, rather than the authors' native Florence predominated their ongoing epistolary dialogue. Between 1513 and 1528 the peninsula's political terrain transformed and so, too, did each man's perceptions and articulations of *Italia*; the meanings of *Italia* that Vettori and Machiavelli conceptualized in 1513, which are discussed below, became, over the next fifteen years, more nuanced and, in some subtle ways, developed along increasingly different lines. This essay traces that development and divergence into the 1520s by examining two largely overlooked texts: the Machiavelli-Vettori correspondence after 1513 and Vettori's own formal history of the period, the *Sommario della Istoria d'Italia*.

⁵ In his discussion of the 1513 correspondence, Italian scholar Ugo Dotti noted that it, "it is here that a break opens up: a break, that is, with the usual mode of posing problems from an exclusively *Florentine point of view* and instead adopting, on the contrary, a decisively *Italian* perspective...not only the drama of Florence's health, but that of the entire peninsula." [è qui che si opera [una] forma di rottura: la rottura cioè col consueto modo di porre i problemi dall'esclusivo *punto di vista fiorentino* per assumerne uno, al contrario, decisamente *italiano*... non soltanto il dramma della salute di Firenze ma quello dell'intera penisola], Dotti, *rivoluzionario*, 248.

⁶ The definitive and only complete edited collection of Vettori's works is Francesco Vettori, *Scritti storici e politici*, ed. Enrico Niccolini, hereafter cited as *Scritti* (Bari: G. Laterza, 1972). That compilation includes extensive archival, bibliographic, and paleographic summaries, see 397-411 for detailed manuscript information regarding the *Sommario*. The *Sommario* is not the focus of any major studies, but does receive insightful commentary and analysis in the following works: Benedetto Croce, "Pagine di Francesco Vettori," *La Critica* 39 (1941): 237-242; Felix Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), 243-244, 248-254, 268-269, 292; Rudolf von Albertini, *Firenze dalla Repubblica al Principato* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995), 248-261; Mario Santoro, *Fortuna, ragione e prudenzia nella civilità letteraria del cinquecento* (Naples: Liguori, 1978), 393-405; Gian Luigi Betti, "La Ragione Negata: Il *Sommario della Istoria d'Italia* di Francesco Vettori," *Studi Senesi* XCIV (1983): 401-409; Andrea Matucci, *Machiavelli nella storiografia fiorentina* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1991), 236-240; Franco Gaeta, "Il Percorso Storiografico di Francesco Guicciardini," in *Francesco Guicciardini: 1483-1983, nel V centenario della nascita* (Florence: L.S. Olschki, 1983), 156; and Dotti, *fenomenologia*, 22-32.

Composed in 1528,⁷ the *Sommario* details the Italian Wars between 1512 and 1527. It is an important, if largely forgotten work that illustrates the astuteness of Vettori's historical thought. In many ways, Vettori still lingers in the shadows of modern Renaissance historiography.⁸ Despite recent studies such as those by Najemy and Dotti that underscore Vettori's provocative role as Machiavelli's intellectual foil in the years preceding *The Prince*, the majority of modern scholarship presents Vettori largely as an ancillary, passive receptacle next to his more famous friend, not as a thinker in his own right.⁹ In particular, the overall profusion of Machiavelli studies has overshadowed Vettori's accomplishments as a historian.¹⁰ Vettori's historical work plays an important role in our understanding of the exchange of ideas between him and Machiavelli. In *Between Friends*, John Najemy focused on the friendly dispute between Vettori and Machiavelli during the years 1513-1515 regarding the limits of political discourse, an issue that Najemy saw present and still unresolved within the pages of *The Prince*.¹¹ In fact, both writers implicitly engaged the viewpoints of the other through their formal writings. Just as *The Prince* reflected prior

⁷ See Rosemary Devonshire Jones, *Francesco Vettori: Florentine Citizen and Medici Servant* (London: Athlone Press, 1972), 51; Albertini, 250; and Betti, 401.

⁸ On Vettori's political career see Devonshire Jones's detailed biography. See also a brief character sketch in Albertini, 246-265, and a short but useful "biobibliography" in Niccolini, *Scritti*, 359-367.

⁹ Najemy's work is the notable exception to the rule.

¹⁰ Vettori's corpus includes, in addition to the *Sommario*, an anecdotal account of his travels in Germany, *Viaggio in Alamagna*, a dialogue on the Sack of Rome, biographies of his father Piero and of Lorenzo de' Medici, the Duke of Urbino, as well as many diplomatic and personal letters.

¹¹ Najemy, 102-103, 107-109, 124-127, 144-146, 176-177, 185-191, 202, 208-209, 347. In that amicable disagreement, a skeptical Vettori argued against a rationally optimistic Machiavelli; the former asserted the inability of language to describe problems and to offer solutions for what he viewed as ever-changing and infinitely complex political realities, while the latter maintained the existence of absolute, universal political truths that language could both discern and describe. For Najemy, that dialogue about "the intelligibility of the world and the possibility of coherent and effective political discourse" carried out in private correspondence was continued within the pages of Machiavelli's most influential work—in Najemy's words, there is a "polemic against Vettori that pervades *The Prince*," Najemy, 201-202.

discussions between Machiavelli and Vettori, so, too, does the *Sommario*. Machiavelli died just before Vettori began writing, but in his history Vettori employed many of the same terms and engaged some of the same issues, like political discourse, that had appeared in his prior correspondence with Machiavelli and in *The Prince* itself. ¹² One of those contested issues was *Italia*. Given its peninsular scope, the *Sommario* provides significant insight into Vettori's perception of *Italia* and the ways in which it contrasted with Machiavelli's in the 1520s. In giving voice to Vettori's later observations, I want to leave open the possibility that between these two Florentines, Vettori had the more "realistic" or "modern" perspective measured against the altered political situation in Italy by the 1520s.

While following the diachronic development of Vettori's and Machiavelli's ideas through the theme of *Italia*, this paper also explores, on a parallel track, the broader question of the valence of *Italia* in early modern political discourse. Among modern historians of the early modern period, *Italia* is a contested term. Some dismiss *Italia* as empty of meaning during the Renaissance on the grounds that most Italians during that time identified themselves primarily through regional loyalties. Edward Muir recently commented that preunification Italy was "a dream that has been given far more credit as an idea than it deserves, an idea far more ephemeral than the persistence of local and regional identities." Yet that "idea" that Muir so quickly disparaged proliferated in the writings of many Italian

¹² For instance, briefly indicating his skeptical position regarding the capacity of political discourse to reach certain truth-claims, Vettori cautioned in the introduction to the *Sommario* that "my purpose here is not to write an entire history, nor am I so arrogant as to convince myself of having perfectly resolved the matters I discuss," *Scritti*, 137.

¹³ As quoted by Gene Brucker, "The Horseshoe Nail: Structure and Contingency in Medieval and Renaissance Florence," in *Living on the Edge in Leonardo's Florence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 64. Lauro Martines has similarly dismissed *Italia* as having hardly any real significance during the Renaissance, see Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City States in Renaissance Italy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 111-113.

intellectuals. ¹⁴ Though *campanilismo*—literally, loyalty to one's bell tower—likely held far more sway over most of the people living on the peninsula, that does not necessarily negate the simultaneous presence of *Italia* in political and historical writings. Other modern historians describe *Italia* during the premodern period as either a "geographical expression," indicating the peninsula south of the Alps, or as a "cultural construct," a recognition of cultural difference among the people who lived on that peninsula from others who lived outside of it. ¹⁵ Such descriptions of *Italia*'s historical meaning are accurate but incomplete. Early modern Italians had in common a set of cultural traditions built upon the heritage of classical Rome; they had a conglomeration of states bound together in a political system of ever-fluctuating diplomatic relations; and they had an awareness of cultural and linguistic

¹⁴ There are, of course, some modern historians who detect and explore issues of early modern *italianità*, that is, Italianness, or the idea of *Italia* which they naturally assume to be valid categories of analysis. Key examples include Vincent Ilardi's "Italianità Among Some Italian Intellectuals in the Early Sixteenth Century," Tradito 12 (1956): 339-367, which includes commentary on the role of *Italia* in both political and poetic writings of the sixteenth century. Felix Gilbert, "The Concept of Nationalism in Machiavelli's Prince," Studies in the Renaissance 1 (1954): 38-48, briefly situates Machiavelli's "Exhortation" in terms of other, earlier writers' approaches to the idea of a unified Italy. The most recent work on premodern "national" Italian sentiment is William J. Kennedy, The Site of Petrarchism: Early Modern National Sentiment in Italy, France, and England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), see especially 8-15 and 20-73. Not only does Kennedy connect Petrarch's works to the growing diffusion of *italianità* in the early modern period, but he offers insightful critical review and argument regarding the validity of studying "national" issues in the premodern era. See also Pauline Moffitt Watts, "The Donation of Constantine, Cartography, and Papal Plenitdo Potestatis in the Sixteenth Century: A Paper for Salvatore Camporeale," *Modern Language Notes* 119 Supplement (2004): S88-S99, and Francesca Fiorani, The Marvel of Maps: Art, Cartography and Politics in Renaissance Italy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 171-232, who examine the Galleria delle Carte Geografiche in the Vatican Palace, executed between 1578 and 1581 by Egnazio Danti. That famous map room depicts the regions of Italy and, argue Moffitt Watts and Fiorani, connects them in a common, Italian historical narrative through accompanying historical vignettes depicting moments of seemingly united Italian defense against Northern military incursions from the fourth century BC down to the sixteenth century. Though that artistic project came well after Vettori's and Machiavelli's deaths, it stands as the most vivid early modern example of *Italia* as an idea transcending both contemporary political boundaries and the intervening centuries between the sixteenth century and antiquity.

¹⁵ Austrian minister Clemens von Metternich (1773-1859) labeled Italy a "geographical expression" in a 1849 letter; historians of Italy subsequently appropriated the term and continue to apply it to preunification Italy. See for example Denis Mack Smith, *Modern Italy: A Political History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 3-6; Steven A. Epstein's review of *Italy Revisited: The Encyclopedia* in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 35 (2005): 558; and Christopher Duggan, *A Concise History of Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), xiii.

differences from peoples beyond the Alps—the *oltramontani*. The economic dominance of Italian banking and commerce and the cultural productivity of the region, especially in the fine arts and in humanistic writings, created, particularly among the Italian humanists themselves, a sense of Italian cultural superiority over the rest of the European continent. The urban experience also served as common ground among individuals from the various states. In these ways, *Italia* certainly contained geographical and cultural significances, but it also contained much more.

By labeling early modern *Italia* as merely a geographical and cultural indicator, historians paint a static picture that does not accord with some of the writings of that period—then, as now, the word *Italia* was a contested category. As described below, the idea of *Italia* had its origins in antiquity when Roman rule consolidated the tribes of the peninsula. The ancients depicted *Italia* as inextricably tied to the preeminence and martial dominance of Rome; they represented *Italia* as unified, strong, and superior to its transalpine neighbors. In broad terms, that depiction of *Italia* persisted after the collapse of Rome and through the centuries of political fragmentation. But during the so-called "crisis of Italy," the protracted period of war and political instability lasting from 1494 to the 1530s that drastically reordered the peninsula's political balance of power and subjected virtually the whole of it to foreign influence, the inherited understanding of *Italia* fell into question. Francesco Vettori

¹⁶ Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 255, and Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 85.

¹⁷ "A native of Florence or Milan or Naples could travel to any other Italian city and feel immediately at home in that urban milieu: its buildings, its streets, its churches, its social and political structures, its economic activity, and its culture," Brucker, 65.

¹⁸ Guicciardini referred to the period as the *calamità d'Italia*; Machiavelli, *la ruina d'Italia*; and Vettori, *la morte* of Italy. Important modern histories on the crisis of the 1520s include J.N. Stephens's *The Fall of the Florentine Republic: 1512-1530* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), Albertini and Devonshire Jones.

challenged the traditional mode of representing *Italia* by introducing the idea of a fallen and irreversibly weakened *Italia* in his writings of the mid 1520s.

The plan for this paper is, first, to locate the classical and medieval origins of *Italia*; second, to explore how Machiavelli and Vettori each wrote of *Italia* in 1513, that is, how each appropriated that inherited classical tradition of writing *Italia*; and third, to examine how Vettori's and Machiavelli's approaches to the idea of *Italia* diverged in the 1520s. In the final section, I suggest some ways in which understanding *Italia* as a dynamic and contested, rather than static, term during the Renaissance may help inform some of the semantic issues regarding Italian national identity that have persisted since the sixteenth century.

Roman Italia: Origins and Echoes

By writing of *Italia* as a unified political and historical entity rather than a patchwork of independent polities, Renaissance intellectuals like Vettori and Machiavelli recalled earlier, classical representations of the word. ¹⁹ Their discourses on *Italia* exemplified, in the words of Ugo Dotti, "the national *re*birth of the peninsula" (emphasis added). ²⁰ Those sixteenth-century Florentines were looking back, past the intervening centuries of political fragmentation, to the *Italia* of antiquity, when the peninsula was politically unified under the aegis of Roman influence. The word *Italia*, perhaps a derivative of the Greek *vitalia*, or "cattle country," originally referred to a small swath of land in Southern Calabria and the tribe occupying it around the fifth century BC. After the success of the Punic Wars, Roman hegemony spread across the peninsula and after the "Social War" of the late first century BC, Roman citizenship was granted to the tribes of Italy (83 BC). ²² By the time of Augustus' rule,

¹⁹ What follows here is an incomprehensive summary of the rhetorical tradition of *Italia* preceding Machiavelli and Vettori and emphasizing writers whose works those sixteenth century Florentines were most likely familiar. For more wider ranging, broad overviews of the idea of *Italia* in history from antiquity down to the nineteenth century see Ernesto Sestan, "L'idea di una unità della storia italiana," *Rivista Storica Italiana* 62 (1950): 180-198; John Larner, *Italy in the Age of Dante and Petrarch* (London: Longman, 1980), 1-16; Nicholas Doumanis, *Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1-45; and Duggan, 1-8.

