

**THE OFFICIAL MACHIAVELLI
CORRESPONDENCE: STRUCTURE
AND DISCURSIVE CATEGORIES**

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ABSTRACT

This paper lists the main findings of an analytical study of the sources related to Machiavelli's professional experience as a Florentine diplomat and government operative: mission correspondence, instructions and government documents covering the period 1498-1527.

Beyond these findings, the monograph that is in preparation on this subject may include introductory sections on the following themes:

- General considerations on the structure and style of diplomatic dispatches
- Machiavelli's professional profile, rank and functions
- Proportions of the various discursive categories in the sources
- Structure of the written piece
- Horizontal factors, valid for all discursive segments

It may equally entail a final chapter on the particularities of Machiavelli's dispatch style, including occasional lecturing tendencies.

Finally, the notes of the monograph version will include the actual quotations from the Machiavelli correspondence, as they appear in the *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere. Legazioni, Commissarie, Scritti di Governo*. 2002-, Salerno – Roma

Whenever references in the notes only carry the time and place of a report, they refer exclusively to autograph Machiavelli dispatches. Instructions given or received by Machiavelli are abbreviated as follows: 'M instruction/guidance for X...' and 'X instruction/guidance for M'. Instructions addressed to Machiavelli by the Florentine authorities are in italics.

INTRODUCTION

Renaissance diplomacy

The model of permanent bilateral diplomatic relations, still valid at the turn of the second millennium, with its corpus of techniques and customs, was laid down in the second half of the fifteenth century.¹ Milan, the Papal States, Venice and Florence were among the first to codify chancellery disciplines for a system of permanent representation.

In his major work on this period, G. Mattingly mainly relied on the treaties and professional manuals setting out the principles of the incremental practice of permanent bilateral diplomatic representation. There are no examples, no substance, but the overall framework of a new form of political behavior and new instruments of foreign policy is described. By placing the focus on the treaties on diplomatic practice, Mattingly's study attempts to move closer to the nature of this institutional novelty created in Italy at that point in time.

The present study directly addresses the format, structure and language of the diplomatic product itself, be it in the shape of mission dispatches, pieces of guidance issued by political authorities or papers put forward in institutional contexts for government deliberations.

Compulsory discursive categories

Whatever the formats, individual whims, collective styles, different degrees of respect for discursive levels and systemic pressures, any report of this nature has to accommodate certain compulsory categories. They may be delivered in different ways, be more or less analytically distinct from each other. Without them, however, the dispatch does not fulfill its function. Central among these categories are information, interpretation, analysis, indirect and direct policy recommendations, operational matters, also referred to as case-handling and negotiation; finally: administrative issues.

This break-down of discursive categories structures the following study.

¹ Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy*, 1955

INFORMATION

Proportions and focus

Delivering reliable general information, or *avvisi*, and specific intelligence relating to the carrying out of given instructions are, in sheer volume terms, the most important tasks of Machiavelli's dispatches. This category alone, including the general peddling of news and rumours at the court, at all levels of confidentiality, represents close to 40% of the entire administrative correspondence.

The thematic center of Machiavelli's career as a Florentine government functionary remains the positionings and operations of the main European and regional peninsular powers in the Italian wars. This focus is strong, close to exclusive. In retrospect some proportions may seem odd, as when a major economic fact with far-reaching impacts and even long-term global perspectives and consequences appears merely as a marginal side remark in this Italy-centered context. In the Machiavellian chancellery narrative, which is strictly concentrated on the power games that are linked to the local stage, fundamental changes in global trade patterns such as the switching of trade routes away from the Mediterranean and into the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, constitute precisely marginal annotations of secondary importance.²

The outlook, however, is considerably broader than at the beginning of this formative period of Italian diplomacy. In the middle of the fifteenth century, in a pre-invasion situation – as illustrated, for instance, in the Barbavara, Trancedini and Amidani dispatches from Rome to Francesco Sforza – the level of 'general information' hardly exists. Occasional references to Venetian jealousies and Naples-Aragonese, Florentine and Genovese interests cannot change the fact that at this point in time the main subject is bilateral business relations. Privileges, benefits, influences on nominations and delayed payments account for over 90% of the volume of reports.³ The descent of Charles VIII into Italy in 1494 and the successive involvements of other European powers in Italian affairs over the following decades prompt an enhancement in the reporting perspective and increase the need for a wider range of political and policy-relevant information.

The fact speaking for itself

To reach beyond words and to create facts on the ground – *effetti* and possibly *buoni effetti* – remains one of the principal dimensions of state action. Also, at the very top of the information credibility ranking are situations in which the mere fact intrudes on the discourse, where the spoken or written word need not be relied on, and where the facts speak themselves or for themselves, delivering the highest possible degree of truth collateral. In this category are all the cases where matters of fact impose their own reality – at the maximum, of

² Imola 16.11.1502.

³ Carteggio degli oratori sforzeschi alla corte Pontificia (I) 1447-1452 (Gianluca Battioni), Roma, 2013.

course, in the *fatti d'arme*, confirming or nullifying the announcements, promises, suppositions or speculations that may have preceded them. It may be a reality represented by the facts on the ground, by what might not have been heard, but the effects of which can clearly be observed, by what remains constant, at all times or by what has just been executed or implemented, without any previous announcement. Also, at this high level of certainty, it may involve what has been effectively decided or concluded, which need not be repeated, nor supplemented by other pieces of information, as well as what has been made public or emerges from channels that cannot be doubted.

Reality spoke for itself during the second Cesare Borgia mission. Confronted only by verbal messages of peace, agreements and understandings on the one hand, in stark contrast to the obvious war preparations on the other, Machiavelli cannot fail to conclude that the facts speak louder and more truthfully than any words, even coming from the highest possible level of authority. In parallel with current peace negotiations, Cesare Borgia is investing heavily in armaments and troops.⁴ At the other end of the channel of command Marcello Virgilio picks up this point about realities speaking louder than words and recycles it in his guidance for Machiavelli at Imola: do the facts indicate that the priority is war rather than peace?⁵ A similar degree of attention is paid to what Machiavelli in *Il Principe* will call *realtà effettuale*, a reality constructed not by words but by hard facts, during the mission to Maximilian six years later: Machiavelli, writing to Vettori's signature, underscores this principle of fact-based reflection and reporting. The eye alone is the measure of all things. Only the visible effects possess credibility and can make serious advice possible.⁶ Whether information-oriented, like the Cesare Borgia II mission, or a case-handling task, like the Maximilian assignment, the mission's purpose remains to get at the facts beyond the words. Especially in operational contexts, the *effect* is required, as well as general intelligence gathering. In a purely information-targeted context, all words have to be checked against the realities on the ground. This direct staging of the fact, confirming, contradicting or supplanting what is being said, occupies a central role in the common chancellery jargon, whether employed by Machiavelli or by his colleagues and superiors.

Certain victories may be won by way of words, placing the impact of the fact at yet another level of efficacy. Verbal manifestations and concrete actions accompany each other in the political project, leading to the correct dosage of words and facts in light of the object being pursued. This combination commands the envoy's particular attention to the pursuit of the case at hand: what are the sequences, and which words and actions are fielded by interlocutors? A project of good neighborliness between states requires an adequate mix of words and deeds. Increasing the intensity of a political initiative implies case-handling, the production of facts. Facts, symbolic actions

⁴ Imola 29.10.1502, *id.* 30.10.1502, 01.11.1502, 03.11.1502, 13.11.1502, 20.11.1502, 22.11.1502.

⁵ Cancelleria fiorentina (guidance) 11.11.1502.

⁶ Trento 08.06.1508.

and verbal endeavours go hand in hand. A decisive change in policy does not leave room for any contradiction between words and facts: they correspond to each other. However, the constant risk of verbal inflation draws attention to a fundamental principle: at times the fact has to take center stage.⁷

Machiavelli's own attention to the antinomy between words and facts, including stressing the inferior status of words with respect to reality, is explicit in the instructions from his hand, including the very early ones. When words do not suffice, one has to move on to facts. Speaking with his authority as chancellor, Machiavelli, at one point, demands action and facts, immediately, tonight. If words are not enough to achieve persuasion, actions will shortly be deployed to serve the same ends. A dangerous situation occurs when domestic political production is limited to rhetoric while the enemy is busy generating facts on the ground; if this happens, enemy projects flourish, whereas Florentine ones evaporate in smoke. There may be moments when the administration admits having given assistance mainly as lip-service and recognizes the need to deliver troops and facts. The same intention and inspiration are lodged in remarks to the effect that it is facts rather than words that should testify to the seriousness of a stated political intention, or that a given partner's proposal needs to be underpinned by realities rather than by words. When these realities correspond to earlier assurances, the Florentine attitude will always be favorable.⁸

The major truth and reality value of deeds compared to words is also what greets the Florentine envoy when his is facing his interlocutors on an outside assignment. Often instructed to serve partners and political allies with a constant flow of hot air and to avoid being driven to conclude anything concrete, Machiavelli receives the reaction that might be expected from Cesare Borgia: words from Florence are always satisfactory; what is missing are the facts, particularly something that would correspond to merit that has been earned. Machiavelli demands facts from the administrators and commanders of the Florentine domain. He collects similar messages from his interlocutors when on mission himself: Florence's answers to questions from the King of France must consist in concrete actions because nobody believes in words anymore. Decisions have to be made, and sustained by the facts, because the time for words and nice promises is over. At several points the second mission to Cesare Borgia touches upon fictitious facts, for instance, providing fewer troops than actually agreed. The Duke mocks the poor showing of his opponents, stating that the facts will have to demonstrate who they are, and what we are. However, he also chooses to let words precede facts. Having fewer fears for the realization of his projects, he can promise more. When he does not fear anything anymore, the facts will be there to follow up on the promises.⁹ Formulating an instruction for Machiavelli in Cesena, Marcello Virgilio acknowledges that the repetitious

⁷ Cancelleria fiorentina (guidance) 07.11.1500, *id.* 28.10.1502, M instruction for Piero Ardinghelli 04.04.1503, M instruction for Bernardo da Diacceto 13.05.1503, M instruction for Giovanni Ridolfi 14.05.1503, Instruction for M (without signature) 30.10.1503, M instruction for Pierantonio Carnesecchi 19.08.1505, Instruction for M in France (without signature) 05.08.1510, Blois 02.09.1510.

⁸ M instruction for Iacopo Ciacchi 05.02.1498, M instruction for the general field commissioners (at Pisa) 27.08.1498, M instruction for Bernardo da Diacceto 26.09.1498, M instruction for Simone Ridolfi 30.09.1498, M instruction for M instruction for Jacopo de' Pitti 18.10.1498, M instruction for Andrea de' Pazzi 31.10.1498, Meeting summary (Consulta) 09-10.06.1499, M instruction for Francesco Guiducci 14.07.1503.

⁹ Forlì 17.07.1499, Blois 11.10.1500, Nantes 25.10.1500, Imola 20.10.1502, Imola 23.10.1502.

Florentine way with words in the end dilutes the strength of its messages and postures. Sympathetic reassurance, however often repeated and paraphrased, is not enough. In time, the facts will have to take the floor.¹⁰

Variable relations between facts and words

At all times facts retain precedence with respect to words. Exceptionally, however, Machiavelli's correspondence also refers to facts and situations of such a nature that the simple existence of a reality can usefully be assisted by words in order to achieve a given set of purposes. The impact and significance of actions and facts can be enhanced by words. Spanish troops should not be classed as enemies because they are to be deprived of opportunities to assume a hostile posture not only through actions, but also with words. The same procedure is followed four years later: when a state of facts has been achieved by way of positive manifestations, it is good to confirm it in writing.¹¹ However, the most usual situation is one in which the absence of facts and their replacement by words corresponds to a situation in which the hope is entertained that the facts will reflect the words uttered by one's partners. Moreover, the other side of the negotiating table, may eventually decide to demonstrate, with facts, what has been promised.

This permanent dilemma – the instability or uncertainty of the relationship between things and words, or the insufficient credibility of words – points to one of the essential, compulsory diplomatic tasks: to evaluate the validity and legitimacy of this representational structure, measure the truth ratio or coefficient correctly in each case, and establish the nature and calibre of the correspondence between *fatti* and *parole*. Towards the end of the project to recover Pisa, the indications and assurances are as positive as words can express, and if the facts live up to these promises, it is as if Florence has already taken possession of Pisa. During the third mission to the Court of Louis XII the King has at least two reasons to be suspicious of Florence: in order to eliminate these suspicions, Machiavelli points to the need for facts rather than words. A piece of guidance from Marcello Virgilio picks up this point: stay close to the facts, engage all forces, avoid words and demonstrations.¹²

Can the facts, possibly, ultimately, correspond to the words uttered? There are clearly situations where words seem evanescent, fake or symbolic. A discourse without collaterals may be called upon to fill out the void, among other things to defend the credibility of the state. Where facts are lacking, craft may be needed. When Cesare Borgia asks for Florentine troops to be deployed around Borgo and Anghiari, Machiavelli indicates that the demand could be met by a lower level of effort, stage-managing the neighborhood, talking of four rather than two, as the Duke has no means of verification. At one point, when handling the other issue of a *condotta* for himself in the service of Florence and spotting the usual Florentine hesitations over expenditure, Cesare is the one to invent a

¹⁰ Instruction for Machiavelli (Cancelleria fiorentina, Marcello Virgilio) 20.12.1502.

¹¹ M instruction for Pierantonio Carnesecchi 05.07.1505, Blois 09.08.1509.

¹² Cesena 18.12.1502, M instruction for Antonio Giacomini 31.08.1505, Pisa Siege Headquarters' report (Machiavelli's hand, signed Alamanno Salviati) 31.05.1509, Blois 18.07.1510, Florence (Antonio della Valle instruction for Machiavelli) 02.09.1510.

cheaper formula. However, this involves faking the numbers. Officially and nominally there will be three hundred horse, but in reality Florence will only get two hundred, and not pay for more. In July 1509, after a government (X) meeting, Machiavelli's summary, quoting an intervention by Iacopo Salviati, distinguishes between the lack of will to produce facts and the need to comply with customary expectations to deliver at least symbolic gestures.¹³ Words, signals, messages, symbolic acts and demonstrations may venture to make something exist that does not. Or the contrary: unacceptable, obnoxious facts may be concealed with a flow of comforting words. In the middle of Machiavelli's mission to Rome, Venice initiates a clandestine operation to increase its foothold in the Romagna in the wake of the demise of the Borgias. Referring to the Venetians closing in on the Church's domain and their political-territorial interests, Machiavelli quotes the Bishop of Volterra to the effect that the Pope ought to follow the example of those, meaning the Venetians, who make a big show of words but do not want to hear from others about what they are actually doing.¹⁴

The relationship between facts and words may evolve from non-defined status towards mutual contradiction. Sometimes too alleged facts, not yet verified, are not contradicted by other facts. At times there are concrete signs of what could easily be a concrete outcome or considered a valid basis for acting. But even if background facts, concrete proceedings and verified implementation remain the ultimate yardstick of promises and assurances given, a benchmark for discursive credibility, in many situations the facts are not immediately available, whether alone or accompanied by oral statements. In other situations, where the facts are lacking but words stand in for them, the observer may want to discard these words right away if they are in flagrant contradiction with the supposed facts. If they do not make sense with respect to what Machiavelli in *Il Principe* will later qualify as *realtà effettuale*, even words from authoritative sources cannot be trusted.

This unstable and many-sided relationship between things and words, especially the infinite number of possible situations, from concordance and accordance to discrepancy and contradiction, occupy a central place in Machiavelli's reporting, as well as in the guidance formulated by him in his capacity as head of the second Florentine Chancellery. As mentioned above, the early phases of the second mission to Cesare Borgia represent significant examples of such discrepancies, reaching the point of contradiction between what is being offered for everybody to believe and what results from plain observation of realities in the company of partners and interlocutors. On the one hand, conspicuous demonstrations of peaceful intentions and the carrying over of existing agreements are ventilated. On the other hand, the effective preparations for war are so obvious that the relationship between things and words evolves into a situation of overstretch.¹⁵

¹³ M instruction for the Casentino general commissioners 26.01.1498, Imola 16.10.1502, *id.* 08.11.1502, Florence 06.07.1509.

