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# MACHIAVELLI ON *ARTE DELLO STATO*

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*Abstract.* In his extraordinary study *From Politics to Reason of State*, Professor Maurizio Viroli (1992) points out the moment when the ancient notion of politics was replaced with the Renaissance and modern understanding of the reason of state. What was left out of the research was the fact that the political theory register introduced a new term which explains this transition and derogation from the classical notion of politics. The Machiavellian term *arte dello stato*, describing actions of agents of politics, represents a revolutionary innovation, and this is the process whose development I wish to address in this paper, as well as to explain what it means. Finally, with regard to the historical context, I aim to show that it is precisely the practice of political agents of the time that Machiavelli used to frame the new idea.

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### *Arte dello stato*

A question that may never be settled: the question of Machiavelli. This remark of Benedetto Croce (Berlin, 2013, p. 100) is still provocative today because everything about Machiavelli is confusing and absurd. It is unusual that someone who wrote so clearly can trigger so many different interpretations. Besides, the greatest surprise for every Machiavellian scholar is the fact that there is no mention of the word politics whatsoever in the book which somewhat shaped political theory. This should not be regarded as strange, as politics of the time was never the subject of his theoretical interests. In his letters to Vettori (Machiavelli, 1988, p. 142), one can see that, while he was writing *The Prince*, Machiavelli was riddled with the idea of rule, primarily what rule really is, its types, how to come to it, maintain it, or lose it. His knowledge of governance is “the knowledge of the deeds of great men that I have learned from a long experience in modern affairs and a continuous study of antiquity” (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 5), having studied the art of the state for years (*a studio dell’ arte dello stato*) (Machiavelli, 2018, p. 2877). It is here that Machiavelli uses the compound word that stood out from the usual terminology used at the time (*civilis scientia, civilis philosophia, civilis ratio*) (Viroli, 1998, p. 45).

The reason for not using the conventional terminology was simple. The art of the state, as Machiavelli saw it, was a completely new subject of political theory during his era. In that sense, the first sentence of *The Prince* has a special indication since he adds a new meaning to the notion of *stato*. Rubinstein (2004) showed that when this work was written, *stato* had a long history but not a single, precisely defined meaning. Renaissance humanists used this notion when discussing different forms of the state, in the same way Aristotle did it in his *Politics*.<sup>3</sup> It also referred to the *ruling regime* over a certain territory or within a city-state. With Machiavelli, one can note his spelling, *lo stato*, which

<sup>3</sup> Aristotle’s distinction between forms of government reached Renaissance humanists via Thomas’s comments on Aristotle’s *Politics*, where he translates oligarchy into Latin as *status paucorum* and democracy as *status popularis*. For more on this, see Skinner (2004, p. 375). For more about Thomas’s importance within the Renaissance humanist movement, see Rubinstein (1982, p. 155 et seq).

refers to a territory, whether a republic or a monarchy, ruled by a ruler. Contrary to the Roman expression, *optimus status reipublice*, the Renaissance linguistic practice accepted the meaning of *stato* as primarily implying the *power* which was the essence of the ruling prerogative necessary to establish control over a territory. Therefore, a ruler's status depended not only on their ruling position but even more so on the power to elicit obedience and affirm sovereignty over a certain territory and people.

There is another very clear tendency that stands out in *The Prince* more than anywhere else, and it is the author's wish to treat *lo stato* as an entity independent from its rulers—as a self-founding *status* and an appropriate basis to legalize the actions of a state's rulers. Therefore, even though *The Prince* speaks to rulers, it is inevitable that within it, *lo stato* is treated as an independent entity as a *subject of research*. In other words, it aims to show a clear distinction between ruler and rule as their prerogative practice or function. This makes it clear that *The Prince* cannot be a *specula principum* because the work does not discuss the “ideal” ruler. In addition, under the term ideal ruler, this literature implied a meaning that had already been established in antiquity, with all those attributes that did not interest Machiavelli. Thus, Machiavelli is not interested only in *cose di stato* but also in *dello stato*, or politics understood as a way of establishing, protecting, and maintaining the ruler's status. Still, besides numerous similarities, the etymological closeness does not entail the conclusion that Machiavelli uses the modern notion of state as an abstract and independent entity—an autonomous political subject.<sup>4</sup> For Machiavelli, the *stato* itself is ruined by the downfall of the ruler who is the provider of the *status*.<sup>5</sup> So, the *stato* always belongs to someone, and its existence, even its founding, are dependent on the capability of an individual belonging to a group and independent from a specific form of political regulation, which is exactly the segment at which *arte* points; *arte dello stato*, therefore, represents the art of ruling a state, e.g., the skill a ruler uses to establish, maintain, and secure their status.