²⁰ "La rinascita nazionale della penisola," Dotti, fenonenologia, 38.

²¹ Ernest Pulgram, *The Tongues of Italy: Prehistory and History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 19-20. Also, for background on the pre-Roman origins of the word *Italia* see the entry "Italia" in *Brill's New Pauly Antiquity*, vol. 4 (2005), ed. Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, 993.

²² For the conquest and Romanization of the peninsula and its subsequent elevation to special colonial status see Arthur Keaveney, *Rome and the Unification of Italy* (Exeter: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2005), especially 99-115 and 189-195; Jean-Michel David, *The Roman Conquest of Italy*, trans. Antonia Nevill (Oxford: Oxford

Italia had reached a close approximation of its modern geographical significance, spanning roughly from the Alps in the north to Sicily in the south.²³ Around that time, in the first century BC, Roman writers such as Pliny the Elder, Cicero, and Livy, whose works were familiar to Vettori and Machiavelli, wrote of *Italia* as a unified political entity with a shared history.²⁴

In his *Commentariolum petitionis* (c. 64 BC), a treatise on electioneering tactics, Cicero advised the would-be consul to envision *Italia* as an undivided political unit, urging him to "comprehend in your mind and memory the whole of Italy [*totam Italiam*]."²⁵ The historian Titus Livy, perhaps Machiavelli's greatest classical influence, collapsed Italy and Rome into a singular geographical and political unit.²⁶ For example, in his prefatory speech before his famous invasion of the Italian peninsula, the Carthaginian general Hannibal, through the creative filter of Livy's pen, referred to the Alps as the "walls of Rome."²⁷ while

University Press, 1997), 1-8, 157-182 and Michael Crawford, "Early Rome and Italy," in *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9-39.

²³ Pliny the Elder and Cato both considered the geographical contours of *Italia* as stretching from the Alps, down the length of the peninsula, and on to Sicily. See Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, trans. John Healy (New York: Penguin, 1991), III.38-138, 43-48. For Cato's comments summarized, see *New Pauly*, 993.

²⁴ Vettori and Machiavelli likely began their classical education at young ages, possibly under the tutelage of the same teacher, the priest Paolo Sasso da Ronciglione. See Devonshire Jones, 7, and, on Machiavelli's early classical literary encounters, Sebastian De Grazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 5-6. On 23 November 1513 from his ambassadorial post in Rome, Vettori wrote Machiavelli that in his free time he was reading Livy, Sallust, Tacitus, Ammianus Marcellinus, Suetonius, and Aelius Lampridius, among others, (*Lettere*, 189). Both the informal and formal writings of both men indicate a deep appreciation and knowledge of many classical Roman and some Greek authors.

²⁵ Cicero, Letters to Quintus and Brutus, Letter Fragments, Letter to Octavian, Invectives, Handbook of Electioneering, ed. and trans. D.R. Shackleton Bailey (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), page 424, line 33.

²⁶ Livy himself was not a Roman of the Romans, but a native Paduan (born in 59 BC), thus his persistent patriotism throughout his histories, especially in recounting the war with Hannibal, is further testament to the fluidity of Roman and Italian identities by the late first century BC.

²⁷ Titus Livy, *The War with Hannibal*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt and ed. Betty Radice (New York: Penguin, 1972), 60.

his Roman counterpart Scipio called his troops to the "defense of Italy," that is, "our homeland." Livy's rhetorical choices indicate a precedent in antiquity for invoking, in a poetic and sentimental vein, the idea of *Italia* as an extension of Rome, especially in the context of imminent military threats. By the time of Augustus's rule, Virgil, a poet whom Vettori and Machiavelli frequently cited, ²⁹ consciously joined together *Italia* and Rome in a shared, divinely ordained, and seemingly predestined historical path. In the final book of the *Aeneid* (c. 19 BC), set in the mythic fog of Rome's nascent days, Virgil foreshadowed the future greatness of the city as dependent on the union of Rome and its Italian neighbors, as the goddess Juno decreed to Aeneas "let Italian valor be the strength of Rome in after times." The idea of "Italian valor," or in Machiavelli's parlance, Italian *virtù*, was critical to Machiavelli's expressions of *Italia* centuries later, as I will show.

When Rome fell, so, too, did the reality of a politically unified and militarily powerful *Italia*. Yet despite the emergence of fierce and long-standing political fragmentation, poets and political observers kept alive classical representations of a strong, united *Italia*. The most notable medieval contributors to that rhetorical tradition were Dante and Petrarch.³¹ Dante understood peninsular internecine warfare and the corrupt, abusive

²⁸ Ibid., 67.

²⁹ For example, Machiavelli references the *Aeneid* in *Principe*, XVII, *Opere di Niccolò Machiavelli*, vol. 1, ed. Rinaldo Rinaldi, hereafter cited as *Opere* (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1999), 284. Vettori echoes the same epic poem in his 23 November 1513 letter to Machiavelli as well as that of 16 January 1515, *Lettere*, 280-282. Also see Najemy, 309-310, 317-318.

³⁰ "And let Italian valor be the strength of Rome in after times," Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. Robert Fitzgerald (New York: Vintage, 1990), XII. 1121-1123, 398.

³¹ It is worth noting the special place that Dante and Petrarch held in Machiavelli's and likely Vettori's lists of favorite authors. Writing to Vettori in the now famous letter of 10 December 1513, Machiavelli mentioned that he usually spent a portion of his mornings reading either Dante or Petrarch. "Partitomi del bosco, io me ne vo a una fonte, et di quivi in un mio uccellare. Ho un libro sotto, o Dante o Petrarca," *Lettere*, 194. Machiavelli also began his letter to Vettori of 9 April 1513 with a Dantean passage from *Inferno*, *Lettere*, 110. Also see Najemy, 103-107.

presence of the Roman church as having wracked Italy, leading him in *Purgatorio* to lament, "Ah, Italy enslaved, abode of misery, pilotless ship in a fierce tempest tossed, no mistress over provinces but a harlot!...untamed and wild...widowed and bereft." In his *De monarchia* (c. 1315), the poet expressed a desire for the Holy Roman Emperor Henry VII to descend into Italy and to unite the disparate Italian states and put an effective end to the violence that had plagued the peninsula for centuries. Dante echoed that hope again in the *Purgatorio*, when *Italia* personified cried out, "My Caesar, why are you not with me?" Dante grieved for *Italia* and the absence within it of unity and strength, yet, through his appeals to Henry VII, Dante also held out hope that *Italia* could be redeemed from its "bereft" state. For Dante, the *Italia* of antiquity—internally peaceful and strong—was not dead and gone, but rather lying in wait for its savior. The "pilotless ship" persisted, requiring only a commander.

A generation after Dante in the fourteenth century, Petrarch drew inspiration from the idea of a strong *Italia*, Rome's *Italia*. Like Dante before him and Machiavelli after him, Petrarch reflected on the presence of Northern armies on the peninsula. While acknowledging and despairing over Italy's seeming weakness relative to its "barbarian" invaders, Petrarch held close the idea of the potentially powerful *Italia*. As with Dante, Petrarch's image of classical *Italia* waited for its rebirth. In his sonnet "Italia mia," Petrarch

³² Dante, *Purgatorio*, trans. Jean and Robert Hollander (New York: Doubleday, 2003), VI. 76-78, 98, and 113.

³³ Scholars have debated the plausibility of such hopes, see introduction by Prue Shaw in Dante, *Monarchy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), ix-xxxv. Jean and Robert Hollander identify three "stages" of Dante's appeals to Henry VII: "initial dubiety" from 1308-1310; excitement 1310-1311; and, finally "wary enthusiasm" by the spring of 1311, see notes in Dante, *Purgatorio*, 126.

³⁴ Ibid., VI. 114.

³⁵ Kennedy, 8-15 and 23-36.

pinned blame for the foreign invasions squarely on Italian shoulders. The poet faulted contemporary Italians for not living up to their ancestral stock as the heirs of Roman military prowess. Petrarch specifically berated his fellow Italians for the reality of continued defeat in battle; the onus to strongly defend *Italia* is with the Italians, for they are the ones, in Petrarch's words, with that "gentle Latin blood." ³⁶ Petrarch implied a direct, almost biological link with the ancient Romans that infused in the Italians of his day the capacity to "throw down this burden, rise up from this shame." The failure of Italian arms was, for him, the failure to recover the spirit of antiquity: "to let the Northerly fury, a savage race, Conquer our intellect, Is our own sin." Perhaps most important for later discussions of *Italia* in the early sixteenth century, Petrarch couched his descriptions of Italian strength in terms of virtù—a word and idea central to Machiavelli's political thought and his perceptions of *Italia*, described below. *Virtù* was a term derived from the Latin *virtus*, or manliness, and in the early sixteenth century referred to strong, aggressive action often in a military context.³⁹ Years later, in the final, emotional lines of *The Prince*, Machiavelli turned to Petrarch's words, also from "Italia mia," to invoke the idea of a persistent Italian virtù inherited from Rome and still present in his own day: "Virtù against the fury will take up the arms and put combat to flight for the ancient valor in the hearts of the Italians is not yet dead."40

³⁶ Petrarch, Sonnets and Songs, trans. Anna Maria Armi (New York: Pantheon, 1968), CXXVIII, 207.

³⁷ Ibid., 207.

³⁸ Ibid., 207.

³⁹ Skinner, 87, describes the Latin etymology and connection to ideas of masculinity.

⁴⁰ "Virtù contro a furore prenderà l'armi, e fia el combater corto, ché l'antico valore nelli italici cor non è ancor morto," Machiavelli, *Principe*, XXVI, *Opere*, 400. Vettori's knowledge of Petrarch is confirmed in his letter to Machiavelli from 9 February 1514 (*Lettere*, 223).

Just over fifty years before Machiavelli and Vettori began their writings, a humanist of the papal court, Flavio Biondo, penned *Italia illustrata* (1448-1453), which provided not only a geographical, topological, and cultural summation of the peninsula's regions, but also a celebration of a common Italian history. In his prefatory remarks, Biondo announced his intention to preserve "the places and peoples of Italian antiquity...to revive and record the names that have been obliterated, and in a word to bring some light to bear upon the murkiness of Italian history." The continuity of Roman civilization in his contemporary Italy (most manifestly in the institution of the Roman church) was a dominant theme in that work as well as Biondo's others, *Roma instaurata* (1466) and *Roma triumphans* (1457-1459). Half a century after Biondo and one year after the French invasion of 1494, Bernardo Rucellai's military history *De Bello Italico* (1495) appeared in Latin. The text recounted Charles VIII's expedition across the Alps and as far South as Naples. Vettori and Machiavelli likely read that work, which employed *Italia* as its geographical framework.

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⁴¹ Flavio Biondo, *Italy Illuminated* ed. and trans. Jeffrey A. White (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 5. See also the useful introduction by the editor, vii-xxii. Biondo's citations for *Italia illustrata* included Cicero, Pliny the Elder, Virgil, and Livy. See Biondo, xiv.

⁴² See Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, 203-218.

⁴³ Vettori's mother was Bernardo's sister and Vettori's brother Paolo married Bernardo's granddaughter. See Devonshire Jones, xi, 2, and Najemy, 74. More to the point, Vettori and Machiavelli both attended the intellectual symposiums at the Rucellai gardens in Florence. In the words of Felix Gilbert, "the works of the great historians of the following decades, of Francesco Vettori and Francesco Guicciardini, are in the line of succession from Rucellai's historical efforts, at least in so far as the broad Italian framework, the use of history as a practical guide to politics and the emphasis on the psychology of the participating statesmen are concerned," Gilbert, "Bernardo Rucellai and the Orti Oricellari: A Study on the Origin of Modern Political Thought," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 12 (1949): 12; see also Albertini, 67-85.

1513: Before the Fall

Although Vettori's and Machiavelli's respective thinking about that idea of *Italia*, inherited from those classical writers, crystallized and diverged most noticeably in the 1520s, in 1513 they were already thinking about political developments in a peninsular scope. In that year, Machiavelli had only just begun his political exile, while Vettori held a position in Rome as a Florentine ambassador to the Medici papal court. ⁴⁴ In their 1513 letters Machiavelli and Vettori were concerned with the security of *Italia*, then threatened by the presence of foreign armies on the peninsula and the seeming inevitability of Swiss, French, and Spanish hegemonic expansions. The Swiss, then in possession of Milan, a protectorate of Massimiliano Sforza worried them above all. ⁴⁵

Considering the immediate presence of foreign armies, in 1513 Vettori appeared relatively optimistic regarding the prospects of productive military cooperation between the Italian states. Writing on 5 August 1513 Vettori suggested to Machiavelli that the military cooperation of "tutta Italia" might halt Swiss advancement South of the Alps and that the peninsula might somehow regain some semblance of its pre-1494 political system of independent states—if events fell in the right way, "Italy" might find "itself back in its

⁴⁴ Devonshire Jones, 85-108.

