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Cunctator bei Silius Italicus**
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Fortune, Misfortune, and the Decline of the Machiavellian Heroic Model of Military Glory in Early-Modern Europe

In *Art of War*, Niccolò Machiavelli set the foundations of a debate destined to influence military thinking for centuries. The discussion of the relationship between theory and practice in warfare preoccupied Renaissance and early modern military writers, as did the question of whether or not the theories of the ancients are useful to military commanders.¹ Machiavelli developed his military theory as former Secretary of the Chancery of the Florentine Republic, and, in this role, authored a project for the introduction of a peasant militia in Tuscany. According to his military theory and practice, the military and political orders of the ancients are capable of stimulating an interaction between the people, the state and the military institutions. His assumption that the imitation of Roman military virtue (“virtù”) creates good government and a well-ordered society had a deep impact on the political and military debate in early modern Europe.

Machiavelli points out the function of heroic and glorious military examples, capable of motivating a militia. This article focuses on how the Florentine secretary develops and uses these heroic examples in his books. It draws attention to the significance of the Machiavellian case within a broad literary, artistic, geographical and political context by providing new insights into the diffusion of new models of military heroism in the sixteenth century. The question of heroism allows for an interdisciplinary perspective, which in turn highlights the global importance of the Machiavellian notions of heroism.

Machiavelli’s take on military heroism is double-faceted. First, it is argued that Machiavelli participates in and at the same time contributes to a new concept of *collective* heroism, which spread all over Europe, and which draws from the renewed military practice of infantry replacing cavalry as the central body of the army. This article attaches special importance to Machiavelli’s account of the battle of Ravenna (1512) and its relation to visual representations of what proved to be an exemplary infantry battle in early modern military thinking. It will be shown how

contemporary drawings and engravings share Machiavelli’s view on infantry as expressed in his account of Ravenna, which contributed to shaping the image of the foot soldier as a brutal yet powerful force that needs to be disciplined and trained in order to be ‘heroic’. Secondly, Machiavelli’s writings present us with models of *individual* heroism which are highly ambiguous. As an in-depth analysis of the character of Fabrizio Colonna in *Art or War* will demonstrate, the Machiavellian notion of individual heroism is not essentialist, but context dependent. The Machiavellian hero is not defined by well-established military qualities such as fearlessness and courage, but rather by the idea of ‘glory’ conceived of as the wisdom to make the right decision at the right moment or the ability to create consent among one’s fellow soldiers. Finally, this article shows that, in the course of the sixteenth century, new cultural and social models gradually replaced these concepts of military heroism and war, which were later shaped by the increasing opposition to Machiavelli’s doctrine.

Collective virtue: ‘Heroic’ visions of infantry as warrior. Contact and exchange of ideas in Europe

According to Machiavelli, martial virtue may be the collective virtue of a nation in arms that either fights for its survival, or aims to conquer other territories. For him, however, only the people in arms can be well disciplined as well as glorious. Mercenaries, as Machiavelli says, could match neither the strength nor the determination of troops serving their own country (“you cannot have more faithful, more true, or better soldiers”, Machiavelli, *Prince* 119). Through military discipline, the patriot warrior learns to be a citizen and to display both civic and military virtue (cf. Pocock 201). Therefore, this kind of warrior is part of a collective entity, which on the one hand

is created by the positive influence of discipline (“For without this discipline observed and practiced with utmost care [and] diligence, never was an army good”, Machiavelli, *Art of War* 46),² and on the other, is encouraged by political and civic inclusion, e.g. by benefitting subjects, and – possibly – by the eventual conferral of citizenship, or by creating the sense of benefitting one’s own homeland.³

This model demonstrates the superiority of infantry over cavalry. Consequently, Machiavelli’s writings not only overruled the previous cultural tradition of chivalry as an aristocratic way to think of war (which was in fact “more and more precarious”, Kühner 12), but they also dismissed the humanistic view of the militia as an exercise of individual virtues.⁴ On the contrary, Machiavelli emphasizes the role of infantry – and especially a home-grown popular infantry – as a powerful collective of warriors, which through military glory shapes its own destiny and that of the nation. The idea of this collective force, which is embedded in Machiavelli’s view of armies and war, originated from and, at the same time, contributed to a cultural environment characterized by a dramatic and tragic but also heroic martial vision of powerful infantry clashes.

Most interestingly, this model of a heroic collective in arms is highlighted by visual culture, e.g. in early sixteenth-century drawings and engravings. Hans Holbein’s *Battle Scene* provides an excellent example (fig. 1): a work that, incidentally, resembles Machiavelli’s reconstruction of the battle of Ravenna (1512) in its strong emphasis on the use of swords and daggers among the pikes at close distance.

During the Middle Ages, infantry clashes, set in motion as a last resort, were not fights between two masses but the sum of many combats between individuals (Keegan 100). But in the early sixteenth century, open-field battles were characterized by large opposing infantry formations, which generally led to massive casualties. In this type of war, the pike played an important role. In particular, this weapon famously permitted the Swiss infantry formations to dominate the fields of war during the second half of the fifteenth century. According to Machiavelli, Ravenna was a turning point in the history of warfare, because of the innovative and peculiar tactic adopted by the Spanish who closed the distance and engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the German infantry in French service: a feature which, in the famous Florentine secretary’s view, was the



Fig. 1: Hans Holbein the Younger. *Battle Scene*. c. 1524 (drawing, pen and ink and brush, grey wash, 28.6 x 44.1 cm), Kunstmuseum Basel.

secret behind the success of the Spanish tactical model on the field of Ravenna and a model that every “prince” should follow in order to shape what Machiavelli defines as a “third order” of infantry: a sort of a multi-task infantry battle formation (Machiavelli, *Prince* 120).⁵

The battle (fought between the Papal and Spanish troops of the Holy League and the French in April 1512) is an event that impressed upon the minds of the people at the time, and it was well known for the number of casualties left on the field. This episode played a significant part in Machiavelli’s as well as in other early modern cultural concepts of war and military glory.