¹⁴ Rome 30.11.1503.

¹⁵ Imola 29.10.1502, *id.* 08.11.1502, 28.11.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502.

At the very end of the second Cesare Borgia mission, there is an articulation of two apparently diverging policy lines with respect to Pandolfo Petruccio: Cesare Borgia directly aims at a military operation in order to dislodge Pandolfo from Siena, while Alexander VI is simultaneously keeping the negotiation track open. There is, however, no real difference here between son and father: the former is responsible for the real aim, the latter for the pretext. Machiavelli makes it clear that the papal gestures towards Pandolfo are purely tactical, to be constantly checked against reality.¹⁶ Cesare Borgia's actions are the result of a clearly defined strategy and correspondingly rational tactics. Four years later Julius II's management of the relationship between things and words involves another style of action. There is equally a well-understood strategic orientation: recover parts of Marche, Umbria and Romagna, even at the expense of tensions with respect to France. But day-to-day moves are not conducted with the same level of control as in the case of Cesare Borgia. Obeying sudden whims and impulses, they are often deployed as improvisations – another subcategory of *variazione*.¹⁷

The scale of certainties

To the variations of the relationship between things and words corresponds a scaling of truth coefficients: there are many levels of information value. The Machiavelli correspondence operates on the basis of an inherent scale of relative certainties of this sort. Beyond the level of absolute or relative certitude, cautioned or sustained, entirely or partially, by the facts and first-hand sources, everything else, whether verbal or oral, possesses a potentially lower reality coefficient. They *are* perhaps, but not necessarily. From this point on, towards what is totally impossible – unattainable, excluded, deprived of any existence – Machiavelli relies on a complex indexation system to assess the information value of scraps of information picked up on missions. This hierarchy is primarily governed by a scaled inventory of verbs reflecting a breakdown of degrees. Only a limited number of these verbs, such as *comunicare*,¹⁸ are neutral and do not carry any indexical sign of truth value. A communication simply conveys, technically and accurately, a given message. With such limited exceptions, a large cluster of verbs designates and manages different levels of information credibility. Machiavelli is acutely aware of the necessity to indicate just how much a given piece of information can be trusted and what collateral evidence is available to ensure its validity. He establishes a subtle range, comprising different ratios or factors of trust and truth, or corresponding to different levels of the certainty value of statements.

There is a high end to this certainty scale, a point in time and space where, having to rely on words alone, you cannot get any closer to the truth, to what *is*, without expressing reservations as to its factual existence. For Machiavelli this point is defined by the strict and conspicuous use of the indicative, for example, *ha, è, si truova, vero è che, ha auto, non si sa, altro non ci è, non se ne può dare*

¹⁶ Castello della Pieve 12.01.1503.

¹⁷ Orvieto 05.09.1506, *id.* 06.09.1506, Castel della Pieve 09.09.1506, Perugia 13.09.1506, *id.* 15.09.1506.

¹⁸ Lyon 07.07.1510.

fermo iudizio, questo è in effetto vero è che. This indicative fills out its nominal role, being simply descriptive of the known facts, delivered right in front of the observer, as exemplified for instance in his reports of the second Cesare Borgia mission. It brings home the fact that, in the midst of chaotic occurrences and verbal ambiguities, there are also a number of certainties preceding the ultimate moment of truth: the Senigallia massacre. These certainties appear, flatly and squarely, in the indicative, marking the ratification of what is certain, in spite of multiple opposing tactics of make-believe and dissimulation. Often what is true corresponds to what is paid for – or is directly associated with *sapere*.¹⁹

During the 1506 roaming mission to the travelling court of Julius II, through Umbria and Romagna, the uncertainty stems less from the known tactics of the main interlocutors than from the Pope's capricious temperament. The indicative – the verbal staging of reality – is an apposite and straightforward means of cutting through the mist of contrasting or incongruous pieces of information.²⁰ The use of the present or past tense of the indicative is sometimes followed by an *in effetto, di certo ...*, underscoring the unquestionable status of the statement. The quasi-affirmative *sapere di certo, senza dubbio* and *non si fa dubbio* indicate that adequate verification processes have eliminated uncertainties and that the envoy finds himself in proximity to an established *verità*. Conversely, the impossibility of reaching this maximum level of certainty is equally well defined, with counterpunctual negated indicatives: *non si sa, altro non ci è, non se ne può dare fermo iudizio*.

Authority as truth collateral

In between the extremes – the absolute certainty on the one hand and whatever eludes any kind of verification on the other – there are multiple intermediate levels. In any situation in which the fact is not available, or not given the floor directly, where the high truth coefficient stemming from the deployment of plain facts – the presentation of evidence – cannot be produced, the envoy depends on words. If these words are incoherent, less than trustworthy or mutually contradictory, the authority of the interlocutor represents the best possible truth collateral. Authority or the credibility of sources may be called *gravità, cervello, dimestichezza*, paraphrased by *di buono luogo, da fonte attendibile, (da) uno uomo di gran condizione, uno di questi che sanno, da qualcuno che intende queste pratiche, (che ha) qualche discorso*, and even by way of negative locutions: somebody who does not lie ... *un omo che non dice bugie*.²¹ In the course of the second mission to Cesare Borgia, the anonymous *amico* constitutes a particular pole of virtual authority. Characterized as a friend of Florence, he delivers guarantees of interlocutor sympathy while at the same time being directly associated with the inner circle of Borgia policy-making. This basic attitude and authority creates an environment of authenticity and an informal insurance policy regarding the reliability of information relating to

¹⁹ Imola 30.10.1502, *id.* 01.11.1502, 02.12.1502, Cesena 20.12.1502, Imola 14.11.1502, Cesena 18.12.1502, *id.* 20.12.1502, Sinigaglia 31.12.1502.

²⁰ Viterbo 31.08.1506, Viterbo 01.09.1506, Cesena 05.10.1506.

²¹ Urbino 25.09.1506, Siena 14.08.1507, Blois 26.07.1510, *id.* 09.08.1510, *id.* 24.08.1510.

specific cases and situations. However, even at this significant level of *gravitas* and of proximity to the main political sources, there are no absolute guarantees of the truth.

In the immediate vicinity of the information emerging from authoritative quarters may be grouped those pieces of information that are gradually confirmed by repetition, or by their coming from more than one side, especially when they come from sources that may effectively know the truth, thus reinforcing its status, making it increasingly probable: ... *così sempre questo suo fiume ingrossa*.²²

First-hand information, oral statements and the written piece

Within the category of first-hand information, oral and written sources naturally have different statuses. The written document occupies a privileged position in the hierarchy of relative certainties. Oral statements may just be irresponsible gossip, babble or hot air: contents put on record or otherwise registered in writing, by contrast, have often been distilled through a filter of caution. There is a technical and professional backdrop to this enhanced status. Once a message has been written, it may be stolen or copied. It thus often has to be protected by classification, cryptography and inventive means of transmission. During the mission to the Emperor Maximilian at Bolzano, the arriving courier hides a message in his shoe in order to limit the damage from his being robbed while crossing through the Veneto war zone.²³ When it is finally recovered, however, it is unreadable. Beyond such marginal situations it is rather the hand than the foot which puts documents at risk by leaving a mark, in writing, that could have been avoided by relying only on an oral message.

This raises the fundamental question of the intricate relationship between oral assurances and the written word. Promises and engagements given by the voice alone may be negligible, counting for less than nothing;²⁴ transforming a verbal statement into writing can make it a commitment. As an important chapter of the *Discorsi* will state, a couple of years later:

*[...] one may indulge in any kind of talking with one man, for (if you do not let yourself be led to write in your hand) the yes of one man is worth as much as the no of another: and everyone ought to guard himself against writing as from a pitfall, because there is nothing that will convict you more easily than your handwriting.*²⁵

In most situations, what is verbal is thus significantly less compromising than what is written. In representing a high degree of commitment the written act also becomes a piece of evidence, exceeding by far what might be transmitted orally. This is why certain documents may be shown, read once, but not copied or removed. For the same reasons there are pieces of information that are so

²² Siena 14.08.1507.

²³ Trento 08.02.1508.

²⁴ Melun 26.08.1500, *id.* 03.09.1500, Urbino 26.09.1506, *id.* 28.09.1506.

²⁵ *Discorsi* III/6.

precious, so decisive, that they will not be communicated in writing, but only ventilated during a private conversation, far from indiscreet ears.²⁶ The drafts going up and down between the parties in the sham negotiation of a new treaty between the Papal States and Cesare Borgia on the one hand, and the former La Magione conspirators on the other, are examples of texts where something is always missing, and thus cannot be passed on, copied or otherwise shared.²⁷

In many instances Machiavelli's correspondence delineates this complex relationship between the written act and oral information, as well as the grey zone between the two, completely unbinding the unqualified oral message, whether received randomly or face to face. In the middle of the spectrum, delivering guarantees, proofs and evidence, as in the case of a conspiracy, is the written document. At the very top of the hierarchy, the voice appears again. If it comes from a source of authority and *gravitas*, provided confidentially, with no witnesses, it may represent the highest degree of information value and quality. Knowing that he cannot be compromised, the interlocutor may choose to go much further than he would ever have done in writing. Without any commitment or risk, he can move into close proximity to the truth. There are thus promises that remain verbal, as the written form represents an excessive commitment. There are things heard about events, elsewhere, that need not be written down. If they are true, the local ambassador will confirm them. If they are false, it is not necessary to mention them. Finally, there are items of information that cannot be reported, either in writing or orally, because they have not been conveyed under satisfactory circumstances.

Variations in extraction efforts

However, the envoy's activities often imply different degrees of research effort, digging into domains of knowledge and cabinet confidentiality where the talking does not occur spontaneously. Whereas the general acquisition of what is *nuove* and the passive listening of *intendere*, *sentire* and *conoscere* denote largely neutral and even passive attitudes to describing the obtaining of information from interlocutors, *trarre* and *ritrarre* point to a certain amount of commitment, of the consumption of time, of 'work': target identification, tactical moves, approach and finally methods of draining sources of information. Throughout Machiavelli's chancellery years, *trarre* and *ritrarre* are among the most frequently used words in this context.

In the semantic background hovers a double set of connotations. First there is the metaphor of the extraction, whether from a mine, a well, a given context or a court cabinet – an extraction that may succeed, but that often does not work. Pressuring Robertet at Blois during the first mission to the Court of France, Della Casa and Machiavelli are forced to recognize that even the deployment of cabinet and court craft does not suffice. Nothing can be extracted (*tratto*),

²⁶ Melun 03.09.1500.

²⁷ Imola 01.11.1502, Imola 02.12.1502.

literally, from the interlocutor's mouth.²⁸ Secondly there is the metaphor of the *ritratto*, transforming what has been extracted or gathered into a representation. The result of the act of extracting (*trarre*) is the *ritratto*.²⁹

This is also the method and type of effort prescribed by Machiavelli, writing in his office in Florence, when drawing up administrative guidance for Filippo Sacchetti at Volterra: *trarre per ogni via* and (*darci*) *avviso del ritratto*. This lexical choice stresses the unilateral and laborious acquisition of items of information involving no give and take, or at least not mentioning of the possible exchange of information, nor simply picking up what might be lying around. The use of the verb *trarre* in another context and sense makes the background semantics abundantly clear. With few exceptions it is a matter of taking and profiting from.³⁰ In some cases these actions of extracting and rendering appear neutral and are seemingly effortless.³¹ But elsewhere the extraction performance, commitment and situation are explicitly qualified and underscored in both the instructions and the dispatches through the choice of auxiliary or other accompanying verbs, or by specifying through which channels, and in which situations, the draining of information is to be performed. Such qualifications or specifications may take the form of indications of the access level achieved by mentioning sources. In these contexts, of course, the seriousness of the interlocutor, the *gravitas* of the contact person in question, becomes the key factor. There is no such thing as draining a good-for-nothing or doing so at random. The extraction project targets persons of interest, designated by terms such as *luogo autentico*, *buono luogo*, *gravità*, *primi*, *ministri* and similar.

Amico, primi etc.

At the very top of this scale are the court 'friends', a prominent example being that of the anonymous *amico* during the second mission to Cesare Borgia.³² The *amico* is part of the inner Valentino circle, designated here, as in the correspondence at large, as *primi uomini*, *primi segretarii*, *primi ministri*, *primi fidati*, *primi servidori*, *primi di Corte* [or *del Consiglio*]³³ and currently just *suoi primi* or *primi*.³⁴ The term also serves to designate targeted persons of influence

²⁸ Blois 26.09.1500.

²⁹ Florence 01.04.1501.

³⁰ Melun 27.08.1500.

³¹ M instruction for Angelo Serragli 13.10.99, M instruction for Antonio Giacomini 05.03.1500, M instruction for Luigi della Stufa 30.03.1500, Urbino 26.06.1502, Instruction for M 10.10.1502, Imola 14.11.1502, *id.* 16.11.1502, Instruction for M 26.11.1502, Imola 28.11.1502, Roma 10.11.1503, Instruction for M 13.11.1503, Roma 02.12.1503, Instruction for M 19.02.1504, M instruction for Doffo Spini/Pellegrino Lorini 19.12.1504, M instruction for Antonio Canigiani 24.12.1504, M instruction for Pierantonio Carnesecchi 29.06.1505, Instruction for M 22.08.1510, Valle di Serchio 20.05.1509, Blois 24.08.1510, Instruction for M 29.08.1510, Instruction for M 29.08.1510, Blois 30-31.08.1510.

³² Imola 01.11.1502, *id.* 08.11.1502, 13.11.1502, 20.11.1502, 26.11.1502, 02.12.1502, 02.12.1502, 09.12.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502.

³³ Blois 21.07.1500, Imola 07.10.1502, *id.* 13.10.1502, 27.10.1502, 03.11.1502, 08.11.1502, 28.11.1502, Cesena 14.12.1502, *id.* 26.12.1502, Castel del Lago (or nearby), no date but probably shortly after 14.01.1503 (cfr. Marchand remarks in LCSG, vol II, p. 558-559, note 28) Rome 04.11.1503, *id.* 10.11.1503, Bolzano 01.02.1508.

