

The Use of Kairos in Renaissance Political Philosophy*

by JOANNE PAUL

Although the Greek concept of kairos (καιρός) has undergone a recent renewal of interest among scholars of Renaissance rhetoric, this revival has not yet been paralleled by its reception into the history of political thought. This article examines the meanings and uses of this important concept within the ancient Greek tradition, particularly in the works of Isocrates and Plutarch, in order to understand how it is employed by two of the most important political thinkers of the sixteenth century: Thomas Elyot and Niccolò Machiavelli. Through such an investigation this paper argues that an appreciation of the concept of kairos and its use by Renaissance political writers provides a fuller understanding of the political philosophy of the period.

1. INTRODUCTION

The ancient Greek concept of *kairos* (καιρός) has recently undergone a revival of interest among historians of rhetoric.¹ These scholars detail the importance that ancient writers placed on the concept of *kairos* as denoting both a sense of “adaptation and accommodation to convention” and, conversely, “the uniquely timely, the spontaneous, the radically particular.”² They point to the prevalence of the first sense, often captured in the Latin concept of *decorum*, from the time of Cicero (106–43 BCE) onward, and especially in the Renaissance. Although involving the same

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¹See Carter; Enos; Haskins; Race; Usher; Walzer; and especially the contributions to *Rhetoric and Kairos*. This interest in *kairos* and rhetoric in the Renaissance has also spilled into the study of Shakespeare: see Beehler; Hunt; Waller.

²See Carolyn R. Miller’s foreword to *Rhetoric and Kairos*, xii, xiii. See also Kinneavy, 2002, 60; Ruffy, 134.

understanding of adaptation to circumstance as *kairos*, *decorum* was highly moral — synthesizing the ends of *utile* and *honestum* in any given action — whereas *kairos* carried connotations of moral flexibility, even moral relativism. It is the moralized *decorum* that dominated much of medieval and Renaissance rhetoric and has held the attention of historians of the period ever since. In the words of James Kinneavy, the pioneering scholar on *kairos* in the anglophone tradition, “although the Ciceronian notion of propriety persisted throughout the medieval and Renaissance period, the residual influence of *kairos* is almost a negligible chapter in the history of rhetoric since antiquity.”³ Although work has been done in recent decades to counter this view, the revival of the study of *kairos* in rhetoric has not yet been paralleled by its reception into the history of political thought.⁴

As recent scholarship has shown, an understanding of the various elements in the classical *ars rhetorica* greatly illuminates a reading of political texts, especially in the Renaissance.⁵ *Kairos* as a rhetorical theory — an understanding of how and, more importantly, when to speak in a given context — thus has a fundamental role to play in Renaissance political philosophy, especially given its preoccupation with questions of political counsel.⁶ This paper will begin by focusing on the use of the kairotic tradition by one of England’s leading humanists of the sixteenth century, Thomas Elyot (ca. 1490–1546), in his 1533 *Pasquil the Playne*, a dialogue on the problem of giving appropriate political advice. In *Pasquil*, Elyot deliberately recalls the Greek tradition of *kairos*, and designates the ability to adopt an understanding of kairotic speech as the key talent of the effective political adviser.

As *kairos* is essential to rhetoric, and rhetoric essential to Renaissance political philosophy, *kairos* ought to form an important part of an evaluation of the period’s political thought. The political influence of *kairos*, however, does not end with well-timed political speech, for *kairos* also sets out a model of political action, both for Greek and for Renaissance writers. This theory is best explored in one of the sixteenth century’s most influential political theorists, Niccolò Machiavelli (1469–1527). In *The Prince*, written in 1513 and published posthumously in 1532, Machiavelli emphasizes the importance of a knowledge of *occasione* to his prince, without which his *virtù* will go to waste. This concept of *occasione* bears clear relation to that of *kairos* in the

³Kinneavy, 1986, 82. For Kinneavy’s place in the revival of interest in the concept of *kairos*, see Thompson, 73–88.

⁴See Baumlin.

⁵See Kahn; Skinner.

⁶See Guy; Rose.

Greek tradition, a fact recognized by commentators in the decades that followed as they further developed a political theory founded on the concept of *kairos*.

In order to understand Elyot's and Machiavelli's use of *kairos*, this paper starts with an account of the history of the concept, including its etymology and earliest uses in Sophistic and Platonic philosophy, before moving on to its place in the works of two of the most prominent Greek philosophers of *kairos*, Isocrates (436–338 BCE) and Plutarch (ca. 46–120 CE).⁷ Analyzing *kairos* in political speech and political action separately, the influence of the Greek tradition is shown first in Elyot's *Pasquil*, before moving on to an examination of the ways in which Machiavelli too draws directly on the philosophies of Isocrates and Plutarch, especially regarding the lessons of seizing opportunity, of necessity, of moral flexibility, and the study of comparable historical moments. Finally, this paper ends by gesturing toward the political tradition of *kairos* in the works of late sixteenth-century thinkers, especially those associated with the spread of Machiavellianism and reason of state. By grasping the complex history of *kairos* in the classical (and especially Greek) works embraced in the Renaissance, a political theory of *kairos* emerges that is fundamental to a fuller understanding of Renaissance political thought.

2. ETYMOLOGY AND USES OF *KAIROS*

The word *kairos* has its roots in archery, where it denoted a “penetrable opening, an aperture” through which Greek archers aimed, simulating the forest of shields and armor through which an arrow must pass to reach its target.⁸ This origin explains the many meanings of *kairos*, such as *mark* and *target*, both literally, as in the *Iliad* where it indicates a place on the body to strike fatally,⁹ and figuratively, such as in Sophocles's *Electra*, in which Orestes urges, “Listen closely to my words and correct me, if I miss the mark in any way.”¹⁰ The development of *kairos* from this source explains its dual

⁷Although writing centuries after Isocrates, Plutarch was a leading figure in the Second Sophistic, which drew much of its thinking from the fourth century BCE. See Aalders, 10. For Plutarch's knowledge of Sophistic works, see Bons; Cooper; Mirhady; and for Plutarch's particular interest in Isocrates, see Blois and Bons, 100.

⁸Onians, 345. Ibid., 348, suggests that this etymological background may also be behind the Latin *opportunitas*, formed of the root *porta*.

⁹Onians, 343.

¹⁰Sophocles, 226 (*Electra* 29–31); *ibid.*, 225: “σὺ δὲ ὄξειαν ἀκοήν τοῖς ἐμοῖς λόγοις διδούς, εἰ μὴ τι καιροῦ τυγχάνω, μεθάρμοσον.” For a treatment of *kairos* in Greek drama, see Race.

meaning as an opening or opportunity and as due measure, for the shot requires not only accuracy, but also the right amount of power — neither too much nor too little — in order to pass successfully through the opening.¹¹

In general, *kairos* carried a temporal connotation and has a complex relationship with the other Greek word for *time*, *chronos* (χρόνος).¹² Whereas *chronos* denotes a linear and progressive sense of time, *kairos* stands in opposition as a rare singularity.¹³ One of its standard uses is thus to describe the character of a segment of time, translatable even as *when* or *while*. It is from this use that *kairos* comes to signify *season* or *the times* — for example in Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War* (431 BCE), where he notes that it was “at this crisis” that “Pisander and his colleagues” arrived into Athens.¹⁴

For many thinkers, this use of *kairos* took on an ethical dimension as well. If one accepts *kairos* as a deviation from linear and universal time, any expectation that one must match speech or actions to the character of the times presents problems for universal or absolute moral systems. It is no surprise, then, that from the early centuries of Greek philosophy, the concept of *kairos* was linked to moral relativism, especially that of the Sophists of the fifth century BCE: Pythagoras, Protagoras, and Gorgias.¹⁵ For such thinkers, *kairos* had the power of determining the moral value of human actions: something may be good or bad, honorable or dishonorable, based on its accordance with that particular moment.¹⁶ For example, Gorgias in his *Epitaphios* praises those men who “preferred . . . many times the correctness of words to strict law, because they believed this to be the most divine and universal law: to say and not to say and to do and not to do the right thing at the right time.”¹⁷ A similar lesson is expressed by the anonymous Sophist treatise *Dissoi logoi*: “there is nothing that is in every

¹¹Onians, 345. See the definitions of *kairos* given by Kinneavy, 1986, 80; Miller in *Rhetoric and Kairos*, xi–xiii. See also Haskins, 67.

¹²See John E. Smith.

¹³See Kinneavy, 1986, 79.

¹⁴Thucydides, 1910, 305 (*History of the Peloponnesian War* 8.67.1); *ibid.*, 304: “ἐν τούτῳ καιρῷ οἱ περὶ τὸν Πείσανδρον.”

¹⁵See Kinneavy, 1986, 81–82; Carter, 101; Sipiora, 3; Beehler, 78–79.

¹⁶See Untersteiner, 119–20; Carter, 101; Sipiora, 4; Beehler, 79.