It is in his major works that Machiavelli discusses the Spaniards’ tactics of closing the distance to the enemy and their use of swords: first in *The Prince* (1513), which had been circulating in manuscript from at least 1515 onwards (cf. Bausi 30), then in *Art of War* from 1521 (cf. Guidi, *Dall’Ordinanza* 7-18). (As mentioned before, in these writings he explains that the Spaniards “have entered below among the Germans’ pikes”, Machiavelli, *Prince* 120; also in *Art of War*: “For the Spanish infantries had drawn within sword-range of the German infantry and would have completely consumed them if the German infantrymen had not been aided by the French cavalymen”, in Machiavelli, *Art of War* 39).

The reason for his emphasis on the Spaniards’ tactics is especially that the episode of Ravenna is of key importance for the formation of Machiavelli’s concept of a motivated infantry. His presentation of the battle is functional to his famous assertion that firearms are not fundamental to winning a battle. And the same applies to the entire strategy of offense which informs his military thinking as a whole, and which forms an important part of his concept of military heroism. Fire weapons are useless unless you have a motivated and trained infantry, capable of audacity. What counted the most in warfare to Machiavelli, as Felix Gilbert correctly pointed out many years ago, were still the “human qualities needed in war: courage, obedience, enthusiasm, and ferocity” (Gilbert 24).

In accordance with his method of often emphasizing specific aspects of certain events pertaining to famous historical episodes (Marchand 111), Machiavelli picked out only a single feature of the battle in order to shape an image of Ravenna that was more suitable to illustrate as well as provide evidence of his military doctrine: i.e. the audacity of the Spanish swordsmen and the effects of a possible innovative use of a traditional weapon such as the sword on the outcome of a battle. In essence, instead of emphasizing the bombardment of the enemy line with unusual and unprecedented fire by the artillery of the Duke

of Ferrara in French service – an element that was key to the outcome of the battle of Ravenna and an example of the growing importance of cannons on the battlefield – Machiavelli chose to highlight the portrait of a mass heroic action by the Spanish swordsmen in order to support his idea of a motivated and well-drilled infantry.

Hence, in light of the singularity of Machiavelli’s description of the battle, not found in other written sources of the time (with the exception of the few which draw directly from the Florentine),⁶ one should note that Holbein’s work draws on the same cultural representation of an infantry battle which had informed the portrayal of Ravenna in Machiavelli’s *Prince* and *Art of War*. Incidentally, one could also advance the hypothesis that there might have been more direct cultural links between the two.⁷ Intriguing hints of possible connections arise from the suggested composition of Holbein’s drawing, which is likely to have been commissioned during his stay in England at the time of the festivities held at Greenwich by Henry VIII to welcome a French diplomatic delegation in 1527.⁸ It is conceivable, in particular, that Holbein’s choice of subject for the drawing might have been inspired by some kind of exchange with members of the French mission. This is most likely to be the case if one takes into consideration that the French ambassador sent to Greenwich was Anne de Montmorancy, a protagonist in the history of the Italian Wars who himself had taken part in the battle of Ravenna, and who, incidentally, would be the *dédicataire* of the earliest French manuscript translations of both *Art of War* (c. 1540) and *The Prince* (1546) (cf. Bianchi Bensimon 25, 31-33). Further, the ambassador was accompanied by cardinal Jean du Bellay,⁹ brother of a certain Guillaume to whom the book *Instructions sur le fait de la guerre* was originally attributed (Dickinson), despite being a plagiarism of Machiavelli’s *Art of War*. Finally, it must be noted that the name of Ravenna – which was occupied by Venetian troops after the sack of Rome in May 1527, almost simultaneously with the Greenwich celebrations – must have been heard often in the English court during Du Bellay’s mission, for the restitution of the city to the Papal states became a main subject of discussion between Henry and the ambassadors from at least December of the same year onward.¹⁰

These connections and the exchange between Italian culture, German artists, France and England, are hints that a new military culture, which shared beliefs and visual representations of infantry as a heroic and tragic force, was ignited by the circulation of books, military thinking, and people at the beginning of the early modern age.

Further indication of a possible cultural connection between Machiavelli's portrait of Ravenna and German visual representations of war – as evidence of the formation of new visions of collective military heroism – might be found in the similarities between the same important role assigned to swords in the combat scene by Holbein and an earlier image of the battle that also puts this weapon at the very center of the composition: the woodcut known as the *Battle of Ravenna* composed by either Hans Burgkmair the Elder (1473–1531) (fig. 2) or one of the other artists who took part in the printing process of *Der Weiss Kunig* by Marx Treitzsaurwein (i.e. Leonhard Beck, Hans Schäufelein, and Hans Springinklee).¹¹ The series of texts and sketches by Treitzsaurwein, and then the woodcuts by Burgkmair and the others, were conceived to celebrate the emperor Maximilian I (who himself added comments and personal notes), and were composed during a period starting from approximately the year 1500 and running for at least a decade and a half or more.¹²

Based on the resemblance between Machiavelli's commentary on the use of swords by the Spaniards and the woodcut of the battle of



Fig. 2: Hans Burgkmair the Elder (or perhaps Leonhard Beck, Hans Schäufelein or Hans Springinklee). *The Battle of Ravenna*. c. 1513–18 (woodcut from *Der Weiss Kunig*), Austrian National Library Vienna.