³⁴ Imola 09.10.1502, *id.* 17.10.1502, 29.10.1502, 30.11.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502, Corinaldo 02.01.1503, Gualdo 06.01.1503, Bolzano 17.01.1508, *id.* 14.02.1507, 29.03.1508, 5th copy of 29.03 and continuation of 16.04.

in different contexts: identifying movers and agents in particular cases, formulating questions for the interrogation of prisoners, determining the privilege of carrying weapons or not, distributing responsibilities for levying infantry, directing complaints to local authorities, tasking some rather than others with the management of army provisions, defining social status and support functions with respect to a given political power, mapping clientelistic networks, picking up informal pieces of advice from qualified sources in particular cases, nominating appropriate subjects to give testimony to Florentine magistrates, calling relevant persons to order and reminding them of benefits they have received, selecting sufficient well-to-do local contributors to republican military budgets, indicating representative status during treaty negotiations, making decisions on the choice of appropriate ambassadors to a given court, etc.³⁵ The scaling function of the term and the implications for its credibility coefficient become explicit when exceptionally Machiavelli chooses to combine the conventional they say-others say with *primi* and less-than-*primi*: one among the first-rate interlocutors says X; others, but not among the *first*, say Y.³⁶

The next level is defined by *gravitas*. On one occasion Marcello Virgilio chooses to compliment Machiavelli on this quality of his.³⁷ Years later, while at the French court, Machiavelli will receive a copy of a piece of guidance to Ambassador Pandolfini at Milan in which he is instructed to mobilize his *gravità* in order to obtain a modification of a demand for a transfer of troops, or at least a delay to the operation.³⁸ Beyond the potential seriousness of the *pratica*, however, the qualification of *gravità* is associated with the characterization of interlocutors. Reported circumstances and realities may not be certain, but if their source is a serious person, due note must be taken.³⁹

Further on, with no characterization of the command level, nor the interlocutor's profile, attitude and behavior, conventional expressions are geared towards indicating that a piece of information is credible and first-hand, not relayed through others. In this respect the principal locution is *luogo autentico*.⁴⁰ Credibility can also be acquired without first-hand status. In this case the apposite term is *buono luogo*.⁴¹ In the end, irrespective of the hierarchy,

³⁵ M instruction for Angelo de' Serragli 13.10.1499, Questioning of (prisoner) Alfonso del Mutolo 09.11.1501, M instruction for Bernardo de' Medici 29.04.1503, M instruction for Piero Ardinghelli 29.04.1503, M instruction for Piero Ardinghelli 03.05.1503, M instruction for Bernardo Manetti 30.06.1503, M instruction for Simone del Nero 28.07.1503, Instruction for M 17.11.1503, Instruction for M 20.11.1503, Siena 17.07.1505, *id.* 23.07.1505, M instruction for Iacopo Ciacchi 31.07.1505, M instruction for Battista Guicciardini 30.04.1506, M instruction for Benedetto Bartoli 04.05.1506, Pisa siege camp (non autograph) 01.06.1509, M autograph summary government (X) meeting 06.07.1509.

³⁶ Bolzano 14.02.1507.

³⁷ Marcello Virgilio instruction for M 15.11.1502.

³⁸ Copy for M (in France) of an instruction to Francesco Pandolfino, ambassador at Milan 17.08.1510.

³⁹ Siena 14.08.1507.

⁴⁰ M instruction (Prato, Pistoia) 01.05.1501, Imola 09.10.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502, M instruction for Giovanni Ridolfi 22.03.1503, M instruction for the commander of Campiglia 16.10.1504, M instruction for Antonio Paganelli, commander (capitano) of Livorno 02.05.1505, M instruction for Giovanni Ridolfi 19.12.1505, [continuation of] Blois 29.07.1510.

⁴¹ Cesena 14.12.1502, M instruction for Lorenzo Dietisalvi 22.04.1503, M instruction for Tommaso Tosinghi 11.10.1504,

credibility or status of the source – whether first- or secondhand – the basic criterion for the evaluation of a given piece of information is knowledge and truth, *sapere e verità*.⁴²

Information and timeliness

However, the value and status of items of information is linked not only to the quality of the source but also to the moments and opportunities, the points in time or longer sequences, that led to the information being extracted or to the conclusion that nothing was being made available. Often the dispatches give the reasons why nothing could be extracted, in spite of intensive efforts: the lack of suitable opportunities to put the relevant questions, deliberate secrecy, or overlapping business eating away at limited amounts of time. The stated failure to extract represents a significant portion of the actual use of *trarre/ritrarre*.⁴³

Alternatively, there may be a combination of factors. Beyond the lack of proper opportunities, signals emerging from a recognized source of authority may make no sense, and stepping up efforts to access suitable sources and the deployment of due diligence to identify an opportunity may have no result.⁴⁴ Due diligence and opportunities to ascertain the truth of the matter are factors along with adequate skills: that is, the ability or capacity to perform efficiently in extracting information are at the center of the syntagms formed on *trarre/ritratto*.⁴⁵

Ingegnere/ingegno appear predominantly in the imperative and present/future equivalent locutions included in instructions to convey the message that every available wit, talent, intellect and resourcefulness may be needed to succeed.⁴⁶ Hence the syntagms formed on *diligenzia* and idiomatically linked to *trarre/ritrarre* in order to convey the exact sense of an extraction performed with due diligence. This glossary represents the very example of a shared chancellery jargon, a lexical piece reproduced indefinitely by all hands at the commanding and instructing end, as well as at the receiving end, in the field:⁴⁷ *diligenzia e sapienza*. A variant combines *ritrarre* with *sapere*.⁴⁸ The diplomatic-technical sense of *trarre* and *diligenzia* and their relation to hidden motives, opportunity and discretion is fully exposed when Machiavelli receives guidance to deploy all his diligence to extract judgments, plans and inner thoughts by

Marcello Virgilio instruction for M 09.09.1506, Bolzano 29.03.1508, Blois 24.08.1510, *id.* 02.09.1510.

⁴² Imola, 03.11.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502.

⁴³ Imola 15.10.1502, *id.* 27.10.1502, 09.12.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502, Blois 18.07.1510.

⁴⁴ Cesena 23.12.1502.

⁴⁵ M instruction for the general commissioners at Mugello 05.10.1498.

⁴⁶ M instruction for the commissioners at the Pisa siege 22.10.99, M instruction for general commissioner Antonio Giacomini at the Pisa siege 21.04.1500, M instruction for Filippo Sachetti at Volterra 01.04.1501, M instruction for Tommaso Tosinghi 07.09.1502, M instruction for the commissioners at the Pisa siege 15.06.1503, M instruction for Amerigo Antinori 09.10.1503, M instruction for Antonio Giacomini 02.01.1504, Instruction for M 20.02.1509, Instruction for M (Piombino) 10.03.1509.

⁴⁷ Instruction for M 03.11.1503, Rome 10.11.1503, M instruction for Piero Alberti 17.02.1505, M instruction for Giovanni Ridolfi 20.12.1505, Instruction for Francesco Vettori, Bolzano 19.01.1508, Marcello Virgilio instruction for M, 21.07.1505.

⁴⁸ Ponticelli 22.06.1502.

fielding Florentine motives, but only at the right moment, and in small portions, in order to avoid suspicion.⁴⁹

Professional skills

The extraction comes with art, manipulation, insistence and judgement, as well as through intensified effort – skills, craft, practical wisdom. Squeezing, pumping contacts and dragging information out of interlocutors is a central part of diplomatic action, but it should of course be handled in such a way that it appears effortless and goes unnoticed on the other side of the table. Hence, the mobilization of second-level skills, including tricks, manipulation and insinuations, or at the very least dexterity, increased commitment and superior judgment, *discrezione*, or the combination of demonstrative efforts with *ingegno*.

These efforts may lead to something, or at least may be deployed in hope of a result. They may target the nature of background attitudes. They may correspond to the capacities expected of official representatives, whether in terms of extraction or the ability to describe realities and facts correctly, whether the purpose is to detect the destination of travelers, or troop concentrations.⁵⁰ They may be second-degree efforts, trying to influence the readings others have of a given situation, the *ritratto* they will produce. They may be an aspect of the establishment of political prophecies: how will given operations turn out in the end? They may reflect lesser ambitions and describe goings-on or unrestricted attempts to get to the truth of the matter.⁵¹ Yet again, they may be linked to the capacity and power– *potere* – to extract, still in a positive and effective mode,⁵² an alternative metaphor describing the extraction effort – not only the capacity, but the actual, factual, literally hands-on treatment of the interlocutor. Get a grip on him, turn him around in every direction.⁵³

The vocabulary based on *trarre/ritratto* points to multiple aspects of the skills and abilities to act adequately – and above all efficiently – in extracting information. However, it is conspicuous in Machiavelli's correspondence that the positive statement about the ability to extract and display the results of the extraction only represents one subcategory. Negative acknowledgements that nothing can be done, that sources are blocked, that interlocutors dodge any pitch thrown at them, are statistically significant in the official correspondence. On multiple occasions Machiavelli is forced to admit that, whatever the subtlety of deployed artfulness, the interlocutor is not fooled and the efforts that result

⁴⁹ Instruction for M 29.06.1510.

⁵⁰ M instruction for Giovanni Lapi 02.05.1503.

⁵¹ Marcello Virgilio instruction for M 10.10.1502, *id.* 13.10.1502 (Postscriptum), M instruction for Alessandro Acciaiuoli 21.02.1503, Instruction for Piero Bartolini 02.09.1505, Instruction for Giovanni Ridolfi 14.05.1503, Marcello Virgilio instruction for M 08.11.1503, M instruction for Ugucione Ricci 28.09.1505, M instruction for Federigo Ricci 16.12.1506.

⁵² M instruction for Girolamo da Filicaia 12.10.1503, Siena 12.08.1507, Instruction for Roberto Acciaiuoli 02.09.1510, Bolzano 17.01.1508, Imola 02.12.1502, Siena 14.08.1507.

⁵³ Imola 30.10.1502.

appear futile. Often there seem to be more failures, more limits placed on ability, skills and the power to extract than successful extraction operations. The moments of diplomatic stalling that are impossible to take forward and other types of interlocutor passivity are covered by ritual formulas that are codified just as narrowly as their positive counterparts. The inability to penetrate political and diplomatic lines of defense may be attributed to insufficient craft or artifice, to the obstacles put in the way of insidious action, or to argumentation and language difficulties. The limits to diligence are mainly concentrated in a single negative verb: not to be able to, *non potere...*⁵⁴

Second-hand sources

Further down the line there is another category, clearly distinguishable from the priority area of talkative facts, first-hand information, high-level interlocutors, authoritative contacts, undisputed evidence, confirmation by direct sources or possession of written documents. This is the field of second-hand information relayed by others. This domain is conspicuously segmented, the different levels of credibility being designated by lexical choices inside a subtle hierarchy of nouns and verbs.

In Machiavelli too, the neutral piece of secondary information, often without any indexation whatsoever regarding its truth potential, is the news, *nuove*: ... *È venuto nuove ... né essendo dipoi innovato altro...sono oggi nuove ...Sonci poi nuove ... ci è nuove.*⁵⁵ The envoy may make the point that there *is* news, or that nothing has changed since the last delivery of *nuove*: ... *dipoi non ci è innovato altro*. The lexical counterpoint of *nuove*, stating the fact that there *is* no news, or that there have been no changes to the situation as described in previous dispatches or instructions, comes in a close to invariable form: *non è innovato altro, non essendo innovato cosa, non vedendo innovato altro, per non essere innovato alcuna cosa, dipoi non ci è innovato altro*. The *nuove* may just be carried forward by the winds blowing through the streets and public gatherings – any gathering, whatever the context or interlocutor. News can also be delivered in competent and qualified contexts. *Nuove* does not carry any mark of relative information quality.

Correspondingly, there are winds in the privileged and more qualified arena of the court, chancellery, military command or similar operational context. Things can be picked up, without any other effort than opening one's ears and listening to colleagues in the daily give and take of diplomatic practice. The main verb in this respect is *intendere*, covering all the different meanings of hearing, understanding or establishing a piece of intelligence. The use of this verb, with its related syntagms, predominates in the vocabulary of the dispatches dedicated to information collection, prevailing over any other lexical choice:

⁵⁴ Forlì 24.07.1499, Blois 26.09.1500, *id.* 02.10.1500, Tours 21.11.1500, Imola 07.10.1502, *id.* 12.10.1502, 13.10.1502, 29.10.1502, 30.10.1502, 03.11.1502, 01.11.1502, 20.11.1502, 30.11.1502, 02.12.1502, M instruction for Filippo da Casavecchia, 10.09.1507, Bolzano 26.01.1508, *id.* 01.02.1508, Merano 07.03.1508, Mantova 17.11.1509, Blois 02.09.1510.

⁵⁵ Imola 03.11.1502, Castel della Pieve 09.09.1506, Perugia, 19.09.1506, Blois 29.07.1510, *id.* 30.07.1510.

*intendiamo, secondo intendiamo, intendo oltre a di questo, intendesi, non s'intende, mi pare avere inteso, non ho poi inteso, s'intende che, ho inteso poi, per quello s'intende, aveva fatto intendere, intendesi che, altro non s'intende; non s'intende altro...intendesi nondimanco, s'intende come...*⁵⁶ *Sentire* and in many respects *conoscere* belong to the same category of information, knowledge that is available, without any effort having to be spent in extracting it from reluctant or uncooperative sources. In this, as in other, similar contexts, the negative syntagms and the admissions of powerlessness are as prominent as the straightforward positive locutions.⁵⁷

Rumours

Further down the line are the categories of second- and third-hand information, present at all times not as factual or confirmed news, but as court and office rumours, items that are reported during conversations with colleagues, partners and other interlocutors, whether in close or wider circles. Each of them may carry specific signs of relative credibility. At given times certain themes, issues and questions are continually being talked about. Some of them might be difficult to believe, and they cannot be considered reliable without further verification. The questions being asked may come in different versions, prompting speculation, possibly the object of conjecture and supposition. Answers to questions must often be formulated with a 'maybe' in order to reduce errors. There are of course themes, questions and realities which remain out of reach, either because nobody talks about them or because nobody repeats, expands or paraphrases them. There are things that could have been pushed but are instead passed over in silence. There are situations where the expected insistence fails to emerge. Result: a considerable proportion of effective realities remain ambiguous, hidden, beyond reach. Closer to what might be attainable, but is still merely considered possible, are those occurrences that must be corroborated by supplementary sources: what could happen, or could have happened, possibly under slightly different modalities, or what might happen in the future when certain conditions are met. The conditional and subjunctive modes⁵⁸ appositely replace the indicative at this lower level of truth collateral.

Dire, dicesi, si dice

The main verb used by Machiavelli in the category of second-hand information is *dire*, mainly in the infinitive and the passive mode, or in the third person, singular or plural, used to express general conjectures and suppositions. The preferred forms are *si dice, dicesi, si è detto, diceva* and *dicono*. Other variants are significantly less frequent. Much of the diplomatic trade consists in collecting and relaying what is being said, talked about. A variant of *dire*,

⁵⁶ Imola 28.11.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502, Roma 14.11.1503, Civita Castellana 28.08.1506, Viterbo 30-31.08.1506, Urbino 26.09.1506, Cesena 04.10.1506, Siena 14.08.1507.

⁵⁷ Imola 03.11.1502, Urbino 25.09.1506.

⁵⁸ Imola 28.11.1502, Perugia 15.09.1506, Instruction for Francesco Soderini 24.06.1502, Instruction for Machiavelli 17.11.1503.

denoting a similar level of relative informational validity, comes in the shape of the syntagms based on *voce*. However, the accompanying verbs – *dare, essere, surgere, spargere, trarre, narrare, mantenere, uscire, mandare, correre* – convey nuances that the highly neutral *dire* cannot adequately express: the fact that what can be said and heard on the streets and in the corridors, and ends up being qualified as *voce*, is not necessarily a spontaneous occurrence. It can also be a deliberately constructed rumour geared to orient attitudes, sentiments and opinions in certain directions rather than in another. Finding one’s way in this uncertain environment of rumour peddling often starts by comparing sources and confronting one strand of information with other strands received from elsewhere. If messages from several sources coincide, their level of reliability increases. The multiplication of sources, combined with an evaluation of their relative validity, is a primary method of ensuring the quality of information. Here again this quality is based on authority and credibility: *omini degni di fede*. However, in this domain of second- and third-hand information the multiplicity of sources confirming a tendency, a development or a possible fact is the main guarantee: *da più omini (degni di fede), da più bande/luoghi, da più di una via, da più persone*.⁵⁹

Several degrees lower in terms of relative certainty are multiple sources that do not necessarily confirm one another. The category of ‘*some say-others say*’ covers the type of rumour which manifestly varies according to the origin, background, orientation, allegiance, analytical capacity or credibility of individual information peddlers. Identical things or events may be seen or reported in one way by some, and differently, even contrariwise, by others. The same piece of information is more or less trustworthy depending on the background, attitude and intelligence of the individual dealer in information. It can be talked about in varying terms and interpreted differently. The syntagms used in the correspondence at both ends of the line of communication are highly conventional in form: *chi dice/chi dice, chi dice/altri dicono*.⁶⁰

When the field is extended beyond two sources and the comparison is extended to include multiple conflicting messages on identical themes, the principal lexical marker is the adverb *variamente*, predominantly associated with *parlare*, exceptionally with *referire*.⁶¹ A series of other verbs is associated with the collection and rendering of information, with different levels of credibility, with source background and allegiance. When a traded piece of information can be linked directly to one or a limited number of secondary sources, Machiavelli’s preferred choice is the verb *referire*, with the infinitive and *referito, referisce, referiscono* being the main syntagms.⁶² As may be the case in similar locutions with other verbs, the description of the agent of *referire* is sometimes targeted to restrict enhance, or simply measure the source’s relative credibility,

⁵⁹ M instruction for Guglielmo de’ Pazzi 02.11.1498, Castrocaro 16.07.1499, Instruction for M 11.10.1500, Nantes 04.11.1500, Imola 13.11.1502, Cesena 322–23.12.1502, M instruction for Giovanni Ridolfi 04.08.1503, M instruction for Girolamo de’ Pilli 22.08.1503, M instruction for Giampaolo Baglioni 09.12.1504.