On the other hand, it is worth noting that the Machiavellian *arte* is not of the same kind as the one the classical authors studied. The Italian word *arte*, stemming from the Latin *ars*, is in direct correlation with the ancient Greek word *techne*. This connection is worth highlighting because the classical authorities defined political activities with regard to this notion. Plato wrote about *politike techne*, while Aristotle, in Book VI of *The Nicomachean Ethics* (2009), tried to show that political activity, ruling included, specifically in opposition to this notion, does not constitute a skill in the usual sense. Although it may seem that Plato and Aristotle are on opposing sides, they essentially have the same motif. In order to prove that ruling is inevitably intertwined with ethics,

<sup>4</sup> Certainly, Hobbes is the progenitor of the modern concept of the state.

<sup>5</sup> This can be seen in the reflexive pronoun he often uses—*il suo stato*.

Plato claimed that every skill produces a certain good, ergo having an inherent value.<sup>6</sup> Conversely, to prove the self-purpose of practical action, therefore also of political action, Aristotle refused to call it a craft because, even though it creates something, it is primarily instrumental, rather than moral in nature, and politics is primarily focused on achieving moral goals. This conclusion was most elaborately described by Cicero, drawing a sharp distinction between *morale* and *utile*, but also pointing out that in politics, a moral act is always useful, and therefore, there can be no distinction between good and useful political acts.<sup>7</sup> There were virtually no political discussions where this attitude was not presented in the form of absolute, proven truth up until Machiavelli's *Prince*.

However, in pointing out that the skill of rule is an *arte*, Machiavelli wants to highlight that this skill, like any other, is instrumental in nature. So, in his letter to Vettori dated April 9, 1513 (Machiavelli, 2018, p. 2813/2814), it can be seen that he does not separate *arte dello stato* from textile craftsmanship or financial speculation, and uses this to unambiguously suggest that there are no substantial differences between this and other skills. *Arte dello stato*, like any other skill, focuses on the achievement of specific goals through using adequate means, which also means that it can be learned, and this is why Machiavelli considered himself an expert in the skill. However, mastering this skill does not lie in reading philosophic literature; it is from history and direct political experience that one needs to learn its principles. This is why Machiavelli does not refer to any of the classical authors: Lycurgus and Solon, not Plato and Aristotle, are the authorities to look up to; the people who actually did politics, not the theoreticians who discussed it (Machiavelli, 2018a, p. 171).<sup>8</sup> Like in any other skill, one can only be successful in politics if one achieves a planned goal, e.g., if one establishes, maintains, and preserves their status. However, the basic prerequisite that needs to be fulfilled still relates to the person's moral character. They must primarily learn how not to be good. This particular inclusion of actions that cannot be justified from a moral point of view is the reason behind Machiavelli's reputation as the "teacher of evil" within the history of political theory (Strauss, 1958, p. 9).

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<sup>6</sup> Plato varies this idea in many places. See Plato (1997a, 293b–294c; 1997b, 463D), and the first book in which the discussion between Thrasymachus and Socrates is mentioned (Plato, 1997c).

<sup>7</sup> „Qui numquam posset utilitas cum honestate pugnare“, in: Cicero (1928, III, ii, pp. 7–9).

<sup>8</sup> In that place he says: “E perché e' sono stati pochi che abbino avuto occasione di farlo, e pochissimi quelli che lo abbino saputo fare, sono piccolo numero quelli che lo abbino fatto: e è stata stimata tanto questa gloria dagli uomini che non hanno mai atteso ad altro che a gloria, che non avendo possuto fare una repubblica in atto, l'hanno fatta in iscritto; come Aristotile, Platone e molti altri: e' quali hanno voluto mostrare al mondo, che se, come Solone e Licurgo, non hanno potuto fondare un vivere civile, non è mancato dalla ignoranza loro, ma dalla impotenza di metterlo in atto.”

