

Machiavelli and the Modern State: The Prince, the Discourses on Livy, and the Extended Territorial Republic. Alissa M. Ardito.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. xii + 328 pp. \$99.

The central idea of this vigorously argued study is that, in a Europe increasingly dominated by large monarchical states, Machiavelli understood that the era of small city-state republics was finished and that the future of republicanism depended on adapting it to wider territorial entities. Alissa Ardito contends that Machiavelli admired and studied Rome's expansive, popular republicanism as the best, perhaps the only, way of preserving republican government in Italy. She reads Machiavelli's two most famous works as "interlocking parts of a project" (8) to found a composite territorial state in north-central Italy that "would evolve" (9) into a popular republic: *The Prince* serving as the blueprint for the liberation of Italy and the acquisition by the Medici of a state comprising Tuscany and papal territories, and the *Discourses on Livy* providing the theory and modalities for its transformation into a popular republic. Ardito intriguingly links Machiavelli's inquiry into the prospects for a territorial republic to James Madison and the Federalists, calling them "intellectual patriots in a search for devices and institutions to reinvent urban republicanism for a new political world of extended territorial states" (11). Her analysis of Machiavelli's sustained attention to Rome's policies of granting citizenship to "foreigners" (as he says in the *Discourses*), increasing its population, utilizing the growing plebeian class in its armies, and allowing the people a major role in government — and of his critique of Florence and other contemporary Italian republics for not following such policies — is cogent and well grounded. It could have been stronger with some consideration of Machiavelli's role in, and views on, territorial administration in connection especially with the militia project, as revealed by Andrea Guidi's study of his chancery papers (*Un segretario militante: Politica, diplomazia e armi nel Cancelliere Machiavelli* [2009]), and of Gabriele Pedullà's exploration of Machiavelli's ideas about citizenship and "foreigners" (*Machiavelli in Tumulto: Conquista, cittadinanza e conflitto nei "Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio"* [2011]).

Less persuasive to this reader is Ardito's improbable hypothesis that Machiavelli expected the Medici, after liberating Italy and creating a composite territorial state, to turn this state into a republic (much less a popular republic). The election in 1513 of Giovanni de' Medici as Pope Leo X did not mean that the Medici "assumed de facto leadership of the Italian states" (74) or that "all the hopes of the Italian people were focused on Pope Leo during those dark years" (67), and it seems fanciful to suppose (or to attribute to Machiavelli the belief) that the Medici "would surrender power" to a popular republic (9) and "vanish from the scene" (154). Similarly questionable is the assumption that Machiavelli's idea of the kind of territorial state he wanted the Medici to construct was based on Cesare Borgia's brief conquests (22). Machiavelli was well aware of the fragile and ephemeral nature of Borgia's dominions, acquired, as he says in *The Prince*, through "fortune" and the arms of others, and never consolidated, as the author

claims (52), into a territorial state. If Borgia aspired to become “lord of Tuscany” (44–45), Machiavelli knew it was part bluster and part delusion.

Regrettably, the book is marred by innumerable errors and careless scholarship. Many names, dates, and titles of published works are incorrect, and several studies are attributed to the wrong authors. Some of Machiavelli’s poems and letters are misdated, and quoted passages in Italian are in many places mangled. Siena is repeatedly and erroneously included among republican Florence’s subject cities, and Verona and Pavia were never Florentine possessions (102). Piero Soderini came from an old and distinguished family and did not belong to “a callow new class of government officials,” “middle men on their way up in the world” to whom *The Prince* “sought to make available old tricks of government” (143). The Treaty of Lodi was not the “brainchild” of Lorenzo de’ Medici, who was five years old at the time (147). And Machiavelli did in fact live to hear of the Sack of Rome (303). Such frequent and avoidable errors — and there are more — bespeak an inadequate command of the historical context and detract from the force of the book’s important emphasis on Machiavelli’s ideas about the possibility of a territorial extension of republican government.

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