⁴⁵ *Lettere*, 143-184.

previous boundaries."⁴⁶ Writing in reply to Vettori on 10 August, Machiavelli made light of Vettori's apparent optimism in the possibility of Italian collaboration: "as far as the union of the Italians, you make me laugh; first, because there will never be any union to good ends, and even if the leaders were united, it would not be enough, there are no armies here worth a penny."⁴⁷

Still, in that same letter Machiavelli worried over the future of the peninsula as a whole, fretting about the "the ruin of Italy" and noting that the seemingly inexorable Swiss troops were "a great danger for Italy." He concluded the final letter of the summer on 26 August 1513 with a dark prediction about Italy's future. Unless the French intervened against the Swiss in Italy, then, Machiavelli assumed, the Swiss would become the "arbiters of Italy"—to which he added,

and because this frightens me, I would like to remedy the situation, but I cannot see any other remedy [altro rimedio] and I will begin now to cry with you over our ruin and servitude which, if it does not come today or tomorrow, will come in our time; and Italy will indebt itself to Pope Julius and the others who do not remedy the situation, if now it may still be remedied.⁵⁰

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⁴⁶ "Né bisognerebbe temere de' Svizzeri, i quali arebbono da l'un canto i Franzesi, dall'altro tutta Italia... Et in conclusione, se il Cristianissimo fosse contento a lasciare Lombardia, veggo tutta Italia in pace, et alla morte del re Catolico tornare il regno in un figliolo del re Federigo, e ridursi Italia ne' primi termini," 5 August 1513, *Lettere*, 159.

⁴⁷ "Quanto alla unione delli altri Italiani, voi mi fate ridere; prima perché non ci fia mai unione veruna a fare ben veruno; e se pure e' fussino uniti e capi e' non sono per bastare, sì per non ci essere armi che vagliono un quattrino," 10 August 1513, Ibid., 163.

^{48 &}quot;La rovina d'Italia," Ibid., 163.

⁴⁹ "Pericolo gravissimo per la Italia," Ibid., 164.

⁵⁰ "Io credo bene che possino diventare arbitri di Italia per la propinquità e per la disordini e cattive condizione nostre; e perché questo mi spaventa io ci vorrei rimediare, e se Francia non basta, io non ci veggo altro rimedio e voglio cominciare ora a piangere con voi la rovina e servitù nostra, la quale, se non sarà né oggi né domane, sarà a' nostril dì; e l'Italia arà questo obbligo con papa Giulio e con quelli che non ci rimediono, se ora ci si può rimediare," *Lettere*, 184.

Historians such as Najemy, Ugo Dotti, Rudolph von Albertini, and Frederico Chabod suggest that Machiavelli found in the conclusion of *The Prince* the *altro rimedio* that had eluded him in his August letter to Vettori: a redeemer prince—*redentore*—who could unite the Italian states and stem the tide of foreign invasions. Machiavelli prepared his reader for the conclusion, in which he introduced the notion of Italy's ideal leader by bringing together the two concepts of *Italia* and *virtù* in the last three chapters.

For Machiavelli, the successful repulsion of the invaders from Italy or the failure to do so hinged on the Italian leaders' manifestation of their inherited *virtù*. Its absence explained Italy's dire straights, and its potential revitalization provided Machiavelli with hope for Italy's salvation. In chapter XXIV, "Why the princes of Italy have lost their states," Machiavelli blamed Italian leaders for not preventing or mitigating the damage of the foreign invasions:

Those princes of ours, many of whom were well-entrenched in their principalities, may not accuse *fortuna* for their losses. Their own indolence was to blame...The only defenses that are good, certain and durable are those that depend on one's own actions and one's own *virtù*. 52

The dialectical opposition of *fortuna* and *virtù* pervaded classical and medieval political thought as well as that of the early sixteenth century and, in its broadest terms, represented the two dominant forces that vie for control of states and armies. *Fortuna* was the unpredictable and virtually uncontrollable external force which could be contained, neutralized, or subsumed by individual or collective military prowess, intelligence, and

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⁵¹ Albertini, 46-47; Dotti, *fenomenologia*, 37-43; Dotti, *rivoluzionario*, 243-253, 280-286; Najemy, 156-177; and Frederico Chabod, 177-188, 193.

⁵² "Pertanto questi nostril principi, e quali erano stati molti anni nel loro principato, per averlo di poi perso non accusino la fortuna ma la igniavia loro…E quelle difese solamente sono buone, sono certe, sono durabili, che dependono da te propio e dalla virtù tua," Machiavelli, *Principe*, XXV, *Opere*, 370-371.

cunning, or *virtù*. ⁵³ For Machiavelli, the fact that foreign armies descended upon the Italian peninsula and usurped many states' political autonomy had more to do with human failings on the part of Italian rulers, above all their lack of foresight and decisive action, than with supra-peninsular events or *fortuna*. A collective failure of *virtù* accounted for the disasters at hand. Moreover, Machiavelli clearly suggested that those Italian princes had the potential, if not to prevent, then at least to render less terrible Italy's catastrophic predicament through their own skills, that is, *virtù*.

In chapter XXV, Machiavelli invoked the image of a devastating flood to convey *fortuna*'s capacity for unpredictable destruction; the most pressing example of which was the waves of invasions that had overtaken Italy:

If you consider Italy, the stage for all these changes, you will see that she is a countryside without dykes or embankments, for if Italy had been sufficiently reinforced with *virtù*, like Germany, Spain, and France, this flood would not have taken such a varied course, or else it would not have come at all. ⁵⁴

The flood could have been stopped. In the emotional and, among modern scholars, controversial final chapter, the "Exhortation to liberate *Italia* from the barbarians" (hereafter cited as the "Exhortation"), ⁵⁵ Machiavelli called for the expulsion of the invaders by means

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⁵³ On the opposition of *fortuna* and *virtù* see J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 84-88, 94-97, 108, 136, 166-169, 173, 184-185, 188-194; Skinner, 95, 121-122; Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 37-45.

⁵⁴ "E se voi considerrete la Italia, che è la sedia di queste variazioni e quella che ha dato loro il moto, vedrete essere una campagna sanza arigini e sanza alcuno riparo; che, s'ella fussi riparata da conveniente virtù come è la Magna, la Spagna e la Francia, o questa piena non arebbe fatto le variazioni grande che le ha, o ella non ci sare' venuta," Ibid., XXV, 376.

⁵⁵ Some of the controversy revolves around the date of the final chapter's composition. Generally, those who claim a later date also argue for the passage's peripheral importance within Machiavelli's overall thinking. For a summary of this debate before 1950 see Gilbert, "Nationalism in Machiavelli's *Prince*," 38-48; for a more recent synopsis of the views of Gennaro Sasso and Mario Martelli, see John Najemy, 176-186. Others debate the seriousness of Machiavelli's call for Italian unity as a means of expelling the ultramontane invaders.

of a prince with a certain set of skills and strengths. To liberate *Italia*, Machiavelli prescribed aggression, a willingness to seize the moment [occasione], and impetuousness [impetuoso], in other words, a prince imbued with virtù. Like Petrarch before him, Machiavelli distinguished "Italians" from the generic transalpine "barbarians" by noting the particularity of "Italian virtù." Machiavelli's rimedio—that called for the reactivation of that virtù through the efforts of a skilled leader—recalled earlier classical representations of *Italia*. In the *Aeneid* Virgil had written of Italian military valor as the common, uniting link between the Romans and their Italian neighbors. In the *Purgatorio* Dante had portrayed *Italia* as a rudderless vessel awaiting the arrival of its commander, similar to Machiavelli's redeemerprince, who could guide it back to the greatness it had enjoyed in its classical past. Further reinforcing his place in a larger rhetorical tradition invoking a transcendent, classically rooted *Italia*, Machiavelli ended *The Prince* with the above-cited words from Petrarch's canzone "Italia mia."

In 1515 the looming Swiss threat diminished significantly after their defeat by mostly French forces at the battle of Marignano, paving the way for the Hapsburg-French confrontation for Italian hegemony. During those years, Machiavelli continued to relate his conceptions of *virtù* and *Italia*; the return of *virtù* would also return *Italia* to the political unity and military fortitude that it had enjoyed under Roman rule.

I

Emphasizing the theme of "love of country," Sebastian de Grazia interpreted chapter XXVI of *The Prince* as the culminating "point of it all" of Machiavelli's political philosophy, De Grazia, 152-158, 193. Pocock, 180-182, thought that the ideas of a redeemer prince and of a united Italy were too idealistic to have been a serious plan of political action. The irresolution of the chapter has also attracted more literary-minded interpretations that question the discursive and linguistic structure of the chapter: see Victoria Kahn, "Virtu and the Example of Agathocles in Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Representations* 13 (1986): 78-79, and Thomas M. Greene's "The End of Discourse in Machiavelli's *Prince*," *Yale French Studies* 67 (1984): 69-71.

Around 1517, in *The Discourses*, Machiavelli lamented Italy's political fragmentation, noting the monarchical unity of France and Spain and specifically blaming the Roman church, which, bereft of "virtù," had "not been able to occupy all Italy, nor had it allowed another to do so...and because Italy is under so many princes and *signori*, out of which has been born such disunion and such weakness, Italy has become prey for powerful barbarian invaders and any other attacker." But for the church's lack of *virtù*, Italian unity would be possible, and that would be a positive development. Machiavelli's general confidence that such a union would benefit the peninsula as a whole reinforced his insistence in the final pages of *The Prince* that the resurfacing of Italian *virtù* could make possible the military or political union of the peninsula's states.

Machiavelli's hopes for *Italia* may seem somewhat vague because of his reliance on an intangible concept like *virtù*, and, in fact, his reflections on *Italia* in the *Discourses* received criticism from a prominent contemporary intellectual figure. Fellow Florentine historian Francesco Guicciardini highlighted the hopeful nature of Machiavelli's vision. In his "Considerations on the *Discorsi* of Machiavelli," Guicciardini agreed with Machiavelli that the Roman church was to blame for Italy's political fragmentation, but dismissed the idea that the unification of states with independent political interests would be possible or, in the end, even desirable. The usurpation of Italian dominion by one Italian state, as Machiavelli had suggested in *The Prince* and in *The Discourses*, would, according to

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⁵⁶ "Perché, avendovi quella abitato e tenuto imperio temporale, non è stata si potente né di tanta virtù che l'abbia potuto occupare la tyrannide d'Italia e farsene principe; e non è stata dall'altra parte si debole che, per paura di non perdere il dominio delle sue cose temporali la non abbia potuto convocare uno potente che la difenda contro a quello che in Italia fusse diventato troppo potente...Non essendo adunque stata la chiesa potente da potere occupare la Italia, né avendo permesso che un altro la occupy, è stata cagione che la non è potuta venire sotto uno capo; ma è stata sotto più principi e signori, da' quali è nata tanta disunione e tanta deboleza che la si è condotta a essere stata preda non solamente de'barbari potente ma di qualunque l'assalta. Di che noi altri Italiani abbiamo obbligo con la chiesa e non con altri," Machiavelli, *Discorsi*, I, xii in *Opere*, 505-506.

Guicciardini, be too difficult to accomplish and, even if achieved, would create a volatile amount of jealousy on the part of the subsumed states.⁵⁷

Some years later Machiavelli structured his *Istorie fiorentine*, presented to Pope Clement VII in May of 1525, in an overtly Italian geographical framework. ⁵⁸ Echoing his thoughts from the *Discourses*, Machiavelli again decried what he understood as the church's role in preventing Italian unification. ⁵⁹ Perhaps more important, he also reinforced his

⁵⁷ "But I do not know if an Italian *monarchia* would be a good or bad thing because, if under a republic, it would be glorious for the name of *Italia* and a good thing for that city that dominated, but it would be total calamity for all the other states as they would be oppressed under the shade of the other, dominant one" [Ma non so già se el non venire in una monarchia sia stata felicità o infelicità di questa provincia, perché se sotto una republica questo poteva essere glorioso al nome di Italia e felicità a quella città che dominassi, era all'altre tutte calamità, perché oppresse dalla ombra di quella]. Moreover, Guicciardini noted, the fact that "Italy is divided into many dominions" did not account for the peninsula's victimization by "barbarians," for similar "calamities" occurred while Italy was politically unified under imperial Rome. Finally, Guicciardini implied that the "flourishing" of so many Italian cities "in our own time" would not have occurred under a single, unifying rule [E se bene la Italia divisa in molti domini abbia in vari tempi patito molte calamità che forse in uno dominio solo non arebbe patito , benché le innudazione de' barbari furono più a tempo dell imperio romano che altrimenti, nondimeno in tutti questi tempi ha avuto al riscontro tante città floride che non arebbe avuto sotto una republic ache io reputo che una monarchia gli sarebbe state più infelice che felice], Francesco Guicciardini, *Considerazioni sui Discorsi di Machiavelli, Opere*, vol. 1, ed. Emanuella Lugnani Scarano (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1982), 629-630.