⁶⁰ Imola 20.10.1502, *id.* 09.12.1502, Roma 30.10.1503, *id.* 04.11.1503, 02.12.1503, Viterbo 31.08.1506, Bolzano 31.01.1508.

⁶¹ Blois 26.09.1500, Imola, 20.11.1502, *id.* 26.11.1502, M instruction for Giovanni Ridolfi 30.06.1503, Roma 26.11.1503, Mantova 17.11.1509.

⁶² Montargis 12.08.1500, Imola 26.11.1502, Urbino 26.09.1506, Roma 02.12.1503.

'objectivity' or, conversely, evident bias. If, for instance, an interlocutor is French or linked to a specific family or clan, the corresponding adjectives convey a certain number of meanings, implications and other consequences for the interpretation of the contents of the message.⁶³

Reservations regarding the credibility of sources and the policy/posture characteristics and negotiating behavior may be associated with feudal or 'tribal' allegiances and only exceptionally with national origins. If there is a rudimentary political ethnography in Machiavelli, mainly lodged in the 'minor' political writings,⁶⁴ there is no doubt that the dispatches generally consider politics as being governed by its own internal logic. There may occasionally be specifically Italian, German or Spanish ways of conducting business, with more than just nuances between Neapolitan, Venetian and Florentine political behavior. However, the crucial issue remains the fundamental compatibility between systems and action. One slight question mark, due also to Machiavelli's fundamentally *misogallico* attitude, is associated with France and with French ways of posturing, negotiating and conducting general business. This reveals itself in passages such as the description of the departure from Rome of Charles d'Amboise, Cardinal of Rouen, a major *papabile* in the early years of the sixteenth century. Machiavelli describes the attitudes and gestures of the Cardinal as more easy-going and 'human' than one would expect, being a great lord – and a Frenchman.⁶⁵

Tenersi per fermo

Moving into this field of uncertain information, of expectations, doubts and suppositions, confronts the observer with another order of magnitude with respect to the technical-diplomatic vocabulary. The statistical frequency of the use of the respective terms in this domain prevents even abbreviated quoting of the relevant passages. In the developments below, the overall proportions and relative importance of the individual syntagms will be defined, the quoted passages being mainly illustrative.

Even in the midst of uncertainty and extended lines of transmission, some kind of informational solidity can be established: second-hand sources of information may lead to the truth. Whatever is considered a matter of fact, corresponding to an existing reality – for instance, in terms of attested developments, including formalized agreements and understandings – is broadly qualified, in Machiavelli's as in the general chancellery correspondence, as *fermo*.

Used in its simplest form, this word is used to guarantee the validity of the information. However, it should be noted that in a significant number of cases the semantic reach of the qualification is immediately reduced analogously to the case with *voce* by use of the associated verbs: *tenersi/credere/essere (per*

⁶³ Imola 01.11.1502, Roma 04.12.1503.

⁶⁴ *De Natura Gallorum, Rapporto di cose della Magna, Discorso sopra le cose della Magna et sopra l'Imperatore, Ritratto di cose di Francia, Ritratto delle cose della Magna.*

⁶⁵ Roma 07.12.1503.

fermo).⁶⁶ But whereas the *voce* case includes orchestrated operations designed to stage certain realities rather than others, backtracking on what should be 'firm' remains on the consumer's side of the table by making reference to holding views and beliefs rather than the active dissemination of alternative realities. When an indication is confirmed by multiple sources and considered a fact belonging to the present tense, or is directed to the near or distant future, therefore with a slight or more pronounced degree of uncertainty, the main vocabulary is based on *attendere* or *aspettare*.⁶⁷ A similar meaning is conveyed by *dubitare* and by other syntagms formed on *dubbio*: *dubitasi, non ne fa dubbio, senza (qualche) dubbio*.⁶⁸ Whereas the infinitive *stimare* remains associated with recognition, evaluation and calculation, *stimasi* serves in a few occurrences, when the perspective combines the present and future tenses, as a synonym of similar syntagms based on *attendere, aspettare, dubitare* and *congetturare* (often also *coniettare*).

The locutions constructed on *ragionare* and *ragione* extensively cover similar functions related to the provision of information, especially when used to describe possible outcomes, as associated with the specific intellectual behavior of interlocutors, the logics of local ways of thinking or the functioning of given mindsets: *ragiona, ragionare, ragionamento, ragionando, ragionato*.⁶⁹ Not surprisingly, when the validity or quality of a piece of information is hypothetical, mainly based on opinions, beliefs or impressions, and also preferably directed to the future tense, *credere* dominates in the infinitive, with *si crede, credesi* and *credono* as its main variants.⁷⁰

Dubious and unobtainable information

One particularly large group is represented by the pieces identified as dubious or insidious. Among these are false pretexts and promises, including statements of what is deemed desirable rather than real. Reporting from government and diplomatic construction sites also covers what is being put on show and what will not necessarily be proved correct, for instance, conveying rumours, including those generated on purpose, in line with the syntagms based on *voce*. Supply and demand come together in this category, which thus also includes the messages that people in general, or certain interlocutors in particular, want to hear, objects of hope or promises, given and entertained. Among these are what has to be shown in order to demonstrate good faith, what is obtained indirectly, obliquely, by pretending to ask for something else, and what is not true but is

⁶⁶ *Tenersi per fermo*: 10 registered cases.

⁶⁷ Imola 16.11.1502 24 examples; *attendere*: 43 examples. Related syntagms: 221, M instruction for Piero Vespucci, 08.07 117 (all meanings). Related syntagms: 437.

⁶⁸ Cesena 23.12.1502, Viterbo 02.09.1506, Blois 27.08.1510, *Dubbio*: 78 examples. *Dubitare*: 156 examples. Related syntagms, formed on *dubita-*: 446 examples.

⁶⁹ Imola 14.11.1502, *Ragionare*: 74 examples. *Ragionando*: 24. *Ragionamento*: 85. *Ragionato*: 52. *Ragionasi*: 6. All syntagms on *ragiona-*: 399.

⁷⁰ Imola 10.11.1502, Imola 28.11.1502, Rome, 16.11.1503, Corciano 12.09.1506, Perugia 16.09.1506, Blois 30.07-1510 (Postscriptum). *Credesi*: 42 examples. *Si crede*: 135. All variants formed on *cred-*: 1938 examples.

used tactically to influence action in certain ways. In this same drawer are grouped the consequences of hidden agendas: the deployment of arguments listing the reasons for something entirely different being placed elsewhere, statements uttered in bad faith, contradictory promises that cannot be fulfilled, rumors presented as facts, and even as truth, or elements only fielded to demonstrate or illustrate differences from predecessors or previous situations. In this category can also be included items of information that carry a 'positive' sign of dissimulation. In certain situations, adequacy, expediency, confidentiality and criteria of privileged access may determine that the truth is kept away from sight, and consequently that any interpretation of events, actions or political signals will need to confront words and appearances with concrete interests and proven facts. The pretexts formulated may not necessarily correspond to real motives. Interlocutors might pretend to regard something as good news in order to exclude certain interpretations that could be detrimental to their position. There are situations where it might be appropriate to demonstrate trust in something or somebody, even if there are serious reasons to believe that such trust cannot be substantiated.⁷¹ There are significantly lower points in the truth hierarchy, occupied by elusive or non-registered sources or by other types of insufficient information quality, corresponding either to a low degree of accessibility to truth or to what remains improbable, unnecessary or beyond reach, as well as to unreliable cabinet gossip, political babble and outright lies.⁷²

Inside the segment covering what is difficult to obtain or off limits, different elements live in cohabitation. Some are pieces of information that can no longer be obtained because circumstances such as war prevent the free flow of information. Others are items that cannot be seized, buried as they are in secrecy and confidentiality, or protected by a lack of access to valid interlocutors. Yet other items are hidden in different ways and cannot be extracted from the main available sources and interlocutors. Finally, there is what has not been heard or perceived, cannot be figured out or even guessed, been neglected or cannot be accessed for different reasons, including those pieces of information which might have been announced, but did not materialize, have been forgotten or failed to be registered for different reasons. The omissions, silences and voids simply commanded by *chancellery discipline* may be put in a subcategory of its own. They can be due to respect for promises given, or they may correspond to criteria of textual economy and operational efficiency, governing, for example, the inclusion of only those elements that are essential to the mission and, correlatively, the exclusion of the marginal, the superfluous: a narrative thus not overburdened with unnecessary elements. Maintaining a certain quality of reporting may entail withholding and filtering items that do not meet essential chancellery norms. Other elements can also be omitted, including those that are regarded as having been safely received through previous correspondence or oblique channels. There are also pieces of

⁷¹ Imola 26.11.1502, Corinaldo 01.01.1503, Perugia 15.09.1506, Rome 21.11.1503.

⁷² Trento 30.05.1508, Mantova, 20.11.1509. Bugie: 9 examples.

information to which no ears can be lent, or which are considered impossible to articulate in a given court or other political context.

The envoy may be able to grasp the main orientation of a given policy or project, but not be given the conditions to get hold of the details, because of either interlocutor secrecy or other restricted access to information. He can choose not to mention the conditions of an agreement in the making because this information has not been acquired under satisfactory circumstances. One's main interlocutors may leave out many elements and details of specific cases, whereas their collaborators will pick them up. The reasons for such differences, and for delays in the delivery of information or responses to solicitation, cannot always be perceived. Secrecy over the publication of agreements can prevent diplomatic representatives from obtaining copies of the relevant texts. For reasons of timing and expediency, a given report may be sealed and sent on its way despite a lack of adequate verification, to be conducted subsequently. The urgent business of the main interlocutors and the mere confusion of the overall picture of events can deprive the envoy of the access and opportunities needed to check the correctness of his information. At other times he may get hold of a considerable amount of information without discovering the internal logic of associated goings-on. In his reporting he will then have to forego any analysis and simply report what is in front of him, providing a literal rendering of encounters and conversations, making it clear that nothing has been left out, and refraining from taking any further steps.

Communication through war zones can prove impossible because of infrastructural breakdown. At times the envoy may have to collect a contradictory or bizarre piece of information without being able to arrive at the justification that would normally be needed to sustain its plausibility and relevance. Particulars reported from another court need not be relayed to Florence. If they are true, the local ambassador will confirm them. If they are false, they need not be mentioned at all. The envoy may admit to having forgotten the name of a locality and thus choose to leave the piece of information incomplete. He can invoke the concern not to irritate his authorities by mentioning the names of certain persons. And finally, the most consistent obstacle of all: discretion, silence, confidentiality, restricted information sharing, sometimes kept within the limits of a single brain, which does not reveal anything before effectively initiating action.⁷³

Spin and unmasking spin

Finally, there is a related type of communication, yet noticeably diverse with respect to its targeting, one constructed to convey a certain impression rather than another, to put a certain 'spin' on things in order to influence public opinion or one's main interlocutors by tactically steering one's 'communication' efforts. Examples include making a given pope appear more effective as a secular ruler than his predecessors and publicly fielding purposely constructed elements and arguments to check the ambitions of adversaries and dissuade

⁷³ Imola 27.10.1502, *id.* 13.11.1502, 20.11.1502, 02.12.1502, Cesena 18.12.1502, *id.* 20.12.1502, 23.12.1502, 26.12.1502, Roma 01.11.1503, Blois 29.07.1510.

them from going ahead with their projects.⁷⁴ Conversely it might be used to unmask similar operations by partners and interlocutors, as well as to unravel less than trustworthy rumors, checking on the realities behind what is probably gossip or *bugie popolari*. It also involves researching the motives behind gestures and attitudes seemingly characterized by sullenness, indicating hidden resentments, and being prepared to use false pretexts to get to the truth of the matter.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Imola 14.11.1502, Viterbo 31.08.1506.

⁷⁵ Imola 20.11.1502, Cesena 20.12.1502.

OPERATIONAL FUNCTIONS

Political activity can hardly be reduced to questions of language alone. Of course, action produces words, and it needs the constant companionship of discourse. But in most instances the essence of action is to leave the realm of words behind and move into operations, be they military, financial or low-end empirical case-handling, sometimes in discreet or even silent mode, solving existing problems and delivering practical answers to urgent, medium or long-term questions.

In terms merely of proportion, the second most important category of Machiavelli's official correspondence is this case-handling part, very concrete *pratiche* of all kinds. Examples include carrying out issued instructions, adapting them to the actual situation, to the time and place; relaying answers from partners and interlocutors to questions put by the government; and soliciting general flexibility or seeking minor or major adjustments to initial positions. Also, when working at the other end of the line, out of Florence, Machiavelli formulates instructions to governors, administrators and civil and military authorities of Florentine territory in his capacity as Head of the Second Chancellery, directing them to act on specific issues. The latter function is genuinely and exclusively executive. The former presents a contrast in this respect, as several formally operational assignments are such in name only.

These operational phases are unevenly distributed throughout Machiavelli's career according to the specific target of the mission, as formulated in the instructions. Prominent assignments, such as the second Cesare Borgia (1502-03) and the Julius II (1506) missions, remain information-dominated. The operational aspects represent low percentages in the overall volume of the latter correspondences and mainly relate to day-to-day business between neighbouring states, in this case Florence on the one hand and the Papal States and Romagna on the other, cases that later periods of diplomatic history would consider predominantly consular business. The second Cesare Borgia mission, with its crucial importance for Florentine positioning regarding the political projects of the Pope and his son, only includes 7.6% of unequivocally case-handling ive sections engaging the respective interlocutors in negotiations.

The direct and indirect recommendation, without a basis in the issued guidance, including the trick of implying an anonymous *amico*, a friend of Florence adequately positioned in the court of accreditation, represents another 4.8% of the volume of dispatches for this assignment. The figures for this would of course be different if the passages containing the repetitious Cesare Borgia demands for a Florentine *condotta* and for a more comprehensive agreement with Florence had been included in the count. However, these events cannot be catalogued as ongoing *pratica* in either the terms of the initial mission guidance, issued with the credentials, or the subsequent supplementary instructions. There is never any sign of Florence yielding to this pressure. On the contrary, realizing that the Duke will continue to insist on developing a concrete case in direct negotiations, Machiavelli is instructed, initially on November 15th, first to put uncomfortable questions regarding the foreseen contents of such an

understanding to rest,⁷⁶ then, on November 19, in an exceptionally direct manner, to close the door on them explicitly.⁷⁷ For Florence this is but one of several questions that should be left unanswered, a not-to-be *pratica* that may generate numerous *avvisi* from Machiavelli to headquarters, but never anything material. No exchange of actual draft agreements or anything similar occurs. In the case of the Julius II Romagna mission of 1506, which raised other questions of direct relevance to the integrity of Florentine territory, the volume of case-handling elements stands at 10.4%, and there is no direct nor indirect counselling of the chancellery by the envoy.