His insisting on immoral actions is not considered only because of their efficacy, but because of a deeper and much more serious reason.

If one considers an often dismissed detail of *The Prince*, highlighted in Section VI, it can be seen that Machiavelli speaks of the *new ruler*, one who did not inherit their status, but who needs to establish it. In his discussion on *ordini nuovi*, he often speaks of innovators and reformers. So, he is interested in the practice of agents who establish, maintain, and protect their own *stato*, and this is where Machiavelli is more than precise. *Arte dello stato* presumes the existence of critical situations, regardless of whether they have been caused by external threat or *corruption (corruzione)*,<sup>9</sup> which causes the state to collapse from within: it is a skill whose *modus vivendi* is corruption itself. Therefore, statehood defined through the prism of classical political thinking cannot be focused exclusively on the achievement of traditionally described demands; it is focused on the need to maintain the formation itself, the state, which is the prerequisite for achieving all other goals. Finally, *arte dello stato* is a skill because political life is not an ideal projection of works of philosophy; it is the arena of conflicted *interests* and values formulated according to them.

### *Politics*

This kind of definition was significantly different from what was considered *politico* in the conventional political language of Machiavelli's times. Civil political life was the humanist thinker's subject of research and it had a clearly defined meaning, as well as an adequate register used in the analysis of this concept.<sup>10</sup> According to civil humanists, the basic assumption that had to be satisfied prior to even talking about *vivere politico* was that the state regulation had to be republican. Political life is possible only in a republic because it is the only form that enables a civil life, and because the functioning of the order itself depends on civil virtues, primarily justice, whose significance was deemed crucial, ever since the ancient thinkers, in order for a state to operate.

Justice was the basic building block of political life according to all political theory. Therefore, in the humanist sense of politics, the essentials of meaning were established primarily through Cicero's notion of *respopuli*, but also in Aristotle's pointing out of the significance of the citizen in Book III of *Politics* (Aristotle, 1998). Thus, politics represented the skill of leading a republic according to the

<sup>9</sup> An extremely significant concept for Machiavelli and the entire epoch.

<sup>10</sup> On pre-humanist representatives, compare Baron (1955). On humanistic political thought, see Hankins (1996). Also, see the seminal Skinner studies (1978; 2004) and Pocock (1975), especially its first part. On the humanist advisory literature devoted to rulers, see Gilbert (1939).

principles of justice and reason.<sup>11</sup> Relations between citizens, who were seen as rational beings able to speak, were established by *reasons*, so no concepts of extortion or power and force could be found within the notion of politics. *Reason*, as the second essential component of this thinking, was understood according to Cicero's *recta ratio*, which implied the need to use the universal principle of justice to mediate among all the aspects of citizens' actions within the state. This kind of action was a manifestation of the human essence, so the difference between a republic and a *stato* was not merely in terminology, but it had a firm substantial basis as well.

The schism between these notions is overcome in the very first sentence of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli points out that all states are *either* republics *or* monarchies, so the republic appears within the classification of states as one of them (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 7). According to this, a republic is a *stato* as well, and the notion enabling the distinction is found where this was not common in theory up until then. The answer is in the same sentence, with Machiavelli connecting the *stato* to the *respopuli*: "dominions that have had and continue to have power over men." Machiavelli talks of rule using the word *dominion*, employed in the diplomatic practice in his era to denote rule, i.e., dominion over a certain territory (Viroli, 1992, p. 130). Working as the secretary of the War Council of Ten, it was precisely the aspect of domination of a certain ruler or government over a territory that Machiavelli was familiar with, so in that respect, it is probable that he would, in the very first sentence, use *stato* in a way unconventional for political theory but nonetheless understandable from the standpoint of concrete political practice. Moreover, the Republic of Florence had *dominion* over a certain territory and *popolo*. This is why he was able to establish, in the continuation of that sentence, that a republic is a *stato*, just as a monarchy is, because it rules over people; ergo, because it is an order within which there is an effective government that elicits obedience in its citizens in a certain territory. If one connects this detail to the previously highlighted fact that a *stato* is always factually owned by someone—a specific individual or group, as it is in a republic—it becomes more coherent what Machiavelli had in mind when he introduced the new compound. Research into *arte dello stato* means research into a skill, an art that utilizes rule in order to *establish, maintain, and protect one's own status and dominion*.