¹⁷Gorgias, 2004, 24 (*Epitaphios* 6); Gorgias, 1964, 2:285–86: “προκρίνοντες, πολλὰ δὲ νόμου ἀκριβείας λόγων ὀρθότητα, τοῦτον νομίζοντες θειότατον καὶ κοινότατον νόμον, τὸ δεῖν ἐν τῷ δεόντι καὶ λέγειν καὶ σιγᾶν καὶ ποιεῖν [καὶ ἔσθν].” Square brackets indicate text added by the editors of the 1964 edition to complete the fragment. See Rostagni, 32.

respect seemly or shameful, but *kairos* takes the same things and makes them shameful and then changes them round and makes them seemly.”¹⁸

Much of what is known of Sophistic thought, especially regarding kairotic moral flexibility, comes, as it did to Renaissance writers, through the works of anti-Sophists such as Plato.¹⁹ Plato was concerned to provide an alternative to the moral relativism of the Sophists, often aligning his character of Socrates against Sophistic straw men. He did, however, confront them on (or rather in) their own terms, that is, by providing a definition of *kairos*. For Plato, *kairos* undergirds the understanding of virtue as the universal golden mean between two extremes — a doctrine embraced by both Aristotle and Cicero, as well as (through such sources) philosophers of the medieval and Renaissance periods.²⁰ *Kairos* also played a crucial role in Plato’s rhetorical and political philosophy. For instance, his construction of the ideal statesman in the *Politikos* is built upon a notion of *kairos*: “For what is really kingship must not itself perform practical tasks but control those with the capacity to perform them, because it knows when it is the right time to begin and set in motion the most important things in cities and when it is the wrong time.”²¹ Plato, in the *Politikos*, gives his statesman the essential skill he had assigned to the rhetorician in his *Phaedrus*. In this latter text, Plato’s Socrates details the qualities of the ideal orator, noting that only once he has “added thereto a knowledge of the times for speaking and for keeping silence, and has also distinguished the favourable occasions for brief speech or pitiful speech or intensity” will his art be complete.²²

3. KAIROS AND RHETORIC IN ISOCRATES AND PLUTARCH

Isocrates, a student of the Sophists and contemporary of Plato, and Plutarch, writing in the Second Sophistic, were particularly preoccupied with the questions of when to speak or to stay silent, and when certain topics should

¹⁸ *Dissoi Logoi*, 111 (2.19); *ibid.*, 112: “οὐδὲν ἦν πάντῃ καλόν, / οὐδ’ αἰσχρόν, ἀλλὰ ταῦτ’ ἐποίησεν λαβών / ὁ καιρὸς αἰσχρὰ καὶ διαλλάξας καλὰ.” The quotation is probably taken from Euripides: see MacPhail, 102; Sipiora, 3–6.

¹⁹ Rostagni, 33.

²⁰ Kinneavy, 2002, 62. See Haskins, 57.

²¹ Translation and original quoted in Lane, 142: “τὴν γὰρ ὄντως οὖσαν βασιλικὴν οὐκ αὐτὴν δεῖ πράττειν ἀλλ’ ἄρχειν τῶν δυναμένων πράττειν, γιγνώσκουσαν τὴν ἀρχὴν τε καὶ ὄρμην τῶν μεγίστων ἐν ταῖς πόλεσιν ἐγκαίρειας τε πέρι καὶ ἀκαιρίας.”

²² Plato, 9:553–55 (*Phaedrus* 272a); *ibid.*, 9:552–54: “προσλαβόντι καιροὺς τοῦ πότε λεκτέον καὶ ἐπισχετέον, βραχυλογίας τε αὖ καὶ ἐλεινολογίας καὶ δεινώσεως.”

be broached, based on a consideration of *kairos*. In *Against the Sophists*, Isocrates outlines a similar set of skills for the rhetorician as Plato had, adding that oratory especially requires “fitness for the occasion, propriety of style, and originality.”²³ It remains, however, unclear how one is to determine what is fit for the occasion: when one should speak, and when silence is to be preferred. For Isocrates, there are only “two occasions for speech — when the subject is one which you thoroughly know and when it is one on which you are compelled to speak.”²⁴ It is “on these occasions alone [that] speech [is] better than silence; on all others, it is better to be silent than to speak.”²⁵ However, of what this compulsion consists Isocrates is unclear; he does not, for example, tell his listeners whether a counselor ought to feel compelled to speak the truth to his king.

Plutarch gives a fuller treatment of these issues than Isocrates, divisible into two interrelated themes: the correct timing-propriety for specific topics and the timing-propriety of frank speech (*παρρησία*, *parrhesia*).²⁶ He too emphasizes the importance of the orator’s knowledge of *kairos*, for “occasions arise quickly and often bring with them in public affairs sudden developments,” which explains why “Demosthenes [as an orator] was inferior to many, as they say, because he drew back and hesitated when the occasion called for the opposite course.”²⁷ On the other hand, “the man who is so moved by the events which take place and the opportunities which offer themselves that he springs to his feet is the one who most thrills the crowd, attracts it, and carries it with him.”²⁸ Thus it is that “he who knows how, knows also when to speak.”²⁹

Plutarch’s views on *kairos* can be found in his *Quaestiones Convivales* (*Table Talk*), in which he asks, “Whether midst our cups it is fit to talk

²³Isocrates, 1928, 2:171 (*Against the Sophists* 13); *ibid.*, 2:170: “τῶν καιρῶν καὶ τοῦ προεπόντως καὶ τοῦ καινῶς ἔχειν.” Note that Isocrates here marks a clear distinction between *kairos* and “propriety of style,” or *prepon*, as two different elements of oratory.

²⁴Isocrates, 1928, 1:29 (*Ad Demonicum* 1.41); *ibid.*, 1:28: “δύο . . . καιροὺς τοῦ λέγειν, ἢ περὶ ὧν οἶσθα σαφῶς, ἢ περὶ ὧν ἀναγκαῖον εἰπεῖν.”

²⁵Isocrates, 1928, 1:29; *ibid.*, 1:28: “ἐν τούτοις γὰρ μόνοις ὁ λόγος τῆς σιγῆς κρείττων, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἄμεινον σιγᾶν ἢ λέγειν.”

²⁶For the tradition of *parrhesia*, see Colclough.

²⁷Plutarch, 1874, 10:187 (*Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* 804a); *ibid.*, 10:186: “ὄξεῖς γὰρ οἱ καιροὶ καὶ πολλὰ φέροντες ἐν ταῖς πολιτείαις αἰφνίδια . . . Δημοσθένους ἡλαττοῦτο πολλῶν, ὡς φασί, παρὰ τὸν καιρὸν ἀναδυόμενος καὶ κατοκνῶν.”

²⁸Plutarch, 1874, 1:187; *ibid.*, 10:186: “ὁ δ’ ὑπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτῶν ἀνιστάμενος καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν καιρῶν ἐκπλήττει μάλιστα καὶ προσάγεται τοὺς πολλοὺς καὶ μετατίθησιν.”

²⁹Plutarch, 1919, 1:267 (*Lycurgus* 20.2); *ibid.*, 1:266: “Ὁ εἰδὼς . . . λόγον καὶ καιρὸν οἶδεν.”

learnedly and philosophize?”³⁰ The figure of Plutarch begins by recalling Isocrates’s discussion of *kairos*: “Isocrates the rhetorician, when at a drinking bout some begged him to make a speech, only returned: With those things in which I have no skill the time doth not suit; and in those things with which the time suits, I have no skill.”³¹ The character of Crato agrees in principle with Isocrates’s statement, “if he designed to make such long-winded discourses as would have spoiled all mirth and conversation,” but suggests that it is possible to introduce at this time speech that serves to “regulate and adjust . . . our gay humours and our pleasures, to proportion the time and keep them from excess.”³² The discussants agree that “topics fit to be used at table” are those stories and examples “fitted to . . . the juncture of affairs,” which “instruct . . . with persuasive and smooth arguments.”³³ Thus they conclude that it “become[s] a philosopher to enquire which is the convenient and proper time” for all things.³⁴

It is Plutarch’s treatment of *parrhesia* and *kairos*, however, that had the greatest impact on discussions of political counsel in the Renaissance, particularly his observations in *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* (*How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*).³⁵ Plutarch employs *kairos* repeatedly throughout this text, marking its importance for those wishing to give truthful and virtuous advice for the honor and profit of the hearer. This is in contrast to the flatterer, whose speech is directed at the pleasure of the hearer and who has no notion of *kairos* at all. The flatterer, Plutarch

³⁰Plutarch, 1874, 8:9 (*Quaestiones Convivales* 1.1.1); *ibid.*, 8:8: “Ἐὶ δεῖ φιλοσοφεῖν παρὰ πότον.” For a discussion of *kairos* in Plutarch’s *Quaestiones Convivales*, see Ruffy, 134–35. For dining as an important philosophical activity and a time for giving political counsel (as it is in Elyot), see Dillon, 37.

³¹Plutarch, 1919, 8:9 (*Quaestiones Convivales* 1.1.1); *ibid.*, 8:8: “οὐδὲ γὰρ Ἴσοκράτη τὸν σοφιστὴν ὑπομεῖναι δεομένων εἰπεῖν τι παρ’ οἴνον ἀλλ’ ἢ τοσοῦτον ἔν οἷς μὲν ἐγὼ δεινός, οὐχ ὁ νῦν καιρός: ἐν οἷς δ’ ὁ νῦν καιρός, οὐκ ἐγὼ δεινός.”

³²Plutarch, 1919, 8:11; *ibid.*, 8:10: “εἰ τοιαύτας ἔμελλε περαίνειν περιόδους, αἷς ἔμελλον Χαρίτων ἀνάστατον γενέσθαι συμπόσιον . . . οὔτε τινὸς παιδιᾶς οὔτε τινὸς ἡδονῆς διαγωγὴν ἐχούσης ἀποστατεῖν εἰκὸς ἀλλὰ πᾶσι παρεῖναι τὸ μέτρον καὶ τὸν καιρὸν ἐπιφέρουσαν.”

³³Plutarch, 1919, 8:15; *ibid.*, 8:14: “διηγήσεων εἶναι τι συμποτικὸν γένος . . . λόγος ἔχων καιρὸν ἀρμόζοντα τοῖς . . . πράγμασιν . . . φιλοσοφῶσι . . . διὰ τοῦ πιθανοῦ . . . τῶν ἀποδείξεων.”