Again, these counts are of course largely the consequence of a narrow definition of 'case-handling'. This definition does not include the operational advice that Machiavelli himself deems fit to be conveyed to headquarters, even if no direct guidance has been issued in this respect, nor does it include the advice drawn up by the unnamed *amico*. Both of these strands are included in the categories of *direct* and *indirect recommendations*. An alternative approach might have been to break the information part of these missions down to distinguish its constituents from one another, thus identifying those linked to an operational task: a delicate, unpractical method with multiple risks of making arbitrary judgements.

One important information target for both the Cesare Borgia II and Julius II Romagna missions consists in keeping an eye on political activities and military operations in the immediate neighborhood of the Florentine domain's borders, assessing the risks and identifying symptoms of political and territorial spillovers that threaten to disrupt the existing balance of power. In this sense these missions also have indirect operational purposes in overall political terms, which are more consequential than the concrete handling of individual cases of medium or low importance. However, the analytical choice in this context remains to define 'case-handling' as the coming together, on one platform, of two interlocutors or parties negotiating an actual case: payment under political racketeering, the release of a prisoner, the contract for a *condotta*. Marginally operational business also includes logistics, provisioning, financing, organization, managing favours and privileges, corruption, influencing trafficking, serving the specific interests of Florentine citizens and operators, identifying risks and opportunities for the Florentine state and proposing targeted actions in situations that headquarters might not become aware of in time.

As noted earlier, the two main categories, the information and operational chapters, remain the dominant themes in the diplomatic dispatches, together representing 72.8% of the total. The France III mission stands out for its specific internal proportions, its sheer information content falling to 9.6%, whereas the case-handling elements, still narrowly defined according to the above criteria,

⁷⁶ Marcello Virgilio instruction for M 15.11.1502.

⁷⁷ Marcello Virgilio instruction for M 19.11.1502.

represent 53.4%. On top of the latter figure comes information that is strictly, technically and politically related to the object of negotiation, adding an additional 15%. The conclusion: the mission devoted 68.4% to handling the case in question, all other aspects and elements having a secondary place. One of the first of Machiavelli's assignments is an even more acute example in the same category. In the Sforza-Riario commission, the direct operational part reaches 57.8 %. Combined with the reporting of what will be defined as *auto-verbatim* (24.4%), the rendering of the implementation of given instructions, the interpretation of the score and other related elements, the combined operation-relevant elements represent 88% of the commission's correspondence. There are practically no pieces of general information at all. The residual 12% is mainly related to interpretation, including the 'hybrid' passages previously referred to, the rare moments when Machiavelli demonstrates less rigour and stylistic consistency by letting different strands overlap, as brought out above.

Heavily operation-oriented are also France I (info 15.2%, operational 67.7%, verbatim 15.9%, linked mainly to the case-handling purposes of the mission) and Germany (info 39.6%, operational 44.1%). Opposite proportions dominate the Cesare Borgia II mission (info, including verbatim 60.9%/operational 7.7%), Julius II Romagna (1506) (info, including verbatim 78.8 %/operational, including elements related to advice and feedback provided and verbatim passages concerning the cases, 9.9%).

Main fields of operation

One important layer of political and managerial substance, extensively exposed in the instructions issued by Machiavelli, is governed by his function as Head of the Second Florentine Chancellery, in charge of questions pertaining to the administration and security of the Florentine domain.

Florence cannot change the territorial status quo in Italy, but nor can any other state absorb Florence without having to confront the other main local actors moving out to defend the existing balance of power. These basic conditions of security policy authorize a renunciation of defense policies, but only apparently. At its margins Florentine territory is exposed to incursions, infringements and rebellions. The Val di Chiana upheaval, ambiguities over Siena, the Vitelli family's harassment and Pisa's secession are just some of the events that called for an adequate armed response during Machiavelli's tenure in the Florentine republican administration.

His responsibility for the territory gives Machiavelli opportunities for policy formulation, decision-making and the management of military questions, including infrastructure, personnel, garrisons and deployment. His portfolio thus *de facto* covers responsibilities which, in the present-day world, would pertain to a permanent state secretary of defence. In the Florentine perspective, however, the state retains only very indirect means of fully assuming its defense obligations, as the security of the territory mainly depends on successive subcontracting agreements with local *condottieri* or on French heavy cavalry assisted by Swiss mercenaries. During Machiavelli's years of professional

activity, the only strategic object is the recovery of Pisa. The two other potential targets – Lucca and Siena – are never considered seriously. Neither the other peninsular guardians of the existing balance of power since the Peace of Lodi of 1494 nor the major European powers would have let either Florence or the Papal States get away with it.

Machiavelli's preoccupations as Head of the Second Chancellery remain centered on the day-to-day management of the local defense teams and the fortifications of Florentine towns. These activities are amply reflected in the guidance issued by Machiavelli from his headquarters in Florence. But the lack of larger autonomous standing military forces tends to put a major stress on the negotiations on *condotte* and other types of external military support, confirming the relationship between offers of military protection and sheer extortion, between security guarantees and budgetary considerations, ultimately prompting the proposal for the *Ordinanza*.

These same conditions structure the other strand of activity undertaken by Machiavelli in his second capacity as a government diplomatic functionary and official representative of the *X di Balìa*. In this role he also at times acts upon the direct and personal instructions of Piero Soderini, *gonfaloniere perpetuo* from 1502 till the end of the Republic, and that of the main phase of Machiavelli's career, in 1512. In this capacity he undertakes diplomatic missions and local commissions, acting on guidance issued mainly by his colleague Marcello Virgilio, Head of the First Florentine Chancellery and responsible for the Republic's external relations. One important item is the negotiation of financial questions, primarily at the court of France, but also in Italy (Forlì, Mantova). During the joint Vettori-Machiavelli mission to Maximilian at Bolzano, he performs a similar task with respect to the Empire when the incursion of the Emperor into Italy is on the point of becoming a reality. While 'financial questions' mainly cover the costs of 'protection', whether in terms of subsidies for French troops in Italy or as downpayments to the King, they also, especially at the Court of France, include the identification of suitable operators for purposes of lobbying and corruption.

Along the way secondary cases emerge or are purposely articulated and picked up in both instructions and reporting. There are also a number of operational improvisations: taking care of the specific individual interests of Florentine citizens, as instructed by headquarters, or proposing suitable action to manage emerging situations and business not foreseen in the instructions issued. The handling of adverse Italian interests abroad in a given political context also represents a field of potential initiative. This is especially the case at the French court, where situations insufficiently known or largely unknown to headquarters regularly emerge. In order to defend Florentine interests in these court intrigues, sustaining the action of friendly operators and countering the influence of hostile elements, Machiavelli makes his own decisions and conveys recommendations to Florence about how to keep individual intriguers happy, or at bay. During the first mission to the French court, Machiavelli thus recommends official support for Giulio Scruciati in his ongoing confrontation with the Bandini heirs. The case implies a delicate evaluation of pros and cons. On the one hand, there is the reality of the hitherto active furthering of

Florentine interests at the court of Louis XII by Scruciati. On the other hand, there is a risk of a 180-degree reversal of attitude, meaning active retaliation against Florence, if nothing is done to show gratitude and support his case. If passivity prevails, the impressionable King of France might easily be taken in by Scruciati's incongruous and truculent ways, prone to turn his anger against Florence if his demands are not met. The adjectives and qualifiers convey the measure of the danger incurred. Scruciati has credibility, is well-spoken, audacious, interfering and terrifying, and he entertains passions without limits. The conclusion: anything he undertakes is bound to produce effects.⁷⁸

Bilateral cases (2ND Borgia mission)

From the Florentine perspective, the second Cesare Borgia mission is an information and observation assignment. But it just so happens, over this extended period of time, that Machiavelli acquires sufficient proximity and access to Cesare Borgia's court to become the main agent – political, commercial and consular – between Florence and this embryonic and powerful platform for a new central Italian state based on its recent Romagna acquisitions. This position, right at the interface between the eastern and western regions of central Italy, generates a series of more or less trivial cases, starting at the very beginning of the mission at Imola and continuing until its completion at Castel del Lago more than three months later.

This series of events starts with (i) a Borgia demand for the Florentine government to move troops towards Borgo San Sepolcro as a dissuasive message for Paolo Vitelli.⁷⁹ Also at this point in time Machiavelli is (ii) instructed to seek safe conduct for Florentine merchants moving through Romagna.⁸⁰ Later in October Florence solicits, through Machiavelli, (iii) the liberation of the fortress commander Salvestro dei Buosi, imprisoned at Anghiari and transferred to Forlì. The case meets with difficulties because of opposed interests in the Duca Valentino's camp.⁸¹ Then, in the first days of November, the Borgia treasurer Spannocchi approaches Machiavelli with (iv) a demand for Florence to receive favorably the visit of Baldassare Scipioni, recently appointed an infantry commander in Valentino's army.⁸² Favors in the opposite direction are requested by Florence the following day when the Duke is (v) entreated to intervene in Rome with the Pope himself and with the Cardinal of Salerno in order to solve the problem of the debts of certain papal courtiers with the Florentine Gaddi merchants.⁸³ Another idea, emerging from the Florentine Chancellery, is (vi) a proposal to increase the tax revenues of the Republic by imposing a tithe on the clergy. This is passed on to Machiavelli with the aim of getting Cesare Borgia to support this proposal in order to ensure the

⁷⁸ Tours 24.11.1500.

⁷⁹ Imola 07.10.1502, *id.* 09.10.1502.

⁸⁰ Imola 09.10.1502.

⁸¹ Marcello Virgilio instruction for Machiavelli 25.10.1502.

⁸² Imola 04.11.1502.

⁸³ Marcello Virgilio instruction for Machiavelli (postscriptum) 05.11.1502.

necessary papal approval.⁸⁴ In a display of tactical skill, the latter point is played back as a *quid pro quo* by the Duca Valentino through the court *amico* in connection with the furthering of his diplomatic offensive to conclude a *condotta* with Florence. The planned imposition on the Tuscan clergy is suggested as a supplementary means of financing the cavalry that Cesare Borgia would place at Florence's disposal. This move is conducted through an appeal addressed to Florence by Cesare Borgia to deliver at least a discounted version of the desired *condotta*. Nominally to be maintained at three hundred horse it is understood that two hundred would be acceptable in practice.⁸⁵ This concession is combined with a papal agreement on the tax to be levied on the clergy – *una decima o due* – the latter in order to finance the *condotta*.

A few days later, a personal letter from Gonfaloniere Piero Soderini to Machiavelli instructs the latter (vii) to intercede with the Duca Valentino on behalf of Conte Giovanni di Carpigna in order to avoid any aggression against his domain during the Borgia operations in the area.⁸⁶ Less than two weeks later Machiavelli attracts the attention of headquarters to (viii) the need to protect Florentine merchandise at Ancona against army-generated looting. He intervenes on his own initiative with Alessandro Spanocchi at the Cesare Borgia court in order to ensure this protection, combined with advice to transfer these stocks of merchandise to Cesena or Rimini, where security is better.⁸⁷ In the days preceding the departure of Cesare Borgia from Imola, Machiavelli recommends (ix) the early restitution of stolen horses, presumably stolen by Florentine subjects, as the Duke tends to blow this case out of all proportion, making it look as if he has lost a territory. The envoy sees retaliation against Florentine merchants as a concrete risk.⁸⁸ On the eve of the move out of Imola towards Cesena and then to Senigallia, Machiavelli is instructed to approach Cesare Borgia in order (x) to obtain the suspension of a former intervention by himself to have the President of the Apostolic Chamber modify the attitude of the Chamber in a specific case (Agostino Chigi/Paolo di Nanni Rucellai).⁸⁹ Another endeavour, in the opposite direction, is undertaken at Cesena; Machiavelli mentions it in a postscript. A close collaborator of Cesare Borgia urges him to intervene with the Florentine judicial authorities (xi) in order to delay a court appearance regarding the 72-year-old Bartolomeo Marcelli related to the Arezzo rebel cause. The bad weather, including heavy snowfalls in the Appennine Mountains, delayed the arrival of the convening notice and made it impossible for Bartolomeo to arrive on time.⁹⁰

And immediately afterwards, as Cesare Borgia's troops move into Urbino territory and thus closer to Florence's borders, on December 17th Marcello Virgilio informs Machiavelli of the evacuation of people and assets from the border region towards Urbino and (xii) instructs him to work to forestall any

⁸⁴ Imola 08.11.1502.

⁸⁵ Imola 08.11.1502.

⁸⁶ Piero Soderini, personal instruction for M, Florence 15.11.1502.

⁸⁷ Imola 28.11.1502.

⁸⁸ Imola 06.12.1502.

⁸⁹ Instruction for Machiavelli 07.12.1502.

⁹⁰ Cesena 14.12.1502 (*Postscripta*) The case has a follow-up in on 26.12.1502, reflected in Cesena 26.12.1502.

looting of Florentine property by the Borgia troops.⁹¹ On December 19th at Cesena, another demand flows in the opposite direction: the Duca Valentino (xiii) takes steps to intervene in internal nominations and electoral procedures in Florence, asking his collaborator Agabito Gerardini to convey to Machiavelli his preference for Lodovico Archilegio de Amelia as judge of the Arte della Lana.⁹² The day after the Senigallia massacre, 1st January, in Corinaldo, Cesare Borgia's immediate aim is (xiv) to calculate the benefits of the event for himself, and especially for others. In general terms he mentions a new obligation, visibly hoping to cash in, but without going into accounting details.⁹³ One week later the calculation is done, and he presents the benefits of the Senigallia operation more or less directly in the form of an invoice to Florence. His services in getting rid of the enemies of the Republic are worth 200,000 ducats, roughly evaluated as the expenses that Florence would have had to invest in a military operation against Vitellozzo and the Orsini, without being able to count on an outcome as successful as Senigallia has proved to be.⁹⁴ Of course this is not a bilateral case at the same secondary level as the others on this list, but rather a pitch to specify a debt, obtain credit for an action that has clearly also benefitted Florence, and force the Florentine government acknowledge its debtor status with respect to the Borgia. Also on January 1st another invoice, containing less significant figures than those associated with the Senigallia operation, comes Machiavelli's way (xv): the Florentine rebel and Medici partisan Goro Gheri of Pistoia is picked up by Spanish troops, who appear ready to trade him for cash. Machiavelli promptly suggests that Florence takes charge of him by paying off his captors for 200 ducats.⁹⁵ The resulting guidance to Machiavelli is typical of the penny-pinching attitudes of the Florentine leadership in trying to reduce a small sum by at least 50%, possibly more, and even indicating the relevant bargaining methods: show no particular desire and belittle the merchandise as much as possible.⁹⁶ In this way an observation mission, with no major operational or even minor explicit purpose, develops into a platform for handling everything of bilateral interest. All in all, there are fifteen different *pratiche* not covered by the initial mission guidance ranging from petty personal cases to questions of political and financial relevance. The only common factor among them is the background understanding, on both sides of the table, that a bilateral relationship implies a mutual rendering of services, a constant give and take.

Other assignments also involve the management of emerging business not foreseen in the original mission guidance. During the Julius II Romagna mission, in 1506, the Pope finds it convenient to take a shortcut through Florentine territory. This presents an occasion for Machiavelli to propose the appropriate

⁹¹ Marcello Virgilio instruction for Machiavelli, Florence 17.12.1502.

⁹² Cesena 19.12.1502.

⁹³ Corinaldo 01.01.1503.

⁹⁴ Assisi 08.01.1503.

⁹⁵ Corinaldo 01.01.1503.