It has been pointed out that Machiavelli did not care much for researching practice which entails rule within a stable political structure, where the distribution of power and dominion is done through established institutional channels. On the contrary, the establishment, maintenance, and protection of the *stato* assume the existence of circumstances that question it: critical situations, whether conditioned by elements of corruption which attack the state from within or through an external threat, closely tied to the life of every state,

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<sup>11</sup> This is a paraphrase of Brunetto Latini's famous definition. See Viroli (1992, p. 2).

and, to express this in Machiavellian terms, representing circumstances where the *need* conditions the action. It is clear that these sorts of circumstances cannot be resolved using standard procedures, because their essence is in the absence of any stable, legal, or moral (customary) frame which would provide instructions for action. This is exactly where *arte dello stato* is actualized, a skill with but one goal, to preserve the state. According to Machiavelli, be it a ruler or a pretender, a citizen who has reached the position where they can govern a state or a republican government, all of them will certainly face the demands of necessity at a certain point; they will face a borderline moment where any value- and norm-oriented reasoning regarding the invested means will lose its purpose.<sup>12</sup> Whether the ruler acts on behalf of their personal interest or the common good, the preservation of the state becomes the ultimate goal. This is exactly why rulers must learn how not to be good. The strength of this imperative is not so much in the celebration of morally faulty doings as the only option, but in the fact that the ruler must know, according to the demands of the situation, how to utilize good or bad actions: some situations will demand a crime, while others will benefit most from faith and morality. This is why classical political writings and the literature that analyzes rules have no value to Machiavelli—they disregard an important aspect of politics. Even though this skill cannot be legitimized through the prism of a traditional list of principles, it can still be categorized as a different basis for reason. It is precisely *mantenere lo stato* which will be the basis of the state reason (*ragione di stato*).

According to all this, one can conclude that the *rule* about which Machiavelli wants to talk is not merely one of the questions—it is the crucial question of political theory. Whether the state is a republic or a monarchy, its maintenance will inevitably depend on the skill of the ruler or the citizens. The *stato* could no longer represent the means whose significance is used to realize a moral purpose of political life. Its maintenance became an equal cause, considering that the existence of the state, with corruption seen as an inherent segment of political life, became the primary condition necessary for the fruition of the demands issued by the type of rule itself, be it a monarchy or a republic.

When it comes to resources, every single one of Machiavelli's works has but one principle: *arte dello stato* is about using resources which could not be legitimized from either the legal or the Judeo-Christian moral decalogue point of view: murders, frauds, breaking one's word, monstrous crimes, execution of the innocent, instrumentalization of religion and moral as a means to a political end are merely a few of the actions this skill entails. However, there is something highly significant from a theoretical point of view, the highlighting of the fact that these actions are done to maintain the *stato*, which derogates from the ruling

<sup>12</sup> For example, Machiavelli says: "You must always have understood that things done out of necessity neither should nor can merit praise or blame" (2020, p. 198).



moral and civil reason. Since critical situations are essential in political life and their solution can only be found in *arte dello stato*, the use of morally wrong means in politics is, according to Machiavelli, *necessary*, and thus *justified*.<sup>13</sup> The skill of rule cannot be founded solely on moral reasons, because in one aspect, this action is guided by the state reason. It is a paradox that a creation initially made for the purpose of good life is founded, maintained, and protected by means that could never be described as good. That is why Friedrich Meinecke (1962, p. 25) is right when he says:

“Whatever the circumstances the business of ruling is, as we have remarked, always carried out in accordance with the principles of *raison d'état*. *Raison d'état* may be deflected or hindered by real or imaginary obstacles, but it is part and parcel of ruling.”