Ravenna prepared at the court of Maximilian I, one might even advance the hypothesis that Machiavelli either had the opportunity to consult the same sources or hear about this event from persons who were on the field that day. Luca Rinaldi, one of the Emperor's advisors, is mentioned by Machiavelli in chapter 23 of *The Prince* ("man of Maximilian", Machiavelli, *Prince* 112) as one of the sources he used to create his psychological sketch of the Emperor, although he refers to conversations they had had during his 1508 diplomatic mission to the court of Maximilian in Tyrol.¹³

Incidentally, in light of this representation of the battle by Treitzsaurwein and the artist who worked on the woodcut representing Ravenna, it must be observed that Machiavelli's reconstruction of the battle was more accurate than generally thought by scholars.

However, it is important to highlight that this kind of visual representation of a clash of infantry as a battle of swords (and as a dramatic and frantic event) might have reached Holbein through Burgkmair (despite the fact that the former was younger than Burgkmair, both of them lived in Augsburg and Basel at same time).¹⁴ Particularly the image of swordsmen in close combat in the woodcut of the *Battle of Ravenna* (if it is to be attributed to Burgkmair) must have struck Holbein. Still, the focus Machiavelli put on Ravenna as well as on the different military tactics of the Romans in *Art of War* contributed (from its publication in 1521 onwards) to the success of this new visualization of an infantry fighting fiercely at short distance with pikes, swords, and daggers. This representation differs from other contemporary portrayals of battles with two opposing fronts of pikemen geometrically set in formation.

This conception of infantry as suggested in works such as Holbein's and *Der Weiss Kunig* can also be connected to a view of infantrymen as a destructive and brutal but also powerful force which needs to be disciplined to avoid disorder and subsequent defeat, a conception which may also be linked to the circulation of cultures of war between the Italian peninsula and the rest of Europe. Other works by Holbein serve to corroborate this hypothesis, particularly the engraving known as *Bad War*, which recalls some of the scenes of his aforementioned drawing (fig. 3). According to modern commentators, this work also refers to the wars in Italy and, most significantly, it shows the dangerous effects of keeping the long pikes uncoordinated and disorganized. This detail evokes another distinctive Machiavellian topic: the need for training and discipline. And it might provide further evidence for the

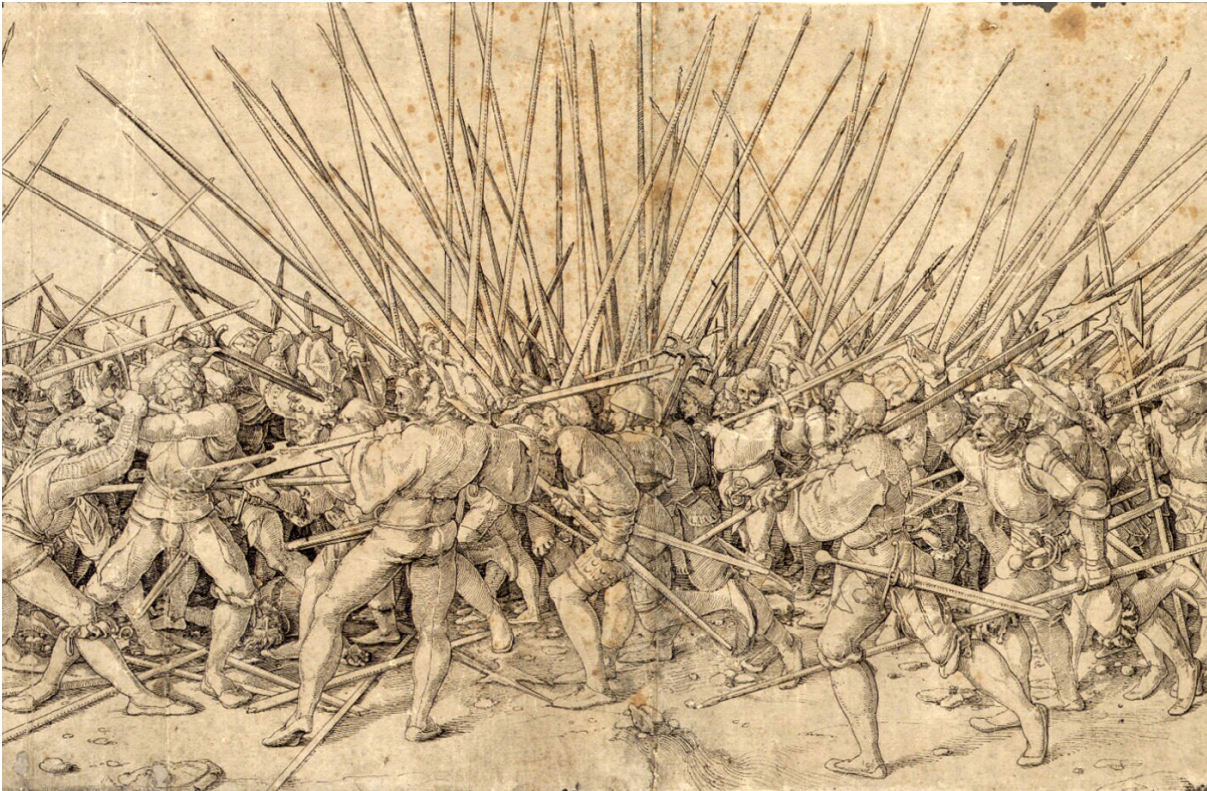


Fig. 3: Hans Holbein the Younger. *Bad War*. Early 16th century (engraving), Albertina, Vienna.

circulation of his military ideas in the artistic and intellectual circles frequented by Hans Holbein.

