

**MACHIAVELLI'S MISSING ROMULUS AND
THE MURDEROUS INTENT OF *THE PRINCE*¹**

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Abstract: This paper argues that *The Prince* should be read as bearing uncomfortably specific policy recommendations, namely for the work's dedicatee Lorenzo de' Medici to kill his uncle Pope Leo X and the college of cardinals to begin unifying Italy. In support of the argument, the paper develops Machiavelli's parallel construction between Chapters Six and Twenty-Six, where he mysteriously omits Romulus from a list of great founders whose example should be emulated. In short, Chapter Twenty-Six is an integral, integrated part of *The Prince*.

It is well known that Machiavelli's *Prince* can be read as a book of stately advice, for perhaps republicans and/or princes, a trap for the Medici, and an extremely sophisticated job application. Much of the debate has centred on the final chapter. Felix Gilbert frames the issue well:

The structure of *The Prince* has always been examined in the hope of finding a solution to the much debated question whether the Italian nationalism of the last chapter formed an integral part of Machiavelli's political outlook or whether it was merely a decorative conclusion — a rhetorical, humanist ornament . . . I believe we have to accept . . . the last chapter, which is not prepared for by any hint in the preceding sections of the book, stands by itself, mainly intended as a concluding rhetorical flourish.³

But another view has never been adequately presented. While scholars such as Friedrich Meinecke, Leo Strauss and J.H. Whitfield have reticently indicated the possibility that Chapter Twenty-Six is an integral, integrated part of the work, which intimates concrete policy prescriptions, no prior treatment

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³ F. Gilbert, 'The Humanist Concept of the Prince and *The Prince* of Machiavelli', *The Journal of Modern History*, 11 (1939), pp. 449–83; cf. E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis, 1919–1939* (New York, 2nd edn., 1964), p. 89. Viroli has pointed out that using the term 'nationalism' in discussions of Machiavelli is historically imprecise, I therefore do so with reservations and only when engaging another author's perspective. See M. Viroli, *For Love of Country* (New York, 1995), pp. 36–7.

has elaborated the argument.⁴ The stakes of the debate are Machiavelli's intentions and the aims of the most famous book on politics.

I argue that *The Prince* should also be read as an ominously detailed death warrant. Through an underappreciated parallel construction in Chapters Six and Twenty-Six, I believe Machiavelli employs a Livian pattern to commend Romulus as the superlative model of how to go about liberating Italy. What makes Romulus the most excellent example in Chapter Twenty-Six is that he executed his uncle and brother and united diverse peoples, all to found a polity which became a great empire on the Italian peninsula. Presenting the work to Lorenzo de' Medici and encouraging him to emulate Romulus implies horrific undertakings, specifically murdering his uncle, Pope Leo X, and the college of cardinals. Machiavelli cannot suggest such odious actions openly without risking rebuke and depriving his tactical and strategic plans of helpful stealth.

The paper is organized in the following manner. The first section discusses the practical and theoretical puzzles of Chapter Twenty-Six; the second section presents the argument in-depth; the third section details the alternative hypotheses; and the final section addresses the implications of the argument and how it speaks to the literature.

I The Puzzles

The puzzles can be divided into practical and theoretical. Let us start with the practical problems of Italian unification. If the goal is to liberate and unify Italy, there is no question what keeps it divided and weak: the Church. Machiavelli argues:

And no province has ever been united or happy unless it has all come under obedience to one republic or to one prince, as happened to France and to Spain . . . Thus, since the church has not been powerful enough to be able to seize Italy, nor permitted another to seize it, it has been the cause that [Italy] has not been able to come under one head but has been under many princes and lords, from whom so much disunion and so much weakness have arisen

⁴ See F. Meinecke, *Machiavellism: The Doctrine of Raison D'Etat and Its Place in Modern History*, trans. D. Scott (New Brunswick, 1998), pp. 41, 166, 293, 359; L. Strauss, *Thoughts on Machiavelli* (Chicago, 1978), pp. 69, 309; J.H. Whitfield, *Discourses on Machiavelli* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 27, 123, 157, 158, 161, 204; cf. C. Lefort, *Le travail de l'oeuvre Machiavel* (Paris, 1972), pp. 446–7. Like Machiavelli, Meinecke and Whitfield move Romulus' position repetitively when listing the four founders while keeping the other three in the same order. Strauss raises the silence of Romulus and then footnotes Stefano Porcari's attempt on the pope's life (of which more later). All chapter references are to *The Prince* unless otherwise stated.

that it has been led to be the prey not only of barbarian powers but of whoever assaults it.⁵

If one wanted to decrease the number of political heads in Italy by decapitating the Church, the attempt would probably involve multiple targets. The pope is not the only obstacle to unity, cardinals also exert a divisive influence: 'Nor will these parties ever be quiet as long as they have cardinals; for cardinals nourish parties, within Rome and without, and the barons are forced to defend them.'⁶ The core problem is the pope and the cardinals' circular sources of legitimacy. That is, popes gain their legitimacy by being selected by the cardinals and cardinals gain their legitimacy by being selected by popes. Should the pope be eliminated, the cardinals could select a new one, and vice versa.

In addition, semi-powerful Italian city-states stand in the way of unity, jealously guarding their autonomy. They too have to be brought under one rule if Italy is not to remain at the mercy of great powers.⁷ In short, the practical puzzle of liberating Italy is how to rid the peninsula of the divisive influence of the Church and baleful Italian multipolarity.

Turning to the theoretical puzzle, in the dramatic conclusion of *The Prince* Machiavelli details the deplorable state of Italy to Lorenzo de' Medici, the young prince to whom the work is dedicated:

And if, as I said, it was necessary for anyone wanting to see the virtue of Moses that the people of Israel be enslaved in Egypt, and to learn the greatness of spirit of Cyrus, that the Persians be oppressed by the Medes, and to

⁵ N. Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, trans. H. Mansfield and N. Tarcov (Chicago, 1996), p. 38 [I 12]; cf. N. Machiavelli, *Art of War*, trans. C. Lynch (Chicago, 2003), VII 247. Since this passage is from the *Discourses*, we cannot assume a reader of *The Prince* would be familiar with it. Yet there is enough anti-Church sentiment and praise of lone unifiers in *The Prince* for a reader to understand that reorganizing the Church might aid the liberation of Italy. See V. Sullivan, *Machiavelli's Three Romes: Religion, Human Liberty, and Politics Reformed* (De Kalb, 1996), Chs. 1–2.

⁶ N. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, trans. H. Mansfield (Chicago, 1998), p. 47 [Ch. 11]; cf. N. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, trans. L. Banfield and H. Mansfield (Princeton, 1988), I 9.