Cosimo Medici was the first person that we know to have justified his *arte dello stato* with the state reason and, more significantly, to have legalized it, thus eliminating derogation from the previously established values which were based on morality and the law. This is why I will focus on the historical context, to provide an illustration for these theoretical observations and to formulate a thesis according to which Machiavelli's contemporaries' actual actions enabled him to come up with a new idea.

### *Cosimo Medici and the Power of Balìa*

Cosimo Medici inherited neither the status nor the territory of his *dominion*. He climbed the social ladder from a common republic citizen to a ruler using “behind-the-curtain-politics.” Relying on his enormous wealth, extortion, threats, and benevolence which was driven by specific causes rather than moral good, Medici managed to weave a net of *friends (amici)* he used to obtain the republic's institutions and impose his own interest as the interest of the *patria*. The skill with which he, with his party, managed to instrumentalize the republic's institutions was within the legal boundaries of the system.

Medici was among the first people to realize the power of the *balìa* institution, which used to be enforced in situations when the *patria* was faced with threats and which became the main instrument of Medici's dominion.<sup>14</sup> The *balìa* was usually introduced for a certain period of time and suspended laws otherwise in force. Its course ran until the removal of the circumstances that had led to it.

<sup>13</sup> The notion of necessity is one of the most common in Machiavelli's writings.

<sup>14</sup> The legal formulation reads: “Totalis, integra, libera et absoluta potestas et balìa nullis ... legibus limitata, et quam et prout habet totus populus et communis Florentie.” See Rubinstein (1998, p. 80).

It is significant to note that, among numerous rationalizations used to elaborate the need for it in the Parliament, along with the necessity to preserve the *stato*, it became equal to other reasons.<sup>15</sup> However, this *stato* does not mean the same as *patria*, but the *stato* that Machiavelli wrote about in *Florentine Histories, il suo stato* (Viroli, 1992, p. 129). Medici's order, not the state, became the *ratio legis* which justified introducing what state of emergency is today. During the time the legal order and regular procedures were suspended, Medici managed to settle accounts with his opponents. As his famous catchphrase suggests (*e chi gli stati non si tenevano co' paternostri in mano*) (Machiavelli, 2018b, p. 2041), his actions were not based on the Christian decalogue of values. The *virtu* (*virtue*) on which he based his success was not the moral virtue of classical political philosophy, but the sum of all the qualities essential to establish, maintain, and preserve the *stato*. If one were to analyze the phrase *arte dello stato*, one would note that, for its actualization, Machiavelli pointed at the significance of extraordinary circumstances, or, as Gilbert notes, paradoxical situations. The qualifier which often recurs in Machiavelli's works and unequivocally implies that the passages analyze *arte dello stato* is the notion of necessity. To a ruler, a critical situation is one that challenges their position. These are the situations where Machiavelli sees and justifies the skill of ruling. Cosimo Medici used *balia* to keep Florence in a state of political crisis, or necessity in Machiavelli's words, and this gave him free rein. Even though Florence experienced a true rebirth of its culture and economy, it was corrupt politically. The skill used to integrate corruption into the very essence of the art of rule, presenting the *modus vivendi* of political practice, awakened Machiavelli's theoretical interest. It is precisely this reason that led him the claim that the republic is a *stato* as well, suggesting that the type of state itself is not enough to ensure civil life.

Medici's example is valuable because it largely overlaps with Machiavelli's writing in its essence. In the part that deals with the *new ruler*, it can be seen that it is not a monarch or a ruler who inherited the ruling status, but an agent who came into this status, i.e., a citizen who is trying to become or who has succeeded in becoming a ruler. In Book VI of *The Prince*, Machiavelli unambiguously notes that in these situations, a new order (*ordini nuovi*) is inevitable, a state of necessity where there are no institutions with the power to guarantee and elicit the respect of the legal order; the state where all the stable elements of the system have collapsed and are questioned. As a historical reference, one

<sup>15</sup> Specifically, this happened in 1446, when the usual rationalization about the need to convene the *balia* was replaced by a more general formulation that apostrophized, along with the typical need to preserve freedom, the need to protect the state. In the original it reads: "pro ... consequenda ... et conservanda pace ... pro defensione libertatis et conservatione status." It is interesting that the Parliament insisted on two occasions that such an abstract determination be specified and reduced to the aspects for which the *balia* was traditionally convened.