³⁴Plutarch, 1919, 8:245; *ibid.*, 8:244: “ἔσκέφθαι καλῶς εἶχε τὸν φιλόσοφον περὶ . . . καιροῦ καὶ ὥρας.”

³⁵The importance and popularity of *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* in the Renaissance is the reason for using the 1603 translation of the text by Philemon Holland, drawing out the similarities in language between it and the sixteenth-century discussions of *kairos* that follow.

suggests, “sheweth himself alwaies jocund, mery and delightsome, without crossing at any time.”³⁶ By contrast, a true friend is willing to give admonishment as well as praise, so long as “it be done in time and place convenient.”³⁷

Discussing *parrhesia*, Plutarch notes that “this libertie of speech where of I speake, is the nature of a medicine, which if it be not given in time convenient and as it ought to be, besides, that it doth no good at all, it troubleth the body, worketh greevance, and in stead of a remedie prooveth to be a mischiefe.”³⁸ Without *kairos*, frank counsel is no better than flattery, and in fact may even be worse, for “fit opportunity overslipt and neglected doth much hurt.”³⁹ On the other hand, “a faithfull and carefull friend” will not “reject such occasions,” but will “take hold thereof quickly, and make good use of them.”⁴⁰ Such moments “open the doore and make way for us to enter, and give us leave to speak frankly.”⁴¹ In short, “opportunitie a wise and skilfull friend will not omit, but make especial good use of.”⁴²

He repeats the lessons of *Quaestiones Convivales*, writing that “we must take heed how we speake broad at a table where friends be met together to drinke wine liberally and to make good cheere: for he that amid pleasant discourses and mery talke mooveth a speech that causeth bending and knitting of browes” causes great disruption and even risk, for “this neglect of opportunitie bringeth with it great danger.”⁴³ Given this hazard, Plutarch addresses the following questions: “In what cases and occurrences then, ought a friend to be earnest and vehement? and when is he to use his libertie

³⁶Plutarch, 1603, 85; Plutarch, 1888, 1:121: “ἔοικεν . . . ἀεὶ παρέχειν ἰλαρὸν καὶ ἀνθηρὸν καὶ πρὸς μηδὲν ἀντιβαίνοντα μηδ’ ὑπεναντιούμενον ἑαυτόν.”

³⁷Plutarch, 1603, 85; Plutarch, 1888, 1:121: “ἐν καιρῷ.”

³⁸Plutarch, 1603, 105; Plutarch, 1888, 1:159: “καίτοι καθάπερ ἄλλῳ τινὶ φαρμάκῳ, καὶ τῷ παρρησιάζεσθαι μὴ τυχόντι καιροῦ τὸ λυπεῖν ἀχρήστως.”

³⁹Plutarch, 1603, 108; Plutarch, 1888, 1:165: “ὁ δὲ καιρὸς ἐν παντὶ μὲν παρεθεῖς μεγάλᾳ βλάπτει.”

⁴⁰Plutarch, 1603, 110; Plutarch, 1888, 1:169: “οὓς δὲ παρέχουσιν αὐτοὶ πολλάκις οὐ χρῆ προΐεσθαι τὸν κηδόμενον φίλων ἀλλὰ χρῆσθαι.”

⁴¹Plutarch, 1888, 1:169: “ὡσπερ ἐνδόσιμον εἰς παρρησίαν ἐστίν.” As Onians, 348, points out, there was an etymological connection between the Latin for *door*, *porta*, and *opportunistus*, another common Latin translation for *kairos*.

⁴²Plutarch, 1603, 111; Plutarch, 1888, 1:170: “καιρὸς ἐστὶ νουθεσίας . . . Ὡς χρῆτ’ ἂν ἐμμελῶς ὁ χαρίεις.”

⁴³Plutarch, 1603, 108; Plutarch, 1888, 1:165: “Ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἐν οἴνῳ καὶ μέθῃ τὸ τοιοῦτο φυλακτέον, εὐδηλὸν ἐστίν. Εὐδία γὰρ ἐπάγει νέφος ὁ κινῶν ἐν παιδιᾷ καὶ φιλοφροσύνη λόγον ὀφρῶν ἀνασπῶντα καὶ συνιστάντα τὸ πρόσωπον; ἔχει δὲ καὶ κίνδυνον ἢ ἀκαιρία μέγαν.”

of speech, and extend it to the full?”⁴⁴ In other words, Plutarch seeks to determine what it is exactly that makes counsel kairoic and thus justifies free speech. The answer combines the virtuous ends of counsel with a consideration of *kairos*. One should give frank counsel “when occasion is offered, and the time serveth best to repress excessive pleasure, to restraine unbridled choler, to refraine intollerable pride and insolencie, to stay insatiable avarice, or to stand against any foolish habitude and inconsiderate motion.”⁴⁵ *Kairos* exists in the opportunity to encourage virtuous action and bridle vice. For Plutarch this “define[s] . . . the opportunity of free speech.”⁴⁶

4. KAIROS AND THE COUNSELOR IN ELYOT’S *PASQUIL*

One cannot separate the treatment of *kairos* in Isocrates or Plutarch from the consideration of “oportunitie & tyme” in Thomas Elyot’s *Pasquil the Playne*.⁴⁷ Elyot translated Plutarch’s *De liberis educandis* in 1530, and it has been suggested that he also produced a translation of Plutarch’s *Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur* for Henry VIII.⁴⁸ In the same year that Elyot published *Pasquil*, he also published a translation of Isocrates’s *Ad Nicoclem*, a work of political advice to the Cyprian king Nicocles in which Isocrates notes that the crucial virtue of a counselor is the ability to speak in accordance with *kairos*. In Elyot’s words: “specyally they that be *counsaillors* ought to haue consideration of the occasyon, tyme, and oportunyte.”⁴⁹

⁴⁴Plutarch, 1603, 110; Plutarch, 1888, 1:169: “ἐν τίσιν οὖν σφοδρὸν εἶναι δεῖ τὸν φίλον καὶ πότε τῷ τόνῳ χρῆσθαι τῆς παρρησίας.”

⁴⁵Plutarch, 1888, 1:169: “ὅταν ἡδονῆς ἢ ὀργῆς ἢ ὕβρεως ἐπιλαβέσθαι φερομένης οἱ καιροὶ παρακαλῶσιν ἢ κολουῖσαι φιλαργυρίαν ἢ ἀπροσεξίαν ἀνασχεῖν ἀνόητον.”

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Elyot, 1533, 5. Importantly, in his *Dictionary* of 1538, sig. XXX^v, Elyot defines *decorum* as “a semelynesse, or that which becommeth the person, hauynge respecte to his nature, degree, study, offyce, or professyon, be it in doynge or speakynge, a grace. sometyme it sygnifyeth honestie.” He does not connect *decorum* to a discussion of timeliness, thus making it even clearer that his discussion in *Pasquil* is about a completely different topic. Walzer also notes the connection between *kairos* and counsel in *Pasquil*, although he does not make mention of Elyot’s direct translation of the term, nor the Plutarchan tradition upon which he draws.

⁴⁸Jardine, xxiii.

⁴⁹Isocrates, 1533, 11 (*Ad Nicoclem* 52): “χρῆ τοίνυν ἀφέμενον τῶν . . . καὶ μάλιστα μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν καιρῶν θεωρεῖν συμβουλευόντας.” Elyot’s translation emphasizes the themes of *kairos* and the counselor far more strongly than the modern: Isocrates, 1928, 1:107 (*Ad Nicoclem* 52): “You should, therefore, avoid what is in controversy and test men’s value in the light of what is generally agreed upon, if possible taking careful note of them when they present their views on particular situations.”

This idea is played out in *Pasquil*. *Pasquil* is a dialogue between three counselors on the best method of giving advice to their prince. The title character must defend his frank speech against two other figures: Gnatho, who argues that flattery is the best way to counsel a king, and Harpocrates, who favors silent acquiescence. Gnatho chides *Pasquil* for “raylyng” on without considering “what, and to whome, and where thou spekest.”⁵⁰ He suggests that *Pasquil*’s “libertie in speche” is “vnprofitable” as “nothing that thou blamist, is of one iote amended, and thou locest therby preferment” as well as wasting time.⁵¹ This argument is based upon his interpretation of “Aeschylus counsaylle,” given in *Pasquil* as “holding thy thonge wher it behoueth the. And spekyng in tyme that which is conuenient.”⁵²

The line quoted is from the second play of Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*, *The Libation Bearers*. The character of Orestes addresses the chorus, instructing them to “keep silent in places where there is need and speak that which is in the right place.”⁵³ Elyot’s work in *Pasquil* is cut out for him, as neither the “places where there is need” to keep silent nor “that which is in the right place” to speak are defined. Like Plutarch, Elyot seeks to identify exactly what constitutes kairotic counsel, and so the rest of the dialogue concerns the proper interpretation of this line from Aeschylus — in other words, the proper interpretation of *kairos*.

Gnatho gives his reading first. He interprets the statement as meaning that “it behoueth a man to holde his tunge, whan he aforeseeth by any experience, that the thinge, whiche he wolde purpose or speke of to his superior, shall neyther be pleasantly herde nor thankfully taken.”⁵⁴ He suggests that, when it comes to words, “oportunitie & tyme alwaye do depende on the affection and appetite of hym that hereth them.”⁵⁵ Of course, anyone well read in their Plutarch, as Elyot was, would know that this was an interpretation of *kairos* completely at odds with the one that a good counselor was meant to adopt.

In response, Elyot has *Pasquil* reiterate much of the Plutarchan doctrine of *kairos* explored above. He begins with examples drawn from Plutarch’s discussion of table talk: “When men be set at a good soupper, and be busily

⁵⁰Elyot, 1533, 4^{r-v}.

⁵¹Ibid., 4^v.