⁵⁸ In fact, Book I narrates peninsular history from the Fall of Rome until the fifteenth century with hardly a mention of Florence. Machiavelli was aware of the seeming paradox underlying the peninsular scope of his Florentine history; he self-consciously justified the structure of his work several times in the text of the *Istorie*, stating that one cannot understand Florence's past without a greater knowledge of Italian history as a whole. In the preface Machiavelli explained his intentions to include those parts of Italian history that are necessary for understanding Florentine history, Istorie fiorentine in Opere di Niccolò Machiavelli, vol. 2, ed. Alessandro Montevecchi, (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1971), 281, hereafter cited as *Opere*, vol. 2. Later, in the opening lines of Book VII: "perhaps it will appear to those who have read the above text that a Florentine writer has taken himself too far away in narrating those happenings in Lombardy and in the Kingdom (of Naples): nonetheless I have not fled nor shall I flee from similar narrations because, although I have never promised to write of the things of Italy, it does not appear to me that I should leave them behind...by not narrating them our history would be less understood and less gratifying, especially since the wars in which the Florentines were compelled to participate were born out of the actions of other peoples and princes of Italy" [E' parrà forse a quegli che il libro superiore aranno letto che uno scrittore delle cose fiorentine si sia troppo diteso in narrare quelle seguite in Lombardia e nel Regno: nondimeno io non ho fuggito né sono per lo avvenire per fuggire simili narrazioni perché, quantunque io non abbia mai promesso di scrivere le cose di Italia, non mi pare perciò da lasciare indietro di non narrare quelle che saranno in quella provincia natabili. Perché, non le narrando, la nostra istoria sarebbe meno intesa e meno grata, massimamente perché dalla azioni degli altri popoli e principi italiani nascono il più delle volte le guerre nelle quali i Fiorentini sono di intromettersi necessitati], Machiavelli, Istorie fiorentine, Opere, vol. 2, 633.

⁵⁹ "Because the popes always feared one whose power had become great in Italy, even if it was through the benefices of the church that their power grew, and because they sought to undercut their (the church's) power, there arose those frequent changes and tumults that occurred in Italy. The fear of one power begat the growth of

conceptions of *Italia* as inherently strong and awaiting a rebirth of its *virtù* by connecting it to a larger theory of historical change. Underpinning the *Istorie* is an understanding of history as cyclical according to which the decline of states and peoples immediately precedes regeneration and re-ascent. Put in Machiavelli's terms, there was an ongoing fluctuation between *ordine* and *disordine* that hinged on the manifestation or lack thereof—the ebb and flow—of collective *virtù*. Applying this theory to *Italia*, Machiavelli noted that since the fall of the Roman Empire, *Italia* had been "sometimes happy, sometimes miserable." When shortly after Rome's collapse "so much *virtù*" emerged "among the ruins" in the cities of the peninsula, the result was a "freed *Italia*, defended from the barbarians." Centuries later, between 1434 and 1494, the *virtù* of those same cities "was eliminated," and *Italia* was

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someone weak, and when that one had grown, he engendered fear and, being feared, they sought to bring him down"[perché i pontefici temevano sempre colui la cui i favori potenzia era diventata grande in Italia, ancora che la fussi con i favori dell Chiesa cresciuta, e perché e' cercavano di abbassarla, ne nascevano gli spessi tumulti e le spesse variazioni che in quella sequivano; perché la paura di uno potente faceva crescere di abbassarlo], Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, *Opere*, vol. 2, 353.

In the opening of Book V of the *Istorie*, Machiavelli wrote: "Most of the time, provinces go from order to disorder and then pass again from disorder back to order, for nature does not permit earthly things to stand still...thus from the good they are always descending to the bad and from the bad rising themselves up to the good. Because *virtù* produces peace, peace generates *ozio* and *ozio* gives way to disorder and then ruin; and similarly from ruin is born order and from order, *virtù* and from that glory" [Sogliono le province il più delle volte, nel variare che le fanno, dall'ordine venire al disordine, e di nuovo di poi dal disordine all'ordine trapassare: perché non essendo dalla natura conceduto alle mondane cose il fermarsi...e così sempre da il bene si scende al male, e da il male si sale al bene. Perché la virtù partorisce quiete, la quiete ozio, l'ozio disordine, il disordine rovina; e similmente dalla rovina nasce l'ordine, dall'ordine virtù, da questa Gloria e fortuna], Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, *Opere*, vol. 2, 514. On Machiavelli's cyclical view of history as expressed in the *Istorie* see John Najemy's "Machiavelli and the Medici: The Lessons of Florentine History," *Renaissance Quarterly* 35 (1982): 574-576; and Salvatore Di Maria, "Machiavelli's Ironic View of History," *Renaissance Quarterly* 45 (1992): 248-270.

⁶¹ "Ora felice, ora misera la Italia," Machiavelli, *Istorie fiorentine*, *Opere*, vol. 2, 515.

⁶² "Nondimeno surse tanta virtù in alcuna delle nuove città e de' nuovi imperi i quali tra le romane rovine nacquono, che, sebbene uno non dominasse agli altri, erano nondimeno in modo insieme concordi e ordinate che da' barbari la liberorono e difesono," Ibid., 515.

"again exposed to the barbarians... *Italia* again put itself into their slavery." In the final lines of *The Prince* Machiavelli had applied that cyclical vision of history to Italy's specific case. There, he had compared Italy's desperate situation with that of the ancient Israelites, who had to be first enslaved in Egypt before they could be redeemed and experience collective regeneration. Sixteenth-century Italy's "enslavement" at the hands of foreigners suggested that *Italia* had arrived at an historical nadir, which, according to Machiavelli's historical outlook, actually implied imminent rejuvenation. He had found in Italy's dark times various glimmerings of hope.

Virtù was a thread running through Machiavelli's writings from *The Prince* onward and, in his discussions of *Italia*; it implied his belief in the potential for Italian leaders to alter considerably the decline of the peninsula, which was overrun by invaders. It should be noted that one of the most recent scholarly interpretations of the *Istorie*, an article by Salvatore Di Maria, 65 specifically engaged the question of whether or not Machiavelli was "hopeful" or

⁶³ "Tanto che quella virtù che per una lunga pace si soleva nelle altre provincie spegnere, fu dalla viltà di quelle in Italia spenta...alla fine si aperse di nuovo la via a' barbari e riposesi la Italia nelle servitù di quegli," Ibid., 516.

⁶⁴ Well before he had explicitly articulated his cyclical theory of history in the *Istorie fiorentine*, Machiavelli seems to have thought that ruin (rovina) was a necessary precursor to regeneration—specifically for Italia. In the final chapter of *The Prince* he wrote that *Italia* had reached a new level of weakness such that "I cannot even imagine there was ever a time more appropriate than the present" for a redentore prince to come along. Machiavelli also provided historical examples to support his notion of a continual degeneration—regeneration cycle of collective virtù: "it was necessary for the manifestation of the virtù of Moses that the Israelites be first enslaved in Egypt...likewise in present times it was necessary that *Italia* reduce itself before bringing to the surface the virtù of the Italian spirit." Before the return of that Italian virtù, Italy had to be brought to her knees, "more enslayed than the Hebrews, more oppressed than the Persians, more dispersed than the Athenians, without a leader, without order, beaten, crushed, dispossessed, lacerated, overrun; she had to have endured every sort of ruination" [che io non so qual mai tempo fussi più atto a questo. E se (come io dixi) era necessario, volendo vedere, la virtù di Moysè, che il popul d'Isdrael fussi schiavo in Egipto...volendo conosciere la virtù di uno spirito italiano, era necessario che la Italia si riducessi ne' termini presenti e che ella fussi più stiava che il Hebrei, più serva che Persia, più dispersa che gli Ateniesi; sanza capo, sanza ordine, battuta, spogliate, lacera, corsa; et avessi sopportato d'ogni sorte ruina], Machiavelli, *Principe*, XXVI, *Opere*, 388, See Dotti, fenomenologia, 106.

⁶⁵ See above note 61.

"despairing" about the capacity of humans to determine "the outcome of life's events" at the time that he wrote the *Istorie* and the potential for *Italia* to determine its own political future. 66 Di Maria proposed that the answer to that question "must proceed from evidence derived directly from a close reading of the text itself." In the end, he detected in the ironic tone and structure of that work evidence enough to conclude Machiavelli's utter disillusionment and fatalistic frame of mind, particularly in regard to the idea of *Italia* and its future vis-à-vis the invaders. According to Di Maria, Machiavelli recognized that "Renaissance Italy was experiencing a serious and irreversible cultural and political decline" and, further, that "Machiavelli, no doubt sharing in the prevailing mood of hopelessness, looks at both the present and the past, and sees no sign of an upward swing of the historical cycle."68 In short, according to Di Maria, Machiavelli had by then determined that the world was "a stage in which man is doomed to a tragic end in a futile attempt to impose his will upon the immutable course of human history."69 Di Maria's sophisticated reading of the Istorie failed to take into account Machiavelli's later writings from the 1520s. The next section of this essay continues to argue that Machiavelli in fact remained hopeful in his perspective on the future of *Italia* by examining some of his other, generally overlooked writings from the 1520s and, more important, by exploring the developing contrast between his and Vettori's writings on *Italia*. The juxtaposition of Vettori's and Machiavelli's

⁶⁶ Di Maria, 249.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 249.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 267.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 268. Puzzlingly, Di Maria cites Najemy as agreeing with his point regarding Machiavelli's hopelessness vis-à-vis *Italia* in 1525 when, in fact, Najemy's article only posits Machiavelli's skepticism about the ability of one man to redeem *Italia*—according to Najemy, the *Istorie* reveals Machiavelli's continued "faith in the collective *virtù*" of Italians and "their capacity for renewal as a community, even, or perhaps especially after the worst *battiture* and *disordini*," Najemy, "Lessons of History," 576.

perspectives on that idea may lead to a questioning of Di Maria's claims that Machiavelli recognized Italy's predicament as "irreversible," that he adopted a position of "hopelessness," and that he had determined history and the case of Italy to be "immutable."

1520s: Between fortuna and virtù

While Machiavelli remained excluded from political activity by virtue of his exile, spending most of his days reading and writing on his farm in Sant'Andrea in Percussina, Vettori became increasingly involved in the complex events of the period. Between 1515 and 1519, Vettori served as an ambassador representing Florentine and Medici interests in France, and became one of the closest advisers to the de facto leader of his home city, Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino. After Lorenzo's death in 1519, Vettori held various political offices in Florence, often traveling between there and Rome and eventually emerging as one of the Medici Pope Clement VII's closest advisers. During those years, Vettori developed a notion of *Italia* that contrasted ever more sharply with Machiavelli's. That growing contrast emerged initially in a series of missives directed to Pope Clement by both Vettori and Machiavelli.

When in 1525 the armies of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V seemed poised for victory against the forces of the French monarch Francis I, Pope Clement VII found himself and Italy at a diplomatic crossroads. On the one hand, the pope could form an alliance with France and the Italian states in opposition to the emperor. On the other hand, Clement could

⁷⁰ Devonshire Jones, 109-142.

⁷¹ Ibid., 143-161.

⁷² Ibid., 161-198.

acquiesce and seek terms of peace.⁷³ In that year Vettori wrote a memorandum to Clement, the so-called "Discourse of Francesco Vettori regarding whether or not it would be better to form a League [of allies to oppose the emperor] or to strike an accord with the emperor."⁷⁴ Vettori seemed reconciled to the inevitability of *Italia*'s subjugation by foreign armies.

In his treatise, Vettori advised the pope to come to terms with Charles V on the grounds that no Italian coalition could possibly overcome such a strong opponent. By Vettori's own estimation, most people shared the opposite view. Vettori acknowledged in the *Discorso* that "the emperor aspires to dominion over all Italy, and not only Italy, but most of Christendom and that it would be the duty of all Italian leaders, and above all the pope, to prevent such an outcome. But he differed from the other curial counselors in asserting "I cannot see any *rimedio* for Italy. The resurfacing of that word, *rimedio*, is telling. Machiavelli had already found what he believed to be a *rimedio* for *Italia* in the form of a redeemer prince, but for Vettori such positive thinking was misguided hopefulness. As spectacular as a Papal-led coalition victory over the emperor would have been, "everything that appears glorious does not turn out to be always useful."

⁷³ For historical background on that period see Devonshire Jones, 161-174.

⁷⁴ "Discorso di Francesco Vettori se fusse meglio fare una lega o vero accordare con l'imperatore," published in *Scritti*, 299-302. Niccolini attributed the title to Carlo Strozzi but says the handwriting of the body of the text is Vettori's, see Niccolini, 442. Devonshire Jones, 174-176, and Stephens, 192-193, both agreed that the document, title aside, is in Vettori's hand. I have also seen the document and agree with their assessments.

⁷⁵ In Vettori's words "ninety percent of Roman opinion favored war," Devonshire Jones, 183.

⁷⁶ "Noi possiamo pensare che Cesare aspiri al dominio di tutta Italia, e non solo d'Italia, ma della maggiore parte della Christianità, e che sarebbe officio di tutti e' potentate italici, e massime del Pontifice, ovviare a questo suo disegno," *Scritti*, 299.

⁷⁷ "Non vediamo che rimedio abbi Italia," Ibid., 299.

⁷⁸ "Nondimeno tutto quello che apparisce glorioso non è poi utile," Ibid., 300.