⁹⁶ Florence 09.01.1503.

protocols, reception and provisioning, thus seizing the opportunity to make a gesture towards the Pope.⁹⁷

Corruption and mission financing practices

There are also the goings on related to the corruption of officials, most conspicuously in the case of Charles d'Amboise, Cardinal of Rouen, and Florimond Robertet at the French court, central recipients of Florentine graft throughout Machiavelli's career, as explicitly stated in mission reports from 1500 to 1510.⁹⁸ The missions to France, where the *mammona iniquitatis* constitutes a serious factor, are examples of partial task paralysis, partly because of the stingy behavior of headquarters towards its own officials. It has often been noted that Machiavelli's missions were insufficiently financed. In his authoritative work on *Renaissance Diplomacy*, Garrett Mattingly⁹⁹ appositely makes the point about the adequate financing of foreign policies, citing Milan and France as early examples of the effective deployment of resources to diplomatic missions. He also draws attention to the specifics of and differences in state decision-making in this respect. Powers such as Milan and France have one-stop monarchical systems for deciding on expenditure, the latter including a discretionary power to adjust the tax base, but many others need to go through elaborate collective procedures to raise the necessary funding for particular projects and purposes. The Florentine Republic is to be found at the far end of this scale, with its complicated administrative and consultative routines, on top of its fundamentally miserly behavior, which does not easily make allowances for expeditious gestures, as, for example, Machiavelli needed on his third mission to France. Not only do the representatives of the Florentine Republic lack the means to buy or sustain the necessary influence at court, their own provisions are rarely paid for on time and are often under-estimated. Among the passages categorized under 'operational business' in this study are also those that deal with repeated complaints regarding the late receipt of the mission's provisions and the more than miserable status of the state's representatives resulting from the restrictive attitudes of the administration, which keep its representatives' operating costs down to a point where they appear as B-list diplomats, often unable to live up fully to the rules of the game.¹⁰⁰

In an ultimate demonstration of ill will, there is never any compensation for provisions corresponding fully to payments already due and impending obligations, and never any significant anticipation of resources to cope with the mission's future even in the short term. Having started his individual assignment at the beginning of October at Imola with a budget of 55 ducats, Machiavelli finds himself indebted to his colleagues in Florence and at the

⁹⁷ Castel della Pieve 09.09.1506 (*Postscripta*).

⁹⁸ Melun 26.08.1500, *id.* 27.08.1500, 03.09.1500, Melun, 14.09.1500, Tours 24.11.1500, Blois 29.07.1510.

⁹⁹ *Op.cit.* p. 130.

¹⁰⁰ Lyons 29.07.1500, *id.* 30.07.1500, Saint Pierre-le-Moutier 05.08. 1500, Montargis 12.08.1500, Melun 29.08.1500, *id.* 03.09.1500.

Cesare Borgia court at the beginning of December. By December 18th he has spent 70 ducats, and only on the 20th does Marcello Virgilio sign off an order to provide him with 25 ducats¹⁰¹ to enable him to pursue his mission further. This modest extra allowance arrives just in time at Cesena (26.12.02) for him to be able to catch up with the court on its way to Senigallia. But immediately afterwards emergencies requiring urgent dispatches more than double the normal courier fee (two ducats), eating away at the small margin of ten ducats allowed for.

Amending contents of guidance

The case of initiatives being taken outside the limits laid down in formal guidance issued to the mission has been mentioned. Yet another diplomatic tactic is to alter the contents of the instruction to take account of existing personal and power relations inside the court, relations that may be ignored or be insufficiently known at headquarters, and to use this alteration actively to promote Florentine interests. Thus there are improvisations on the margins of the mission guidance. This is the case during the first mission to the French court, when Della Casa and Machiavelli move to take account of the special relations and mutual sympathy between Charles d'Amboise, Cardinal of Rouen, and the commander of the French troops at Pisa.¹⁰²

These alterations are often matters of emphasis. How strongly should a point be stressed, an interest expressed? In certain cases overstressing a point may create the risk of being presented with an invoice exceeding one's willingness or ability to pay. Maintaining an atmosphere of ambiguity (who is demanding what among the parties concerned?) can be instrumental in lowering the expectations that a concession will be made.¹⁰³

Machiavelli generating cases

Finally, there is an operational field that lies totally beyond the interests described in given directives or cases arising out of interests pursued by third parties. This is the self-generated field that emerges when the envoy spots an opportunity to reinforce Florence's credibility and to serve the Republic's interests by designing new initiatives, for instance, by acting as a political broker or go-between, or by appearing useful to the locals inside the network of the host court. One such case of initiating *maneggi* – putting together an innovative political project – arises during the third mission to the French court. At a crucial moment of tension between the King of France and the Pope, Machiavelli sees an opportunity to render intermediate services and chooses to step in, appealing to support from Headquarters in doing so.¹⁰⁴ Further down

¹⁰¹ Marcello Virgilio instruction for M 20.12.1502.

¹⁰² Nevers 07.08.1500.

¹⁰³ Bolzano 24.01.1508

¹⁰⁴ Blois 03.08.1510, *id.* 18.08.1510.

the line he also summarizes the difficulties arising out of this assumption of an active role, including undesirable or counterproductive effects, when the ambassador to Rome, Pierfrancesco Tosinchi, provokes the anger of the Pope by effectively acting as a go-between.¹⁰⁵ A genuine Florentine peace initiative thus generates an incentive for the Pope to retaliate.

Lexical characteristics of action

In these *pratiche* the Machiavelli glossary regarding the aspects of the negotiating process, the *dare* and *essequire* of *commissioni* and the handling of partners and interlocutors broadly reflects and reproduces the stylistic orientation, lexical routines and other characteristics of Florentine chancery practice related to operations. One significant feature of the information-handling vocabulary, as set out analytically above, was a considerable subtlety and lexical variation, a sophisticated vocabulary devoted to the description of the diplomatic situation on the one hand, and to the infinite nuances of the management of personal relations in cabinet and court contexts on the other. A similar conclusion cannot be drawn regarding operational matters. When it comes to the implementation of Florentine policies, as defined in the instructions issued for the various missions, one major characteristic dominates: the negotiating objects, the effective handling of things and operations, are reflected in a limited number of nouns and verbs. The terms defining the missions, their motives and precise purposes, the means, the implied costs, risks and liabilities thus remain relatively succinct.

Among the reasons for this difference is the basic taciturnity in describing actions. Acting means producing facts, not words. As was the case regarding information, the 'verbal point zero' marks the stage of major efficiency when it comes to political action. At this juncture, the facts are not represented or preceded by words but speak for themselves. They directly take the floor – ultimately corresponding to the the act of war, *il fatto d'arme* – or the moment of truth, where realities clash without any verbal or speculative cushioning, as in Shakespeare:

*[...] The time approaches/That will with due decision make us know/What we shall say we have, and what we owe/Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate/But certain issue strokes must arbitrate [...]*¹⁰⁶

When the facts speak independently, directly, the maximum operational performance is achieved.¹⁰⁷ 'Action orientation' is a central part of the evaluation of Alexander VI by Louis XII. The Pope acts expeditiously and decisively, often without announcing anything beforehand. He of course incarnates the spiritual authority of the Church. Above all, however, he is effective in creating the facts on the ground. The qualifications are illustrative of the skills associated with action as opposed to words: an armed posture, less

¹⁰⁵ Instruction for ambassador Roberto Acciaiuolo 02.09.1510.

¹⁰⁶ Siward in Macbeth 5.4

¹⁰⁷ Blois 14.10.1500, Nantes 25.10.1500, Instruction for Francesco Vettori 08.04.1509, Blois 18.07.1510.

fatigue and fewer impediments than others.¹⁰⁸ Analogous conclusions could have been drawn for Julius II, with two important nuances: in his case the action orientation will turn against France, and his general behavior is chaotic, with little preparation and anticipation.

The general – not specific – framework of political action is its mode, style and choice of expedients: ways, needs, means, effects and benefits, the sum of its concrete cases and targets pursued, its interests.¹⁰⁹ Beyond these generics, the main nouns defining operational areas, objects, issues, motives, purposes and obligations constitute fairly short lists, reflecting the cases and mission targets defined by government instructions. The general vocabulary boils down to *accordo, disegno, dominio, effetti, libertà, provizione, provvedimento* and *sicurezza*. Even the priority vocabulary corresponding to the conversion or implementation of these generally formulated purposes and interests into operational objects and objectives is limited: *alloggiamenti, artiglierie, capituli, spedizione, gente d'arme, imprese, lance, pagamenti, Svizzeri, vettovaglie*.¹¹⁰ The majority of other terms employed in these contexts, be they abstract (*comodo, conservazione, profitto, rimedio, sostanza*) or concrete, practical (*cerimonie, donative, faccenda, guernigione, munizioni, soldi*), are far behind in terms of their statistical frequency and occupy significantly less prominent positions in the dispatches.¹¹¹

The management and handling of these objects is equally limited in scope. These limitations are directly reflected in the vocabulary conveying the nature and orientation of political and military action. This is particularly the case for the inventory of operative verbs reserved to describe dealings with primary political realities such as war and peace, holding or surrendering fortresses, conducting or resisting aggression, downpayments of subsidies, delaying operations, betraying or maintaining promises, fostering convergence or creating division. The verbs used include acquire, contribute, delay, conquer, govern, maintain, operate, respect, get hold of, stabilize, pressure, provide, retribute, remedy, arrange, reengage or confront, endure or suffer, and also *trarre*, in the basic sense of 'profiting from'.¹¹² Other verbs are employed in operational contexts, but they appear less frequently: implement, seize and gather, deliver assistance, carry out commissions, draw conclusions, fight winnable wars, make dispositions, establish and secure a state, obtain, deliver, oblige, produce effects, take sides, disclose positions, remain at discretion,

¹⁰⁸ Nantes 25.10.1500.

¹⁰⁹ In this and the following notes, 118 included, the examples will be by simple indication of numbers, in the present case: *modo* 2723 examples, *bisogno* 506, *effetti* 230, *espediente* 74, *spedizione* 104, *frutto* 104, *pratica/pratiche* 582, *utile/utilità* 305.

¹¹⁰ *Accordo* 577 examples, *alloggiamenti* 210, *artiglierie* 298, *capitula* 207, *disegno/disegni* 384, *gente/genti d'arme* 270, *impresa/imprese* 573, *lance* 212, *libertà* 175, *pagamento/pagamenti* 291, *provvedimento* 152, *provisione* 325, *sicurezza* 175, *svizzeri* 268, *vettovaglie* 158.

¹¹¹ *comodo* 2 examples, *conservazione* 56, *cerimonie* 27, *donative* 10, *faccenda/faccende* 109, *guarnigione/guernigione* 10, *munizioni* 83, *profitto* 48, *rimedio* 81, *soldi* 76, *sostanza* 9.

¹¹² *acquistare* 31 examples, *concorrere* 45, *differire* 90, *entrare* 220, *espedire* (= *sistemare*) 79, *espugnare* 30, *governarsi* 19, *intervenire* 17, *mantenere* 89, *operare* 151, *osservare* (promesse) 92, *pigliare* 260, *posare* 44, *preme(re)* 33, *provvedere* 275, *restituire* 48, *rimediare* 44, *rimettere* 71, *riparare* 27, *saldare* 25, *sopportare* 32, *trarre* 286.

devote attention.¹¹³

There are liabilities and risks linked to the pursuance of political purposes and cases. The potential field of failure, expenditure, mistakes, incidents, accidents, operational errors and mishandling connected with the management of these negotiating objects is correspondingly narrow. This is the case for nouns: trouble, burden, defect, delay, inconvenience, fraud, failure, disbursements, complaints, ruin, treason.¹¹⁴ A similar situation exists concerning the *verbs* denoting the interventions pertaining to the 'negative' or destructive spectrum of political action, situations including the loss of the state, delayed payments, broken promises or agreements, incurring costs and losses, facing problems and expenditure. There is a narrow perspective and universe of cases, exemplified by a manageable list of verbs: condemn, despair, fail, tire, miss, deny, prejudice, pay, break, corrupt, interrupt.¹¹⁵ Another limited, even marginal segment of the lexical material associated with action and general operational purposes conveys precise meanings regarding converging interests: furthering of understandings, making concessions in negotiations, shaping agreements,¹¹⁶ calculations and assessments concerning the price to be paid in terms of concessions and risk-taking: give in, concede, consent.¹¹⁷

Glossary of the process

Elsewhere, however, but still on the case-handling side, an extensive, developed and varied glossary can be found in the language linked to the diplomatic 'process'. This variety reflects the nature of the business. From the Florentine state's perspective, the business of politics is characterized less by the factual realization of deals and more by what leads up to them, what makes it possible to put them off, avoid them altogether or rationalize inadequate or uncomfortable outcomes post facto. For a medium-sized central Italian state with political and military means that are well below its economic and financial potential and European outreach, the managing of relations, interlocutors and partners remains the main aim. Concrete results, registered in agreements or translated into downpayments and thus expenditure on the part of the state, are more often to be avoided than pursued. The typical goal of a Machiavelli mission, even with a formal operational target, often has to do with such processes, implying temporization, diplomacy and network dealings inside the grey zone between things and words. It unfolds in the space where effective

¹¹³ adempire 1 example, còrre/cogliere 4, dare aiuto 6, eseguire (commissione)1, fare (conclusione 6, guerra guerriabile 2, opera 12, provvedimenti 1), farsi (uno stato) 1, fermare (lo stato) 1, impetrare 9, intervenire 17, mettere nelle mani 1, obbligare 17, partorire (frutto, vittoria, effetti) 9, pigliare (partito) 14, scoprirsi 16, stare a discrezione 5, stare alla vista 5.

¹¹⁴ affanni 9 examples, carico 203, difetto 25, dilazione 67, disagio 69, fraude 18, mancamento 42, pagamenti 65, querimonie 6, ruina 65, rovina 31, tradimento 24

¹¹⁵ condannare 3 examples, disperare 4, errare 51, infastidire 11, mancare 344, negare 28, nuocere 51, pagare 275, rompere (convenzioni) 51, - corrompere 3, interrompere 5, sopportare 32, spendere 85, tórre lo stato 2.

¹¹⁶ accettare 38 examples, accordarsi 19, cancellare 9, convenire 56, praticare 42, praticarsi 1, ragguagliare 4.

¹¹⁷ concedere 29 examples, consentire 41

intervention in aspects of policy anchored in material, solid phenomena – war, peace, armies, money, profit – exists in cohabitation with other, much less tangible elements, such as human relations and verbal exchanges between political actors in a chancellery and court setting.

Thus, the overwhelming proportion of this semantic field does not reflect result-oriented dealings, be they conclusive or inconclusive. Rather, the vocabulary illustrates the infinite subtleties and varieties of the diplomatic trade as expressed through the verbs used to describe them in the dispatches. This lexical material represents another order of magnitude and diversification: sweeten, affirm, broaden, amplify, dare, risk, increase, slander, cancel, demand, *back down from*, agree, confer, trust, ease, consent, agree, believe, take care of, blame, give reasons, wish, be wary, tame, deviate, dispute, complain, evaluate, put together, put on show (ceremony, trust, judgment, resolution), favor, be more explicit, quibble, benefit, facilitate, judge, behave, obtain, make efforts, instruct, cool down, justify, leave (behind)/let go, plot, handle, keep up, deserve, threaten, offer, omit, operate, oppose, give birth (figurative)/entail, feed on empty hopes, persuade, take sides, lend an ear, promise, reason, respond, require, recall, thank, mend/screen, heat up, resent, answer, form alliances, satisfy, solicit, suffer/endure, hope, hesitate, buy time, deal with, benefit from.¹¹⁸

Several reasons dictate these proportions, especially the significant variation and complexity of the diplomatic action – verbal practice, talking and listening – in contrast to the reduction of the lexical spectrum when it comes to the definition and management of the ultimate objects of the assignments: security and defense policies, downpayments, *condotte*. In the case of the Florentine state's operations, Machiavelli's missions included, two further reasons are associated with the nature, contents and purposes of both missions and commissions. In the first place there are the limited policy objects and perspectives of the Florentine state. Throughout the fifteen years of Machiavelli's administrative career, the status of Florence is that of a French protectorate. For the greater part of this same period the Florentine government's only territorial project – political and military – is to recover its political and administrative control of Pisa. Its other preoccupations are mainly conservative and concern border security and integrity. These stable policy and alliance patterns are basic realities and were never questioned by the leadership of the Republic in the person of the Gonfaloniere, Piero Soderini. They are sustained until the point of no return, in the period 1511-12, when the

¹¹⁸ addolc(ire) 6 examples, affirm(are) 80, allarg(are) 74, amplia(re) 9, ardire 21, arrischia(rsi) 8, augument(are) 23, calunnia(re) 5, cancella(re) 53, chiede(re)/richiede(re) 288, condescendere 6, conferi(re) 122, confida(re)/confidenza 172, confort(are) 516, consent(ire)/acconsent(ire)/-consentimento 164, conveni(re)/conveniente 452, crede(re) 916, cura(re)/cura(rsi) 829, danna(re) 105, desider(are)/-desiderio 1743, diffid(are)/diffidenza 62, dimestic(are)/domestic(are) 13, discosta(rsi) 59, disputa(are) 50, doler(rsi) 97, esistima(re) 38, usare (cerimonie) 27, fa(re) fede 19, fare iudizio 14, (fare/dare/aspettare...) risoluzione 196, favori(re) 340, giovare 16, agevol(are) 13, giudica(re) 375, governar(e) 199, impetra(re) 11, ingegn(arsi) 425, intepid(ire) 5, iustifica(re)/giustific(are) 287, lascia(re) 634, maneggi(are) 122, mantene(re) 187, merita(re) 171, minaccia(re) 51, offeri(re) 168, opera(re) 977, opporsi 31, partori(re) (effetti) 42, persua(dere) 206, piglia(re) (partito) 470, prestare (orecchio, fede) 31, promette(re) 227, ragio(nare)/ragioni 1136, replicare 247, record(are) 1185, ringrazia(re) 65, ripara(re) 42, riscaldare 30, risent(ire) 58, risponde(re) 478, stringere/ristringere 115, satisfa(re) 777, sollicit(are) 563, sopporta(re) 97, spera(re) 517, sta(re) sospeso 36, temporeggia(re) 86, tratta(re) 469, valer(e/si) 248.