⁵²Ibid., 5^v–6^r.

⁵³Aeschylus, 2:216 (*Libation Bearers* 583–85): “σιγάειν θ’ ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν τὰ καίρια.” Translation my own. Note that the form here is *kairios*, a variant of *kairos*. Note as well that the added temporal reference “spekyng in tyme” given by Elyot has no precedent in the original.

⁵⁴Elyot, 1533, 5^v–6^r.

⁵⁵Ibid., 6^r.

occupied in eatynge and drinkinge, though thou be depely sene in philosophie, holde thy tonge and dispute not of temperaunce.”⁵⁶ This is juxtaposed with a more formal council setting: “Whan thou arte sittynge in counsaile aboute maters of weighty importaunce: talke not than of passe tyme or daliaunce, but omittinge affection or dreede, speke than to the purpose.”⁵⁷ If one takes account of the proper occasion, Pasquil tells Gnatho, then the counsel will be even more effective. For example, “Whan thy frendes be set downe to souper, before the cuppes betwixte fylled: reherce the peryll and also dishonesti that hapneth by glotony.”⁵⁸ When it comes to councils, the right time comes “after thou haste either herde one raisonne bfore the, or at the leest weye, in the balaunce of thyne owne raison ponderid the questio[n].”⁵⁹ It is then that one should “spare not to shew thine aduise, & to speke truely.”⁶⁰

Pasquil then proceeds to give Gnatho a full definition of the classical concept of *kairos*: “Oportunite consisteth in place or tyme, where and whan the sayd affections or passion of wrath be mitigate and out of extremitie. And wordes be called conueniente, whiche haue respecte to the nature and state of the person, vnto whom they be spoken, and also to the detrimente, whiche mought ensue by the vice or lacke that thou hast espied, & it ought not to be as thou hast supposed. For oportunitie & tyme for a counsayllour to speke, do not depend of the affection and appetite of hym that is counsayled: mary than counsaylle were but a vayne worde, and euery man wolde do as hym lyst.”⁶¹ As Plutarch had established, the affections should not be entered into a consideration of opportunity; in fact, the opportune time is when they are “out of extremitie.” Rather one should only consider those things that will ensure that truthful and virtuous counsel will be most efficacious.

Pasquil and the third member of the dialogue, Harpocrates, also enter into a consideration of *kairos* and counsel. Hearing that his master will “syt in counsaile about waightie causes” after dining, Harpocrates declares that only after he too has dined will he give attendance.⁶² This prompts in Pasquil a diatribe against the reversals of the world, which cause men to counsel after the day is done, instead of attending to such matters first thing

⁵⁶Ibid., 7^r.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid., 7^v–8^r.

⁶¹Ibid., 8^v–9^r.

⁶²Ibid., 12^v.

in the morning.⁶³ He reflects that “after noone is tourned to fore noone, vertue into vice.”⁶⁴ This discussion of the importance of the timing of pleasurable pursuits (namely dinner) and counsel, following closely on the heels of Pasquil’s previous examples that juxtaposed the same, recalls the reader to a consideration of the importance of the opportune time to counsel, especially as regards the definition of virtue and vice.

These themes are continued in the ensuing debate. Challenging Harpocrates’s dedication to silence, Pasquil asks him, “If I perceyued one at thy backe with a swerde drawne, redy to strike the, woldest thou that I shulde holde my peace, or else tell the?”⁶⁵ Harpocrates responds that “naye, sylence were than oute of season.”⁶⁶ The proper season for speech was a rendering of *kairos* employed by English translators, and Plutarch himself had criticized those who employ “hurtfull and unwholesome sauces” to “season their free language.”⁶⁷ Pasquil does the same, and responds that Harpocrates “wyll season sylence,” joking that “marye I wene my lorde shulde haue a better cooke of you thanne a counsayllour.”⁶⁸ He asks Harpocrates, “Howe thou doest season thy sylence[?]”⁶⁹ Harpocrates responds that he does so “with sugar, for I vse lyttell salte,” and Pasquil retorts that this “maketh your counsayl more swete than saueri.”⁷⁰

Harpocrates’s seasoning of his silence with sugar, Pasquil suggests, makes it more appealing to the pleasurable appetites of his master, but less wholesome. The timing or season of his counsel alone changes its direction from virtuous ends to serving only the passions. Harpocrates concedes this point and so Pasquil asks him again, “Whan is your silence in season?”⁷¹ Harpocrates admits that he “can not shortly tel” for he is “so abashed” by the

⁶³Ibid., 13^r. See Dillon, 37, for the importance of dining and philosophic counsel.

⁶⁴Elyot, 1533, 13^v.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Ibid. For the translation of *kairos* as *season*, see Baumlin, 141–44. *To season* in English has its root in the temporal meaning of *season*, originally referring to allowing fruits, etc., to season — i.e., “to render (fruit) palatable by the influence of the seasons” — before picking them. Thus *right time* is etymologically linked to this sense of seasoning, and Elyot’s pun has even greater meaning. See *OED*, s.v. “season,” *v.* 1.a.

⁶⁷Plutarch, 1603, 107. See Puttenham, 223: “And some things and speaches are decent or indecent in respect of the time they be spoken or done in . . . every thing hath his season which is called Oportunitie, and the vnfitnessse or vndecency of the time is called Importunitie.”

⁶⁸Elyot, 1533, 13^v–14^r. See Walzer, 11.

⁶⁹Elyot, 1533, 15^v.

⁷⁰Ibid., 15^v–16^r.

⁷¹Ibid., 28^v.

“froward reson” of Pasquil.⁷² Pasquil comes to an end by encouraging his listeners to “beare away the sayde sentence [of Aesyclus] with myne exposition, and vse it” — in other words, to take away his interpretation of *kairos* and apply it to their counsel.⁷³

5. *KAIROS* AND POLITICAL ACTION IN ISOCRATES AND PLUTARCH

As mentioned above, it is in Isocrates’s *Ad Nicoclem* that he sets out kairotic timing as an essential attribute of a political counselor. This text also draws attention to a knowledge of *kairos* as crucial to the king himself, positing a theory of *kairos* distinct from that of rhetoric alone, and concerned with political action as well. Isocrates tells Nicocles that he must “keep a watch continually” both on his “words and actions. . . . The best thing is to hit the exact course which the occasion demands.”⁷⁴ This view of kairotic political action is most clearly expressed in his *Panegyricus* (ca. 380 BCE), an appeal to the Greek people to unite in expelling the Persian barbarians. He tells them that “the moment for action has not yet gone by” and that they “must not throw [*kairos*] away; for it is disgraceful to neglect a chance when it is present and regret it when it is past.”⁷⁵

The problem becomes determining these kairotic moments and the action that they require. For Isocrates, the answer is the exercise of *phronesis*, or prudence.⁷⁶ The problem with the Sophists, he explains in his *Against the Sophists*, is not that they based their ethics on *kairos*, but that they had not developed the prudence necessary to utilize it.⁷⁷ He accepts, as the Sophists had, that when it comes to political affairs such as peace and war, “nothing . . . is in itself absolutely either good or bad, but rather it is the use we make of circumstances and opportunities which . . . determine the

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Ibid., 29^f.

⁷⁴Isocrates, 1928, 1:59 (*Ad Nicoclem* 33); *ibid.*, 1:58: “ἐπισκόπει τοὺς λόγους ἀεὶ τοὺς σαυτοῦ καὶ τὰς πράξεις . . . κράτιστον μὲν τῆς ἀκμῆς τῶν καιρῶν τυγχάνειν.” Once again, Elyot’s translation of this section on *kairos* varies from the modern, further emphasizing the role of counsel in guiding the king’s passions through a knowledge of *kairos*: Isocrates, 1550, B1^v (*Ad Nicoclem* 33): “Dooe thou nothyng in furie, sens other men knowe what time and occasion is meestest for the.”

⁷⁵Isocrates, 1928, 1:123 (*Panegyricus* 5); *ibid.*, 1:122: “οὐδ’ οἱ καιροὶ πω παρεληλύθασιν μάλιστα δ’ ὁ παρῶν καιρός, ὃν οὐκ ἀφετέον.” *Ibid.*, 1:223 (*Panegyricus* 160); *ibid.*, 1:222: “καὶ γὰρ ἀίσχρον παρόντι μὲν μὴ χρῆσθαι, παρελθόντος δ’ αὐτοῦ μεμῆσθαι.”

⁷⁶See Garver, 7.

⁷⁷Sipiora, 9.

result.”⁷⁸ His own educational program is outlined in his *Antidosis*, in which he writes that teachers are to instruct students to “combine in practice the particular things which they have learned, in order that they may grasp them more firmly and bring their theories into closer touch with the occasions for applying them. . . . [Those] who most apply their minds to them and are able to discern the consequences which for the most part grow out of them, will most often meet these occasions in the right way.”⁷⁹ He concludes, however, that “no system of knowledge can possibly cover all these occasions, since in all cases they elude our science.”⁸⁰

However, one must still find a way to cultivate prudence — an understanding of how to act kairotically — without the use of universal laws or an absolute moral system. The answer rests in the nature of *kairos* as a segmented piece of time. As it is separable from the general progress of chronological time, it is possible to isolate two similar events — two kairotic moments — and compare them, drawing conclusions for present action. As Isocrates notes in his *Panegyricus*: “the deeds of the past are, indeed, an inheritance common to us all; but the ability to make proper use of them at the appropriate time . . . is the peculiar gift of the wise.”⁸¹ For Isocrates the “educated” are those “who manage well the circumstances which they encounter day by day, and who possess a judgment which is accurate in meeting occasions as they arise.”⁸²

This is precisely the approach applied by Plutarch in his *Lives* (ca. late first century–early second century), a method made explicit in the pseudo-Plutarchan *Parallela minora*: “since I have discovered that similar events [to those of the ancients] have happened in this modern era, I have singled

⁷⁸Isocrates, 1928, 1:375 (*Archidamus* 50); *ibid.*, 1:374: “οὐδὲν . . . ἐστὶν ἀποτόμως οὔτε κακὸν οὔτ’ ἀγαθόν, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἂν χρήσῃται τις τοῖς πράγμασι καὶ τοῖς καιροῖς, οὕτως . . . τὸ τέλος ἐκβαίνειν.”