As mentioned above, Machiavelli's insistence on discipline probably prompted a certain kind of imagery of warfare. In order to ensure perfect coordination among the different ranks of a battle formation, *Art of War* stresses the role of military figures, such as corporals and sergeants, in charge of ensuring "the cohesion of the army" (Pedullà 85):

For in the armies one observes two orders: one, what the men in each battalion must do; the other, what the battalion must then do when it is with the others in one army. (Machiavelli, *Art of War* 47)

There are further instances, though, of the impact of concepts and topics developed in Machiavelli's *Art of War*, especially on representations of war and battle in German cultures of warfare, which, vice versa, are of key importance to Machiavelli's military thinking. Both the Swiss and the Landsknechts' sense of corporate identity precisely represented the model that in Machiavelli's opinion came closest to the martial spirit of the Romans who fought

for the glory of their homeland. Their highest reward was honor in battle and freedom for their communities, not financial gain as was the case for the Italian *condottieri* (cf. Parrott 61). Machiavelli's Fabrizio Colonna provides "evidence" for this kind of discipline and cohesion, precisely by mentioning the virtuous "example" of Germany (cf. Machiavelli, *Art of War* 61).

However, even though Machiavelli associates heroism to a concept which refers to the collective force of a popular infantry, he also conceives virtue and glory as specifically individual achievements.

Individual virtue: The Machiavellian concept of 'heroism' and its transformations in subsequent military thinking

In Machiavelli's writings, images of glory and heroism are often associated with individuals, such as historical figures of his time and notable characters of ancient and biblical history. A famous example of a political or religious leader

who is seen as a virtuous and glorious founder of a new state by the force of arms is the peculiar Machiavellian figure of the 'armed' prophet Moses ("Moses, Cyrus, Theseus, and Romulus would never not have been able to make their peoples observe their constitutions for long if they had been unarmed", Machiavelli, *Prince* 55). Another type of hero is a military commander who is capable of setting an example for his soldiers or his fellow citizens in arms: a commander who, as such, is also capable of leading more reliable and loyal troops (e.g. Valerius Corvinus who wanted his men to follow his "deeds", not his "words", and "not only discipline, but also example", Machiavelli, *Discourses* 297).

However, for Machiavelli, 'different' kinds of virtuous individual behavior may produce the same outcome. The "hardness of Manlius Torquatus and the kindness of Valerius Corvinus acquired for each the same glory" (ibid. 22). Machiavelli's extraordinary acumen consists precisely of his understanding that heroism must "accord to the needs of the times" (i.e. to the prevailing political and military situation) in order to achieve true 'glory' and to fulfill the purpose of motivating the people to defend their own country. Both Manlius and Valerius

lived in Rome, with like virtue, with like triumphs and glory, and each of them, in what pertained to the enemy, acquired it with like virtue; but in what belonged to the armies and to their dealings with the soldiers, they proceeded very diversely. For Manlius commanded his soldiers with every kind of severity, without interrupting either toll or punishment; Valerius on the other hand, dealt with them with every humane mode and means and full of familiar domesticity [...] Nonetheless, with so much diversity of proceeding, each produced the same fruit, both against the enemies and in favor of the republic and of himself. (ibid. 264-265)

Thus, either humanity or punishment may achieve the same 'glorious' outcome. In addition, glory and heroism are achieved not exclusively by military virtue intended as courageous performance. Valerius Corvinus "was made consul at twenty-three years". After Livy's histories, Machiavelli explains how "[s]peaking to his soldiers", Valerius said that the consulate was "the reward of virtue, not of blood" (ibid. 121).

Sometimes glory is also achieved through cleverness and ambiguity, and, occasionally, even by ignominy or criminal virtue. This concept is embodied in the way Machiavelli writes about Lucius Lentulus, who, after explaining that "the

life of Rome consisted in the life of [its] army," argues that "the fatherland is well defended in whatever mode one defends it, whether with ignominy or with glory" (ibid. 301). These distinctions set the Machiavellian concept of heroism further apart from the model of honor and bravery inherited from the western cultural tradition of chivalry.

Machiavelli's idea of individual heroism therefore amounts to a concept of 'glory' which is intended to benefit one's own homeland or be obtained by pursuing great achievements without any moral restraints, rather than amounting to a vision of 'nobility' of honor and spirit.

On the other hand, Machiavelli understands that, as Ronald Asch points out, "no hero is imaginable [...] without a community which [...] acknowledges him" (Asch, *The Hero* 7). Consequently, according to Machiavelli, a political or military leader sometimes needs to wear a disguise to acquire either reputation or consent and to attain real glory, i.e. to be truly 'heroic'.

An exemplary case of these new, unheard forms of heroism in Machiavelli's works is the ambiguous figure of Cesare Borgia: a military and political leader whose pursuit of glory and remarkable achievements make him a special kind of hero, as does his merciless and cold-blooded attitude towards both those who conspired against him and those who act against the benefit of the people. Nevertheless, in his failure to understand the risk of trusting the new pope Julius II after the death of his father, Pope Alexander VI, he is at the same time, in his inability to foresee danger, an anti-hero who can serve as an example of unwise conduct to the readers of *The Prince*. Glory is therefore not only bravery, force, or nobility. It is also wisdom and the ability to make the right decision according to the moment and occasions that fortune offers.

Another example of the ambiguous construction of Machiavellian heroism is the character with the majority of the dialogue in *Art of War*, Fabrizio Colonna, who actually is not a stereotypically standard and plain military hero. Machiavelli's Fabrizio is different from the contemporary standard of a military commander. Due to his key role in some of the main battles of the Italian Wars, one might consider him a military 'hero'. Nonetheless, and at the same time, he is also a 'counter-hero', as he reveals the incompetence of Italy's warrior nobles in the face of the external enemies who invaded Italy.¹⁵ In addition, Machiavelli's Fabrizio is a contradictory figure: the leader of a cavalry force who promotes the superiority of infantry over cavalry throughout the dialogue of *Art of War*. Colonna is also the one who paradoxically advocates the strategy

of an immediate cavalry charge to neutralize the enemy's firearms, despite being the historical protagonist of an actual battle that, according to modern historians, proved the ineffectiveness of cavalry action against full artillery fire.¹⁶