In the *Discorso*, Vettori underlined his hopelessness by writing of *Italia* metaphorically as an invalid near death for whom there was no cure. In this very brief treatise (eight paragraphs), Vettori linked images of mortality with the idea of Italy a striking number of times. He wrote that "this body of Italy is gravely ill; taking it into war could be the strong medicine that could liberate it, but it could also bring it swift death." After advising the pope to strike a deal with the emperor, he emphasized the need to keep Charles' financial demands reasonable, "so as not to bring us a quick death." Finally, Vettori stated that if the emperor's terms proved impossible to meet, Italian leaders would have to "put themselves into every danger, throwing themselves into the fray and deciding that it would be better to die by the hands of others than by one's own."

While Vettori seemed convinced of the necessity of reaching a peaceful accord with the invaders, thinking any Italian opposition hopeless, Machiavelli had joined Francesco Guicciardini at the military camps in Northern Italy in 1526. Clement VII had entrusted Guicciardini with the position of lieutenant-general in the papal army that was attempting to stem the tide of foreign advancements. ⁸² Not only do Machiavelli's actions during the last two years of his life suggest that he still harbored the hope that somehow, someway, the utter

⁷⁹ "Questo corpo d'Italia sia infermo gravamente e che, dandoli una medicina forte quale sarebbe il pigliare la guerra, lo potrebbe liberare, ma lo potrebbe ancora condurre alla morte sùbita," Ibid., 300.

^{80 &}quot;D'un modo che non fussi soma che ci conducessi alla morte sùbita," Ibid., 300.

⁸¹ "E sarebbe in tal caso da mettersi a ogni pericolo et a ogni sbaraglio et iudicare che fussi meglio morire per man d'altri che occidersi da sé medesimo," Ibid., 301. Vettori later extended the association of *Italia* as a fatally ill body that he presented in the *Discorso* in the *Sommario* when he described the Italian military captains as comparable to "a group of unversed, amateur doctors who, without purging the body of its illness, try to cure it by applying strong unguents to the extremities without realizing that they are conveying them right to the heart" [come alcuni medici poco esperti e poco dotti che, senza purgare il corpo delli mali umori, sanano con loro unguenti forti le piache delli membri non nobili e non s'accorgano che riducono la materia al cuore], Ibid.,

⁸² For more information on this often overlooked period of Machiavelli's life, see Dotti, *rivoluzionario*, 409-428.

subjugation of the peninsula could be averted, but so, too, do his words. In the often overlooked letters from those years Machiavelli persistently couched his hopeful expressions of *Italia* in a rhetoric of *virtù*—never really abandoning the intellectual commitment to a potentially strong *Italia* that he first displayed in *The Prince*'s final chapter.

In 1526 Machiavelli echoed the seemingly grandiloquent recommendations that he had made in *The Prince* in a decidedly formal context—a letter addressed to Pope Clement. In that letter Machiavelli advocated bold aggression as the key to defeating the foreign invaders. Machiavelli wrote that document one year after Vettori had penned his *Discorso* in which he had counseled the pope to come to terms of peace with Charles V. By contrast, Machiavelli offered the pope the outlines of a hard-hitting plan to distract and undermine Charles' hegemonic aspirations in Italy. It was a complex and bold strategy involving the forces of the Holy League of Cognac, who would execute a diversionary attack on Charles' interests in Naples while also sending other forces into Lombardy. Vettori assisted in delivering Machiavelli's letter to Clement. Later in the same year, however, Vettori wrote to Machiavelli and expressed his misgivings about what, to Vettori, was a delusional plan that failed to take into account Charles' access to massive amounts of money and troops. Vettori conveyed his feelings bluntly: "My friend, I do not approve of your plan; Charles has

⁸³ See a summary of it in Devonshire Jones, 178.

⁸⁴ The Holy League of Cognac was an alliance combining the resources of Rome, Venice, Florence, and Milan, established in the spring of 1526. For more on the League, see Cecil Roth, *The Last Florentine Republic* (London: Methuen, 1925), 9, 15-16, 68-71, 85-86, 104-105, 235-236.

⁸⁵ Devonshire Jones, 178.

⁸⁶ Vettori passed the letter to Filippo Strozzi who, according to Vettori in his letter of 5 August 1526, presented it to Pope Clement VII, *Lettere*, 360.

too much good *fortuna*."⁸⁷ A few years later in his *Sommario*, Vettori developed further his understanding of *fortuna* in the context of Italy's recent history, which I will discuss below.

In a subsequent letter from the same year, Machiavelli wrote to Guicciardini. The Spanish-German forces were advancing, and Machiavelli was anxious; with no help on the way from the French king, "Italy would be left to its ruin." He feared that "Italy would be lost." Yet Machiavelli did not see the situation as hopeless; again he invoked that word *rimedio* several times, musing to Guicciardini that "these times demand decisions that are bold, unusual, and strange." Writing not in terms of Florence, but in terms of Italy, Machiavelli insisted on the necessity of action infused with *virtù*, instead of appeasement. The course of action he proposed to Guicciardini strikingly resembled that which he described in the final chapters of *The Prince*. He saw in Giovanni de' Medici, 90 the mercenary captain known as *delle bande nere*, "the only *rimedio*," an opportunity for a single individual to harness Italian *virtù*: "Among the Italians there is no other leader whom the soldiers would follow more willingly...he is bold, impetuous, and a strategist." Echoing the exact phrase from his 1513 letter to Vettori and from *The Prince* of that same year, Machiavelli repeated that revealing word *rimedio* in proposing a plan of action meant to

⁸⁷ "Ma solo vi voglio dire che l'Imperatore ha troppo gran fortuna; compare, io non appruovo quello andare con lo exercito verso il regno," *Lettere*, 361, 363.

^{88 &}quot;Lascia rovinare l'Italia...perduta che sia l'Italia," *Lettere*, 346.

^{89 &}quot;Questi tempi richieggono deliberationi audaci, inusitate, et strane," Ibid., 347.

⁹⁰ Giovanni de' Medici was a condottiere captain who established a military reputation in the service of Florence during the Medici annexation of Urbino in 1516-1517 and who, at the time of Machiavelli's letter, was operating under the aegis of the League of Cognac, Devonshire Jones, 178; Roth, 10, 12, 73; *Scritti*, 178, 214.

⁹¹ "Et se questo rimedio non ci è, havendo a far guerra, non so qual ci sia; né a me occorre altro," Ibid., 348.

⁹² "Fra gli Italiani non ci sia capo, a chi li soldati vadino più dietro, né di chi gli Spagnuoli più dubitino (temano), et stimino più: ciascuno tiene ancora il signor Giovanni audace, impetuoso, di gran concetti," Ibid., 347.

mitigate foreign hegemony in Italy, indicating his clinging adherence to the idea of Italy's potential salvation. Machiavelli had also employed a word—*impetuoso*—that he had used in the "Exhortation" to describe the ideal characteristics of Italy's redeemer prince. ⁹³ Although Machiavelli's proposal appears nothing but sincere, there was little in Giovanni's campaigns against the Hapsburg armies that would have provided any basis for taking such grandiose hopes seriously. As Devonshire Jones pointed out, at the time of Machiavelli's letter to Clement VII, "despite the highest expectations, in no sector of the war which the pope had planned were the forces of the League successful." Later in that year Giovanni, whom Machiavelli wrote about in such a hopeful vein, died from wounds suffered in battle. ⁹⁵

⁹³ Machiavelli, *Principe*, XXVI, 384.

⁹⁴ Devonshire Jones, 178.

⁹⁵ Vettori, *Scitti*, 234, 242.

Vettori's *Italia rovinata*

Throughout the mid-1520s Machiavelli's hopeful insistence that something could still be done to avert the peninsula's subjugation by foreign armies reflected the continuation of beliefs that he had held back in 1513. By contrast, in 1513 Vettori had expressed the hope that perhaps the Italian states could act in accord and hold off the serious military threat posed by the Swiss. But by 1525, in his *Discorso* directed to Pope Clement, Vettori had abandoned any vestiges of that optimism in exchange for a clear resignation regarding Italy's inability to repulse or even effectively combat its invaders. Vettori's resignation regarding *Italia* in 1525 became more nuanced and even more despairing by 1528 when he wrote his *Sommario*.

Vettori's history was unique for the early sixteenth century. It was the first of its period to employ *Italia* as the unifying frame of its analysis that was also written in the vernacular. ⁹⁶ Francesco Guicciardini's *Storia d'Italia*, the best-known early modern history of a unified Italian entity appeared eight years after Vettori's *Sommario*, in 1536. ⁹⁷ Like Vettori, Guicciardini was also a close friend of Machiavelli's; like Vettori, he also held important posts in Medicean Rome and Florence, and, finally, the two collaborated

⁹⁶ As noted above, Rucellai's *De Bello Italico*, a Latin work with which Vettori likely read, appeared in 1495.

⁹⁷ See Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 271-301. Eric Cochrane, "L'Eredità del Guicciardini: dalla stroria 'nazionale' alle storie 'definitive," in *Francesco Guicciardini*, 1483-1983, 271-291.

significantly within the Palazzo Vecchio, especially after 1527. Such circumstantial evidence may indicate that Guicciardini read Vettori's *Sommario* and, as Franco Gaeta has argued, perhaps Vettori's thinking on *Italia*, not only as a guiding geographical framework for a history but also as an irreversibly weak entity, influenced Guicciardini's own, later historical opus. The fact that Vettori wrote in the Tuscan language that subsequently diffused throughout the peninsula as standard Italian lends his interpretation of *Italia* wider import for subsequent peninsular history. In particular, Vettori's representation of *Italia* in his treatise marks a clear break away from the classical, medieval, and Machiavellian rhetorical tradition that, despite the medieval and Renaissance realities of political fragmentation, had invoked *Italia* as a strong entity, imbued with an inherent *virtù*—an *Italia* that recalled the military preeminence and political unity of imperial Rome.

Vettori began to write the *Sommario* in the wake of a particularly tumultuous year. In 1527 Spanish and German soldiers had sacked Rome, ¹⁰¹ and, in Florence, a group of citizens had exiled the Medici clan from the city, temporarily replacing their de facto rule with an oligarchic government led by Niccolò Capponi. ¹⁰² The new regime adopted a position hostile

⁹⁸ Devonshire Jones, 226-294.

⁹⁹ Gaeta, 156-157.

¹⁰⁰ The debates among sixteenth-century intellectuals about whether or not the Tuscan dialect should become a unifying Italian language—the so-called *questione della lingua*—had already begun and continued throughout the century. For a general review of the *questione*, see Bruno Migliorini, *Storia della lingua italiana* (Florence: Sansoni, 1971), 321-340, and Martines, 317-322. Modern historians have noted Vettori's use of *Italia* as the major category of historical investigation. Albertini wrote that "Vettori anticipates by some years the shifting of historical interests from the Florentine horizon to the Italian one that will have its first complete expression in Guicciardini's *Storia d' Italia*" [II Vettori anticipa di qualche anno quello spostamento dell'interesse storico dall'orizzinte fiorentino a quello italiano che avrà la sua prima espressione compuita nella *Storia d'Italia* del Guicciardini, Albertini, 251. Also see Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 248-250.

¹⁰¹ The most recent work on the Sack is Kenneth Gouwens, *Remembering the Renaissance: Humanist Narratives of the Sack of Rome* (Boston: Brill, 1998).

¹⁰² On the 1527 revolt see Devonshire Jones, 198-200; Stephens, 195-214; and Roth, 37-54.

to most of the former Medici loyalists, whose number included Vettori, making his presence in the city difficult, if not impossible. ¹⁰³ Vettori retreated to the countryside where, in his own words, "finding myself this spring at the villa with time on my hands, I thought I would write, not a complete history, but a short and select *sommario* of the events in Italy from the end of 1511 to the start of 1527." ¹⁰⁴ The particular moment at which Vettori sat down to write imbues the *Sommario* with several layers of meaning, both historical and personal.

In the first place, as Machiavelli had done before him and Guicciardini would do later, Vettori sought a means through historical writing to comprehend better the series of events that had, almost in a flash, left him destitute and unwanted by his native city. ¹⁰⁵ It also seems plausible that Vettori's temporary rejection by the new administration in the Palazzo Vecchio may have inspired him to adjust his historical lens wider than Florence or Tuscany. As J. N. Stephens proposed, the frustration of certain statesmen with the inabilities of their governments to navigate successfully or even to comprehend the political changes occurring around them led those thinkers to ask themselves "what was left?" and, Stephens continued, "Italy not Florence, that was the necessary conclusion and it became the subject of history."

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¹⁰³ *Scritti*, 246; Devonshire Jones, 201-204. See also Vettori's letter to Bartolomeo Lanfredini, in which Vettori described his dire financial straights stemming from the new regime's taxation of the optimates (*ottimati*). Vettori and his wife, "without money" and "without anything else in the house," had to sell their clothes before leaving Florence, in Albertini, appendix, 438.

¹⁰⁴ "Onde, trovandomi questa primavera alla villa ozioso, pensai di scrivere non intera et iusta istoria, ma brieve et eletto sommario delli successi dal fine dell'anno MDXI insino al principio del MDXXVII in Italia," Vettori, from the introductory letter of the *Sommario*, *Scritti*, 134.

¹⁰⁵ In Albertini's words, Vettori, like Machiavelli and Guicciardini, turned to historical writing to "make clear the recent past and to understand his own condition in a moment in which he found himself excluded from political activity and in which events had taken a completely unexpected turn" [di rendersi conto del recente passato e di comprendere la propria condizione in un momento in cui si trovava escluso dalla politica attiva e in cui gli eventi politici avevano preso una piega del tutto inattesa], Albertini, 250.

¹⁰⁶ Stephens, 157.