Conciliabulum of Pisa, after a similar provocation at Tours the preceding year, represents the crossing of a red line with respect to Julius II, prompting further Spanish operations on the Peninsula and ultimately resulting in fall of the Florentine Republic and the return of the Medici. The question marks Machiavelli places on the limits of these policies and on the consequences of managing a state with no homegrown military forces are well known. The former finds an expression in an epigram,¹¹⁹ the latter in the well-known project for a Florentine Militia – the *Ordinanza*.

As an official of the Florentine republic, Machiavelli works under these narrowly defined conditions: no construction of any new foreign policy object, no innovative redesign of policy, no fundamental reorientation or conclusion of alternative alliances. These policies imply constraining factors, obliging Florentine diplomacy to operate in narrow channels, predominantly facing big power rackets and negotiating invoice bottom lines. The basic means – political, financial and military – for enlarging this perspective and changing the situation are not available.

Fake negotiations, handling of relations

As already highlighted, on the basis of the nature and proportions of the dispatch vocabulary alone, Florentine negotiating assignments are often such in name only, as delaying tactics and process management are more important factors than the direct targeting of results and conclusion of agreements. The framework for this type of diplomatic business – doing without doing – is even reflected in, and delineated by, the issued credentials and instructions. However, the reduction of the spectrum for negotiation is not only due to the rudimentary profile, as described above, of Florentine policies, it is also limited by the well-defined interests and ambitions of political partners and allies. The territorial projects of France, Spain and the Empire, as well as their implementation and handling by the respective courts, only vary marginally over the years covered by Machiavelli's career as a functionary of the Republic.

The majority of the instructions issued to Machiavelli in the course of this second mission to Cesare Borgia in Romagna, and particularly in response to Florence being continually pressed to agree to closer tie with the Duca Valentino and to conclude a formal *condotta*, exemplify this line of ambiguity and wait-and-see. What is asked of the envoy is to talk without saying anything concrete, to obtain security guarantees without making any financial commitments, to conduct permanent consultations while indefinitely exploiting pretexts to avoid concluding binding agreements. Marcello Virgilio's guidance dated 21.10.1502 represents a culmination of these policies and attitudes, justified by internal procedures, delays in handling instructions and answers, parallel goings-on and indefinite routines of *conferire* and *consigliare*. Its contents do not give Machiavelli any new factors or variables for handling the pressure generated towards Florence at Imola, neither in substance nor

¹¹⁹ La note che morì Pier Soderini/l'anima andò de l'inferno a la bocca;/gridò Pluton: - Ch'inferno? Anima sciocca,/va su nel limbo fra gli altri bambini. -

simply tactically.

Another masterpiece of cumulated uncertainties and ambiguities, totally devoid of a clear basis for negotiating anything concrete, is the guidance¹²⁰ issued five years later for the ambassador to the Emperor, Francesco Vettori, while awaiting the arrival of Machiavelli to assist him at the court of Maximilian at Bolzano in the Tyrol. This text represents a compilation of the latest information from other sources regarding the probability of the Maximilian project in Italy. While stressing the responsibility placed on Vettori and Machiavelli to assess the realities behind this project and to come up with realistic figures for the downpayment to the Emperor, it does not give them any practical or tactical handle whatsoever with which to manage the negotiations.

Even more importantly, neither Vettori and Machiavelli at the Imperial Court of Maximilian nor Della Casa and Machiavelli during the first mission to France have discretionary, plenipotentiary powers to conclude a deal within a given range of figures and conditions. They mainly conduct exploratory talks, test the waters and thus delay explosions of impatience on behalf of interlocutors and partners. Models are established for the design and profile of possible understandings, but the instructions explicitly avoid the risks of formalization. They are envoys with credentials, but without full powers, as Guicciardini would note in his *Storia Fiorentina*.¹²¹ A few years later, Guicciardini, acting at the Spanish court at Burgos, similarly found himself without the means to play a meaningful role during the period leading up to the Prato massacre and the following demise of the Republic.¹²²

More than other Florentine representatives, who enjoy full ambassadorial rank, Machiavelli lacks negotiating autonomy. He does not even have narrow discretionary margins enabling him to cope with secondary factors. When operating on his own in his capacity as a government secretary, a headquarters envoy, as already mentioned he handles the case by talking the talk. The purpose is mostly to buy time, avoiding worst case scenarios evolving out of situations dominated by silence and by possible misunderstandings due to ambassadors having departed or not yet arrived. This goal of just keeping things going, maintaining relations without giving firm commitments and establishing oneself among the other actors in the court to which the mission is directed, is what calls for the deployment of a sophisticated verbal activity. The task is to keep the process and the diplomatic trade simmering, being active on the mutual advice and services exchange platform, avoid ambiguous silences, with their resulting political uncertainties, confirm that ‘we are still talking’, that future agreement is still possible – in brief, to confirm, or make it look as if, Florence is positively engaged in a process. One must seize the opportunities that arise to play a positive role in court contexts in order to increase personal and public credibility, as well as express a willingness to find solutions to

¹²⁰ Florence 21.11.1507.

¹²¹ LCSG, VI, p. 171 in note: Marchand recalls the words of Guicciardini in the *Storia fiorentina*, cit. p. 443): Vettori carried a general commission to prospect and to report, not to negotiate and conclude [il Vettori era stato inviato «con commissione generale, e da intendere e scrivere, non da praticare e conchiudere»].

¹²² Ferdinand of Aragon urges Guicciardini for authority, in terms of full powers to negotiate, and by default chooses to act through Gonsalvo de Cordoba, viceroy in Italy, cfr. Guicciardini, *Legazione di Spagna*, p. 42, ed. N. Capurro, Pisa, 1825.

existing problems, as exemplified above by the bilateral cases and initiatives during the Cesare Borgia II mission and the Julius II assignment.

This line of business, reducing formally operational tasks so that they seem less so, in fact also opens up the essential field of diplomacy: a platform on which mutual checking-out is conducted as a permanent activity, one where information, hints and rumors are traded. It is also a political market place where often something has to be given in order to receive, in terms not only of concessions, but also of reflection, analysis and intellectual authority. One must obtain access to useful information from others by oneself being a valid interlocutor. This is a genuine diplomatic process, one that is only apparently sterile, as it delivers daily assurances that we are friends today, as we were yesterday and as we are going to be tomorrow. A considerable proportion of Machiavelli's efforts are geared towards avoiding moments of silence, absence and uncertainty, indicating that something detrimental to the interlocutor's interest could be about to happen.

The basis of Florentine palace policies – delaying tactics, postponing contractual engagements, avoiding payments – may be perceived as displaying a skittish, cowardly, poor and narrow-minded posture, incapable of taking in whatever is coming one's way beyond what can be absorbed and managed in the limited perspective of a medium-sized central Italian state. This is especially the case seen in the light of other symptoms to the same effect. At the same time this political behavior finds its superior rationale – and justification – in the fundamental instability, if not vanity, of the political projects being pursued during this period within the basic balance of power developed after the Peace of Lodi in 1454. Less than a year after Machiavelli's second Cesare Borgia mission, which was totally dominated by the Borgia's pressure for an alliance with Florence, the Duca Valentino's power is rapidly vanishing, in a general echo of the factors and conditions repeatedly described by Mattingly regarding the unstable nature of the Italian Renaissance state¹²³ It is also a specific reminder of Machiavelli's analysis of the prerequisites of success for the Borgia Romagna operation. We are told first, that Pope Alexander VI must be kept alive (though he dies in August 1503) and secondly, that the support of Louis XII of France must be maintained (though it is much less clear it would be following the election of Julius II).¹²⁴

In the case of the Emperor, the end of the Italian expedition and the coronation project are effectively blocked by Venice within a similar time span of less than a year. The Cesare Borgia Romagna operation and the imperial mission are just two among other examples of the often short-lived nature of the Italian projects of the greater European powers in this period. Against this uncertain background, the tendency of Florentine policy to weather imminent storms rather than confront them under full sail and to let time pass in talking does not simply appear as a cowardly, risk-averse posture. Rather, it seems to have been

¹²³ ...Just 'to maintain the state', just, that is, to keep the current government from being overthrown, was a grave, continuous problem, Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* p.57.

¹²⁴ [...] questo Signore, vivente il Pontefice e mantenendo l'amicizia del Re, non mancherà quella fortuna che gli è avanzata¹²⁴ sino a qui [...] [28] Die 17 octobris 1502, Imolae.

inspired by a wise comprehension of current local and epochal dynamics of the security system governing the Peninsula. The efficiency of this wisdom, with its consequences in terms of delaying policies and tactics, in fact only revealed its limits when the more momentuous insistence of Spain at the hands of Ferdinand of Aragon in 1512, then of the Empire under Maximilian in 1527, started to produce their effects,

Operational functions: concluding remarks

Reverting to the point of departure, the lexical material in the correspondence, it is a remarkable if unsurprising fact that Machiavelli's main function as a custodian of relations and a manager of processes, rather than as a plenipotentiary negotiator of binding commitments or agreements, is dictated not only by the contents of his instructions: it is also directly represented in the dispatch glossary devoted to political action, described above. What becomes formal through ambiguous guidance and that absence of full powers is largely reflected in the characteristics and proportions of the chancellery terminology. The language, and especially the verbs corresponding to this semantic segment, covering the nuances of process management, are significantly more prominent, extensive and varied than all the other syntagms denoting this field.

It is also in this domain that professional skills – the ability to handle uncomfortable, almost awkward situations – are called for. These personal skills, including mental agility, are at work right from the beginning of Machiavelli's professional career. During the encounter with Charles d'Amboise, related in a dispatch dated 21 November 1500, Machiavelli, through the tactical use of an original metaphor, changes the whole nature and atmosphere of a confrontation. This is not simply a question about a delayed Florentine downpayment to France but one about a family relationship. By comparing the King of France to a father who should not see his children's deeds in the light of his own desires, but rather against the background of their possibilities, the argument is placed on another footing and can be developed as a human, family, domestic issue: it is no longer just about numbers.¹²⁵ Ten years later, towards the end of his tenure at the Florentine chancellery, and again during a mission at the French court, it is once more the moral angle which is instrumental in changing the tone. His Majesty should put things in perspective and consider smaller and bigger things according to their individual value. The points made against Florence at the French court belong in the former category. What is the real significance of the departure of an ambassador or the termination of a *condotta* in the light of a general relationship where Florence's positive actions over the years can only be deemed meritorious?¹²⁶ Should such petty invoices and lack of proportions be allowed to dominate life in an otherwise stable family circle characterized by mutual trust?

¹²⁵ Tours 21.11.1500.

¹²⁶ Blois 18.07.1510.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Direct

The direct political and operational advice given by Machiavelli to his government in Florence as an envoy is close to non-existent. Explicit political recommendations occupy a low 0.27% of the total correspondence at a conservative estimate. In the only mission containing this discursive category, namely the second mission to Cesare Borgia, the equivalent percentage is still only a mere 1.24%. And even here some of the advice appears as *post festum* comments to already implemented decisions. One example is the advice on the choice and posting of ambassadors in a way that serves Florentine interests best: move up one notch on the ladder of representation at Rome, or rather at Imola? When Machiavelli recommends the nomination of an ambassador to Imola rather than to Rome on the basis of Cesare Borgia's greater significance in decision-making compared with Alexander VI, the opposite option has already been decided in Florence.¹²⁷

The different versions of a possible deal with Maximilian, as suggested by Vettori and Machiavelli during the mission to Germany, are not recommendations in the proper sense. They appear as clarifications of possible options, but mostly fall short of taking a definitive view resulting in a clear-cut policy recommendation. There is one exception: on 8 January 1508 Vettori and Machiavelli move close to taking full responsibility for a well-defined line of action by recommending that Maximilian's move into Italy should be considered the most likely scenario, its abandonment a less realistic outcome. In case of error the former possibility can be handled somehow, whereas the second eventuality remains unmanageable, or at least dangerous.¹²⁸ Mostly, however, the envoys' remarks are comments on the substance and tactical limits of the Florentine government's guidance and the practical difficulties of converting it into an effective negotiating position at the Imperial court.¹²⁹

Indirect

The discursive category of indirect political advice, generally presented as the opinions of well-intentioned operators, friends of Florence, visibly favored or obliquely endorsed by Machiavelli, represents another marginal occurrence in the official correspondence. However, it assumes a more significant role in two missions, both of them characterized by the insufficient transparency of the court's working environment: the second Borgia mission, and the mission to the Emperor in Bolzano in the Tyrol. In these obscure contexts, where the effective orientations of the principal movers are difficult to guess, the role of entourage intermediaries increases. The use of *primi* as a substantive designating cabinet collaborators is notably more frequent in the correspondence from these two

¹²⁷ Cesena 14.12.1502.

¹²⁸ Trento 08.02.1508.

¹²⁹ Trento 08.02.1507, *id.* 30.05.1508.

missions than from other assignments, as well as from Machiavelli's instructions as Head of the second Florentine Chancellery. Among these advisory sources, close to the main authorities and interlocutors, the anonymous and confidential 'friend' at the mobile Valentino court represents a special case, confirming at the same time the status of the second Cesare Borgia mission as the main scene of Machiavelli's preferred, indirect way of transmitting advice and suggesting specific action. There has been, and still is, a debate over whether this colleague, the *amico*, actually existed. An important source at any rate needs protective anonymity. But even if these elements are put together from different sources or altered by Machiavelli's arguments, the reference to an unnamed colleague remains a convenient cover for presenting pieces of information associated with uncomfortable pieces of advice, or alternatively, for avoiding any personal responsibility for a given interpretation or suggested course of action. However, the degree of reality behind this presentational method and the exact function of the expedient is a less interesting question in this context than the plain fact that recourse to this discursive level remains limited.