This is a biographical detail concerning the life of the real historical figure of Fabrizio Colonna, which is interesting in terms of Machiavelli's conceptualization of his character as well as in terms of new heroic role models. At the aforementioned battle of Ravenna in 1512, after suffering prolonged artillery fire, Fabrizio disobeyed the Spanish captain Pedro Navarro's orders by sending his cavalry formations to attack. The attack came too late and was disorganized. As the remarks attributed to Colonna in Francesco Guicciardini's *Storia d'Italia* testify, everyone at the time was aware that he had contravened his superior's command.¹⁷

Fabrizio also claimed to have given precise advice to Navarro, either to set up camp in a different location and prepare a fortified defense by avoiding battle, or to anticipate the French action by attacking them before the bulk of the army crossed the river Ronco. (As suggested by the character Fabrizio: "[I]f you want an artillery piece not to harm you, it is necessary either to stay where it does not reach you or put oneself behind a wall or behind an embankment"; but for those captains who cannot stay behind an embankment, "there is no other remedy than to occupy it [the artillery] with as much speed as you can", Machiavelli, *Art of War* 72 and 73). Once again, Guicciardini explains: "For Fabrizio Colonna had advised them to charge the Enemy when he began to cross the stream" (Guicciardini 246). This action might have proven effective, despite the fact that in the view of contemporaries, the French victory at Ravenna was due to Navarro's fatal mistake of not waiting behind the embankments which were previously dug (cf. Fournel/Zancarini 207).

The implications of this episode on both Machiavelli's construction of Fabrizio and the perception of this character by the readers of the time are very important in terms of the heroic. Today we may be unaware of the actual meanings certain terms or figures had at the time when a particular work was written.¹⁸ As Quentin Skinner highlighted, a lack of knowledge affects our understanding of Renaissance political writings (cf. Skinner 48).

One should therefore consider that, when Machiavelli wrote *Art of War*, it was probably well-known that Fabrizio had been the commander of the vanguard of the Spanish army which had suffered heavy losses during the French bombardment, and that, consequently, he had decided

to disobey his superior's commands and attack the French. This is documented, for instance, by sources concerning early reconstructions of the events at Ravenna, certainly available to both Machiavelli (in his function as secretary of the Florentine Republic) and members of the political class.¹⁹ Henceforth, despite losing the battle and being criticised by public opinion (as we know from a letter in which the real Colonna argues against other possible versions of events of the battle, in a commitment to defend his own reputation, Sanuto 316), Fabrizio became an important military character for Machiavelli, who ascribed him his usual irony and polemical potential. In fact, the contradictions of Machiavelli's Fabrizio in *Art of War* create the 'heroic' character of a mercenary who paradoxically promotes an infantry home-grown militia counter to his own interests as a *condottiere*). Fabrizio is also the one who in the book promotes a quick and heroic action from the "horns" (i.e. from the flanks) to "occupy" the enemy's artillery before it is able to massacre your own army with unstoppable fire on the field (this quick action is assigned to the "velites", as Machiavelli calls this mixed cavalry vanguard following Roman terminology, Machiavelli, *Art of War* 72). Ironically, however, this is precisely what happened to the historical Colonna at Ravenna. The choice of Fabrizio Colonna as central character in *Art of War*, therefore, is to be connected to Machiavelli's own knowledge of the events of the battle of Ravenna. At the same time, the battle, and the part the historical Colonna played in it, were well known to any reader of the time, not only to Machiavelli. In particular, Ravenna played a key role in shaping the image of individual heroism and glory both in the mind of Machiavelli and the minds of his contemporaries. Depending on the different perspectives, more than one 'hero' became famous after the battle. One of them is certainly the classical tragic figure of Gaston de Foix who died on the field and was celebrated for it by the French. Machiavelli, however, picked another type of 'hero'.

Actually, Ravenna as a historical episode proves the diversity among perceptions of what constitutes a military 'hero'. The connotations which arise from historical facts, and the military techniques as suggested by the literary character of Fabrizio in *Art of War* both effectively amount to a controversial and emblematic potential. To his contemporaries he can be 'heroic' in an ideological way, due also to his essential ambiguity. Ultimately, the construction of the character of Fabrizio as an individual 'hero' is also part of the aforementioned Machiavellian response to firearms based on audacity, drill, and motivation,

which informs the strategy of offense that is at the core of his military thinking.

However, the influence of other aspects of Machiavelli's military models can be seen in subsequent famous military commanders throughout history. As some passages of Peter Whitehorne's "epistle dedicatorie" in his early translation of *Art of War* into English highlight (1560), Machiavelli's reasoning about the virtues of the Romans stimulated a discussion on the concept of military glory which stresses features such as bravery, discipline and individual honor:

Wherefore, sith the necessitie of the science of warres is so greate [...] and the worthinesse moreover, and honour of the same so greate, that as by prose we see, the perfecte glorie therof, cannot easely finde roote, but in the hartes of moste noble couragious. (Machiavelli, *The Arte of Warre*, 6-7)

This kind of thinking is embodied in other heroic military figures of the time, such as the Duke of Alba, the governor of the Spanish Netherlands.

Against a common interpretation of *Art of War* as a merely literary exercise, it must be reaffirmed that the book actually had a larger impact on military practice at the time of the war in Flanders than has been assumed by modern scholars such as Sidney Anglo (570-71). Alba's command over his troops was shaped on the model of perfect discipline associated with the Romans, especially as represented by Machiavelli's *Art of War* and its epigones. *The marginalia* by Gabriel Harvey (an early reader of the book), written in his copy of Whitehorne's translation of *The Arte of Warre*, not only list Machiavelli among the authorities in the field of military literature (as noted by modern readers; Lawrence 56) but also confirm the association between the "old Roman most worthie Discipline & Action" stressed by the latter, and the "Spanish Discipline vnder ye Duke of Alba & ye Prince of Parma".²⁰ Particularly in Iberian culture, in fact, the focus on military discipline was increasingly central to the construction of the Spanish empire (cf. Rodríguez de la Flor 167-168). The duke's portrait by the Netherlandish painter Anthonis Mor (1549), in which Alba is represented as a proud and fearsome general in his imperious posture, highlights this kind of cultural military model (fig. 4).