Two aspects of Vettori's history in particular help to distinguish his conception of *Italia* from Machiavelli's: first, its European geographical scope and, second, its emphasis on the greater influence of *fortuna* rather than *virtù* in Italian political affairs. Vettori's project of elucidating the recent past began with the assumption that the reasons behind the calamitous events in Italy could only be understood in the wider context of European diplomatic events. 107 Vettori derived his subtle understanding of transalpine politics at least in part from his own ambassadorial experiences 108 at the courts of the Holy Roman Emperor Maximilian in 1507-1509¹⁰⁹ and France's King Francis I in 1516-1518.¹¹⁰ Compared to Machiavelli, Vettori had a much broader perspective of political geography. In his attempts to understand the crises facing Italy, Machiavelli had looked no further than the Alps in locating possible causes and solutions to Italy's woes. For Machiavelli, the collective failure of Italian virtù and its possible rejuvenation, that is, the rimedio, were to be found in Italy, through the actions of Italian leaders. But in the prefatory letter of the Sommario, Vettori asserted the necessity of looking beyond the Alps in order to understand why events had transpired in the way that they had. He wrote,

> it is impossible to ignore that which occurred outside of Italy because those things are in a way connected together with that which occurred inside [the peninsula], such that one can

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¹⁰⁷ For this reason Felix Gilbert deemed the *Sommario* "the first European diplomatic history." Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 248.

¹⁰⁸ Vettori narrated many of those ambassadorial missions in the *Sommario*, writing himself into the history in the third person, *Scritti*, 143-144, 162, 164, 169, 183, 208-209, 232, 241.

¹⁰⁹ An assignment Vettori shared with Machiavelli, Devonshire Jones, 10-34.

¹¹⁰ Vettori, *Scritti*, 169, 183; Devonshire Jones, 109-143.

only write poorly about the events in Italy while omitting external events entirely. 111

In other words, according to Vettori, the Italian crises of the early sixteenth century resulted from a complex series of events throughout Europe, from England to Turkey.

Vettori's particular emphasis on the interconnectivity of continental politics led him to portray the Italian states and their leaders as forcibly and unavoidably passive in determining the future of *Italia*. Rather, the "major princes" beyond the Alps—Ferdinand of Aragon, Francis I of France, and Charles V Hapsburg—and not Italian leaders, were in control of the political fortunes of *Italia*. The rivalries of those monarchs determined the course of Italian politics. Looking back at the aftermath of the unexpected French victory over the Swiss at Marignano in 1515, Vettori endeavored to explain why Francis I did not follow his victory with further peninsular acquisitions. "Certain" that Francis' forces could have "destroyed the Spanish army and that of the church," Vettori thought it logical that "if Francis followed that victory, he would easily have become *signore* of Italy." From the perspective of almost fifteen years later, Vettori reflected that if Francis had become *signore* of the peninsula, his presence might have granted Italy some level of stability and protection: "in the hands of such a good and excellent prince, under his shade, Italy would have been able to repose itself in many years of peace." Vettori explained that such a desirous turn of

¹¹¹ "Quantunque cognosca non essere possibile non parlare ancora di quello che è occorso fuori d'Italia perché le cose, delle quali si tratta, sono in modo collegate insieme, che male si può scrivere di quelle d'Italia, omettendo l'altre interamente," Vettori, *Scritti*, 135.

^{112 &}quot;Principi grandi," Ibid., 182.

¹¹³ "A destruere lo essercito ispano e quello della Chiesa. . .il Re a seguitare la vittoria la quale se lui seguiva, era facil cosa che lui diventasse signore d'Italia," Ibid., 168.

¹¹⁴ "Che quella [Italia] venisse in mano di sì bono et eccellente Principe, sotto l'ombra del quale sarebbe potuta riposarsi molti anni in pace," Ibid., 168.

events never occurred because the other northern European rulers, locked in a competition for greater influence, would never let a rival take total possession of the contested prize,

Italy. Francis never tried

to enter into such a venture because the Swiss, exasperated after their defeat [at Marignano], would descend again more fiercely than ever, [and] Germany would unite itself upon understanding that Francis wanted to occupy Italy; the King of England, fearing Francis' influence, would move against him in France, and King Ferdinand would do the same.¹¹⁵

Noticeably absent as a factor in deciding Italy's fate was *Italia* itself. Instead, in Vettori's eyes, a mixture of ambition and wariness on the part of the more powerful European leaders dictated the course of political events on the peninsula.

By portraying *Italia* in a decidedly passive vein, Vettori negated the relevance of Italian *virtù* as a possible *rimedio*. Machiavelli had hinged the fate of *Italia* on either the collective failure or the collective revitalization of its inherent *virtù*, placing the responsibility for Italy's salvation or ruin squarely on the shoulders of Italian leaders. By contrast, Vettori saw Italian leaders as powerless to determine their own political futures. The agents determining Italy's fate lay beyond the Alps. Thus, the bold, strong *Italia* of ancient Rome and of Machiavellian *virtù* was reduced, in Vettori's mind, to a forcibly passive player in its own political destiny, helplessly exposed to the whims of *fortuna*. ¹¹⁶

Machiavelli's engagement in *The Prince* of the struggle between *fortuna* and *virtù* is its most famous iteration from the early modern period. Machiavelli had unequivocally

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¹¹⁵ "Cioè che non era da entrare in nuove imprese perché li Svizzeri, esaperai per questa rotta, scenderebbono di nuovo più feroci che mai, che l'Alamagna si unirebbe tutta, quando intendesse volesse occupare Italia, che il re d'Inghilterra, temendo la grandezza sua, li moverebbe in Francia et it re Ferrando farebbe il medesimo," Ibid., 168.

¹¹⁶ For *fortuna* in Renaissance political philosophy, see Skinner, 87, 95, 121-122, 186-189; Pocock, 94-97, 166-169.

asserted the potential of individual leaders and whole societies to harness the influence of *fortuna* through their own *virtù*, a principle he immediately applied to Italy's situation, as discussed above. In a broad sense, Machiavelli gendered his conception of *Italia* masculine. By contrast, Vettori seized upon *fortuna*—whose metaphoric representations from antiquity to the early sixteenth century were feminine in nature—as a greater force in determining the future of *Italia*. For Vettori, then, though he expressed it implicitly, *Italia*'s foremost characteristics were more feminine—prostrate, passive, weak, and exposed to the whims of others, unable to determine her own political future.

While Vettori asserted that *fortuna* oversaw all historical events, stating that "all human actions fall under *fortuna*'s sway," he also had a practical understanding of what *fortuna* meant. Although he was familiar with Machiavelli's reflections on that dialectic from *The Prince*, there were other, distinct interpretations of the meaning of *fortuna* in circulation in Italy in the early sixteenth century. Vettori had, in fact, recently read the Neapolitan humanist Giovanni Pontano's 1512 treatise, *On Fortuna*. Pontano's reflections rang true with what Vettori was observing in Rome as he moved in diplomatic circles. He informed Machiavelli that "Pontano clearly demonstrates that nothing is possible without

¹¹⁷ In Roman mythology, *fortuna* was a female divinity and that mode of representation persisted through the Renaissance, Pocock, 37. The most famous of those representations is one with which Vettori was of course familiar, Machiavelli's well-known maxim from *The Prince*, that *fortuna* was a woman and to control her, one had to approach her violently, with aggression and impetuousness [perché la fortuna è donna et è necessario, volendola tenere sotto, batterla et urtarla...più feroci e com più audacia la comandano], *Principe*, XXV, *Opere*, 384. Many scholars have explored the connections between *virtù* and masculinity and *fortuna* and femininity in Machiavelli's writings, most recently "Meditations on Machiavelli" by Hanna Fenichel Pitkin, 49-93; "Niccolò Machiavelli: Women as Men, Men as Woman and the Ambiguity of Sex" by Arlene W. Saxonhouse, 93-117; "Renaissance Italy: Machiavelli" by Wendy Brown, 117-173; and "Beyond *Virtù*" by John Juncholl Shin, 287-309, all contained in *Feminist Interpretations of Niccolò Machiavelli* (University Park, 2004), ed. Maria J. Falco. On the gender connotations of *virtù* and *fortuna* in Renaissance thought more broadly, see Skinner, 87, 95, 121-122, 186-189, and Pocock, 94-97, 166-169.

¹¹⁸ "Fortuna, alla quale sono tutte le azioni umane sottosposte," Vettori, *Scritti*, 135.

fortuna, no matter the soul, no matter prudence, no matter force, no matter whatever kind of virtù. In Rome, one sees the proof of this every day."¹¹⁹ In other words, there were certain times, like those in Rome after 1513, when it appeared that no human action could dispose fortuna from her dominance. Like Pontanto, Vettori also thought that historical figures possessed either good or bad fortuna. Fortuna allied herself in a positive or negative manner depending on the amount of resources available to a given leader. According to Vettori, for example, "war depends greatly on fortuna, and most of the time, one wins or one loses according how much of it is at your disposal."¹²⁰ Thus Vettori accorded Charles V, with his access to more money, land, and soldiers than any other European leader, good fortuna, ¹²¹ in contrast to "Italy's bad fortuna." Vettori noted that most armies lose when their prince fails to lead them in person, but not in Charles' case; his fortuna proved force enough to ensure victory despite his absence from the battlefield.

By contrast, *fortuna* plagued Italy and Italian leaders, who had recourse to less money and fewer troops than Charles. Vettori highlighted the collective weakness of the Italian states by emphasizing *fortuna*'s hold over Italian political leaders—a point on which Machiavelli drew decidedly contrasting conclusions. ¹²⁴ Clement VII, a key figure in Vettori's

¹¹⁹ "Legi, superioribus diebus, librum Pontani *De Fortuna*, noviter impressum…in quo aperte ostendit nihil valere ingenium neque prudentiam neque fortitudinem necque alias virtutes, ubi fortuna desit. Rome, de hac re, quotidie esperimentum videmus," *Lettere*, 270.

¹²⁰ "Perché la guerra consiste assai nella fortuna et il più delle volte si vince e perde, secondo che quella ne dispone," Vettori, *Scritti*, 215.

¹²¹ For instance, Ibid., 188.

^{122 &}quot;La mala fortuna d'Italia," Ibid., 191.

¹²³ Ibid., 188.

¹²⁴ Felix Gilbert in particular emphasized, perhaps a bit simplistically, the historical agency Vettori accords to *fortuna*. Gilbert wrote that "Vettori had no confidence in man's virtue; to Vettori, *fortuna* was all-powerful, and man a toy in *fortuna*'s hands," Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, 251. The point would be more accurate

history, is a subject about whom both Vettori and Machiavelli wrote. Their differing perceptions of his early pontificate help to explicate the importance each thinker accorded to either *virtù* or *fortuna* as forces controlling Italy political circumstances. Clement's pontificate—which, from the Italian perspective, saw such catastrophes as the spread of Lutheranism, the 1527 Sack of Rome, and the controversy with English King Henry VIII—has given way to a dubious, if ambiguous, legacy. Even before the Sack of Rome, Clement was viewed by many political commentators, including Machiavelli, as a vacillating, indecisive and weak leader, a primary source of blame for Italy's misfortunes. 126

Writing to his friend Bartolomeo Cavalcanti in the winter of 1526 and then to Vettori in the spring of the following year, Machiavelli made clear his understanding that the fate of *Italia* rested in a large measure on the shoulders of Pope Clement and the decisions he made. With imperial soldiers moving virtually unobstructed in Northern Italy, Machiavelli saw the time as ripe for Clement to undertake a bold approach. Specifically, Machiavelli wrote Cavalcanti, "the pope should attack the Kingdom with all his forces…for that reason I wrote

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had Gilbert acknowledged that Vettori saw *fortuna* as a dual-natured, that is, that all humans were not the same in their relationship with *fortuna*; the accord between Italian leaders with *fortuna* was different in Vettori's eyes from Charles V's positive alliance with *fortuna*.

¹²⁵ For the political, cultural, and general historiographical issues that interest modern scholars regarding Clement's pontificate, including his ambiguous historiographical reputation, see the recently edited volume of essays *The Pontificate of Clement VII*, ed. Kenneth Gouwens and Sheryl E. Reiss (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005). Relating to Vettori and Machiavelli, see especially Gouwens' introduction, 3-19; T.C. Price Zimmermann's "Guicciardini, Giovio, and the Character of Clement VII," 19-29; Barbara McClung Hallman's "The'Disastrous Pontificate of Clement VII: Disastrous for Giulio de'Medici?" 29-41; Patricia J. Osmond's "The Conspiracy of 1522 against Cardinal Giulio de' Medici: Machiavelli and 'gli esempli delli antique," 55-75; and Cecil H. Clough's "Clement VII and Francesco Maria della Rovere, Duke of Urbino," 75-109.

¹²⁶ Vettori noted in the *Sommario* that already in 1528, in the wake of the devastating Sack of Rome, public opinion in Florence had turned overwhelmingly against Clement. Vettori remarked that "those who pass judgment on events in Florence, which is in fact almost all men, deemed Clement to be of little prudence and little spirit" [Come in Firenze s'intese il caso, quelli che iudicono delli eventi, che infatto sono é più delli uomini, dannavono Clemente di poca prudenzia e di poco animo], Vettori, *Scritti*, 232.