⁷ On political autonomy, fear of relative gains and balancing in Italy, see Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Chs. 11 and 20. A counterargument to this point is that Machiavelli desired a temporary military alliance to drive out the foreigners, instead of a true unification. While Machiavelli advocates expedient balancing behaviour, such a quick fix is anathema to his doctrine of self-help through expansion. When a political unit cannot keep up with the dominant powers, it must imitate or pay the costs of inferiority. See B. Ackerman, *We the People: Foundations* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 180; cf. K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York, 1979), p. 127. To be competitive in the system, Italy would have to ape England and France, and Machiavelli says as much in *The Prince*, Ch. 3 (cf. *Discourses*, II 4). See Machiavelli's letters to Vettori, 10 August 1513 and 26 August 1513, in N. Machiavelli, *The Letters of Machiavelli*, ed. A. Gilbert (New York, 1961), pp. 128–9, 136–7.

learn the excellence of Theseus, that the Athenians be dispersed, so at present to know the virtue of an Italian spirit it was necessary that Italy be reduced to the condition which she is at present, which is more enslaved than the Hebrews, more servile than the Persians, more dispersed than the Athenians, without head, without order, beaten, despoiled, torn, pillaged, and having endured ruin of every sort.⁸

When Machiavelli remarks, 'as I said' he can have but one reference in mind. The only other time that series occurs in the text is in Chapter Six, where he is extolling the 'most excellent':

For since men almost always walk on paths beaten by others . . . a prudent man should always enter upon the paths beaten by great men, and imitate those who have been most excellent, so that if his own virtue does not reach that far, it is at least in the odor of it . . . I say that the most excellent are Moses, Cyrus, Romulus, Theseus, and the like.⁹

In fact, in Chapter Six, Machiavelli actually recommends these four illustrious names three times. Why is it that when Machiavelli commends liberating Italy in Chapter Twenty-Six he omits the only founder whose empire successfully accomplished the task?¹⁰ This is especially curious given Machiavelli's remarkable obsession with the Romans.

II

The Argument

This section answers three questions: Why is Romulus the supreme example of Italian liberation? How does Machiavelli suggest his example? Why does he make his suggestion sotto voce? The argument is that Machiavelli omits Romulus not because he is unworthy of recommendation but because he is supremely worthy of recommendation. Although all four founders have much

⁸ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 102. Whitfield sees a parallel construction between Chapters Six and Twenty-Six in the four epithets 'powerful', 'secure', 'honored' and 'happy' at the end of Chapter Six with 'beaten', 'despoiled', 'torn' and 'pillaged' in Chapter Twenty-Six. See Whitfield, *Discourses*, p. 27.

⁹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 22. On how strongly Machiavelli encourages imitation, see *The Prince*, Chs. 6, 14, 21, 26; cf. L. Olschki, *Machiavelli the Scientist* (Berkeley, 1945), pp. 43–4; F. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in 16th Century Florence* (New York, 1984), pp. 238–9. A secondary omission in *The Prince* is Numa Pompilius, Rome's second king. In the *Discourses* Machiavelli gives credit for the founding of Rome to Romulus as well as Numa, see *Discourses*, I 11. Ultimately, Machiavelli prefers Romulus to Numa (*Discourses*, I 19.4) but his warm praise for Numa in the *Discourses* contrasts starkly with his stony silence towards him in *The Prince*.

¹⁰ On the importance of founders and the example of Rome, see Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I 6, II 2; P. Villari, *The Life and Times of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. L. Villari (New York, 1968), Vol. 2, p. 134. Guicciardini famously criticizes Machiavelli for his fetish with Rome, see F. Guicciardini, *Selected Writings*, ed. C. Grayson (New York, 1965); F. Guicciardini, *Ricordi*, trans. M. Domandi (Philadelphia, 1972).

in common, Romulus stands out because he rose to power by executing his uncle and consolidated power by killing his brother. Applying Romulus' actions to his own situation, Lorenzo might see that by assassinating his uncle, Pope Leo X, and the college of cardinals, he could shatter the founts of their legitimacy. Lorenzo would then be free to reorganize the Church and begin conquering an Italian state that could compete with other great powers. Machiavelli may use a subtle pattern of Livy's to try to implant curiosity in Lorenzo's mind about the greatness of Romulus; and because Machiavelli's anti-papal, parricidal policy prescriptions go beyond the unseemly, and public knowledge of them would hinder their execution, he is forced to suggest them sotto voce.

Two preliminary observations. One should bear in mind that the differences between Machiavelli's most excellent examples are few. (1) All are rulers in search of states: Moses founds the spiritual empire that begets Judaism and Christianity; Cyrus creates the Persian Empire; Romulus and Theseus found cities that spawn military and cultural empires. All claim distinguished lineage despite being abandoned at birth by one or both of their parents and, with the exception of Theseus, were exposed to the elements.¹¹ All are militarily successful and take upon themselves the task of establishing an empire, typically at a young age.¹² All die unfulfilled if not ignominiously. Moses expires at one hundred and twenty, overlooking the Holy Land he would never reach. Cyrus falls in battle (ironically from a Machiavellian perspective, against a woman) and his empire crumbles.¹³ Theseus falls from power,

¹¹ See N. Machiavelli, *The Life of Castruccio Castracani*, trans. A. Brown (London, 2003), p. 3; cf. J.C. Macfarland, 'Machiavelli's Imagination of Excellent Men: An Appraisal of the Lives of Cosimo de' Medici and Castruccio Castracani', *American Political Science Review*, 93 (1999), pp. 133–46; Lefort, *Le travail*, pp. 336, 362, 422.

¹² Moses excepted. Lorenzo de' Medici is also very young — and perhaps malleable, as Whitfield points out — when he becomes Duke of Urbino. This is consistent with Machiavelli's assertion that fortune favours the young, but that should not obscure a profound tension in *The Prince*. Machiavelli's work is founded on the belief that a correct understanding of politics is indispensable to successful action, yet who knows less than the young? It appears that there is a tradeoff between learning and audacity that must be optimized. See Whitfield, *Discourses*, pp. 103–4; A. Kontos, 'Success and Knowledge in Machiavelli', in *The Political Calculus: Essays on Machiavelli's Philosophy*, ed. A. Parel (Toronto, 1972), Ch. 4.

¹³ I use Herodotus' account for Chapter Six because Machiavelli goes out of his way twice to refer to the Cyrus 'by Xenophon' in Chapter Fourteen. By implication some other Cyrus (historical Cyrus? The effectual truth of Cyrus? Herodotus' Cyrus?) is meant in the other three chapters in which Cyrus appears. I speculate on meager evidence that it is Herodotus' Cyrus. Xenophon tells a tale of a death more peaceful and deliberate for Cyrus than Herodotus relates. On Machiavelli's ambivalence towards and differentiation from Xenophon, see W.R. Newell, 'Machiavelli and Xenophon on Princely Rule: A Double-Edged Encounter', *Journal of Politics*, 50 (1988), pp. 108–30; cf. C. Nadon,

is taken in by a false friend and thrown from a rock. Romulus dies in a thunderstorm, mythically as if scooped up by the gods, but probably, says Livy, it is the Senate who kills him.

Further, (2) determining Machiavelli's message is an inescapably messy matter. He admits that 'for a long time I have not said what I believed, nor do I ever believe what I say, and if indeed sometimes I do happen to tell the truth, I hide it among so many lies that it is hard to find'.¹⁴ All arguments on Machiavelli labour under his dissimulation, and mine more than most. If Machiavelli wanted to hint at homicide he needed to retain plausible deniability if his audience recoiled in horror. Thus, plausible deniability builds disconfirming evidence into the structure of my argument. I concede that definitive proof is a vanishingly unlikely prospect, yet seek to show that my interpretation is at least as tenable as its rivals.

1. What Qualifies Romulus as a Supreme Example for Chapter Twenty-Six?

Romulus is the unsurpassed example because the opportunity (*occasione*) he faced most resembles Lorenzo's. Italy is not being unified so much as reunified, and Romulus' empire was the only political entity to bring Italy under one rule.¹⁵ But the opportunity goes beyond geography. Of all the most excellent founders, Romulus alone attained and consolidated his power by assassinating family members.¹⁶ Before founding his new principality, he had to murder his great uncle Amulius and his brother Remus. Also, in contradistinction to others, Romulus had no preexisting people and had to create one from disparate groups with outstanding martial virtue.

