

Machiavelli's Florentine Republic

What do modern republics have to fear? *Machiavelli's Florentine Republics* reconstructs Machiavelli's answer to this question from the perspective of the *Florentine Histories*, his most probing meditation on the fate of republican politics in the modern age. It argues that his principle goal in narrating the defeat of Florentine republicanism is to debunk the views of leading humanists concerning the overall health of republican politics in modernity and the distinctive challenges that modern republics should expect to face. The Medici family had exposed these vulnerabilities better than anyone else, and Machiavelli reconstructs their political strategy to show how conventional ideas of moral and political virtue are the most potent instruments of princely ambition in a city that wants to be free.

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For C. and C.

Holy Father of thy Country, this title hath been conferred on thee by the people, by the senate, and by us, the knights. But history had already conferred it; yet didst thou also receive, though late, thy title true; long time hadst thou been Father of the World. Thou bearest on earth the name which Jupiter bears in high heaven: of men thou art the father, he of the gods. Romulus, thou must yield pride of place. Caesar by his guardian care makes great thy city walls: the walls thou gavest to the city were such as Remus could o'erleap. Thy power was felt by Tatius, the little Cures, and Caenina; under Caesar's leadership whate'er the sun beholds on either side is Roman. Thou didst own a little stretch of conquered land: all that exists beneath the canopy of Jove is Caesar's own. Thou didst rape wives: Caesar bade them under his rule be chaste. Thou didst admit the guilty to thy grove: he hath repelled the wrong. Thine was a rule of force: under Caesar it is the laws that reign. Thou didst the name of *dominus* bear: he bears the name of *princeps*.

– Ovid, *Fasti* 2, lines 134–144

When he had seduced the army with gifts, the people with grain, and everyone with the charms of peace, he grew stronger little by little. He collected the responsibilities of the Senate, the magistrates, and the courts for himself, with no one to stop him because the most energetic men had fallen in battle or proscriptions. As for the rest of the aristocrats, the more willingly they subjected themselves to slavery, the more they were rewarded with wealth and honors . . . Everything was peaceful, and the magistrates had the same names as before. The younger citizens had been born after Augustus's victory at Actium, and the older ones were born during the civil wars. Who remained who had known the Republic?

– Tacitus, *The Annals*, 1.3–1.5

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Abbreviations

I have used the following abbreviations for Machiavelli's works. All quotations are drawn from these translations, unless otherwise noted.

- P *The Prince*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998). References to *The Prince* are cited by chapter.
- D *Discourses on Livy*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Nathan Tarcov (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). References to the *Discourses* are cited by book and chapter.
- FH *Florentine Histories*, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Laura Banfield (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). References to the *Histories* are cited by book and chapter.