In England too, "troop discipline [...] was fundamental to a nobleman's reputation" (Gunn et al. 233); and something similar can be said for Netherlandish noble captains (cf. *ibid.* 227).

But at the same time, the vocabulary used by Peter Whitehorne (the first English translator

of *Art of War*) in the dedicatory letter addressed to Queen Elizabeth is a hint at the formation of a concept of heroism which slightly diverges from Machiavelli's notion of a 'glorious' figure. In Whitehorne's words, "perfect glory" lives only "in the heart of the most noble courageous" (in Machiavelli, *The Arte of Warre* 6, emphasis AG). Essentially, through a rhetoric stressing a particular feature of the book, the ambiguity of Machiavelli's virtuous examples was subtly turned by his translator into a different kind of pattern, according to which a military leader must be first and foremost 'noble'. Similarly, in the portrait of Alba by Anthonis Mor, while the duke looks like a proud and victorious general, he also looks like a 'noble aristocrat'.



Fig. 4: Anthonis Mor (formerly attributed to Titian). Portrait of Fernando Álvarez de Toledo, 3rd Duke of Alba. 1549, Fundación Casa de Alba, Madrid.

New concepts of glory and heroism, and the increasing opposition to Machiavelli's doctrine

A significant part of the increasing opposition to Machiavelli's doctrine focused precisely on this ambiguity of the Machiavellian heroes as (anti-heroic) role models. In particular, the crisis in the exemplarity of heroes became a crucial point in the reaction against the most controversial aspects of this complex and multi-faceted Machiavellian ideal of military glory and virtue. Catholic political and military thinkers refused to acknowledge that a governor or a general might be 'glorious' without respecting Christian ethical precepts (cf. Merlin 310). Jeronem Osorio (*De nobilitate civili*, 1542) was one of the first to confront Machiavelli's ideas on virtue and war, despite remaining fundamentally ambiguous on the question of military virtue (cf. Angelo 531-33). After giving a catalog of rules for the recruitment and training of an army, Antonio Possevino (*Il soldato christiano con l'instruzione dei capi dello essercito cattolico*, Rome 1569) compares the military virtue of the Romans (as in Machiavelli's view) to the glory of the *miles Christi* who is in pursuit of the glory of God (see Brunelli, *Soldati*). Gregorio Nunes Coronel (*De optimo rei publicae statu*, 1597) argued against the Machiavellian portrayal of Moses as a leader who acquired authority and reputation through his military actions.²¹ After the publication of the *Contre Machiavel* by Innocent Gentillet (1576), the diffusion of so-called 'anti-Machiavellism' also spread in European Protestant culture (e.g. a few years later, Georg Rabe provided a German edition of Gentillet's book: *Regentenkunst, oder Fuerstenspiegel*, Frankfurt 1580), which again questioned the model of virtue and glory advocated by Machiavelli. Many of these writers, however, extrapolated maxims and sentences from his works in order to either avoid the danger of the Inquisition or simply dilute the strength of those ideas considered immoral or radical (see Lepri 45-58).

At the same time, the state of permanent war and insecurity that characterized Europe from the beginning of the sixteenth until the middle of the seventeenth century contributed to profound social and cultural changes in the way people, intellectuals and artists perceived war. This also affected the model of military glory that had previously been strongly influenced by Machiavelli. As mentioned above, while at the beginning of the early modern era, the highest military ranks pursued an ideal of honor and bravery, a countless series of acts of cruelty and robbery on both individual and collective scales also contributed

to a general climate of fear of soldiers, and perpetuated, in the words of Machiavelli, "sinister opinions regarding [...] the military" (Machiavelli, *Art of War*, Preface, 4). In response to this, generals and commanders only rarely represented the ideal of a virtuous captain as an exemplary figure for their fellow citizens or companions in arms (such as Machiavelli's Valerius Corvinus, who acquired glory by being "familiar with the soldiers", Machiavelli, *Discourses* III 22, 267), and decade by decade, they abandoned this concept in order to embrace a model of aristocratic honor according to which the inferior soldier is only rough (and often ruthless) human material to be disciplined, whilst only the noble elite is worthy of honor. This 'new' model of heroism can be compared to a formal game defined by chivalric rules, and that can be connected to the transformations that the definition of nobility underwent from the second half of the sixteenth century onwards.²²

Thinkers such as Giovanni Botero had set the theoretical basis for this cultural and social switch, i.e. a shift from the original meaning of Machiavellian military virtue as a civic concept of a popular army, which either fights for freedom or for the common good, to the idea of military exercises as a tool to channel the energy of the youngsters and the lower classes (from immoral and politically dangerous behaviors). According to Botero's *Della ragion di stato* (1589), these exercises, in subtle ways, avoided the subversion of the social and political order by re-addressing the vigor of the youngsters towards a less dangerous physical and social activity. Botero demonstrates this by re-elaborating on the Machiavellian discussion of the Romans under Romulus.²³

Thus, at the turn of the century, in reaction to the spreading image of ruthless infantry soldiery and as a consequence of the indiscriminate violence of modern warfare, the highest ranks of the army had embraced a sort of aristocratic military code for which nobility of spirit, rank and fine manners went even beyond alignments and enemy lines. From this perspective, 'heroism' is recognized as military membership, i.e. as group or corporate identity. This sense of identity as nobility is mirrored in portraits of the time, such as Diego Velázquez's *The Surrender of Breda* (1634-35) in which the Spanish commander Ambrogio Spinola shows a sense of humanity towards the defeated adversary (fig. 5). This is not only the result of a new conception of the soldier capable of Christian compassion (cf. Rodríguez de la Flor 173), but also of respect towards an enemy, in this case the Prince of Orange, who is a noble warrior too.²⁴



Fig. 5: Diego Velázquez. *The Surrender of Breda*. c. 1635 (oil on canvas, 307 x 367 cm), Museo del Prado, Madrid.