Francesco Vettori." ¹²⁷ Machiavelli was still convinced that his aggressive proposal, which he had submitted to the pope via Vettori (discussed above), could trigger a turn of events in Italy's favor. Ultimate responsibility for Italy's security, in Machiavelli's eyes, still lay with the pope. He noted that "if [that plan] is not executed. I see the war as lost." When the pope disregarded Machiavelli's plan, Machiavelli intimated to Vettori that the pope had chosen "a course that, if it succeeds, will result in our security and, if it does not, will mean our demise." ¹²⁹ Events could unfold successfully or disastrously ¹³⁰ for Italy and, if the latter, "we would in this way, let ourselves be controlled by *fortuna*." Unequivocally, then, Machiavelli thought that in some ways the pope had at least the opportunity to affect the success or failure of the Italians' efforts to assuage the advancement of Charles' forces. It seems that for Machiavelli in 1526 and 1527, individual virtù was still a meaningful consideration in assessing Italy's future—fortuna's grip on the peninsula was not, in Machiavelli's mind, definitive or cemented. In fact, Machiavelli's outlook on the potential for Pope Clement to mediate Italy's situation vis-à-vis the invaders echoed almost exactly his words to Vettori in 1513 when he placed the outcome of Italy's seemingly imminent confrontation with the Swiss on Pope Julius' shoulders, telling Vettori that it was up to Julius

¹²⁷ "Donde che io scrissi a Francesco Vettori, che io credevo che questa impresa non si potesse tollerare...o per diversione, cioè lasciare in questi stati guardate queste frontiere, che questi Ispagnuoli non potessino fare progressi, e con tutte le forze asalire il Regno, il quale credevo si potessi prima pigliare, che una di queste terre qua," Niccolò Machiavelli, *Opere*, vol. 3, ed. Franco Gaeta (Turin: Unione Tipografico-Editrice Torinese, 1985), 617.

¹²⁸ "Oltre a di questo, la guerra nutriva contesa," Ibid., 167.

¹²⁹ "Il quale se riuscirà, sarà per hora la salute nostra; quando non riesca, ci farà in tutto abbandonare da oguno," *Lettere*, 380.

¹³⁰ "Se gli è per riuscire o no, voi lo potete giudicare come noi," Ibid., 380.

^{131 &}quot;E lasciare per questa via governare alla fortuna," Ibid., 380.

to find and execute some sort of *rimedio*. ¹³² In chastising Clement, Machiavelli was also reaffirming his continued belief, however naïve, in the potential for human agency to alter Italy's desperate situation.

Vettori saw Clement differently; as much as the pope may have erred in his decisions and indecisions, Vettori refused to blame him for failing to navigate *Italia* successfully through what, to Vettori, was a set of insuperable circumstances. For Vettori he was an example of a potentially good Italian leader felled by bad *fortuna*. Giulio de' Medici (thereafter Clement VII) ascended to "a pontificate full of war; he found *Italia* full of armies...the Turk in Hungary, and the Roman church little-esteemed because of the growing influence of the Lutheran sect." 133 Vettori succinctly described the effects of Clement's elevation into an almost impossible situation: "He expended a great effort only to go from a good and respected cardinal to a small and little-esteemed pope." Although fortuna had been kind to Giulio de'Medici in his prepontifical life, as soon as he ascended to the papal throne, his fortuna changed from that of a "compassionate mother into a cruel stepmother." At the end of the *Sommario*, Vettori partially exonerated Clement for the Sack of Rome on the grounds that Clement himself was powerless to oppose the forces converging on Rome, noting that, ironically, "he who considers the lives of past popes would judge truly that in more than one hundred years there has not been a pope who was a better

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¹³² See above, page 15.

¹³³ "Trovò l'Italia piena d'esserciti e la Cristianità indebolita per la perdita di Rodi e per la preparazione che faceva il re de' Turchi contro all'Ungheria. Trovò ancora la Chiesa romana in pochissima riputazione rispetto alla sette luterana, che aveva occupata gran parte d'Alamagna e del continuo andava crescendo," Vettori, *Scritti*, 207.

¹³⁴ "Nondimeno durò una gran fatica per diventare, di grande e riputato cardinale, piccolo e poco stimato papa," Ibid., 207.

¹³⁵ "La fortuna, pietosa madre cominciò a diventare crudele matrigna, così fece a Clemente," Ibid., 207. Also see note 117 above.

man than Clement VII...nonetheless the ruin came during his time while the other popes, full of vices, lived and died happily."¹³⁶ Despite whatever personal leadership qualities Clement may have possessed, there was nothing he could have done to avert "the ruin."

Interestingly, the issues of Clement's culpability and the fairness of his received reputation has persisted. As recently as 2005, historians such as Kenneth Gouwens have begun to argue for a reconsideration of that legacy. What has been taken as poor leadership on Clement's part, according to Gouwens, may require further inspection of the extremely difficult, if not impossible, historical circumstances that were facing his pontificate. ¹³⁷ In essence, that was Vettori's argument back in 1528. On the surface, Vettori's conclusions may seem mere Medici praise. As noted, Vettori was a confidant of the Medici pope as well as of other Medici leaders. Vettori himself noted that "there will be some who call me too sympathetic to the actions of Pope Clement VII, to which I respond that I have said nothing that is not true." Several biographical considerations give reason for his readers to take his conclusions about Pope Clement at face value rather than to simply dismiss them as mere appeasements to a powerful patron.

Perhaps the most convincing case that Vettori makes in his *Sommario* to substantiate his claims of relative neutrality regarding the pope is his inclusion of several anecdotes in which Clement failed to heed Vettori's advice. Vettori narrated several encounters with Pope Clement in which he counseled the pope to come to terms with Charles V—advice that went unheeded with disastrous consequences. In 1526, as the imperial army operated dangerously

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¹³⁶ "Chi considerrà la vita de' pontefici passati, potrà veramente iudicare che sono più che cento anni che nel pontificato non sedette il migliore uomo che Clemente settimo. . .nondimeno la ruina è venuta a tempo suo e li altri, che sono stati pieni di vizi, si può iudicare che, quanto al mondo, sieno vivuti e morti felici," Ibid., 245.

¹³⁷ Gouwens, Clement, 3-19.

¹³⁸ "Saranno forse alcuni che mi calunnieranno come troppo affezionato alle azioni di papa Clemente VII, alli quail io rispondo non avere detto cosa che non sia vera," Vettori, *Scritti*, 136.

close to Florentine territory, Florentine officials desired a break with the policies of their pope and de facto Medici lord: "the Otto di Practica, charged with the governance of the city, began to have certain doubts and did not want to follow the pope to their manifest ruin."¹³⁹ Referring to himself in the third person. Vettori explains that the *Otto* sent him to the pope to present the delicate Florentine perspective: "Clement, hearing this proposal, was displeased but, having Francesco as a confidant, thought that he was telling him these things out of affection... Despite having so much respect, he did not believe that things in Florence were as dangerous as Vettori had demonstrated." The pope did not follow Vettori's counsel in the crucial year of 1526, just as he had not in the case of the 1525 Discorso in which Vettori had advised the pope to reach an agreement of peace with the emperor. Perhaps resulting from the rift in perspectives between Clement and Vettori regarding wartime policies and, specifically, the pope's involving a reluctant Florence (and Florentine money) in his war efforts. Vettori aided the successful 1527 anti-Medici coup in Florence. ¹⁴¹ Ironically, the new government then forced Vettori to leave the city. He wrote the Sommario shortly thereafter. Thus, Vettori's standing as a Medici servant was, for the time being, unclear at best.

It seems evident that by the mid-1520s Vettori had developed a bleak conception of *Italia* that departed from the inherited tradition of writing *Italia* as strong. Around the same time, Machiavelli maintained the relatively hopeful vision of *Italia* that he had first expressed

¹³⁹ "E li Otto di Practica, che eron quelli che avevono il pondo di governno della città, cominciorono a dubitare, che volendo seguitare in osservare e' suoi ricordi, non andare alla ruina manifesta," Ibid., 232.

¹⁴⁰ "Clemente, udita questa proposta, gli dispiaceque ma, avendo Francesco per confidante, pensò gli dicessi queste cose per afezione...et avendo ancora per troppo respettivo, non credette che le cose in Firenze fussino in tanto pericolo, quanto egli dimonstrava," Ibid., 232.

¹⁴¹ Devonshire Jones, 186-224.

in *The Prince*. Between 1513 and 1528 Vettori's thinking of *Italia* altered considerably, from an initial stance of optimism to one of almost complete resignation. During the same years, Machiavelli's thinking and writing about *Italia* seemed to remain relatively static and, thus, somewhat out of touch. Writing in the midst of swirling crises, both envisioned *Italia* as essentially weak. Beyond that, their understandings of *Italia* and how they arrived at those understandings differed greatly. Vettori wrote of *Italia* as a virtual corpse, unable to determine its own political destiny. By contrast, Machiavelli's articulations of *Italia* consistently included the theme of potential—that is, in his discussions of *Italia*, Machiavelli stressed the possibility of determinative action through which Italian forces could greatly mitigate damage wrought by foreign invaders. Further, Vettori couched many of his references to *Italia* in terms of *fortuna* while Machiavelli employed *fortuna*'s dialectical opposite, virtù. Finally, to understand the reasons for the crises plaguing the Italian states and to understand *Italia* itself, Vettori looked beyond the Alps. By contrast, Machiavelli's invocations of *Italia* lack any sustained analysis or even recognition of ultramontane political machinations and the severely uneven balance of power between those polities and the Italian states. Rather, he wrote of *Italia* through an optimistic if relatively narrow lens, clinging to his faith in the possibility of redemptive, heroic action.

In his *Sommario*, Vettori recast the word *Italia* by introducing the theme of irrevocable weakness as its defining characteristic, thereby refiguring it in a way that corresponded to the stark realities of the period. He registered the Italian states' collective descent into subjugation by writing of a disempowered, fallen *Italia*, pathetically powerless before the national monarchies and the invading armies sweeping over the Alps. Vettori understood that the common transalpine threat and the changes brought on by the series of

invasions in the early sixteenth century made the Italian states more united by their common plight, almost by default, than at any other point in the peninsula's post-Roman history. Vettori recognized that the Italian states had effectively lost their separate political autonomy, that no single state could develop an external policy independent of the others, and that the collective Italian system of states no longer existed in geopolitical isolation from the rest of the continent. Vettori introduced a characterization of *Italia* grounded in the contradistinction between the northern states' abilities to dictate the terms of their political existences and the Italian states' shared inability to do the same.

Ultimately, Vettori's views on *Italia* seem more realistic than Machiavelli's, measured against the changed political situation in Italy by the 1520s. Machiavelli's thinking remained frozen in 1513, whereas Vettori's evolved, making him, in many ways, and perhaps against conventional wisdom, the more perceptive of the two political analysts by the time of Machiavelli's death. But the question may still linger—why after 1513 did Vettori's and Machiavelli's outlooks, at least on the question of *Italia*, diverge so drastically? On the surface, the Sack of Rome appears to be the event of serious traumatic proportions that might have caused an alert observer such as Vettori to question the Italian states' abilities to dictate their own political futures. ¹⁴² The Sack, however, sheds little light on how Vettori's thinking grew in a direction so different from Machiavelli's. Vettori's thoughts about *Italia* and its unavoidable subjugation seemed well formed before the Sack, as evidenced by his *Discorso* of 1525 and his letters to Machiavelli of 1526.

Instead, the answer, to the extent that one is possible, seems to lay in the dramatically different paths that their lives took after 1513. Remaining physically close to the centers of

¹⁴² Not to mention the possible traumatic aftershock of such a devastating event. Kenneth Gouwens, *Remembering the Renaissance* discussed the psychological implications and contemporary perceptions of the April 1527 Sack.

diplomacy, Vettori's knowledge of the constantly shifting subtleties of continental politics expanded after 1513. Machiavelli, meanwhile, remained largely confined to a rural life in political exile. Back in 1513, Machiavelli concluded one of his letters to Vettori with an apologetic admission. If Vettori found Machiavelli's reflections on contemporary political events perplexing or simply off-base, then Machiavelli beseeched Vettori to "excuse me, for my mind is alienated from such practical matters as I am reduced to living on my farm, far from every human face; not knowing what is going on, I am forced to discuss in the dark." No matter the rhetorical nature of that statement, the fact remained that Machiavelli had been in political exile less than a year and already felt "alienated" from the swiftly changing political circumstances of the period.

Up through the 1520s, Machiavelli's seems to have remained "in the dark," at least relative to Vettori and at least concerning the theme of *Italia*. It would seem that Machiavelli grew ever more out of touch with the shifting particularities of contemporary politics and in particular the realities of a stark and insuperable balance of power between the polities north of the Alps and those to the south, leading him to remain committed to a largely static perception of *Italia* that he had first articulated in the "Exhortation," a relatively hopeful vision of an *Italia* that echoed the poetic, emotional appeals of his Tuscan predecessors Dante and Petrarch. Vettori was more attuned to the political realities of the period. It was Vettori who introduced a break from more traditional modes of writing *Italia*, an entity which, according to Vettori, was now devoid of hope, exposed to the whims of *fortuna*, and beyond the redemptive powers of *virtù*.

¹⁴³ "Scusimi lo essere io alieno con l'animo da tucte queste pratiche, come ne fa fede lo essermi riducto in villa, et discosto da ogni viso humano, et per non sapere le cosec he vanno adtorno, in modo che io ho ad discorrere al buio, et ho fondato tucto in su li advisi mi date voi," *Lettere*, 131.

