



Lucio Biasiori and Giuseppe Marcocci (eds.)
- *Machiavelli, Islam and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern Political Thought*
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Machiavelli, Islam and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern Political Thought provides the first appraisal of the unexplored relations between the work of Niccol  Machiavelli (1469-1527) and the Islamic world: from the Arabic roots of *The Prince* to its first translations into Ottoman Turkish and Arabic. The volume surveys comparative depictions of non-European peoples, Renaissance representations of the Prophet Muhammad and the Ottoman military discipline, a Jesuit dissertation in Persian for a Mughal emperor, peculiar readers from Brazil to India, the parallel lives of Machiavelli, the Turkish bureaucrat Cel lz de Mu taf  (ca. 1490-1567) and the Arabic rendition of *The Prince* at the court of the Egyptian Khedive (viceroy), Mu ammad Ali (r. 1769-1849) in Cairo. Lucio Biasiori and Giuseppe Marcocci's edited volume takes a different tack in that it sheds light on the global circulation and reception of *The Prince* and of other Machiavelli's writings. The current volume is divided into three parts, each of which is comprised of three chapters. The ten prominent contributing scholars produced compelling evidences and studies, from the history of reading to the analysis of the translations and the exploration of the textual interpolations and reversals.

In their introduction to the book, Biasiori and Marcocci undertake the task of reorienting Machiavelli's writings. Reconsidering Machiavellian legacy, the editors assert, contributes to the understanding of his crucial role in the foundations of modern political thought, which is characteristically reduced to a process utterly limited to the West. Machiavelli's works emerged as a much more effective tool to compare events and processes on a global dimension than has been previously recognized. Machiavelli's other compositions can be read as pieces of a wider Eurasian mosaic. This mosaic between the late Middle Ages and the early modern period "was already characterised by incessant political communication across linguistic, cultural and religious borders (3)."

Machiavelli, Islam and the East: Reorienting the Foundations of Modern Political Thought delves into the resemblance between Islamic and Machiavellian political thought, the connection between some Arabic backgrounds of Machiavelli's education and the reception of his writings by authors who handled Islam and the Ottoman Empire after him. From his standpoint, Lucio Biasiori postulates that *The Prince* was greatly grateful to the most extensive Eurasian Pseudo-Aristotelian work in late medieval Europe, the *Kit b sirr al-asr r*, written in eighth century Syria under the Umayyad dynasty and translated into Latin and many European languages under the Latin title *Secretum secretorum* (*Secret of Secrets*). The presence of this Muslim source in Machiavelli explains some similarities between *The Prince* and

Arab political thought, and might also have paved the way for an easier and more trenchant reception of his writings in the Islamic world, where they were not viewed as a radical novelty.

Machiavelli's brief but insightful remarks on political, administrative and military aspects of the Islamic world provoked vivacious debate and sharp reactions in Italy and Spain – a land where a fatal attack on the medieval coexistence among the three religions of the Book (Islam, Christianity and Judaism) had been launched by King Ferdinand II of Aragon (r. 1479-1516), whom Machiavelli notably describes as the boldest monarch of his times, acting under the “cloak of religion.”

In this vein, Vincenzo Lavenia focuses on the genesis of Turkophilia in the sixteenth century, connecting it to the reception of Niccolò Machiavelli and of the Italian humanist Paolo Giovio, in particular the latter's *Commentario de le cose de' turchi* which was published in 1532 by the same Roman printer as Machiavelli, Antonio Blado. Machiavelli's and Giovio's approach influenced a realistic view towards, and the possibility of a comparative analysis of, the Ottoman Empire. Machiavelli's ambivalent attitude regarding the Ottomans, which he transformed into a more general position towards the complex relations between politics and religion, as well as between just war and empire, in early modern Europe.

Carlo Ginzburg tracks the re-appropriation of Machiavelli's *Prince* and *Discourses on Livy* (composed between 1513 and 1519 and both printed posthumously in 1532 and 1531, respectively), by sixteenth century French antiquarians, establishing how their study of classical antiquity widely drew on Machiavelli's comparative approach. The volume demonstrates that the intersection of Machiavelli's writings with the reflection on the New World formed a freshly new attitude towards cultural diversity, which also included the Muslims. This new inclination was characterised by the use of Machiavelli's observations on the Romans as a term of comparison not only for judging and, sometimes, condemning or rejecting political and religious novelties emerging from the newly explored lands, but also for deciphering attitudes and customs in empires with which centuries-old relations, more or less unreceptive, existed.

The creative recovery of Machiavelli's writings by European humanists, missionaries and travellers, to establish comparisons, particularly with Islamic powers, is the main topic of the second part of the volume. The application of quotations and the rephrasing of Machiavelli's statements and themes to the Muslim world are deemed as signs of the global spread of his works and ideas. Pier Mattia Tommasino gauges the weight of the portrayal of Muhammad as an “armed prophet,” derived from a particular reading of *The Prince* understanding it as a more general climax in the European representation of the founder of Islam. The Machiavellian Muhammad marked a turning point in the long tradition of his legend in Europe, interconnecting themes and aspirations circulating at the court of the Ottoman sultan. But when Jesuit missionaries appeared before the Mughal emperor Nur-ud-Din Jahangir (r. 1605-1627), they could not resist the temptation to insert a considerable number of passages from the dedication of *The Prince* to Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino, in the Persian version of a political treatise that one of them, Jerónimo

Xavier, wrote in cooperation with Mulla Abdus Sattar ibn Qasim Lahauri.

Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam disclose in their chapter, “Mediterranean Exemplars: Jesuit Political Lessons for a Mughal Emperor,” which is replete with references to episodes of Eurasian history, that *Ādāb al-Salṭanat* (“Manual for Kings”) follows a path very different from that of Machiavelli, trying to provide Jahangir with an exemplar of a pious prince. This treatise contains Alam and Subrahmanyam’s first evidence of passages stemmed from *The Prince* in a text written in a Muslim land. Therefore, it can be regarded as a variation on the equivocal literature produced at the time in Europe by well-known members of the Society of Jesus, who were engaged in refuting Machiavelli without wholly repudiating the ideas and questions on which he had so deeply left his mark in the political culture of the period.

Giuseppe Marcocci’s chapter which is dubbed “Machiavelli, the Iberian Explorations and the Islamic Empire: Tropical Readers from Brazil to India (Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries)” explores some effects of Machiavelli’s thought on the colonies and the empire building that, despite the disproofs and bans, contributed to making him a significant author in the Iberian world. Marcocci concentrates on two surprising tropical readers of the *Discourses on Livy* and *The Prince* – two Italians (one a Florentine and the other a Venetian). From mid-sixteenth-century Brazil and early-eighteenth-century northern India respectively, they put us in touch with hitherto-unknown fragments of the exchange between the Islamic world and Machiavelli’s writings – an exchange that was much richer than is suggested by the conventional Eurocentric image of Machiavelli as one of the founders of modern political thought.

Not only European authors, however, deployed Machiavelli to (mis)construe Islam and the East, as the third and final part of this volume posits, offering a major contribution to the study of cross-cultural political thought in the early and late modern period. Kaya Şahin brings into conspicuous focus an intriguing case study in his “A Tale of Two Chancellors: Machiavelli, Celālzāde Muştafā and Connected Political Cultures in the Cinquecento/the Hijri Tenth Century.” Şahin places Machiavelli side by side with an Ottoman career bureaucrat and author of historical works, Celālzāde Muştafā (ca. 1490-1567). Inspired by Sanjay Subrahmanyam’s notion of connected histories, and the *histoire croisée* approach, Şahin’s aim is to go beyond a simple comparison of Machiavelli and Muştafā’s lives and works; instead, their opinions and arguments are treated as reactions to specific cultural and political dynamics that were felt across early modern Eurasia. There are some convergences and divergences between these two authors in some themes, the most prominent of which are *Virtù* and *Akl*, political leadership and religion.

The rapid circulation of Machiavelli’s writings across the Islamic world was followed by their translation into Ottoman Turkish and Arabic from the second half of the eighteenth century on, thus contributing to the emergence of a new political vocabulary in the modern Islamic world. In her chapter, Nergiz Yılmaz Aydoğdu presents the results of her discovery of the first translation of *The Prince* into Ottoman Turkish among the manuscripts of the Topkapı Palace Museum Library (*Şarāy-i*

Humāyūn), Istanbul. The probable fruit of collaboration between a dragoman called Herbert (to be identified with Thomas Herbert, a descendant of a Catholic family long since emigrated from the British Isles to Constantinople) and a Turkish learned man, the work was written in a period of crisis for the Ottoman Empire, which had been weakened by the war against Russia. The quest for political and military renewal drove Sultan Muṣṭafā III (r. 1757-1774) to encourage a version of *Anti-Machiavel* (1740), a refutation of *The Prince* written by King Frederick II of Prussia (r. 1740-1786), with Voltaire's help. The fact that *Anti-Machiavel* includes the text it criticises made its translation Machiavelli's official entrance to the Ottoman world. A close reading of this manuscript discloses a complex adaptation of *The Prince* to the Ottoman political reality: the effort to make this treatise lucid to its new Turkish readers is evident in the translation of keywords such as "prince," "state," or *virtù*.

"Translating Machiavelli in Egypt: The Prince and the Shaping of a New Political Vocabulary in the Nineteenth-Century Arab Mediterranean" is about the first Arabic translation of *The Prince*, conceived in 1832 at the court of the Egyptian Khedive (viceroy), Muḥammad Ali (r. 1769-1849) in Cairo, which was still under Ottoman regency. According to Elisabetta Benigni, the translation was connected to Muḥammad Ali's effort to modernize Egypt through a series of economic, political and cultural reforms that aimed to emulate those witnessed by Europe, and ought to be understood in the context of the current Mediterranean spread of discourse about the idea of the nation in the aftermath of Napoleonic expeditions. A careful analysis of this translation reveals that the attempt to adapt *The Prince* to the first half of nineteenth century was less determined than in the Ottoman Turkish case, although Islamic political thought in Arabic confronted completely new concepts, starting from that of "nation," which Machiavelli himself contributed to circulating. In so doing, the basis was also laid for the rise of nationalism across the Muslim world, which in the past century has contributed to the emergence of an anti-colonial nationalism, but also to the return to the rhetoric of clash between West and East.

Lucio Biasiori and Giuseppe Marcocci's edited volume is a well-constructed and foundational piece written by different scholars of a range of latitude and perspective. Challenging unbending separations within Eurasia, this book restores a sense of the global spreading of books, ideas and men in the past. Comparison with other cultures and traditions from different parts of the world, increasingly helped Machiavelli to avoid his name being pigeonholed as synonymous for "deviousness, cynicism and realpolitik," to reduce his thought to a flat anthology of maxims for governance, and to enable his compositions to escape the "black legend" surrounding them and, among other things, make their way in eighteenth century Europe.

Lahoucine Ammari
Sultan Moulay Slimane University
of Beni-Mellal