Fig. 6: Peter Paul Rubens. *The Consequences of War*. 1637–1638 (oil on canvas, 206 x 342 cm), Pitti Palace, Florence.

At the same time, the terrible consequences of conflicts in terms of the number of casualties, as well as the new “calculated use of terror and atrocity to subdue civilians” (Phillips 132), shaped an increasingly diffused sense of piety and a need to reduce the effects of indiscriminate war. The concept of ‘prudence’ – mostly intended as simple ‘caution’ on the battlefield – replaced the Machiavellian idea of “prudenza” as ‘wisdom’ as the new code of conduct for the ‘perfect captain’ (cf. Frigo 281-283). At the same time, Jean Bodin and Justus Lipsius fostered the concept of war as the application of force by legitimate authority and in the interest of the state. Whilst in Machiavelli’s view, one’s personal achievements and contributions to the common good of the fatherland are always valuable, by whatever means might be necessary to accomplish this goal, Lipsius’ ideal army was made of officers not motivated by the quest for individual glory. Rather than being individuals capable of disobeying the superior’s command in order to achieve glory, such as Fabrizio Colonna, captains and soldiers ought to be good professionals capable of both commanding and obeying. Lipsius’ officers are thus above all professionals who

are able to set an example for soldiers, and turn them into equally disciplined troops through constant training and exercise (cf. Rothenberg 35).

At the end of this period, images promoting peace, such as the works of Peter Paul Rubens, recalled the devastation and terror caused by the Thirty Years’ War (cf. Rosenthal 5). Rubens’ picture of the *Consequences of War* (1638–1639) illustrates the changing view of the nature of war (fig. 6). Accordingly, the portrait focuses on the character of a furious and destructive Mars failing to be controlled by a desperate and frustrated Venus, rather than on the heroic figure of a proud and fearsome soldier.

A century after the portrait of the Duke of Alba and Guicciardini’s contemporary representation of Fabrizio Colonna as a soldier in pursuit of honor and glory, and far from the ambiguous and simultaneously ideological character of Fabrizio created by Machiavelli, Rubens presents heroism as informed by an absolutist notion of wise, monarchical statecraft, which prevents the threat of future conflict. Equally, Rubens turns the Roman heritage that Machiavelli used to sustain images of glory and military heroism into a tool to illustrate the dark side of war.



Fig. 7: Simonzio Lupi. *The Battle of Pavia*, from *The Triumphs of Emperor Charles V*. c. 1556–1575 (miniature, 200 x 290 mm), British Library (London), Additional 33733, f. 6.

Over the course of a century, the reception of Machiavelli's concept of heroism as a multifaceted and sometimes ambiguous mixture of military and political glory (e.g. represented by Cesare Borgia in *The Prince*, or Fabrizio Colonna in *Art of War*) as well as of discipline, leadership and wisdom arising from the example of the Romans, underwent different phases. Simpler views of glory and heroism spread into society and military culture. First, military commanders and writers emphasized the need for order and military exercises as a key for success in battle. Inspired by Machiavelli's evocation of the glory of the ancients, military thinkers built on the notions of the discipline and the spirit of the Roman army in order to shape a model of the perfect captain as a tough commander-in-chief capable of ordering an army through punishment and drills, such as the Duke of Alba. This model also shaped visual representations of sovereigns as heroic military commanders, such as in the case of the Emperor Charles V portrayed by Simonzio Lupi as a triumphant mounted figure at the *Battle of Pavia* (1525) in a miniature of a sixteenth-century manuscript (fig. 7).²⁵

By the beginning of the seventeenth century, the diffusion of new pacifist ideas in Europe, in combination with the growing reaction to the ideological and ambiguous components of Machiavelli's military model of glory and especially to his anti-Christian views on politics and ethics, had paved the way for a completely new prototype of military hero: one to be praised for his piety towards peers and the enemy rather than for the determination, strength and sometimes even cruelty used for the common good of the 'fatherland' or the people, as it had been represented by Machiavelli's ambiguous heroes. A new model of honor was born from the ruins of the Machiavellian controversial concept of heroism.

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¹ For a general account on this topic, cf. Fantoni 22–23. Anglo (528) has argued that "in a sense, Machiavelli" is "merely one arch of" the "bridge" built by the influence of Vegetius on military thinking. Nonetheless, the same

scholar has explained that in several instances, the influence of Machiavelli's modification of Vegetius on military thought is "unmistakable" (ibid), and that, consequently, "Machiavelli served as an intermediary between the ancients and their Renaissance imitators" (540).

² Anglo (543) provides an example of the success of this concept summarized by Peter Whitehorne, a passage from a letter of Sir John Smythe which draws from Whitehorne's translation of Machiavelli: "as one saith, the feirce and disordered men been much weaker, then the fearfull and ordered, for that order expelleth feare from men, and disorder abateth feirceness".

³ On this subject, see Guidi, *Un Segretario* 168–185 and 259–277.

⁴ Cf. ibid., 169–180, and Guidi, *Les conclusions 'galliardes'* 58–59.

⁵ For Machiavelli's portrait of Ravenna, cf. Guidi, *Dall'Ordinanza* 14–18.

⁶ On the singularity of this representation of the battle of Ravenna by Machiavelli, cf. Pedullà 95.