While all the most excellent examples used extraordinary modes to come to power, and all were responsible for many deaths, no one but Romulus founded a new principality directly through parricide. This is not to say that any of the others were not responsible for the death of many people and some

'From Republic to Empire: Political Revolution and the Common Good in Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*', *American Political Science Review*, 90 (1996).

¹⁴ Letter 179, of 17 May 1521. See Machiavelli, *Letters*, 200.

¹⁵ Machiavelli is sensitive about moving from generalities to particulars, see *The Prince*, Ch. 20.1, *Discourses*, II 33.

¹⁶ This story is drawn from T. Livy, *The Early History of Rome*, trans. A. de Selincourt (New York, 1971), p. 39 [I 6]. Livy also suggests that Romulus' victory over Remus was not random. Earlier, only Remus fell into a trap laid for both of them. Machiavelli blames Tatiush's death on Romulus, but excuses him *carte blanche* in *Discourses*, I 9. If one is to believe Plutarch, Romulus was also responsible for slaying two of his foster fathers. If we are to lay responsibility on Romulus on a grander scale, it was not long before Rome swallowed Alba. See Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. J. Dryden and H. Clough (New York, 1992), Vol. 1, p. 32.

family members. Moses was 'forced to kill infinite men',¹⁷ including the Pharaoh in whose house he had lived. Cyrus deposed his grandfather and deceived his uncle, though he did not kill them. Because he forgot to put up the white sail of victory, Theseus caused the suicide of his father. However, Romulus alone founded his state through parricide.

Applying the example of Romulus to Machiavelli's times, Lorenzo's opportunity is strikingly similar. Lorenzo too faces an Italy that is a 'mixed' or 'disparate' province.¹⁸ He has the opportunity to found a new principality by murdering his uncle, Pope Leo X, and the cardinals (interpreting clergy as 'brothers' is a plausible view) thereby subjugating the Catholic Church, reordering it along more civic religious lines. Machiavelli is not the enemy of religion; he detests destroyers of religion. But the Church uses Christianity as an infantilizing force, and an Italian unifier could change religio-moral standards along more glorious earthly lines.¹⁹ That Machiavelli originally intended to dedicate *The Prince* to Giuliano de' Medici, the Duke of Nemours and the brother of Leo X, supports the conjecture that the work may have been conceived with a persistent parricidal purpose. Both Giuliano and Lorenzo stood to gain the same prize by the same actions.²⁰

No historical parallel is perfect, and the parallel between Romulus/Amulius and Lorenzo/Leo X is no exception. Romulus gained prominence violently; Lorenzo inherited his position peacefully. One gained by killing his great uncle, the other could gain by killing his uncle. One benefited by murdering his blood brother, the other could gain by murdering priestly brothers (Lorenzo did not have a blood brother). But the similarities are striking given the historical materials available to Machiavelli.

¹⁷ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, III 30.1; cf. *ibid.*, I 9.3.

¹⁸ Machiavelli uses this terminology in Chapter Three where he discusses how Louis XII could have conquered Italy, highlighting mistakes a succeeding conqueror could avoid. See N. Tarcov, 'Machiavelli and the Foundations of Modernity: A Reading of Chapter 3 of *The Prince*', in *Educating the Prince*, ed. M. Blitz and W. Kristol (New York, 2000), Ch. 3. Cesare Borgia and *The Life of Castruccio Castracani* also illustrate traps for an Italian unifier to avoid.

¹⁹ On Machiavelli's criticism of destroyers of religion, see *Discourses*, I 10.1. On religio-moral standards, see I. Berlin, 'The Originality of Machiavelli', in *The Proper Study of Mankind*, ed. H. Hardy and R. Hausheer (New York, 1998), pp. 269–325; J.T. Scott and V. Sullivan, 'Patricide and the Plot of *The Prince*: Cesare Borgia and Machiavelli's Italy', *American Political Science Review*, 88 (1994), pp. 887–900. With regard to Numa's absence from *The Prince*, Numa may be excluded because sixteenth-century Italy, a land with more religion than military virtue, was ripe for a new Romulus, not a new Numa.

²⁰ The Medici were not the only family so situated. Shortly we will turn to the Borgias, but here I should note that Machiavelli has positive things to say about Francesco Maria della Rovere, the militant *nepote* of Pope Julius II. See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, II 10.1 and II 24.4.

Consistent with this interpretation, Machiavelli favourably mentions four other individuals who could have killed the pope. In 1505, Machiavelli was present when Giovampagolo Baglioni had a golden opportunity to kill Pope Julius II and all the cardinals. In *Discourses*, I 27, Machiavelli laments Giovampagolo's restraint in the strongest of terms:

So Giovampagolo, who did not mind being incestuous and a public parricide, did not know — or, to say better, did not dare, when he had just the opportunity for it — to engage in an enterprise in which everyone would have admired his spirit and that would have left an eternal memory of himself as being the first who had demonstrated to the prelates how little is to be esteemed whoever lives and reigns as they do; and he would have done a thing whose greatness would have surpassed all infamy, every danger, that could have proceeded from it.²¹

Similarly, Machiavelli observed to Vettori, 'all the things that have been can, I believe, be again; and I know that pontiffs have fled, gone into exile, been pursued, suffered to the utmost, like temporal rulers, and this in times when the Church in the spiritual matters was more revered than she is today'.²²

Moreover, Machiavelli infamously details the exploits of Cesare Borgia, son of Pope Alexander VI. Jacob Burckhardt once argued:

In fact, there can be no doubt whatever that Cesare, whether chosen pope or not after the death of Alexander, meant to keep possession of the pontifical state at any cost, and that this, after all the enormities he had committed, he could not as pope have succeeded in doing permanently. He, if anybody, could have secularized the States of the Church . . . Unless we are much deceived, this is the real reason of the secret sympathy with which Machiavelli treats the great criminal; from Cesare, or from nobody, could it be hoped that he 'would draw the steel from the wound', in other words, annihilate the papacy — the source of all foreign intervention and of all the divisions of Italy.²³

Machiavelli also describes Cesare's unification of the Romagna in language that could easily describe unification of Italy: 'it had been commanded by impotent lords who had been readier to despoil their subjects than to correct them, and had given their subjects matter for disunion, not for union'. So too Machiavelli's admiration of Cesare's solution could be instructive to a would-be Italian unifier. Borgia employed Remirro de Orco to pacify the region, but

²¹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, p. 64.

²² Machiavelli, *Letters*, p. 180. The passage is drawn from letter 155 of 20 December 1514.

²³ J. Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S.G.C. Middlemore (New York, 1990), p. 88. Burckhardt may be referring to Chapter Twenty-Six in a passage where Machiavelli elliptically refers to 'someone who could judge that he had been ordered by God for her [Italy's] redemption, yet later it was seen that in the highest course of his actions, he was repulsed by fortune'. Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 102; cf. Machiavelli, *Art of War*, p. 12 [I 43].

when his cruelty became excessive and hated Borgia savagely punished him, leaving him in two pieces in the piazza. The spectacle 'left the people at once satisfied and stupefied'. Yet it was Borgia's cruelty that 'restored the Romagna, united it, and reduced it to peace and faith'.²⁴

When cataloguing Cesare's virtues in Chapter Seven, Machiavelli counts among them that 'he could have kept anyone from being pope'²⁵ leaving ambiguous whether Cesare merely held veto power over pontifical ascension or could eliminate the pope and the college of cardinals altogether. Further, in Chapter Eight Liverotto da Fermo gains his patrimony through parricide and Cesare enlarges his by killing Liverotto. The reader may fairly wonder: what benefits would Cesare reap by becoming a parricide like Liverotto? Ultimately, Borgia depends too much on his father, loses his prudence and meets his political demise. But Borgia began to fulfil Machiavelli's unifying project and his mistakes could be instructive to a successor.