⁷⁹Isocrates, 1928, 2:291 (*Antidosis* 184); *ibid.*, 2:290: “καὶ συνείρειν καθ’ ἐν ἑκαστον ὦν ἔμαθον ἀναγκάζουσιν, ἵνα ταῦτα βεβαιότερον κατάσχωσι καὶ τῶν καιρῶν ἐγγυτέρω ταῖς δόξαις γένωνται. . . . οἱ δὲ μάλιστα προσέχοντες τὸν νοῦν καὶ δυνάμενοι θεωρεῖν τὸ συμβαῖνον ὡς ἐπὶ τὸ πολὺ πλειστάκις αὐτῶν τυγχάνουσι.”

⁸⁰Isocrates, 1928, 2:291; *ibid.*, 2:290: “τῷ μὲν γὰρ εἰδέναι περιλαβεῖν αὐτοὺς οὐχ οἶόν τ’ ἐστίν: ἐπὶ γὰρ ἀπάντων τῶν πραγμάτων διαφεύγουσι τὰς ἐπιστήμας.”

⁸¹Isocrates, 1928, 1:125 (*Panegyricus* 9); *ibid.*, 1:124: “αἱ μὲν γὰρ πράξεις αἱ προγεγενημέναι κοινὰ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν κατελείφθησαν, τὸ δ’ ἐν καιρῷ ταύταις καταχρῆσασθαι . . . τῶν εὖ φρονούντων ἰδίον ἐστίν.”

⁸²Isocrates, 1928, 2:393 (*Panathenaicus* 30); *ibid.*, 2:392: “τοὺς καλῶς χρωμένους τοῖς πράγμασι τοῖς κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκάστην προσπίπτουσι, καὶ τὴν δόξαν ἐπιτυχῆ τῶν καιρῶν ἔχοντας.” For Isocrates and the kairotic tradition, see Sipiora, 1–11.

out crises of Roman history; and, to parallel each ancient happening, I have subjoined a more modern instance.”⁸³ Within the *Lives* themselves, *kairos* is a key element, determining the success or failure of the political figure in question.⁸⁴ Plutarch makes clear that the character of the times has great effect on the fortunes of men, whose temperament should accord with the nature of the era in which they live. He gives the example of Cato, whose qualities, admirable though they were, did not accord with his times: he “fared just as fruits do which make their appearance out of season,” as his qualities were “look[ed] upon . . . with delight and admiration,” but not used or appreciated;⁸⁵ he “enjoyed great repute and fame, but was not suited to the needs of men because of the weight and grandeur of [his] virtue, which were out of all proportion to the immediate times”;⁸⁶ he “acted as if he lived in Plato’s commonwealth, and not among the dregs of Romulus,” and so he was defeated in his bid for the consulship.⁸⁷

More often the character of the times offers a rare opportunity to assert one’s agency against the inevitable progress of linear time. By taking note of *kairos*, by being attentive to those crucial moments, an actor has a greater chance of success in an uncertain world. Caesar, for example, triumphed because he was a “man endowed by nature to make the best use of all the arts of war, and particularly of its crucial moments,” such as when he “took advantage of the favourable instant . . . and thereby . . . in a brief portion of one day he made himself master of three camps.”⁸⁸ By contrast,

⁸³[Pseudo-]Plutarch, 1874, 4:257 (*Parallela minora*); *ibid.*, 4:256: “τυγχάνειν εὐρῶν δ’ ἐγὼ καὶ ἐν τοῖς νῦν χρόνοις γεγρονότα ὅμοια, τὰ ἐν τοῖς Ῥωμαϊκοῖς καιροῖς συμβεβηκότα ἐξελεξάμην, καὶ ἐκάστῳ πράγματι ἀρχαίῳ νεωτέραν ὁμοίαν διήγησιν ὑπέταξα.” See Jacobs, 80–83, who points out that Plutarch’s *Lives* were intended not as moral treatises, but as contributions to political philosophy. See also Shipley, 14, 195, 140, 374.

⁸⁴Shipley, 21, 28, 77, 159, 165, 170, 209, 236, 281, 338.

⁸⁵Plutarch, 1919, 8:151 (*Phocion* 3.2–3); *ibid.*, 8:150: “ἐμοὶ δὲ ταῦτό δοκεῖ παθεῖν τοῖς μὴ καθ’ ὥραν ἐκφανεῖσι καρποῖς; ὡς γὰρ ἐκείνους ἠδέως ὀρῶντες καὶ θανμάζοντες.” See Jacobs, 70–71, 254, 281, 314, 337.

⁸⁶Plutarch, 1919, 8:151 (*Phocion* 3.3–4); *ibid.*, 8:150: “δόξαν μὲν εἶχε μεγάλην καὶ κλέος, οὐκ ἐνήρμοσε δὲ ταῖς χρεῖαις διὰ βάρους καὶ μέγεθος τῆς ἀρετῆς ἀσύμμετρον τοῖς καθεστῶσι καιροῖς.”

⁸⁷Plutarch, 1919, 8:151; *ibid.*, 8:150: “ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Πλάτωνος πολιτείᾳ καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῇ Ῥωμύλου πολιτεούμενον.” Montaigne, 593, cites this example in his discussion of “the times” in his essay *On Vanitie*: “Cato’s virtue was vigorous, beyond the reason of the age he lived in: and for a man that entemedled with governing other men, destined for the common service; it might be saide to have beene a justice, if not vnjust, at least vaine and out of season.”

⁸⁸Plutarch, 1919, 7:505 (*Caesar* 26.2); *ibid.*, 7:504: “νυνὶ δὲ ὁ πᾶσι μὲν ἄριστα χρῆσθαι τοῖς πρὸς πόλεμον, μάλιστα δὲ καιρῷ πεφυκῶς.” *Ibid.*, 563 (*Caesar* 53.2); *ibid.*, 562: “ἐχρῆτο τῷ καιρῷ . . . ἡμέρας δὲ μιᾶς μέρει μικρῷ τριῶν στρατοπέδων ἐγκρατῆς γεγονῶς.”

Philopoemen “threw away his life . . . by hastening to attack Messene before occasion offered.”⁸⁹ Being attentive to *kairos* may mean patiently enduring, as in the case of Agesilaus who waited “to find the fitting moment for [his] stratagem,” or acting speedily, as when Caesar took “advantage of the golden moment by showing amazing boldness and speed.”⁹⁰ The lesson of Plutarch’s *exempla* is that “it is the critical moment which gives the scales their saving or their fatal inclination.”⁹¹

This urge to act, whereby an actor can assert his agency against the press of *chronos*, often slips into a reverse relationship, where *kairos* forces action. Plutarch notes that Otho’s policies “were forced upon him by the situation” and that, for Manius, “the crisis forced action upon him.”⁹² *Kairos* is thus inseparable from a consideration of necessity. This connection in turn gives rise to a form of temporally based relativism. Plutarch writes that Titus’s “natural gift of leadership” led him to realize that he should not only rule “in accordance with the laws,” but must also, “when occasion required it,” know “how to dominate the laws for the common good.”⁹³ Plutarch takes such lessons even further, echoing the Sophists, in his treatment of Agesilaus, in which he writes that “honourable action has its fitting time and season: nay, rather, it is the observance of [these] due bounds that constitutes an utter difference between honourable and base actions.”⁹⁴ Comparing Solon and Publicola, Plutarch notes that “we must view men’s actions in the light of the times which draw them forth,” for “the subtle statesman will handle each issue that arises in the most feasible manner, and often saves the whole by relinquishing a part, and by yielding small advantages secures

⁸⁹Plutarch, 1919, 10:389 (*Comparison of Philopoemen and Titus* 1.3); *ibid.*, 10:388: “ἐδόκει δὲ καὶ τὸν βίον . . . προέσθαι . . . μὴ κατὰ καιρὸν, ἀλλ’ ὀξύτερον τοῦ δέοντος εἰς Μεσσηνίην ἐπειχθεῖς.”

⁹⁰Plutarch, 1919, 5:107 (*Agesilaus* 39.1); *ibid.*, 5:106: “καὶ προσεῖχε τῷ καιρῷ τοῦ στρατηγήματος.” *Ibid.*, 7:521 (*Caesar* 32.1); *ibid.*, 7:520: “καὶ τάχει καιροῦ καταληπτέαν οὔσαν.”

⁹¹Plutarch, 1919, 2:521 (*Lucullus* 16.6); *ibid.*, 2:520: “ὁ καιρὸς . . . καὶ τὴν σῶζουσαν καὶ τὴν ἀναίρουσαν ῥοπὴν προστίθησιν.”

⁹²Plutarch, 1919, 10:283 (*Otho* 4.1); *ibid.*, 10:282: “πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν ἡγούντο”; *ibid.*, 9:429 (*Pyrrhus*, 25.3): “καὶ τοῦ καιροῦ βοήθειν ἀναγκάζοντος.”

⁹³Plutarch, 1919, 10:392 (*Comparison of Philopoemen and Titus* 3.2); *ibid.*, 10:391: “οὕτως ἡγεμονικὴν φύσιν ἔχων οὐ κατὰ τοὺς νόμους, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν νόμων ἄρχειν ἡπίστατο πρὸς τὸ συμφέρον . . . ὅπου καιρὸς εἴη.”