⁷ It must be added, perhaps, that at least one of the two opposing infantries in Holbein's drawing is to be identified as German. A soldier on the right apparently wears the cross of St. Andrew (the distinct "X" slashing popularly interpreted as representing the Holy Roman Empire), identifying him as a *Landsknecht*, cf. Kemperdick et al. 322.

⁸ The date of Holbein's drawing is uncertain. However, most likely it was produced in the period from 1524 to 1527. According to Kemperdick et al. 320–22, it might have been commissioned for a reception offered by the King of England, Henry VIII, to the French ambassadors in 1527, or during Holbein's trip to France in 1523/24. There is documentary evidence that suggest that some works were probably commissioned to Holbein by Henry VIII (see Foister, *Holbein as Court*; ead. *Greenwich* 110; ead. *Holbein and England* 122; Rosen 74). The present article argues that if Holbein's *Battle scene* was actually produced in England, might have drawn inspiration from exchanges and contact between Holbein himself and members of the French delegation. However, there is still a possibility that, as suggested by Kemperdick et al., the drawing was commissioned by Henry VIII in order to present a disturbing image to the ambassadors of France, as he apparently did with another portrait representing the battle of Guinegate of 1513. If this is actually the case though, it must be noted that this battle was also fought by England in the context of its membership to the same Holy League called by the Pope against the French since 1511, although the English forces did not take part on the day of Ravenna. Incidentally, Ravenna was certainly not a pleasant image for any French man. Despite the victory on the field by the French, the aftermath of the battle, with the death of their commander-in-chief Gaston de Foix (which was perceived as a tragic event in France), the great number of casualties, and the subsequent disorganization of the army, caused that same French army to be driven out of Italy soon afterwards. Besides, another one of the woodcuts included in *Der Weiss Kunig* is dedicated to the battle of the Spurs (as the day at Guinegate is generally known).

⁹ Cf. Bourilly and Vassiere. See also the correspondence between Cardinal Du Bellay, Anne de Montmorency, and the French king Francis I, published in Brewer 3079–3129. Also Oldmixon, vol. I, 52.

¹⁰ Cf. Bourilly and Vassiere, xx and 86. See also Brunelli, *Gambara*.

¹¹ For the authorship of some the woodcuts in *Der Weiss Kunig*, see Dodgson 396–398.

¹² However, the preparatory materials must have probably been completed by the year 1515, when the proofs of the book were actually printed (although not published until the

eighteenth century), cf. Kroll/Schade s.v.; Kagerer 78-79; Blunk 221.

13 On that occasion, Machiavelli had also met with many other counselors of Maximilian I, such as the bishop Matthäus Lang von Wellenburg (1468–1540), Paul von Liechtenstein (d. 1513), Zyprian von Sarnthein, and the duke Ulrich von Württemberg. For these historical figures, see Hirschbiegel 127, 143 and 228.

14 For Burgkmair's influence on Holbein, see Woltmann 30, 88-89.

15 On this subject, see Najemy. I thank the author for allowing me to read his paper before publication.

16 Cf. Hall 172. However, this point is controversial. Acute observations on this subject by Cassidy 393-394.

17 "Must we all shamefully die because of the obstinacy and malignity of a marrano? Does this entire army have to be destroyed without killing a single one of the enemy? Where are all the victories which we have against the French? Is the Honour of Spain and Italy to be lost because of one man from Navarre?", Guicciardini 248.

18 Today we might not be aware of the differences between what scholars call the 'conventional meaning' of terms and their 'additional connotations' based on the interactive knowledge of the writer and reader belonging to the same group or culture, cf. Grice 183-98. After Umberto Eco's theory and concept of 'Encyclopedia', one may say that each political faction or cultural and social group has its own tools, vocabularies and rhetorical techniques, related to political, social or ideological membership, Eco 140-182.

19 See the reports of the battle by Francesco Pandolfini, in Desjardins, 581-587. Cf. also Dionisotti 359.

20 Harvey's marginalia to *The Arte of Warre* by Machiavelli, quoted from Grafton/Jardine 74.

21 Cf. Wilke 54. Moses is an emblematic figure which highlights the process which Machiavelli's concept of military glory underwent during the course of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. If Machiavelli's Moses, like other non-religious leaders such as Romulus, Theseus and Cyrus, was an ambiguous figure of a prophet who could not have reached his own glory without his own arms, a century later, in line with the new ideal of pacifism and order which spread into Europe, for thinkers such as James Harrington, Moses turned back into the more traditional figure of a legislator (cf. Matteucci 359).

22 See Asch, *Nobilities*. For the changes which occurred in captains' attitudes towards battle during the sixteenth century, cf. also the recent contribution by Breccia.

23 Cf. the reading of a chapter from Botero's *Della ragion di stato* by Cardini 94.

24 For Spinola's comments about the 'nobility' of some of his former adversaries in war, cf. Lawrence 96.

25 For this kind of imagery of Charles V, see Fantoni 61.

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Images

Fig. 1: 7 November 2017. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1c/Battle_Scene%2C_by_Hans_Holbein_the_Younger.jpg>

Fig. 2: 7 November 2017. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/30/Battle_of_Ravenna_%281512%29.JPG>

Fig. 3: 7 November 2017. <<https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/d/d0/Bad-war.jpg>>

Fig. 4: 7 November 2017. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0d/Fernando_%C3%81lvarez_de_Toledo%2C_III_Duque_de_Alba%2C_por_Antonio_Moro.jpg>

Fig. 5: 7 November 2017 <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/8e/Velazquez-The_Surrender_of_Breda.jpg>

Fig. 6: 7 November 2017. <https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/e/ef/Los_horrores_de_la_guerra.jpg>

Fig. 7: 7 November 2017. <<https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/ILLUMIN.ASP?Size=mid&IllID=18207>>

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