Yet another instance is in *Florentine Histories*, VI 29, where Machiavelli writes an apologia for a would-be assassin of the pope. Stefano Porcari, 'a Roman citizen, noble by blood and learning, but much more so by the excellence of his spirit' seeks to kill the pope and restore his fatherland to its ancient form of life. Stefano becomes suspect and is banished to Bologna. Nonetheless, he still undertakes the conspiracy, but it is exposed and fails the night before its execution. Machiavelli closes the section ruefully, noting 'the intention of this man could be praised by anyone, but his judgment will always be blamed by everyone because such undertakings, if there is some shadow of glory in thinking of them, have almost always very certain loss in their execution'.²⁶

Lastly, Machiavelli admiringly mentions Gaston de Foix, Duke of Nemours. De Foix, the nephew of Louis XII, is given great credit for his audacity and military exploits throughout the *Discourses*. His untimely death in the Battle of Ravenna was a crushing blow to his army and turned back an attack on the pope. Prior to the battle, the Duke harangued his troops, promising booty in Rome 'where the boundless riches of that wicked court . . . will be sacked by you . . . [de Foix calls for] divine justice to punish . . . the pride and enormous vices of that false Pope Julius'.²⁷ If title dictated behaviour and the Duke of Nemours were always an enemy of the pope, the position could have been

²⁴ The Machiavelli quotes of this paragraph are drawn from, respectively, *The Prince*, pp. 29, 30 and 65. 'Stupefy' shows up one other time in the work. It is in Chapter Nineteen, referring to how the cruelty of Severus stupefied the people and kept Severus safe from conspiracies. I thank Nathan Tarcov for bringing this to my attention.

²⁵ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 33. Scott and Sullivan have made these interpretations of Chapters Seven and Eight before. See Scott and Sullivan, 'Patricide', pp. 888, 895.

²⁶ Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, p. 264. Keeping with a motif, Machiavelli once again posits Petrarch as the poetic inspiration of Italian unification.

²⁷ F. Guicciardini, *The History of Italy*, trans. S. Alexander (Princeton, 1984), p. 244. See also Machiavelli, *Discourses*, II 16.2, II 17.1, II 17.4, II 24.3, III 44.2-3.

auspicious. After de Foix, the Dukedom of Nemours went to Giuliano de' Medici, the original dedicatee of *The Prince*.

Also consistent with this interpretation are three favourable references to nephews increasing their power by deceiving their uncles: Cyrus attained greatness by deceiving his uncle Cyaxares; Giovan Galeazzo Visconti gained a state by killing his uncle Bernabo Visconti and tried to become king of Italy; and, as mentioned, Giovanni Fogliani was killed by his nephew Liverotto da Fermo, who thereby acquired his state.²⁸

2. *How Might Machiavelli Recommend Imitating Romulus Subtly?*

Machiavelli may be imitating his favourite historian, employing a Livian pattern of silent but superlative praise. To argue that Machiavelli looks favourably on instruction by omission, some point to *Discourses*, II 10. In this chapter Machiavelli calls Livy a 'truer witness than any other' for the opinion that money is not the sinew of war perhaps because 'he comes to his conclusion without ever mentioning money'.²⁹ That is, Livy sets his conclusions off in bold relief by not referring to the common opinion, and Machiavelli is disposed to follow him. Yet I contend this is the wrong model. In *Discourses*, II 10, what is obvious and omitted is frowned upon. Scholars have overlooked a better model, where Livy uses silence to label an example as excellent.

While *Discourses* II 10 generally supports my argument, the specific Livian model Machiavelli would use is more likely to be found in XXXV 14 of Livy's *History*. If Machiavelli is offering a signal list of examples as a context-sensitive ranking, Livy provides him with a precise pattern of how to name three individuals while ranking four. He tells a story of Hannibal meeting with Scipio after the Second Punic War. Scipio asks Hannibal to rank his top three generals. Hannibal replies that first is Alexander, second is Pyrrhus and third is himself. Laughing heartily, Scipio inquires where Hannibal would rank himself had Scipio not beaten him. 'I should certainly put myself . . . before all other generals!', was Hannibal's response, implying with

²⁸ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, II 13; Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, I 27; Machiavelli, *The Prince*, Ch. 8. Although the greatest examples do not illustrate the practice, it could be that Machiavelli is open to the reverse; that is, to uncles killing nephews to found a new principality. Or Machiavelli may merely want to catalyse fear of such duplicity in Lorenzo to stoke a security dilemma and provoke preemption. See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 35, 37, 47, 67, 79.

²⁹ Machiavelli, *Discourses*, p. 149; cf. Machiavelli, *Art of War*, p. 159 [VII 178]; H. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's New Modes and Orders* (Chicago, 1979), p. 216. Alas, the common opinion continues to be stubborn. Hendrik Spruyt asserts: 'Money is the sinews of power, argued Machiavelli succinctly, observing the winds of military change in his day.' H. Spruyt, 'The Origins, Development, and Possible Decline of the Modern State', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 5 (2002), pp. 127–49. Because Spruyt's bibliography does not contain any Machiavelli, it is unclear which source Spruyt has not read where Machiavelli does not make that point.

'elaborate Punic subtlety' that he was not ranking amateurs with professionals. So much did Scipio outrank all the greatest generals that Hannibal considered him worthy 'beyond calculation'.³⁰ By this logic, omitting Romulus indicates his unsurpassed virtue.

3. *Why Would Machiavelli Communicate Policy Prescriptions Sotto Voce?*

Machiavelli risks rebuke by suggesting odious actions openly: strategic surprise aids assassination and cloaking who the initial targets of Italian unification would be dulls the strength of a balancing coalition.³¹ Since Machiavelli was an ambassador, it makes sense to interpret his ambiguity as the 'sign language' of a diplomat. The literature on this point is clear about the utility of ambiguity; it is excellent for retaining flexibility and safely sounding out another's position. One does not have to be a Straussian to believe that Machiavelli had normative commitments and professional experience, and that he would recommend policies that followed from his principles and training. Rising to greatness requires fraud, and Lorenzo needs deception just as Machiavelli does. Characteristically, he praises the early Romans for their fraud.

The Romans therefore are seen in their first increases not to be lacking even in fraud, which it is always necessary for those who wish to climb from small beginnings to sublime ranks to use and which is less worthy of reproach the more it is covert, as was that of the Romans.³²

With regard to plausible deniability, Machiavelli is in a delicate situation advising Lorenzo to kill his uncle. The Medici had previously exiled and tortured him and the suggestion would horrify most people. Machiavelli must be cautious in his counsels in case they are received unfavourably, in fact Machiavelli was hesitant about whether and how to circulate a copy of his work. But by setting the agenda, Machiavelli can lead the reader to a door and have the reader enter on her own.³³ Indeed, *The Prince* in its entirety can be

³⁰ T. Livy, *Rome and the Mediterranean*, trans. H. Bettenson (New York, 1976), p. 209; cf. *Discourses*, I 10.1.

³¹ Machiavelli's thoughts on surprise are more complicated than usually realised (e.g. M. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (London, 2nd edn., 1992), pp. 3–4) and, because it would impede the argument, as presented here. On how the diplomatic use of ambiguity can elicit desired outcomes, see R. Jervis, *The Logic of Images in International Relations* (New York, 1989), Ch. 5; cf. M. DeCallieres, *On the Manner of Negotiating with Princes*, trans. A.F. White (Notre Dame, 1963), pp. 14, 31–2.

³² Machiavelli, *Discourses*, p. 156 [II 13]. See also *ibid.*, II 1.2 and III 40.