⁹⁴Plutarch, 1919, 5:101 (*Agesilaus* 36.2); *ibid.*, 5:100: “τοῦ γὰρ καλοῦ καιροῦ οἰκεῖον εἶναι καὶ ὦραν, μᾶλλον δὲ ὅλως τὰ καλὰ τῶν αἰσχροῶν τῷ μετρίῳ διαφέρειν.”

greater ones.”⁹⁵ This is even more explicitly expressed in the essay *De Defectu Oraculorum* in his *Moralia*, where he notes that “every natural virtue produceth the effect to which it is ordained better or worse, according as its season is more or less proper.”⁹⁶

6. KAIROS AND OCCASIONE IN MACHIAVELLI

Isocrates’s and Plutarch’s development of a political theory of kairotic action should be familiar to any reader of Machiavelli, for his own view of political action is consciously derived from this tradition of thought.⁹⁷ Machiavelli does not employ the term *kairos*, but throughout the *Discourses* (1531) and *The Prince* (1532) he repeatedly uses the equivalent term *occasione* to denote the key moment that must be seized by a prince in order to demonstrate his *virtù*, underlining the importance of acting according to the needs of the moment, adopting a flexible moral stance, and understanding politics through comparative histories rather than universal principles.⁹⁸

Machiavelli draws attention to his use of this tradition in the first lines of the dedicatory epistle to Lorenzo de’ Medici, in which he borrows from Isocrates’s speech, *Ad Nicoclem*. Just as Isocrates had begun his speech by acknowledging that most courtiers bring “kings garments or brass or wrought gold or other valuable things of the kind,” Machiavelli tells de’ Medici that “they, that desire to ingratiate themselves with a Prince, commonly use to offer themselves to his view . . . cloth of gold, pretious

⁹⁵Plutarch, 1919, 1:575 (*Comparison of Solon and Publicola* 4.3); *ibid.*, 1:574: “δεῖ δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ὑποκειμένους καιροὺς τὰς πράξεις θεωρεῖν. ποικίλος γὰρ ὢν ὁ πολιτικός ὃ τρόπῳ τῶν ὄντων ἕκαστον εὐληπτόν ἐστι μεταχειρίσεται, καὶ μέρους ἀφέσει πολλάκις ἔσωσε τὸ πᾶν καὶ μικρῶν ἀποστᾶς μειζόνων ἔτυχεν.”

⁹⁶Plutarch, 1874, 5:495 (*De defectu oraculorum* 49); *ibid.*, 5:494: “πᾶσα γὰρ δύναμις ὁ πέφυκε σὺν καιρῷ βέλτιον ἢ χεῖρον ἀποδίδωσι.”

⁹⁷Isocrates’s works (including the *Ad Nicoclem*, *Panegyricus*, *Panathenaicus*, and *Against the Sophists*, which articulate his views of *kairos*) had been published in Venice and Milan in 1493 and 1513, respectively: see Gnoza. Plutarch’s *Lives* were prevalent and available in Machiavelli’s Florence: see Desideri; Geiger; Pade, 15, 343–44, 347.

⁹⁸Skinner and Price, 107, point out the connection between Machiavelli’s use of *occasione* and the image of *occasio* in *The Prince*, indicating “a favourable opportunity which must be recognized and seized (for it may never come again).” They, however, distinguish this from a “general situation,” such as the captivity of the Jews in Egypt discussed in chapter 26. But this does not take into account the meaning of *kairos* as characterizing a period of time, as it did for the Greeks, and underlines Machiavelli’s connection between necessity, *kairos*, and *virtù* in his final chapter.

stones, and such like ornaments.”⁹⁹ Isocrates had argued that his advice was the “the noblest and most profitable gift and one most becoming me to give and you to receive.”¹⁰⁰ Machiavelli likewise says that he has “found nothing in my whole Inventory, that I thinke better of, or more esteem” than his gift — *The Prince*.¹⁰¹

The emphasis on *occasione* is expressed most clearly in the sixth chapter of *The Prince*. Like Plutarch, Machiavelli sets out examples of the “worthiest persons” to be imitated — in his case Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, and Theseus. He emphasizes that these exemplary leaders were dependent on Fortune only for the opportunity to demonstrate their *virtù*: “it will not appeare, that they had other help of fortune, than the occasion [*occasione*].”¹⁰² Machiavelli sets out a mutually supportive relationship between *occasione* and *virtù*; neither can be realized without the other: “without that occasion, the vertue of their mind had been extinguish’d; and without that vertue the occasion had been offer’d in vaine.”¹⁰³ *Occasione* for Machiavelli, as for Isocrates and Plutarch, functions as a rare opportunity in chronological time, which only the truly prudent can recognize and take hold of: “their excellent vertue made the occasion be taken notice of,” which “made these men happy” and “their country . . . enobled, and exceedingly fortunate.”¹⁰⁴ Similar sentiments are expressed in the *Discourses*, where Machiavelli, drawing from Isocrates, notes that Fortune favors those whose “judgement and spirit . . . knows how to make use of those occasions shee presents him.”¹⁰⁵

Just as with the Greek writers on *kairos*, necessity plays a strong role in Machiavelli’s political works. He writes in the *Discourses* that, because the times are always changing, “to many things that reason doth not perswade thee, necessity reminds thee,” and so he excuses acts, such as Brutus’s murder of his sons, on the grounds of necessity.¹⁰⁶ As the ability to act according to

⁹⁹Isocrates, 1928, 1:59 (*Ad Nicoclem*); *ibid.*, 1:58: “οἱ μὲν εἰωθότες . . . τοῖς βασιλευσιν ὑμῶν ἐσθῆτας ἀγειν ἢ χαλκὸν ἢ χρυσὸν εἰργασμένον ἢ τῶν ἄλλων τι τῶν τοιοῦτων κτημάτων”; Machiavelli, 1640, A5^f. The seventeenth-century translation of the text has been selected to emphasize similarities in the use of vocabulary associated with *kairos*.

¹⁰⁰Isocrates, 1928, 1:59 (*Ad Nicoclem* 2); *ibid.*, 1:58: “καλλίστην δωρεὰν καὶ χρησιμωτάτην καὶ μάλιστα πρέπουσαν ἐμοὶ τε δοῦναι καὶ σοὶ λαβεῖν.”

¹⁰¹Machiavelli, 1640, A5^f.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, 35.

¹⁰³*Ibid.*, 35–36. See Kahn, 31.

¹⁰⁴Machiavelli, 1640, 36. As Skinner and Price, 107, point out, Caesar Borgia also stands as an exemplar of a leader who knows and takes advantage of *occasione*.

¹⁰⁵Machiavelli, 1636, 412.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 35. For Plutarch’s similar treatment of Brutus, see Ingenkamp, 72–73.

virtú is based on *occasione*, there can be no praise nor blame for actions, and the moral valuation of such acts becomes neutral: all is dependent on “occasion . . . giving means to the one to behave himselfe vertuously, & quite bereaving the other of them.”¹⁰⁷

It is this acknowledgement of necessity that lies at the base of Machiavelli’s revolutionary treatment of the virtues in *The Prince*. Machiavelli writes that “it is necessary for a Prince, desiring to preserve himselfe, to be able to make use of that honestie, and to lay it aside again, as need shall require.”¹⁰⁸ The prince must be willing to employ the virtues as necessity and opportunity dictate, “to have a mind so disposed as to turne and take the advantage of all winds and fortunes; and as formerly I said, not forsake the good; while he can, but to know how to make use of the evill upon necessity.”¹⁰⁹ Recalling that, for the Sophists, *kairos* allowed for the redescription of good or bad, just or unjust, one might wonder how much of the famous redescription of the virtues that Machiavelli details in these chapters are attributable to *paradiastole*, and how much to the theory of *kairos* that runs through them.¹¹⁰

As with Isocrates, for Machiavelli prudence is the key skill in determining what action is kairoitic.¹¹¹ He defines this term in chapter 21: prudence, or “the principall point of judgement,” consists “in discerning between the qualities of inconvenients, and not taking the bad for the good.”¹¹² Whereas for the Ciceronian humanists prudence was the virtue that brought universal precepts of the virtues down to earth, Machiavelli’s understanding of prudence is rooted in a focus on real-world circumstances.¹¹³ This means that, despite the definition he gives in chapter 21, it is almost impossible to define what exactly constitutes prudence, what activities or

¹⁰⁷Machiavelli, 1636, 412.

¹⁰⁸Machiavelli, 1640, 118.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., 140.

¹¹⁰For this method of rhetorical redescription (or *paradiastole* — παραδιαστολή), see Skinner, 170–71. Kahn, 19–20, notes Machiavelli’s adoption of a “flexible principle of prudential judgement or rhetorical decorum.” However, as *decorum* was used by Cicero and those who followed him as a solution to moral flexibility, and not a foundation for it, there may be reason to suggest that Machiavelli was instead thinking of the tradition of *kairos*, and not of *decorum*. Thus his alteration of “the meaning of prudence from the humanists’ practical reason, informed by moral consideration, to the calculating potentially amoral faculty of judgment” (Kahn, 21) is probably a return to Isocrates’s *phronesis*. As Garver, 10, points out, “what Aristotle means by prudence must be different from what Machiavelli means.”

¹¹¹For Machiavelli’s relationship with the Greek *phronesis*, see Garver.

¹¹²Machiavelli, 1640, 186.