can note the fact that Medici named himself a *signore* in 1434 through the use of the *balia*, which he initially established to settle accounts with his opponents. The laws passed following the suspension of the *balia* became an integral part of legal positivism and legalized practices that had previously been considered illegal. The insight brought by the “long experience with new events” cannot be covered with the popular phrase on separating politics and morality in Machiavelli’s writings. Medici’s example shows that one type of political practice defined as *arte dello stato* is much more sophisticated, owing its efficacy not only to immorality but also to the ability to instrumentalize moral principles and, upon them, build the *illusion* of a virtuous ruler.<sup>16</sup>

### *Savonarola’s Time*

The end of the 15th century belonged to Savonarola, a priest from the Dominican Order, who believed that one can bring about political reforms through the use of words, i.e., that words form the basis for *ordini nuovi*. The reason behind Savonarola’s significance is the presence of *Aristotelian-civil-apocalyptic* (Pocock, 1975, p. 106) synthesis in thought and *action*, which represents aspects that had the greatest impact on the constitution of the political ideology of the time. Through his reformatory acts, he found himself in the position that Machiavelli named the figure of the *new ruler*; thus, all the theoretical observations found in *The Prince* were existentially applicable to Savonarola. He was included in the project of the Republic’s rehabilitation following the fall of Medici, and engaged in creating an administrative order based on the *Venetian model*, a constitution, and the Church reformation. Savonarola was virtually a part of the change of the very ethos of Florentine citizenry, singling out the concept of *corruption* as the common explanation for the entire historical situation.

The new republic’s foundations were to be found in the Christian doctrine. The sermons he left behind, dealing with political issues, clearly demonstrate Savonarola’s desire to formulate the new constitution and make Jesus the supreme ruler of the state.<sup>17</sup> Savonarola presented himself as a preacher in direct contact with God, and owing to this, able to foresee future events. He was the mediator between God and the people, and his role was to organize Florence according to the divine order. He secured a legitimate basis for his position: a prophet communicating with God, limiting even the Pope’s influence. So, civil morality and *vivere politico* had to be about restoring Christian doctrine regarding sensual life, to which the most appropriate was the Venetian model of the republic, which enabled the relations between people to be based on

<sup>16</sup> See about *appearance* in Machiavelli (2005, p. 62).

<sup>17</sup> See the section dedicated to political sermons in Savonarola (2006, pp. 137–207).

friendship, the same principle he claimed to be the connecting element of the polis within classical political theory.

Machiavelli had an ambivalent attitude towards Savonarola. To him, Savonarola was an “unarmed prophet” (Machiavelli, 2005, p. 22) whose “bare word” possessed the Florentines, leading Florence to its demise. Thus, in *Decennale* (Machiavelli, 1989, p. 1448), we can read the following about Savonarola:

“But that which to many was far more distressing and brought on disunion, was that sect under whose command your city lay.  
I speak of that great Savonarola who, inspired with heavenly vigor, kept you closely bound with his words.”

Also, in his letter to Ricciardo Bechi dated March 9, 1498, Machiavelli (1988, pp. 85–88) describes the atmosphere in the church of St. Marco during the friar’s sermon. The *Exodus*, which was the topic of the commentary, is seen as the basis upon which Savonarola’s political arguments are built, and which Machiavelli correlates with the actual political situation, finding the necessary analogy in the metaphors, affirming his belief that faith is only one political means, albeit the crucial one, which Savonarola uses to secure his own status. What stands out is the comparison of the 1498 sermons to Moses. Every Machiavellian scholar knows that in his writings, Moses is the dominant mythical figure and the representation of the new ruler. He is the best illustration of the fact that in politics, the use of illegal means is necessary and justified, and it is precisely in *Exodus* that one such episode is described (a bloody retaliation against one’s own people for worshipping a golden calf). Moses knew that *arte dello stato* was vital to ruling. The only difference is that he always had an excuse for his actions, claiming them to be divine providence and God’s will, while Machiavelli casts away the theologization and finds the legitimate basis, as claimed in the first part of this paper, in the nature of the *stato*. In a certain sense, from his point of view, theological rationalization is a *decorum* to cover up the true skill of ruling. This is also why Savonarola’s actions are simply a way to justify personal political interest through theological rationalization. The abundant use of Biblical motifs, whose purpose is to justify the friar’s actions, is a clear suggestion that the justification of actions which would not otherwise be easily justified through the decalogue of the New Testament lies in Biblical stories, i.e., the will of the God of the Old Testament. It is not surprising, then, that Machiavelli writes about Savonarola in one of his letters: “Now that he sees he no longer needs to, he has changed his cloak ... he keeps on working with the times and making his lies plausible” (Machiavelli, 1988, p. 88). This statement bears significance and affects Savonarola, precisely because it was him who wanted to eradicate the corruption of the civil ethos through the restoration of Christian and ancient political virtues, but he ended up acting like any other *arte dello stato* exponent in actual situations. The discrepancy between Savonarola’s verbal ideology and his actions is exactly what