³³ On Machiavelli's caution about circulating his work or giving it to its dedicatee, see H. Baron, 'The *Principe* and the Puzzle of the Date of Chapter 26', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 21 (1991), pp. 83–102; S. DeGrazia, *Machiavelli in Hell* (Princeton, 1989), p. 40. There is a story — perhaps apocryphal — that Machiavelli did give his little work to Lorenzo de' Medici, who was uninterested in it and more taken by

read as an exercise in this. Machiavelli starts the book with a series of apparently neutral classifications, then ends up by focusing only on virtuous new princes — a poor fit if the book aims to help Lorenzo keep his hereditary state as is. The final chapter calls for the redeeming of Italy, a great task for a new prince.

With regard to strategic surprise, although it is unclear who the actual readership of *The Prince* was, overtly suggesting papacy would increase the chances that Lorenzo would be exposed and suffer the same fate as Porcari. So too executing the pope and cardinals and announcing oneself as a new Romulus would quickly create a formidable balancing coalition against the new prince — a recipe for brilliant, unlasting success. The first targets of inchoate Italian political union would be other Italian states, and they could not be expected to sit idly by awaiting their demise. Ancient Rome had to lull its neighbours into thinking it unthreatening and defeat them sequentially to unify Italy.³⁴ A new Romulus would have to do the same. On this reading, the bright tone in the final chapter may be employed to disguise or diminish Machiavelli's dark intent, and the 'barbarians' of Chapter Twenty-Six (and *Discourses*, I 12) may be some combination of the pope, the cardinals and other Italian powers. It could be that the deficiently-lettered ultramontanes were also barbarians, but a precondition to beating those barbarians was uniting the barbaric and savagely selfish Italian heads first.

To close, there are good reasons to suspect that Machiavelli had decisive policy recommendations hidden in his *Prince*. By killing his uncle Pope Leo X and the college of cardinals, Lorenzo could begin to unify Italy and aggregate enough power to contend with Europe's great powers. Machiavelli is forced for tactical and strategic reasons to offer his suggestions quietly, so he employs a pregnant silence to raise, and advocate, the emulation of Romulus.

some hounds he had received as a gift. See F. Chabod, *Machiavelli & the Renaissance*, trans. D. Moore (London, 1958), pp. 17–18, 106; R. Ridolfi, *The Life of Niccolò Machiavelli*, trans. C. Grayson (Chicago, 1963), p. 164. Contra Baron, I interpret this hesitance not as uncertainty about the conclusion but as the prudent floating of a trial balloon on a work that could endanger the author's life. On agenda setting, concealment and complicity, see L. Strauss, 'Machiavelli', in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey (Chicago, 1987), p. 312. See also Machiavelli, *Art of War*, pp. 152, 154 [VII 99, VII 124]; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, I 25, I 39, III 48. In the present case it is a second-order conspiracy: Machiavelli conspires to get Lorenzo to conspire. Also, I wish only to adduce my interpretation of Chapter Twenty-Six, not embroil myself in debates on Machiavellian ethics. For an overview of such debates, see Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (New York, 1980), Vol. 1, pp. 135–8.

³⁴ See Strauss, *Thoughts*, pp. 63–9. This pacific façade was not complete fraud. In the expansions of the Roman Republic (510 BC to 121 BC), Rome went to war on average about once every twenty years. L. Keeley, *War Before Civilization: The Myth of the Peaceful Savage* (New York, 1997), p. 33. Lorenzo was no stranger to the balance of power, his grandfather is credited in one of the earliest formulations of it, see Guicciardini, *History*, Book 1; cf. S. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, 1987).

III

Alternative Hypotheses: Parallel Lives?

Alternative hypotheses may be grouped under three rough headings. The omission of Romulus in Chapter Twenty-Six is explained away on: (1) personal grounds for the author and/or his audience; (2) textual grounds, which disqualify Romulus for special consideration in Chapter Twenty-Six; and (3) historical grounds, i.e. Hans Baron's celebrated interpretation of Chapter Twenty-Six.

1. Personal Grounds

An initial reaction could be that Romulus' absence is accidental. Everyone makes mistakes; authors forget; manuscripts are miscopied. Yet it is incredibly implausible to think that someone smart enough to write the most famous book on politics would forget such an obvious example in a fit of absent-mindedness, especially when the author is so fond of Rome. Not only is Machiavelli too intelligent and *The Prince* too finely-chiselled for such a gaffe but it is inconsistent with the evidence. Conspiracies are a preeminent interest for Machiavelli, taking up the largest chapters in both *The Prince* and the *Discourses*.³⁵ Moreover, Chapter Twenty-Six is not missing the word 'Romulus', but, to maintain balance, it is missing a whole phrase referring to Romulus' opportunity. Therefore, a massive, mid-sentence copy error would have had to surgically remove the whole phrase referring to Romulus and nothing else. Also, if Romulus' placement is accidental, it is logical that prior orderings would be either unchanged or random. However, Machiavelli draws our attention to Romulus by changing his placement in the order and no one else's.³⁶ Through all the listings Moses, Cyrus and Theseus always stand meticulously in the same relation to each other. An accidental omission is less likely than an intentional one.

A sceptic might argue that Machiavelli would not hint so silently because his intended audience would not understand the hint. Arguing about the intelligence of Lorenzo is not only fruitless — he died young and we do not know enough about him — but beside the point.³⁷ Machiavelli could not be clearer without losing plausible deniability, personal safety and strategic surprise.

³⁵ See also Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, VIII 1. As Rousseau noticed in *On the Social Contract*, Chapter VI: 'Under the pretext of teaching kings, he has taught important lessons to the peoples. Machiavelli's *The Prince* is the book of republicans.' See J.J. Rousseau, *The Basic Political Writings*, trans. D. Cress (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 183. When Machiavelli tells princes how to avoid conspiracies he is simultaneously announcing to conspirators where princes are most vulnerable to conspiracies.

³⁶ Strauss, *Thoughts*, p. 308, fns. 34–5; cf. M. Martelli, *Saggio Sul Principe* (Rome, 1999), p. 137.

³⁷ Were it not beside the point, there is some evidence that Lorenzo was intelligent. His tomb, sculpted by Michelangelo, has three sculptures on it: Dawn, Dusk and Lorenzo

Furthermore, making his policy recommendations slightly less accessible has the benefit of screening out those who are more likely to botch the plans. On this reading, *The Prince* is not a unidirectional job application. Machiavelli is investigating whether Lorenzo has a job for him at the same time that he is investigating whether Lorenzo will do a job for him.

Another hypothesis is that Lorenzo did not have sufficient motive to kill his uncle. In fact there were many tensions between the Medici.³⁸ When Lorenzo was put in charge of Florence, Leo X gave him condescending instructions, stipulating exactly what to do. By May 1513, Lorenzo explicitly overruled his uncle's plans for the size of the Florentine governing council. Lorenzo was also put in the resentful role of scapegoat when Florentines did not receive their hoped-for papal patronage. There was further conflict over marital matches, competition to lead the army in 1515, who should rule Urbino and the Romagna and Lorenzo's arrogance in governing Florence. Worse yet, Lorenzo owed Leo X quite a bit of money, and Leo X accused Lorenzo of bad alliance formation, tilting too far towards France, especially after his marriage. When Lorenzo died, Cardinal Giulio de' Medici came to Florence to undo Lorenzo's policies with such haste that he did not bother attending Lorenzo's funeral. In sum, the political roles of the Medici were often at odds with their familial obligations. Not only was it reasonable to guess at such family tensions, not only were such tensions present, but also the Machiavelli–Vettori correspondence records dismay about Leo's political and familial roles causing friction.³⁹ Certainly these problems did not lead to parricide, but parricide has happened over less, and one could be forgiven for thinking these motives sufficient.

thinking, *pensieroso*. For Machiavelli's initial impression of Lorenzo, see his correspondence of August 1513, letter 135; Machiavelli, *Letters*, pp. 138–9.