¹¹³See Garver, 27–28.

behavior define prudent action or the prudential person, for it varies with the times.¹¹⁴

Thus Machiavelli, too, turns to a comparison of lives and events taken out of chronological time in order to attempt to demonstrate his version of kairotic prudence. Machiavelli's work is built upon such comparisons, both between diverse cases in ancient times, and, like Plutarch, between the distant past and contemporary situations, based on "the resemblance these accidents have with the auncient."¹¹⁵ From this treatment, he makes clear that two different and morally opposed actions may both be justifiable, depending on circumstances.¹¹⁶ For example, from his comparison of Scipio and Hannibal in the *Discourses*, Machiavelli concludes that "it imports not much, in which of these two wayes [severity or mildness] a Commander proceeds, provided he hath so great worth in him, as may well season the one and the other."¹¹⁷ Likewise in the case of cities, "whosoever then considers what is said, will neither in this blame Athens, nor commend Rome, but will accuse only the necessity, because of the diversity of accidents, which did arise."¹¹⁸

All these lessons — seizing opportunity, the force of necessity, moral flexibility, and the importance of comparative history — are applied in the final chapter of *The Prince*, in which Machiavelli presents his exhortation to free Italy from the barbarians, directly echoing Isocrates's similar plea in his *Panegyricus*. *The Prince* thus begins and ends with a kairotically timed reference to Isocrates's counsel. Machiavelli frames his advice in line with his comments in chapter 6, suggesting that "the times might serve to honour a new Prince," as "there were matter, that might minister occasion to a wise [*prudente*] and valorous [*virtuoso*] prince."¹¹⁹ He returns to his discussion of *occasione*, connecting it with his treatment of necessity: for, just as it was

¹¹⁴Garver, 10. As *ibid.*, 12, notes, prudence, understood this way, is "easier to accomplish than to explain . . . easier to perform than to account for." It is worth noting that whereas in *The Prince* Machiavelli places Fortune and *virtú* as opposing forces — Fortune can only rule "where vertue is not ordeined to resist her" — he replaces *virtú* with prudence in writing his *Life of Castruccio Castracani of Lucca* years later (published with the 1640 English edition of *The Prince*), declaring that Fortune "begins to shew her strength at such a time, when Wisdome [*prudenza*] can challenge no interest": Machiavelli, 1640, 224.

¹¹⁵Machiavelli, 1640, 163.

¹¹⁶See Garver, 15.

¹¹⁷Machiavelli, 1636, 549.

¹¹⁸*Ibid.*, 120.

¹¹⁹Machiavelli, 1640, 212. In this first quotation, Machiavelli uses *i tempi*, not *occasione*, although, recalling the example of Plutarch's Cato, *kairos* was often used to indicate the nature or character of the times to which actors should accord themselves.

necessary for the Jews to be enslaved in Egypt in order that Moses's virtue might be shown, likewise "now wee are desirous to know the valour of the *Italian* spirit, it were necessary *Italy* should bee reduc'd to the same termes it is now in."¹²⁰ He explains that "that warre is just, that is necessary" — the necessity of the time is what dictates the ethical valuation of the action.¹²¹ Thus he appeals to his addressee, de' Medici, to seize the opportunity presented and liberate Italy, based on the comparison with these kairoic exempla. In fact, de' Medici has even more reason to be sure of his success than his predecessors because "every one of [these men] began upon lesse occasion" than the one currently before him: "Circumstances are now very favourable indeed, and the difficulties cannot be very great when the circumstances are propitious, if only your family will imitate the men I have proposed as exemplars."¹²² Just as Isocrates had implored that "we must not throw [*kairos*] away," Machiavelli concludes with the exhortation that "this occasion should not bee let passe."¹²³

7. KAIROS IN THE LATER SIXTEENTH CENTURY

Before moving on to the effects that a revival of kairoic thought had in the later decades of the sixteenth century, it is worth noting another tradition of *kairos* during this period: that of the visual representation of *kairos* present in the popular emblem genre of the time.¹²⁴ For the ancient Greeks, *kairos* was not only a concept, but was also personified as a god, traditionally presented as a young athletic male with a short forelock. Usually represented in the nude, Kairos was always in motion, with wings at his heels, and sometimes on his shoulder. He often held a pair of scales and a razor, poised

¹²⁰Ibid., 213.

¹²¹Ibid., 215.

¹²²Ibid.

¹²³Ibid., 220.

¹²⁴There remained as well a minor Latin tradition of *kairos* embedded in Renaissance rhetorical works based on Cicero and Quintilian, such as George Puttenham's (1529–90) *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) and Angel Day's (fl. 1563–95) *English Secretorie* (1586). After explaining *decorum* as the "good grace of euery thing in his kinde," Puttenham notes that "some things and speaches are decent or indecent in respect of the time they be spoken or done in," and so it is that "euery thing hath his season which is called Oportunitie, and the vnfitnessse or vndecency of the time is called Importunitie"; Puttenham, 219, 223. Day, 34, likewise adds to his rhetorical method for letter-writing a "fewe poyntes, which I haue not thought good to passe vnremembred," including that the secretary "haue regard to his oportunitie," or else face losing his petition. However, in neither case is it given the priority it had been accorded by the Greeks, or Elyot and Machiavelli, nor does it carry the connotations of moral flexibility, necessity, seizing occasion, or the importance of history.



FIGURE 1. *Kairos*. Marble relief. The State Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg. Photograph © The State Hermitage Museum / photo by Pavel Demidov.

to strike off his forelock should he catch someone in the act of trying to seize it (fig. 1).¹²⁵

By the sixteenth century, the figure had become a woman, but very little else had changed. One of the most popular emblem books of the period was undoubtedly that of Andrea Alciato (1492–1550). His *Emblematum libellus*, first published in 1531, went through dozens of editions in a number of languages, always including the visual representation of the concept of *occasio*, almost exactly as the Greeks had portrayed Kairos (fig. 2).

¹²⁵Kinneavy, 2002, 65; Miller in *Rhetoric and Kairos*, xii.



FIGURE 2. “In Occasionem.” In Andrea Alciato, *Emblematum Liber*. Augsburg, 1531. *Alciato at Glasgow*, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

The resemblance to the Greek figure, however, is not coincidental. Alciato’s description of the image begins by identifying it as “the work of Lysippus,” a Greek sculptor of the fourth century BCE and a contemporary of Plato and Isocrates. His famous image of Kairos bore an epigram by the poet Posidippus, which Alciato repeats in his caption of the emblem:

Who are you? / I am the moment of seized opportunity that governs all. / Why do you stand on points? / I am always a leader. / Why do you have winged sandals on your feet? / The fickle breeze bears me in all directions. / Tell us, what is the reason for the sharp razor in your right hand? / This sign indicates that I am keener than any cutting edge. / Why is there a lock of hair on your brow? / So that I may be seized as I run towards you. / But come, tell us now, why ever is the back of your head bald? / So that if any person once lets me depart on my winged feet, I may not thereafter be caught by having my hair seized. It was for your sake, stranger, that the craftsman produced me with such art, and, so that I should warn all, it is an open portico that holds me.¹²⁶

The figure of Occasio develops and changes over the course of the various editions of Alciato. In the 1531 first edition, for instance, the figure is shown with many forelocks, and no wings upon her feet. By the 1534 Paris

¹²⁶Alciato, A8^r.



FIGURE 3. "In Occasionem." In Andrea Alciato, *Emblematum Libellus*. Paris, 1534. Alciato at Glasgow, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

edition, she has her wings, and a repentant man, mourning the loss of her, is figured in the distance to her right (fig. 3). In the 1549 Lyon edition, she is represented as standing upon a turbulent sea, and the item below her feet has been clearly drawn as a wheel (fig. 4). The major exception is the 1621 edition published in Padua, in which the figure is male, stands upon a ball, not a wheel, and is positioned on dry land (fig. 5). The text varies only slightly from edition to edition. Similar images and text can be found in other emblem books, such as that of Guillaume La Perrière in 1544 (fig. 6).

Other emblems of the period emphasize the regret that will come to those who do not manage to seize occasion. For instance, Gilles Corrozet's *Hecatomgraphie* of 1540 shows Occasio, still on a wheel but missing her razor, in a boat and accompanied by a second figure, Repentance, also sitting in her boat (fig. 7). The caption encourages the reader to grasp her quickly when she comes, otherwise "thou shalt make penance."¹²⁷ Perhaps the most striking example comes from Jean Jacques Boissard's *Emblemes latins* of

¹²⁷"Tu en feras la penitence": Corrozet, M2^v. Translation provided by *French Emblems at Glasgow*.



FIGURE 4. “La Occasion.” In Andrea Alciato, *Emblemes*. Lyon, 1549. *Alciato at Glasgow*, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

1588, in which Occasio is shown in the clutches of a fierce Roman soldier (fig. 8). Repentance is once again figured, bearing her whip, but it would seem that it is not required, for the virile soldier appears to have Occasio well in hand. The caption reads: “Grasp [her], if ever occasio offers herself: she is bald from behind: and she glides on winged feet. Following behind, Metanoea [Repentance] pursues with whip brandished: and grievous punishment comes only to the slothful.”¹²⁸

The imagery of these Renaissance emblems, drawn from Greek mythology, was integrated with Machiavelli’s theory of kairotic political action by those writers who used Machiavelli’s ideas, and his language of occasion, in their works. It would be difficult to overemphasize how widespread this use of kairotic language in political thought was in the later sixteenth century, for one sees it employed by a variety of writers across Europe. The themes of seizing occasion, moral flexibility, necessity, and

¹²⁸“Arripe, se quoties offert occasio: calva est / A tergo: & volucris labitur illa pede. / Ponè sequens torto sequitur Metanoea flagello: / Et tantùm ignavis poena dolenda venit”: Boissard, 60. Translation provided by *French Emblems at Glasgow*.