confirms Machiavelli's thesis of the necessity of *arte dello stato* in situations which determine a political status. This is why, in his *Discorsi*, he reminds of Savonarola's inconsistency and cunning in secular matters (Machiavelli, 1996, pp. 93–94). For example, when five citizens who received a death sentence were not guaranteed the right to appeal, Savonarola did not make a statement, but he did profit from it, together with his party. The prophet who aimed to eliminate corruption and reform morality relied in his political actions on the very elements he fought against, and this is the leitmotif of Machiavelli's letters. This is why, in his *Decennale*, he says that all that the *unarmed prophet* was left with in the concrete circumstances were bare words (Machiavelli, 1989, p. 1448). They proved to be insufficient protection from the wrath of the same citizenry who used to love him. What Savonarola did not know was that, in his circumstances, he would not be able to choose his means—they were conditioned by *necessity*. In other words, he was not a true connoisseur of *arte dello stato*.

### *Epilogue*

This cursory overview of the political actions of Medici and Savonarola is sufficient confirmation of the thesis that these actions had elements one recognizes in Machiavelli's *arte dello stato*. Therefore, whether his ideas were scorned or celebrated, ignored or favored, they still, as a rule, proved true in moments of serious political disturbances.

This great thinker's observations came to life in all extraordinary circumstances that undermined an otherwise stable framework of both theory and practice. A thinker who became famous for the efforts to explain an exception, he was the first to clearly see that in politics, it often happens that the dominant reason is significantly different from the one classical political theory believed in the most. Fabrizio's words from *The Art of War* sum up this attitude: "Never believe that the things that depart from the ordinary modes are done by chance" (Machiavelli, 2003, p. 148).

In conclusion, we are aware that Croce's warning still applies and that the question of Machiavelli still remains. However, we hope that we have managed to explain what it is in Machiavelli's teachings that has been so persistently provocative all these centuries. In that spirit, we end the story with a quote from Isaiah Berlin:

"Whenever a thinker, however distant from us in time or culture, still stirs passion, enthusiasm or indignation, or any kind of intense debate, it is generally the case that he has propounded a thesis which upsets some deeply established *idée reçue*, a thesis which those who wish to cling to the old conviction nevertheless find it hard or impossible to dismiss or refute." (Berlin, 2013, p. 88)

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### Макијавели о *arte dello stato*

#### Резиме

У својој изузетној студији *From Politics to Reason of State*, професор Маурицио Вирولي указао је на моменат у коме је антички појам политике уступио место ренесансном и нововековном појму државног разлога. Оно што је остало изван његовог истраживања јесте да је управо тада у речник политичке теорије уведен нови појам који објашњава ову транзицију и дерогацију од класичног одређења појма политике. Сложеница *arte dello stato*, коју је употребио Макијавели како би описао делатност политичких актера, представља епохалну новину, и у овом раду желим да покажем како је до тога дошло, као и да објасним њено значење. На крају, увођењем историјског контекста у причу, показаћу да је управо пракса тадашњих политичких актера могла да послужи Макијавелију у формулисању ове нове идеје.

*Кључне речи:* *arte dello stato*; *arte*; *stato*; политика; Козимо Медичи; Савонарола.



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