³⁸ For background, see H. Reinhard, *Lorenzo von Medici, Herzog von Urbino* (Freiburg, 1935); J. Najemy, 'Machiavelli and the Medici: The Lessons of Florentine History', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 35 (1982), pp. 551–76. On the initial tensions between the Medici, see H.C. Butters, *Governors and Government in Early Sixteenth-Century Florence, 1502–1519* (New York, 1985), p. 240; R. Devonshire Jones, *Francesco Vettori: Florentine Citizen and Medici Servant* (New York, 1972), p. 111; Ridolfi, *Life*, p. 176; J.N. Stephens, *The Fall of the Florentine Republic, 1512–1530* (New York, 1983), p. 80. On Lorenzo's role as scapegoat, see Butters, *Governors*, p. 234. On Lorenzo's spending and debt problems, see Stephens, *Fall*, p. 100; Butters, *Governors*, p. 235. On the issues of Lorenzo's quest for and securing of a marital match, see Butters, *Governors*, pp. 237, 269, 299; Stephens, *Fall*, pp. 97, 100, 106. On Lorenzo's offensive political self-assertion, see Devonshire Jones, *Francesco Vettori*, pp. 119, 136; Butters, *Governors*, pp. 240, 269, 300; Stephens, *Fall*, pp. 98–100, 102, 107. On the speedy undoing of Lorenzo's rule in Florence and the lack of lamentation at his death, see Ridolfi, *Life*, p. 176; Devonshire Jones, *Francesco Vettori*, pp. 138–9; Stephens, *Fall*, p. 108.

³⁹ J. Najemy, *Between Friends: Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli–Vettori Letters of 1513–1515* (Princeton, 1993), p. 147.

The deeper trouble with this perspective is that it assumes that if there were amity between Medici, then Machiavelli would not have dared to suggest treachery. However, in the examples Machiavelli provides, there appears to be longstanding amity prior to the moment of hostility. Romulus, Cyrus, Giovan Galeazzo Visconti and Liverotto da Fermo all betrayed their relatives with little warning. Discord is unnecessary; a glory-seeking prince could make his own opportunity as others have done.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, while the situation may be ripe for parricide, it is difficult to determine a relationship's solidarity from the outside; proceeding with double entendres is a prudent course.

2. Textual Grounds

Another hypothesis would be that Machiavelli disqualifies Romulus from consideration with the others by making his disadvantages more personal. 'It was fitting that Romulus not be received in Alba, that he should have been exposed at birth . . .'.⁴¹ Yet this smacks of subterfuge. There are two claims here: (i) Romulus was unique in being unreceived and (ii) he was unique in being exposed. Therefore these differences disqualify him from being compared to the other excellent examples in the context of Chapter Twenty-Six. Both claims are false. First, Livy is quite clear that Romulus and Remus are not unreceived in Alba — they are 'seized by an urge'⁴² and take it upon themselves to found another city. God's directives to Moses notwithstanding, Cyrus and Theseus are alike self-motivated; they too do not found because they are unreceived. Second, all four founders are abandoned at birth, with all but Theseus left exposed to the elements. Nevertheless, Machiavelli could use the personal difference defence, however flimsy, to plead ignorance should his audience react adversely. The passage on Romulus' personal disadvantages is more probably a screen than a mistake.

An additional textual hypothesis is deficient religiosity. Some contend that Romulus is not included in Chapter Twenty-Six 'perhaps because to Romulus . . . "the authority of God was not necessary"'.⁴³ This hypothesis, in seeking to distinguish the founders from one another, is not sustained by the text. In

⁴⁰ For glory as supreme motive and particularly necessary in the state-building enterprise in Machiavelli, see R. Price, 'The Theme of *Gloria* in Machiavelli', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 30 (1977), pp. 588–631, pp. 595, 618, pp. 595, 618; DeGrazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, pp. 259, 375; Strauss, *Thoughts*, Ch. 4; Villari, *Life*, Vol. 2, Chs. 2–3; Machiavelli, *Discourses*, p. 31 [I 10].

⁴¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 23.

⁴² Livy, *Early History*, p. 39. Plutarch (*Lives*, Vol. 1, p. 31) provides various accounts of the same event, but even in the less honourable account, Romulus and Remus are not unreceived or forced out, but choose to go elsewhere because Alba does not desire the twins' slave and fugitive associates.

⁴³ DeGrazia, *Machiavelli in Hell*, p. 53. Gennaro Sasso also makes this point, albeit tentatively. See G. Sasso, *Machiavelli e gli antichi e altri saggi* (Milan, 1987), Vol. 2, pp. 340–1.

Chapter Six, Machiavelli makes it clear that although Moses was a ‘mere executor’ of things ordered by God, if one examines the actions of the other three illustrious founders ‘they will appear no different from those of Moses, who had so great a teacher’.⁴⁴ Hence, the ‘authority of God was not necessary’ for any of them to found their states. The biblical grounds DeGrazia adduces to substantiate his point only support Moses and Cyrus — there are no reasons for supposing that Theseus too should not have been omitted. Moreover, if religion is so important in founding, why is Numa never mentioned in *The Prince*?

Yet another hypothesis, and one made by Martelli, is that Romulus may be disqualified because he is the only one who does not have an oppressed people. This is true, but it ignores the fact that Machiavelli presents oppression as empirically uninformative when explaining political change. Although Machiavelli claims that if princes avoid being hated and are not oppressive then they will not be overthrown from within, his examples undermine his claim.⁴⁵ He recommends a prince who is not hated yet is still killed in conspiracy, Nabis the Spartan, as well as a prince who is hated but is not killed in a conspiracy, Severus. Of fifteen major conspiracies Machiavelli chronicles in his *Florentine Histories*,⁴⁶ hatred of the rulers does not explain much. In the nine cases where the ruler was hated, four conspiracies were strategically successful; in the six cases where the ruler was not hated, three were strategically successful. Across his works, Machiavelli’s examples point to the minimal effect that

⁴⁴ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 22–3.

⁴⁵ Martelli’s claim can be found in his, *Saggio*, pp. 135–7. On Machiavelli’s method and empirics, see H. Butterfield, *The Statecraft of Machiavelli* (New York, 1967); Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, Ch. 6; F. Gilbert, ‘Machiavelli: The Renaissance of the Art of War’, in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. P. Paret (Princeton, 1986), Ch. 1; Olschki, *Machiavelli the Scientist*.