FIGURE 5. “In Occasionem.” In Andrea Alciato, *Emblemata*. Padua, 1621. *Alciato at Glasgow*, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

lessons learned from comparative history remain, tying this tradition to that of Machiavelli and his classical predecessors.¹²⁹

For instance, Bartolome Felippe (d. 1590) in his *Counsellor* (1568) often borrows from Machiavelli’s *Prince* in his attempt to establish the proper skills of a political counselor. He notes that history is especially useful to a counselor, whose role requires knowledge of “fit opportunitie, with

¹²⁹The focus here is on the tradition drawn from Machiavelli, and not from Elyot, because there is no question that the former had a much greater influence throughout the later sixteenth century. That being said, there is perhaps some work to be done regarding Elyot’s kairotic timing for counsel and the Tacitean tradition within reason of state that employed similar language.



FIGURE 6. “Occasion.” In Guillaume la Perrière, *Le theatre des bons engins*. Paris, 1544. *French Emblems at Glasgow*, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

occasion proportionable,” as “counsellors for the most part, depend vpon the occasions and circumstances.”¹³⁰ Recalling the classical tradition, Felippe adds that “in ancient times past, the Image of opportunitie was set vp in many places, that men might remember to let no occasion slip, which might be to their commoditie when opportunitie was offered . . . they painted her on a wheele, because she neuer standeth still, nor remaineth in one place, with wings on her feete, because she passeth away swiftly, her face covered with the haire of her forehead, because she lets none know her, but such as be verie attentiu to looke on her: with a raser in her hande, because shee

¹³⁰Felippe, 43, 4.



FIGURE 7. “L’ymage d’occasion.” In Gilles Corrozet, *Hecatomgraphie*. Paris, 1540. *French Emblems at Glasgow*, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

cuts of their hope that take no heede of her but let her passe: with the hinder part of her head balde, because if she once be gone, no man can catch hold of her, and with a Maid that waits vpon her which is called *Poenitentia*, for repentance doth accompanie them that cannot tell how to reape profit by occasion.”¹³¹ Like Machiavelli and the Sophists before him, Felipe emphasizes that the important question is not whether an action should or should not be done — whether it is *utile* or *honestum* — but rather when it should be done: “many things in mans life are mard, not for that they ought not to be doone, but because they be not doone in time and place.”¹³²

History, as it was for Machiavelli, was for Felipe and others like him the crucial source for this sort of knowledge.¹³³ As Thomas Blundeville (ca. 1522–ca. 1606) writes in his *True order and methode of wryting and reading hystories* (1574), the historian gains “better knowledge of the opportunitie of affayres” of his own time by studying those whose “skill . . . causeth him to take occasion when it is offered, and to vse the meetest

¹³¹Ibid., 8.

¹³²Ibid., 9.

¹³³See Grafton.



FIGURE 8. “L’Occasion.” In Jean Jacques Boissard, *Emblemes latins*. Metz, 1588. *French Emblems at Glasgow*, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

means to bring it to passe.”¹³⁴ The reader of history learns that such an individual’s actions are “forced by outward occasion” and therefore “deserue neyther blame nor prayse.”¹³⁵ Although his relationship with Machiavellian ideas was complex at best, here at least Francis Bacon (1561–1626) also agrees, detailing in his *Aduancement of Learning* (1605) the political “wisedome of pressiing a mans own fortune,” whereby a man may learn how “to frame the mind to be pliant and obedient to occasion.”¹³⁶ The surest way to this is to follow Machiavelli’s method of the study of comparable histories, for “the fourme of writing which of al others is fittest for this variable argumente of Negotiation and occasions is which Machiauel chose wisely and aptly for Gouvernente: namely discourse vpon Histories and Examples.”¹³⁷

The most influential adoption of this language comes with the reason of state discourse toward the end of the sixteenth century.¹³⁸ The greatest

¹³⁴Blundeville, sig., Bii^v.

¹³⁵Ibid., sig., Civ^r.

¹³⁶Bacon, 1605, 92–93, 98. See Kahn, 116.

¹³⁷Bacon, 1605, 92.

¹³⁸See Kahn, 142.

example of this new political vocabulary is from Giovanni Botero (ca. 1544–1617), whose *Ragione di Stato* was first published in 1589.¹³⁹ Having set out his desire to correct a political discourse corrupted by Machiavellian “lack of conscience,” Botero establishes a reason of state which seeks to identify the “knowledge of the means by which such a dominion [a state] may be founded, preserved and extended.”¹⁴⁰ Although he states that he wishes to reject Machiavelli’s influence, he does so by adopting Machiavellian language, including the relationship between *virtù* and *occasione*. He notes that “circumstances [*occasione*], the weakness of the enemy and the deeds of others all play a considerable part in conquest,” and so it is only those with the *virtù* to counter and seize these occasions who “can hold what has been conquered.”¹⁴¹ In his lengthy discussion of the maxims of prudence that a prince must embrace, Botero writes that every ruler must “learn to recognise the critical moment [*occasione*] in war and affairs and to seize opportunities as they appear.”¹⁴² He defines for the reader a “certain point of time when a fortunate combination of circumstances favours some piece of business, which both before and after that moment would be most difficult: this is opportunity, and it is of supreme importance.”¹⁴³ He repeats these ideas in his *I Prencipi* of 1600 with direct reference to Plutarch’s *Lives*. In writing on Caesar, Botero notes that “Plutarch reporteth, That Caesar was indued by nature with a singular and extraordinary capacite, in knowing how to take opportunities in all his actions and enterprises.”¹⁴⁴ This “Opportunitie,” he goes on, echoing Plutarch once again, “is a most faithful friend to those, who duly & aduisedly go on in their proceedings; but an enemie vnto such as rashly & vnseasonably hasten their course, before their good houre be come.”¹⁴⁵

Botero’s friend, the Savoyard diplomat René de Lucinge (1554–ca. 1615), applied Botero’s theories to his *De la naissance, durée et chute des états*, published a year before *Ragione*, based upon an early draft of Botero’s work.¹⁴⁶ Lucinge uses Botero’s theories to analyze the Ottoman Empire, inquiring after the means by which they have attained their greatness, how they maintain their empire, and the possibilities for overthrow by European powers. Lucinge makes clear that the Ottomans have employed a number

¹³⁹For the choice of Botero, see Kahn, 62.

¹⁴⁰Botero, 1956, xiv, 1. See Kahn, 71.

¹⁴¹Botero, 1956, 6.

¹⁴²Ibid., 46.

¹⁴³Ibid.

¹⁴⁴Botero, 1602, sig., Kvi^r.

¹⁴⁵Ibid.

¹⁴⁶See Baldini.

of Machiavellian tactics in order to gain and retain the power they hold in the world. These practices, however, are not to be wholly condemned, for “there is not any vice so detestable, or crime so hainous that sometime carrieth not with it a shew and colour of good, and proueth not profitable to him which in due season performeth it,” a lesson driven home in the chapter demonstrating that the Turk, to establish his state “hath laide hold on occasion.”¹⁴⁷ Lucinge is even more direct in his allusion to the classical tradition than Botero, combining his Machiavellian language with the imagery of the Renaissance emblems as Felipe had done: “The ancient Romans signified vnto vs by the picture of occasion (whom they adored as a goddesse, putting wings to her feete, supported with a bowle, behinde bald, and before hairie) that we must bee diligent to apprehend her when shee presenteth her-selfe, and not in any case to let her slippe: considering that if she once escape vs, she leaueth vs nought but a vaine and vexing repentance.”¹⁴⁸ There is “nothing more commendable,” Lucinge writes, “in all a mans actions” than the ability “to make the best vse of occasion.”¹⁴⁹ Like Botero, Lucinge defines occasion, describing it as “an opportunity that the time more by accident then prouidence offereth vnto vs, for the well performing of what we haue in hand, and for the abstaining and well comming off from a dessine vnseasonably attempted.”¹⁵⁰ It is not enough, however, simply to know the occasion; Lucinge makes clear that what sets the Turk apart is his “nimblenesse and celerity vpon his occasions,” for “that which most importeth, is to serue our turnes with it at an instant, when it presenteth it selfe, to guide out intentions to that perfection we aime at.”¹⁵¹

It would be the work of a much larger study to demonstrate the multiple uses of this concept as it continued to be employed in the sixteenth and into the seventeenth centuries, applied to political actors such as Henry VII,¹⁵² the Earl of Leicester,¹⁵³ Catherine de Medici,¹⁵⁴ Louis XIII,¹⁵⁵ and the Elector Palatine,¹⁵⁶ as well as political events such as the

¹⁴⁷ Lucinge, 39, 56.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 67.

¹⁵² Bacon, 1998.

¹⁵³ *Leicester's Commonwealth*.

¹⁵⁴ Dowriche.

¹⁵⁵ Balzac.

¹⁵⁶ *Altera Secretissima Instructio; Secretissima Instructio*.

courtship of Elizabeth I,¹⁵⁷ the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre,¹⁵⁸ and the English Civil War.¹⁵⁹ What should be clear, however, is that by the end of the sixteenth century there was a prevalent political discourse derived from the Greek tradition of *kairos*, without which a full understanding of the political theory of the period — especially the shift toward a prudential and flexible political ethics, the emphasis on historical example, and the language of necessity and emergency — remains irrecoverable. To analyze and understand the political discourse of the Renaissance period, an understanding of *kairos* as both a theory of political speech and political action must be developed. Given the recent scholarship on *kairos* by historians and theorists of rhetoric, and the work done by historians of political thought on the transmission of classical ideas in Renaissance political writing, there is perhaps no better time to begin such important work.

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¹⁵⁷Thomas Smith.

¹⁵⁸Dowriche.

¹⁵⁹Parker, 1640 and 1643.

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