The increasing contrast between Vettori's *Italia* and Machiavelli's during the 1520s helps us to understand something of the changing nature of their intellectual dynamic in its final stages and, especially, to appreciate the development and maturation of Vettori's nuanced thoughts on the complicated events of the early sixteenth century. But Vettori's historical portrayal of *Italia* is suggestive of some conclusions beyond the context of his relationship with Machiavelli. First, Vettori's refitting of *Italia* suggests that in the sixteenth century the term had a dynamic nature, belying modern historians' dismissals of the term as static or irrelevant during that period. Second, the portrayal of *Italia* as a passive, exposed, and feminine entity subsequently emerged as the dominant historiographical, political, and literary topos describing the peninsula in that period of foreign invasions. 144 Machiavelli and Vettori both employed *Italia* as a unifying frame for their analyses of the tumultuous events of the early sixteenth century. Writing in the Tuscan dialect both thinkers interpreted and articulated the word *Italia* differently. Their dialect and the concepts it conveyed through Florentine usage subsequently diffused throughout the peninsula and emerged as standard Italian carrying those meanings with it. The word *Italia* continued to acquire different meanings in different historical contexts, including, after 1861, a nation-state.

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¹⁴⁴ Natalia Costa-Zalessow, "Italy as Victim: A Historical Appraisal of a Literary Theme," *Italica* 45 (1968): 216-240.

Italia and the Prehistory of the Italian National State

In the spirit of an epilogue, I would like to suggest some ways that the equivocalness and contested nature of *Italia* in the early sixteenth century might inform some modern conversations regarding the same term. While the history of the Italian national state begins in 1861, the "prehistory" of *Italia* extends further back in time. Etienne Balibar defines the prehistory of a nation as

those structures [that] appear retrospectively to us as pre-national, because they made possible certain features of the nation-state, into which they were ultimately to be incorporated with varying degrees of modification. We can therefore acknowledge the fact that the national formation is the product of a long "prehistory." This prehistory, however differs in essential features from the nationalist myth of linear destiny. ¹⁴⁵

To understand the process of the formation of nations, Balibar asserts, one must also understand the foundational elements that predate, but not necessarily predetermine, a nation's political constitution. This paper has examined some of the linguistic prehistory of the Italian national state. Vettori's and Machiavelli's writings of *Italia* were not previews of the Italian nation—such an entity was inconceivable to them—but rather, for those sixteenth-century Tuscans, *Italia* was an abstraction whose meaning they helped to construct discursively. The historical fate of *Italia*, from antiquity through the sixteenth century and

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¹⁴⁵ Etienne Balibar, "The Nation Form: History and Ideology," in *Becoming National*, ed. Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 133.

down to the present day, suggests not only the essentially historical and amorphous nature of the term but also the persistence of an ongoing discussion surrounding its meaning.

Still today many discussions of Italian national identity explicitly query the meaning and valence of *Italia*. Italian intellectuals, in particular, skeptically question the word's referential substance. In 1964 the Italian journalist Luigi Barzini captured the sense of a semantic tension between the unifying implications of the word *Italia* and the realities of diverse regionalism when he reflected that, since the peninsula's political unification in 1861, "official Italy has apparently succeeded merely in unifying names, labels and titles, but not reality." Scholars continue to doubt the significance of *Italia*, some even claiming that the word is hollow, not describing a national entity at all, or, in the words of Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, a "state without a nation." Even a cursory look at an Italian bookstore shelf yields such titles as *Se cessiamo di essere una nazione* [If We Cease to Be a Nation] and *L'Italia non esiste* [Italy Does Not Exist]. Apparently, then, a telling characteristic of Italy's nationhood is, at least among some intellectuals, its fundamental questioning of its constituent nature.

Broadly speaking, those Italian scholars point out that there is a decisive gap in meaning between *Italia* and the Italian nation. During the *Risorgimento*, the nineteenth-century construct of "nation" imposed itself over the preexisting abstraction of *Italia*. One of the architects of the *Risorgimento*, Massimo d'Azeglio, famously claimed after 1861, "We

¹⁴⁶ Luigi Barzini, *The Italians* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 238.

¹⁴⁷ Zeffiro Ciuffoletti, "Stato senza nazione," in *La construzione dello stato in Italia e Germania*, ed. L. Ambrosoli, et al. (Manduria, 1993), 57-68; G.E. Rusconi, *Se cessiamo di essere una nazione* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1993), 1-24, 167-179; Giorgio Calgano, ed, *Bianco, rosso, e verde: L'Identità degli Italiani* (Rome: Laterza, 1993). Also see, Ernesto Galli della Loggia, *L'Identià Italiana* (Bologna: il Mulino, 1998), 113-165; Sergio Salvi, *L'Italia non esiste* (Florence: Camunia, 1996), 273-277.

have made Italy, now we must make Italians." The nineteenth-century national movement gave a new meaning, that of a legal entity, to the preexisting concept of *Italia*. Three concepts that had distinct meanings in premodernity—*Italia*, *nazione*, ¹⁴⁹ and *stato*—had merged, at least in the writings of some intellectuals. Because this essay has suggested that early modern *Italia* and modern *Italia* represent essentially different meanings but also that early articulations helped to prefigure later ones, it is perhaps worth noting that some scholars of the Renaissance recently devoted attention to the historically amorphous meaning of *stato*. Like *Italia*, *stato* represented a contested, dynamic meaning during the Renaissance not analogous to modern renderings of "state." A recent conference on the premodern origins of the state in Italy engaged the appropriateness of using the centralized state as a "category of analysis" in a time when the state as we now know it was "literally inconceivable." Participants differed in their opinions but reached some degree of

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¹⁴⁸ As quoted by Nick Carter in "Nation, Nationality, Nationalism and Internationalism in Italy, from Cavour to Mussolini," *The Historical Journal* 39 (1992): 545.

¹⁴⁹ The word *nazione* existed in sixteenth-century Italy and before, referring to collaborative commercial ventures and the physical space of their foreign, jurisdictionally independent outposts. See Frederico Chabod, *L'Idea di Nazione* (Bari: Laterza, 1979), 19-20. On the early modern etymology of the word, see "Le nazioni in Italia," Salvi, 75-82.

¹⁵⁰ See Nicolai Rubinstein's "Notes on the Word Stato in Florence Before Machiavelli," in Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, ed. Giovanni Ciapelli (Rome, 2004), 151-163. On the semantic differences between medieval and Renaissance stato see John Najemy's "Stato, comune, e "universitas," in Orgini dello Stato: Processi di formazione statale in Italia fra medioevo ed età moderna ed. Chittolini, Anthony Molho, and Pierangelo Schiera (Bologna: il Mulino, 1994), 647-650. In the same volume, see Giorgio Chittolini's "Il 'privato,' il 'pubblico,' lo Stato," 565-572, which explicitly questions the idea that stato has a fixed definition which, for Chittolini, includes, "full sovereignty, absolutism, the preeminence of public institutions, centralization, coercion, the exercise of power in the name of public interest"). Rather, Chittolini adopts Ernesto Sestan's assertion from Stato e nazione nell'alto Mediovo (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1994), 114, that "the term 'state' shares this inconvenience with many other terms in the modern historical vocabulary: church, people, country, law, liberty, and so forth. Every concept has its own historical life; the term that expresses it remains or can remain intact and unchanged while gradually coming to include shifting and diverse conceptual realities." Where available, I used the English translations from the abbreviated, American version, edited by Julius Kirshner, The Origins of the State in Italy, 1300-1600 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹⁵¹ Kirshner, 5.

consensus, deciding that, at the least, the formation of medieval and Renaissance states "was a kaleidoscopic event opening up a new imaginative territory."¹⁵²

Similarly, I see Vettori's and Machiavelli's discourses on *Italia* as connected to later developments of the word. Vettori's Sommario, specifically its clear illustration of the equivocalness of *Italia*, suggests that Italy's dialogical model of national identity has roots in the sixteenth century. Vettori's recasting of *Italia* as fundamentally weak indicates that the modern querying of the word has its origins in the period in which the peninsula was carved into independent states. The concept of *Italia* came under scrutiny in the early sixteenth century when the foreign invasions upset the fragile balance of power among the small states and revealed that their contrived independence from each other and from the other European states was no longer possible. Although *Italia* has represented different meanings in various historical contexts, it has proved a durable subject of conversation both in the early sixteenth century and in more recent times. For many Italians, regional modes of identification may still undermine any overarching sense of identity. Like a piazza in the evening, the Italian approach to the question of "Italy" as a "nation" is characterized by vibrant discussion and a cacophony of voices. Italian national identity contains a self-reflective and intellectually rich tradition of querying the meanings of some of its most essential terms.

Historians, especially Anglo-American ones, have not always recognized the full complexity of Italy's amorphous national identity. By imposing upon it certain expectations of inner coherency, they fail to consider Italian identity as equivocal and rooted in an ongoing conversation. ¹⁵³ Italian scholar Ernesto Galli della Loggia described Italian national

¹⁵² Ibid, 5.

¹⁵³ Those scholars expect Italy to adhere to some model of unity, implying that Italy's national identity currently lacks an important component achievable only through the breaking down of regional difference. Most recently,

identity, especially in regards to its statehood, as "a prisoner of a comparative mechanism" that passes negative judgment on Italy's supposed "absence" of national identity by contrasting it with the supposed coherency of the English and French national models. Some historians have recently sought to correct the imposition of false comparisons by viewing Italy's internal diversity and lack of a coherent national identity as an opportunity to expand the conceptual limits of the usual nation-based paradigm of historical analyses. Those historians affirm Italy's status as a nation-state while also suggesting its exemplification of an alternate (though certainly not unique) model of nationhood that does not conform to any supposed ideal of inner unity but that, instead, accommodates the primacy of fragmented, regionally based identities as part of an overarching but fluid national identity.

Recent studies on the origins of nations provide fresh theoretical bases for rethinking the nature of Italian national identity and its possible origins in the sixteenth century. In the last few years, approaches to the constructions of national identities have emphasized

Gene Brucker wrote, "When, at some distant time in the future, the inhabitants of Lombardy and Sicily feel that they are brothers, that they belong to the same community, then the terminus of that long and torturous route (to unification) will have been reached," "From Campanilismo to Nationhood" in Living on the Edge of Leonardo's Florence, 61. See also, Roger Absalom, Italy since 1800: A Nation in the Balance? (New York, 1995); Martin Clark, Modern Italy, 1871-1995 (London: Longman, 1996); Duggan, 293-294. I suspect that such predetermined measuring of Italy's sense of nationhood also contributes to the lack of recent studies about emerging notions of italianità or the Italian "nation" in the early modern period. An example of a work that asserts the early modern roots of what later became "national" identity elsewhere in Europe is Colette Beaune, The Birth of an Ideology: Myths and Symbols of Nation in Late-Medieval France, trans. Susan Ross Huston, ed. Fredric L. Cheyette. Berkeley (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

¹⁵⁴ "Nel campo della statualità e della politica sopratutto l'identità italiana è prigioniera di un meccanismo comparativistico. . .dominato dal modello anglo-francese, e in tale comparazione riportare la peggio." Galli della Loggia, 113-116.

¹⁵⁵ Nicholas Doumanis, 1-8, calls into question "unfair and inappropriate comparisons with supposedly model nations" in regards to Italy's national identity; Donna R. Gabaccia uses the case of the Italian immigrant experience and Italian regional modes of identification "to query the tyranny of the national in the discipline of history," "Is Everywhere Nowhere? Nomads, Nations, and the Immigrant Paradigm of United States History," *The Journal of American History* 86 (1999):1115-1134.

imaginary and creative factors, as well as the role of intellectuals in shaping and modifying conceptions of nationhood. ¹⁵⁶ Perhaps more important, historians such as Balibar, Anthony D. Smith, and Prasenjit Duara also question the kind of nationalist ideals and expectations of inner coherency—"the myth of linear destiny"—that have misdirected some interpretations of Italian national identity. ¹⁵⁷ For example, Duara's reassessment of the origins of national identity suggests the replacement "of a teleological movement toward a more cohesive ideal" with "a mobilization toward particular objects of identification. In this way we may view the histories of nations as contingently as nations are themselves contingent." ¹⁵⁸ Significantly, many of these queries are emerging from scholars with roots outside of the European tradition, who are perhaps more willing to consider a broader spectrum of forms of national identities. Moving beyond the expectations of a "cohesive ideal" of national identity offers a refreshing, validating perspective on Italy's model, one based on discussion and including an on-going questioning of the meaning of *Italia*.

¹⁵⁶ Benedict Anderson defined his now well-known notion of imagined communities as "distinguished by the style in which they are imagined" *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 6. Strictly speaking, Anderson understood imagined communities as a distinctly modern construction, but I have found useful his emphasis on the abstract, that is, extra constitutional, elements of "nation." Also useful is some poststructuralist understandings of national identity that emphasize the role of writers and the inherent tension between the very idea of an all-encompassing, coherent national identity and its always more complicated reality. See Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation," in *Nation and Narration* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291-320, and Lloyd S. Kramer, "Historical Narratives and the Meaning of Nationalism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 58 (1997): 534-538.

¹⁵⁷ Anthony D. Smith, "The Origins of Nations," in *Becoming National*, 106-130, and, in the same volume, Prasenjit Duara, "Historicizing National Identity, Or Who Imagines What and When?" 151-179.

¹⁵⁸ Duara, 172.

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