⁴⁶ To keep my accounting transparent, what follows are the cases, where they can be found in the *Florentine Histories* and whether the target was hated and the conspiracy strategically (as opposed to tactically) successful. The cases are: Walter, Duke of Athens (II 36–8) (hated, successful), Ciompi (II 13–16) (not hated, successful), Maso Degli Albizzi (III 27) (hated — NM calls the people ‘malcontent’, unsuccessful), Florentine Revolution (III 28) (unclear — hence this case is dropped, unsuccessful), Pagolo (IV 25) (hated — NM calls him a ‘tyrant’, successful), Cosimo de’ Medici (IV 27–9) (not hated, a qualified success), Rinaldo Peruzzi (IV 32–3) (hated, a qualified success), Erasmo (V 6–7) (hated, successful), Annibale Bentivoglio (VI 10) (not hated, unsuccessful), the pope (VI 29) (hated, not successful), Piero de Medici (VII 10–17) (hated for collecting debts mercilessly, unsuccessful), Cesare Petrucci (VII 26–7) (not hated, unsuccessful), Duke of Milan / Galeazzo (VII 33–4) (hated, unsuccessful), Pazzi (VIII 2) (not hated, unsuccessful), Girolamo Riario (VIII 34) (hated, not successful), Galeatto Manfredi (VIII 35) (not hated, successful). I code hatred based on Machiavelli’s favourable or unfavourable references to conspiracy targets in the passage. By strategic success I mean gaining and maintaining power for more than a year. In the *Discourses*, III 6, Machiavelli also undermines his claim through the examples of Spurius Cassius and Manlius Capitolinus.

oppression has on effecting political change. He therefore could not have believed that an oppressed people was a requisite or even significantly interesting condition for founders or a would-be founder. Nonetheless, the subtlety may have been enough to confuse potential persecutors or filter out the incompetent.

3. *Historical Grounds*

Finally, one of the most popular interpretations of Chapter Twenty-Six is Hans Baron's. He argues that the last chapter of *The Prince* was a late addition, tacked on sometime between December 1514 and September 1515. The claim rests mostly on biographical and historical detail; circumstances at that moment were most favourable for Leo X to set up a *nepote* state for Giuliano de' Medici in the North, to keep the French at bay. Baron finds his conclusions 'definitive' and notes that the 'incubus' of the nationalist interpretation of *The Prince* 'will never have the power to make a comeback'.⁴⁷

However, the nationalism of *The Prince* may not be as easily dismissed as Baron believed. Although he makes no mention of Romulus' disappearance, his is the reigning interpretation of Chapter Twenty-Six and one that cannot be overlooked.⁴⁸ We have several points of disagreement; here I sketch the most salient. His view is incompatible with mine because he does not see Chapter Twenty-Six as an essential part of *The Prince*; he finds the political window of opportunity too ephemeral and he believes that Machiavelli does not expect or desire the liberator of Italy to become so by force. In brief, the problem with Baron's argument is that it is fundamentally anti-Machiavellian. Baron soft-pedals deceit and duress, he makes Machiavelli and his intended audience too dependent on fortune.

With regard to Baron's diachronic composition argument that the idea of Chapter Twenty-Six proceeded from conditions in Italy during an eight-month period, I cannot concur. I agree conditions in Italy influenced Machiavelli to write what he did, and revisions were made over time. Where Baron and I part company is how fleeting the opportunity was and how transformative revisions were. I find it dubious that Giuliano de' Medici at the head of a fragile balancing coalition to keep the French out of Milan in 1515 would impel Machiavelli to attach a patriotic conclusion to a finished study. Baron disagrees.⁴⁹

Textually, Baron is on shaky ground. His belief that Italian liberation depends on a delicate constellation of political factors is contrary to what *The Prince* preaches. Machiavelli makes clear that one does not need much

⁴⁷ Baron, 'The *Principe*', pp. 101–2.

⁴⁸ Baron may have made the same mistake as Chabod (*Machiavelli*, p. 69), who imagined that Romulus reappears in Chapter Twenty-Six when he does not.

⁴⁹ See N. Tarcov, 'Quentin Skinner's Method and Machiavelli's *Prince*', *Ethics*, 92 (1982), pp. 692–709. See note 7 above.

opportunity, people had a hand in forging their own destiny. While ultimately lady Fortune's preferences are the final arbiter — she 'lets herself be won' by the bold — virtue is a fair match to fortune. It is not only in Chapter Twenty-Five that he makes this case, but also in Chapter Twenty-Six when he is comparing the situation in Italy to the opportunity that the most excellent examples faced. Although 'these men are rare and marvelous, nonetheless they were men, and each of them had less opportunity than the present; for their undertaking was not more just than this one, nor easier, nor was God more friendly to them than to you.'⁵⁰ The most excellent examples all founded great states despite probably being lowly, bastard children with criminal histories. They are great for the very fact that they overcame all the things beyond human control, in a word, *fortuna*. Machiavelli approves of men who did not need to be related to the pope to have the opportunity to kill him and the cardinals, and he frowns on Cesare Borgia for his dependence on his father. Machiavelli occasionally appeals to 'anyone who understands', thus broadening the application of his ideas. It would be contrary to the letter and spirit of the work to be so contextually sensitive that the predictable vagaries of politics would invalidate a chapter shortly after its inception.

Baron claims that Machiavelli does not expect or even wish for a 'redeemer' of Italy to use force of arms. Thinking about the matter in a common sense manner, how exactly would one free Italy from barbarians without recourse to force? And would Machiavelli of all people be likely to think an unarmed policy possible, desirable or durable? Baron bases his claim on a passage in Chapter Eleven, where Machiavelli hopes Leo X's 'goodness and infinite other virtues' can make the pontificate very 'great and venerable'.⁵¹ Baron ignores that Machiavelli is an improbable advocate for pontifical aggrandizement.

It is more likely that Machiavelli is alluding to other instances where he used similar language to make a broader, bloodier point. The only other time he uses the phrase 'infinite virtues', Chapter Seventeen, is in the context of Hannibal's inhuman cruelty, which made him 'venerable and terrible'. Machiavelli also uses 'infinite' with reference to two other individuals when discussing the topic of cruelty. One is Agathocles for his 'savage cruelty and inhumanity, together with his infinite crimes . . .' and 'infinite betrayals and

⁵⁰ Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 103. The founders listed in Chapter Six are of highly dubious paternity; Machiavelli supposes them to 'have had such humble fathers that, feeling ashamed of them, they have made themselves out to be sons of Jupiter or some other god' (Machiavelli, *Life*, p. 3). Machiavelli may be making a related point in *Discourses*, III 48. He curiously refers to Fulvius, a humble figure in Livy's *History*, who rises to greatness (the point is complicated by the evocation of Quintus Fabius, but that is a digression). See also Strauss, *Thoughts*, p. 75; H. Pitkin, *Fortune is a Woman: Gender and Politics in the Thought of Niccolò Machiavelli* (Berkeley, 1984), p. 260.

⁵¹ For Baron's claim and the text on which he bases it, see Baron, 'The *Principe*', pp. 95–6; Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 47.

cruelties' in Chapter Eight. The other is Antoninus [Caracalla] for his 'infinite individual killings' in Chapter Nineteen.⁵² The latter two references relate back to cruelties well or badly used. Cruelties well used are those done at a stroke, like the acts of Agathocles who killed the rich people and senators of his city at once in order to assume power. Having 'infinite virtues' in this sense is a suggestion: to kill many important people quickly, then stop and turn the cruel deed to public advantage. Whoever understands this lesson may have to practise it to liberate Italy.

To conclude, no previous treatment of Romulus' disappearance has been remotely satisfying. An accidental omission is highly improbable, there are sufficient motives and opportunity to suspect Machiavelli may be plotting, textual explanations have been seriously inadequate, and Baron's historical explanation of Chapter Twenty-Six is textually insensitive. While a watertight explanation is too much to hope for, no alternative hypothesis solves the practical problems of Italian unification, and none offers a compelling explanation for Romulus' disappearance in Chapter Twenty-Six.

IV Conclusion

In summary, Romulus' attributes singularly qualify him as the example *par excellence* for sixteenth-century Italian liberation. He kills his uncle and brother to unify power, unites disparate peoples and founds a mighty empire, not coincidentally on the Italian peninsula. In Machiavelli's day, few individuals were as well positioned as Lorenzo to kill the pope and cardinals, reorder the Church and reunify Italy. *The Prince* represents Machiavelli's effort to imply the horrific undertaking through his parallel constructions in Chapters Six and Twenty-Six. But Machiavelli cannot commend Romulus' example too openly. An untoward reaction might lead to retaliation, deprive the plan of surprise, make the targets harder to destroy and increase the probability and strength of a balancing coalition.⁵³

Some implications follow from the argument above, chief of which is the coherence of *The Prince*. An inconclusive debate has raged for some time on the chronology of its composition, and nothing contained in this work is likely to strike a decisive blow. Nevertheless, if my argument is correct, *The Prince*

⁵² For the reference of which I speak, see Machiavelli, *The Prince*, pp. 35, 37, 47, 67, 79. On cruelty well used by unifiers in Italy, see also the Remirro de Orco and Severus narratives in *ibid.*, pp. 30, 65, 78.

⁵³ Returning to the first quote of this paper, it is curious that Felix Gilbert sees no preparatory groundwork laid for Chapter Twenty-Six, and believes the Chapter to be decorative. First, it is odd because Gilbert is Meinecke's most famous student and Gilbert appears not to have learned what his teacher saw. Yet second, it is odd because Gilbert dismisses the last chapter as ornament, in a work that begins with the author stating 'I have not ornamented this work' (Machiavelli, *The Prince*, p. 4; cf. *Discourses*, III 48).

is a more cohesive document than it is often given credit for.⁵⁴ With the tie between Chapters Six and Twenty-Six, the suggestions for Italian conquest in Chapter Three, the anti-Church vitriol, as well as the narratives on Agathocles, Cesare Borgia, Remirro and Liverotto, Machiavelli suggests repeatedly throughout the work how Italy could be liberated.⁵⁵ How consonant *The Prince* is with the *Discourses* is a matter that cannot be treated adequately here.

Another central implication of this work is the content of Machiavelli's republicanism. If Romulus is the exemplar of how to unify Italy, then imitating his model means an imperfect, not immediate republicanism. Romulus created free institutions, with princely elements, that survived his death and on which the strength of the Roman Republic was built. But reaching the Republic took time and tyranny, and the institutions themselves were incomplete and in need of innovation and renewal to attain greatness. Commending the example of France and absolute leaders with popular armies in the *Discourses* suggests that Machiavelli was open to non-republican institutions.⁵⁶ He could not have thought of crudely importing Republican Rome wholesale into the conditions of sixteenth-century Italy, but insofar as their empire is the

⁵⁴ An exception to this trend is M. Viroli, *Niccolo's Smile: A Biography of Machiavelli*, trans. A. Shugaar (New York, 2000), p. 159.

⁵⁵ On Machiavelli's tension between liberty and greatness, see P.J. Coby, *Machiavelli's Romans: Liberty and Greatness in the Discourses on Livy* (Lanham, 1999); also J. Najemy, 'Baron's Machiavelli and Renaissance Republicanism', *American Historical Review*, 101 (1996), pp. 119–29; Whitfield, *Discourses*, pp. 198–204. Contra Baron, Strauss believes (*Thoughts*, pp. 48, 52) that twenty-six was the original number of chapters intended for *The Prince*. This is in keeping with his numerological interpretation of Machiavelli. Twenty-six is, says Strauss, 2 times 13, which signifies fortune, or it could be the alphanumeric sum of the Hebrew God (Strauss, *Machiavelli*, p. 311). Perhaps, perhaps not, though this last interpretation strikes me as far-fetched. If one is to read Machiavelli numerologically, I offer another alternative. Twenty-six could be a calendrical reference. There are twenty-six weeks in a half-year, suggesting the Machiavellian theme of cycles and nature's variability. See Machiavelli, *Letters*, p. 185. Why twenty-six as opposed to fifty-two or some other multiple of thirteen is a larger issue, but it could relate to middle ways, half-truths and the *Discourses*. English readers should not suspect that twenty-six refers to the alphabet; sixteenth-century Italian did not have twenty-six letters.

⁵⁶ On Machiavelli's view of France, see *Discourses*, I 16, I 19, I 55; he also commends France in Chapter Nineteen of *The Prince*. I owe to J. Langton ('Machiavelli's Paradox: Trapping or Teaching the Prince', *American Political Science Review*, 81 (1987), pp. 1277–88, p. 1281) the claim that Machiavelli praises absolute leaders with popular armies such as Tullus, Pelopidas, Epaminondas and the King of England. This view concurs with the Cambridge School's idea that a prince, or princely power, is necessary in founding. See, for example, *Machiavelli and Republicanism*, ed. G. Bock, Q. Skinner and M. Viroli (New York, 1990). For critical views, see J.P. McCormick, 'Machiavelli Against Republicanism: On the Cambridge School's "Guicciardinian Moments"', *Political Theory*, 31 (2003), pp. 615–43; J. Femia, 'Machiavelli and Italian Fascism', *History of Political Thought*, 25 (1) (2004), pp. 1–15.

best guide, a Roman stamp would be the predominant cast on a Machiavellian unifier. The most excellent examples all died unfulfilled; there could be no illusions of seeing the completion of one's founding efforts. With Romulus as the great example though, sound institutions, citizens infused with civic virtue and an expansionist republic would be the ultimate, glorious rewards.

My argument also speaks to some of the more compelling arguments in the literature. For example, John Scott and Vickie Sullivan⁵⁷ do extraordinary work on patricide in *The Prince*, and this work builds on and largely corroborates theirs. They contend that Cesare Borgia squandered the opportunity to kill the pope and cardinals to free Italy from its ruinous reliance on the Church and fortune. They are partially right about Borgia being a great example; Machiavelli does flatter him highly and mentions him in more chapters of *The Prince* than anyone else. Nonetheless, they go astray when they render unto Cesare more than they render unto Romulus. Borgia is at best half — and the less successful half at that — of Machiavelli's Italian unifying models in *The Prince*. Borgia fails because he relies too much on this father and does not insulate himself enough from the vicissitudes of fortune; Romulus succeeds because he founds great institutions that persist beyond his life and endure the trials of history. He, not Borgia, is *The Prince*'s model nonpareil.

Adopting an idea of Hans Baron's, Mary Dietz accuses Machiavelli of using cunning to ensnare the Medici.⁵⁸ She argues that if they followed the advice in the book it would recoil on them and bring back republican rule to Florence. The argument presented here agrees with Dietz that *The Prince* has republican intentions and is designed to ensnare, but not through the pathways she indicates. On my reading, Machiavelli intends to divide and conquer the Medici in order that a Medici can begin dividing and conquering Italy. When Dietz treats the Medici as a monolithic bloc she marginalizes the benefits of intramural feuding.

Finally, since no interpretation of *The Prince* has taken the field (nor, I hope, will), I have sought to enliven the contest with the introduction of another competitor. We have seen how *The Prince* can be read as a book of stately advice (which aims to deprive others of their states), a trap for the Medici (or perhaps just one of them), and a job application (for both Machiavelli and Lorenzo). Alongside the better-known interpretations belongs another, perhaps no less worthy. A richer reading of *The Prince* includes the exclusion of Romulus.

Joseph M. Parent

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⁵⁷ Scott and Sullivan, 'Patricide'. Chabod (*Machiavelli*, p. 69) also makes the case for Cesare Borgia as exemplar.

⁵⁸ See H. Baron, 'Machiavelli: The Republican Citizen and the Author of *The Prince*', *English Historical Review*, 76 (1961), p. 217–53; M. Dietz, 'Trapping the Prince: Machiavelli and the Politics of Deception', *American Political Science Review*, 80 (1986), pp. 777–99.