The passages nominally mentioning the *amico* and his views represent 1.57% of the entire corpus of dispatches from the second Cesare Borgia mission, while the total of indirect recommendations stands at 3.65%. Once more the basic attitude and reflexes of the disciplined government functionary explain these low figures. It is not up to Machiavelli, from his formally modest position in the hierarchy and strictly instrumental function as an envoy, to overplay his hand as a political advisor to his government. Hence the expediency of someone else, whether real or fictitious, to serve in this capacity, and only when there seems to be an overwhelming necessity.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ Imola 30.10.1502, *id.* 01.11.1502, 08.11.1502, Cesena 23.12.1502.

INTERPRETATION

In volume terms, the passages dealing with interpretation appear equally as a secondary discursive category in Machiavelli's correspondence as a whole, occupying a mere 4.8% of the entire span of text. Interpretative passages are only deployed in the reporting from four missions: Cesare Borgia II (12.6%), Siena III (9.2%), Julius II/Romagna (2.5%) and France III (6.1%). Against this background, the noticeably higher incidence of interpretation in the dispatches from the second Cesare Borgia mission must of course attract attention, this assignment remaining one of the centerpieces of Machiavelli's administrative career, also being significant in terms of the duration and volume of mission reporting.

There are variants in the category 'interpretation'. Some acts, events or documents may remain for ever beyond reach, denying any possibility of understanding what actually took place or the purposes and motivations involved. Personal conjectures mainly occur in well-defined situations, where they represent a prospective effort by the envoy to anticipate a future state of affairs, formulate a prophecy or preempt a risk. Whether because of insufficient access to facts, reliable sources or classification, or because of outright secrecy, the interpretation process is engaged when an overwhelming necessity emerges to look beyond the uncertainties of the present moment, into a hypothetical future state of affairs.

The subordinate role of this category needs to be understood primarily in the light of a strictly technical-diplomatic point of view, of administrative discipline, and certainly independently of the specifics of Machiavelli's hand as well. In the first place, there is the division of labor between envoy and chancellery already mentioned – reporting is the task of the envoy, while interpretation and analysis remain a customary privilege of headquarters, a job for the political leadership. Secondly, there are the consequences of this partition: if sustained by other symptoms – including a conspicuous lack of access, insufficient quality of the obtained information or defective performance in negotiations – a 'compensatory' increase in the interpretation proportion of the reporting may be perceived at any time as a sign of professional weakness and a motive for early replacement by the authorities issuing instructions. When it became clear to the Italian foreign minister, Count Ciano, that his ambassador in Berlin was not perceiving realities and thus tending to descend into chitchat, he immediately started preparing the succession: [...] *[ambassador] Alfieri made a useless trip to the Russian front, where he saw Hitler. He learned nothing concrete, and for this reason he chatters a lot [...] I must have his successor ready [...]*.¹³¹

Even late in the second Cesare Borgia mission, when Machiavelli does not refrain from conveying his proper reading of the situation, of saying *I*, this inherent risk in adopting a mode of interpretation is qualified as *mettere di bocca*, that is, adding something verbal that might not be verifiable and that thus

¹³¹ Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario P. 642*, Rizzoli, Milano 1980.

subverts the analysis to be undertaken by headquarters.¹³² The statistical rarity of the verbs denoting interpretation is indicative of the marginal role of this discursive strand. There is, of course, the undefined *credere*, covering now and then the meaning of interpretation. But even this infinitive, and the finite forms of the same verb, lag behind in frequency compared to other verbs flanking and regulating the diplomatic activity. Together *interpretare* and *interpentrare* – the explicit and literal mode of interpretation – appear only 27 times in the corpus of the correspondence.¹³³

The synonymous *coniettare*, with the substantive *coniettura* and the infinitive itself in dominant positions, appear at more than the double the frequency.¹³⁴ However, a total of 69 occurrences is still a modest number compared to the large, varied and indefinitely recycled verbal apparatus linked to information retrieval, and even to the less expansive vocabulary of case-handling. On the margins of this lexical domain there is only one use of *inferire* but, not surprisingly, significantly more (253) of the very generic *credere*, which covers a much larger semantic range than interpretation.

From borrowed to proper interpretations

The interpretations of others – explicitly staged by using these verbs and other related syntagms – accompany the general stream of information being continuously delivered by the envoy.¹³⁵ When it comes to the conjectures of the fully autonomous envoy presented in the first person singular – not what *they* extrapolate, what *this* or *that* one foresees, but what *I* would predict – the related glossary is even more evanescent. The close link between the marginal place of this discursive style in diplomatic reporting, particularly compared to the language of information handling, and even to that of operational tasks, thus finds its confirmation at the most basic lexical level.

On the second Borgia mission Machiavelli is finally in character as the proponent of a given conjecture. The assumption of this role is suddenly achieved, right in the middle of the routine reporting of what others may say, think or suppose. At a given point he chooses to take responsibility for one reading of the situation and case at hand rather than for another, thus underscoring his authority and confirming the view that he, as the titular holder of the mission, considers *this* to be *his* personal interpretation. Leaving out the substance of the matter and underlining only the logical connectors, the point in time at which this development of the dispatch takes place can be identified even more clearly:

[...] as I have previously informed you, all qualified observers retain their breath [...] and when they have sufficiently considered all possibilities

¹³² Cesena 18.12.1502.

¹³³ interpreta(re)/interpentrare(re) 24.

¹³⁴ coniettura(re)/congettura(re) 72

¹³⁵ Imola 26.11.1502, Cesena 14.12.1502.

they determine that he cannot but [...] Even though this seems to be contradicted by [...] I highly trust those having this opinion [...] but there are also others who say [...] and as people thus entertain various opinions [...] it might be better to let time reveal things than to invest efforts in evaluating them [...] If you have to [...] I again respond [...] All these courtiers indeed say [...] and somebody believes that [...] that I think cannot be.¹³⁶

At the same time, the standard reservations concerning interpretation and opinion-generating activities are repeated indefinitely.

An overall assessment of the official correspondence makes it clear that generally Machiavelli does not encounter insurmountable difficulties in his systemic efforts to keep the volume of interpretation down. Whether due to his own capacity to penetrate things, and to achieve access to valid interlocutors, he succeeds in staying predominantly in the information and operational mode, thus maintaining healthy proportions among the various discursive categories in his dispatches.

What are the factors that favor a limitation of the overall volume of interpretation?

Access level

One important factor in conducting missions stands out with respect to the potential for reducing information uncertainties and thus for any recourse to interpretation. From the very outset of the second assignment to Cesare Borgia's court, Machiavelli entertains a close and confidential relationship with the Duca Valentino's main collaborators, the *primi*, the *ministri* and, on two occasions, *primi ministri*, otherwise *primi uomini*, *primi secretari* and one occurrence of *primi fidati*.¹³⁷ More importantly, and right from the beginning of this assignment, the recipient of the credentials himself receives Machiavelli immediately upon his arrival.¹³⁸

The long and detailed exposé following this opening testifies to the confidence and proximity that already exists between the two interlocutors. In spite of his modest official rank, Machiavelli clearly carries not only credentials, but also credibility, confirmed a few months earlier when accompanying the Bishop of Volterra on a mission to the Duca Valentino. Another sign of his personal status is that, just before arriving at Imola, Machiavelli crosses the path of Agabito Gerardini, designated envoy of Cesare Borgia to Florence, who, on his own initiative, chooses not to proceed further but returns to Imola with Machiavelli¹³⁹ and remains there: mission interrupted. From that point onwards, at least for the time being, Machiavelli is the main link between the

¹³⁶ Cesena 14.12.1502.

¹³⁷ Imola 09.10.1502 *id.* 13.10.1502, 17.10.1502, 27.10.1502, 29.10.1502, 03.11.1502, 08.11.1502, 28.11.1502, 30.11.1502, Cesena 14.12.1502, *id.* 23.12.1502, 26.12.1502, Corinaldo 02.01.1503, Gualdo (Tadino) 06.01.1503, Castel del Lago or nearby (incomplete, no date) probably shortly after 14.01.1502. See Marchand, note 28, p. 558, LCSG vol. II.

¹³⁸ Imola 07.10.1502.

¹³⁹ Imola 08.10.1502.

Borgias and Florence. Two weeks later, Alessandro di Rinaldo Braccesi (Bracci) starts fulfilling a similar role in Rome while waiting for the appointment and departure of an ambassador.¹⁴⁰ But as things happen well before the Florentine ambassadors arrive at the Cesare Borgia court and at Rome respectively, history regards Machiavelli as the principal manager of Florentine relations with the Borgia power structure at this critical moment. This is all the more notable as only exceptional circumstances can make Rome the more important place of the two, for reasons that Machiavelli explains himself.¹⁴¹

Conditions of access

On this mission there are, as so often happens on any assignment, moments when even healthy basic conditions and mutual trust are influenced by outside events, thus menacing the quality of the information and increasing the risks of interpretation. In this particular case there are periods when Borgia suspicions concerning real Florentine intentions seem to be growing and where the court's temperature with respect to the envoy is low, access is slower, the tone is more measured and encounters are less frequent,¹⁴² prompting an extension of the margins for interpretation. Among these moments there are situations in which the Duke demonstrates impatience with Florentine foot-dragging, shunning Machiavelli for a couple of days, or Machiavelli himself chooses to anticipate this impatience, calculating that the instructions issued to him are so vague and inoperative that it will be better if he keeps his distance.¹⁴³ There are also moments when Cesare Borgia suspects that an anti-Florence alliance is in the making and when opportunities to reach interlocutors and make them talk are scarce, to the point of conveying the impression that Machiavelli is being isolated.¹⁴⁴ There are also moments when access becomes impossible, either because tensions and suspicions prevail, or because the Duke is busy elsewhere, or on the point of leaving.¹⁴⁵ However, the deterioration of access at these moments remains entirely explicable by the nature of the case, in each individual situation, by the policies that are being pursued and practical or political circumstances. There is never any sign that Machiavelli has lost personal credibility with Cesare Borgia or with his entourage. Except in these moments of tension and political inertia, access to Machiavelli's main interlocutors and to Cesare Borgia himself is readily granted, either during conventional afternoon audience slots or outside them, in the early morning or late in the evening; Machiavelli is received promptly, both on his own initiative and just as often because he is summoned to court on Cesare Borgia's orders. As couriers usually arrive in the late afternoon or early evening, the presentation of messages and instructions can be accommodated inside normal audience hours corresponding to the same time slot.¹⁴⁶ But Machiavelli also has access at odd hours, in the morning, early afternoon or late at night, when

¹⁴⁰ LCSG, vol. II p. 385, note 7 (Storie fiorentine, ed. cit., p. 389).

¹⁴¹ Cesena 14.12.1502.

¹⁴² Imola 30.10.1502, 20.11.1502.

¹⁴³ Imola 03.11.1502, *id.* 22.11.1502, 29.11.1502.

¹⁴⁴ Imola 29.10.1502.

¹⁴⁵ Imola 29.10.1502, *id.* 06.12.1502. Cesena 26.12.1502.

¹⁴⁶ Imola 09.10.1502, *id.* 12.10.

urgency, or emergencies, call for immediate consultation.¹⁴⁷ Apart from the moments of tension already mentioned, Borgia *bouderie* or Machiavelli's own self-restraint, an audience can be solicited and immediately obtained by the envoy, and even improvised.¹⁴⁸ And when the initiative comes from Machiavelli himself, but at an inconvenient moment for the Duke, he is nevertheless received immediately after a written note has been passed on through collaborators.¹⁴⁹ Confidence is an established fact, including the sharing, with Machiavelli, of current correspondence with other interlocutors and third persons.¹⁵⁰

Beyond it all, Cesare Borgia keeps in touch with Machiavelli at all times, summoning him to his cabinet whenever reasons of greater or lesser importance make it relevant.¹⁵¹ It appears particularly significant, a token of acquired proximity, that Machiavelli finds himself being called into the Duke's presence only three hours after the Senigallia action.¹⁵² He is clearly conscious himself, at all times, of the relationship between information quality and low volumes of interpretation on the one hand and proximity to the main actors on the other. He always stays close to the court, establishing a level of confidence that extends and obscures his formal function as a Florentine envoy somewhat and makes him slip into the role of a trusted local *cortigiano*, a member of the Cesare Borgia entourage.¹⁵³ He remains in frequent, often daily contact with Agabito Gerardini Spanocchi,¹⁵⁴ possibly identifiable as the anonymous '*amico*'.

Rank and powers

To what degree does the modesty of Machiavelli's rank – never accredited with full ambassadorial title – negatively influence his proximity to his main interlocutors, and thus indirectly his recourse to interpretation? At times Machiavelli points out the possibility of obtaining even better access by recommending his recall and replacement by a higher-ranking representative such as an ambassador. His motives are personal, and the often repeated appeals for recall are expressions of lamentation, to be found during other missions too. With regard to conditions of access, however, it is doubtful whether any such change would have made a difference. It is significant, and is clearly stated in his own hand, that without a more effective mandate and possibly discretionary powers the higher rank might not be enough: a fully fledged ambassador would have been in a similar situation. On December 14th the real problem is spelled out: even an ambassador would have to be invested with an effective mandate and the power to negotiate.¹⁵⁵ When, finally, at the end of the mission, but after the Senigallia massacre, Cesare's court sends

¹⁴⁷ Imola 20.10.1502, *id.* 27.10, 08.11. Cesena 14.12.

¹⁴⁸ Imola 06.12.1502, Torgiano 10.01.1502.

¹⁴⁹ Imola 15.10.1502.

¹⁵⁰ Imola 23.10.1502.

¹⁵¹ Imola 09.10.1502, *id.* 20.10.1502.

¹⁵² Corinaldo 01.01.1503.

¹⁵³ Imola 20.10.1502.

¹⁵⁴ Imola 29.10.1502.

¹⁵⁵ Cesena 14.12.1502.

Machiavelli a final demand for a higher level of representation, it is again accompanied by the very same point he had earlier made himself to his authorities: not just a demand for one of the first citizens of Florence to be appointed ambassador, but one invested with relevant powers and the authority to act.¹⁵⁶

As already noted, the lack of full powers is a structural feature, putting envoys, including ambassadors, in awkward situations, as Vettori and Machiavelli discovered with Maximilian in 1507-08 and Guicciardini with Ferdinand of Aragon in 1512. However, this particularity is not relevant with respect to conditions of access and consequently for interpretation volumes in mission reporting, not during the second Cesare Borgia assignment, nor during other missions entrusted to Machiavelli alone. From Imola onwards, until the mission ends in the Perugino, the general trajectory of reciprocal communications clearly demonstrates a consistent level of proximity and trust. Cesare Borgia and his ministers actively share information with Florence through Machiavelli in their own well-understood interest in entertaining good relations with their main neighbor in central Italy. Thus, for all practical purposes, there are problems with neither rank nor access on this mission. Machiavelli succeeds in operating efficiently in a difficult environment, the main conclusion in the present context being that he does not need to compensate for an insufficient lack of information by an increase in the volume of interpretation. The abundantly lamented insufficiency of rank and the appeal for him to be replaced by an ambassador is primarily a pretext for him to be recalled in order to regain control of his private affairs and dealings.

Secrecy and ambiguities

Personal credibility, acquired access level, respect and penetration performance are thus salient features of Machiavelli's work, on this mission as on others. They are, however, not the only factors involved in measuring or guaranteeing a mission's result, nor, in the present context, in regulating the margin for interpretation, conjecture and approximation. Effective proximity is reduced by other factors, represented in the first place by the systemic secrecy of the Borgia court and its equally systemic ways of entertaining ambiguities. One important factor limiting performance and conversely generating interpretation is thus the overall cabinet discipline and handling of classified items. Restricting the distribution of information, holding back on all written documents, avoiding any anticipatory revelation of a planned course of action and maintaining an opaque cloud of ambiguity regarding policy options are structural traits of Cesare Borgia's court and chancellery. Such practices impose tight limits for any diplomatic actor in this environment. These limits apply to everybody – ambassadors, other envoys, and even to Cesare Borgia's own collaborators. They systemically prompt speculation, conjecture and interpretation.

Cesare Borgia himself is the principal proponent of this style of communication.

¹⁵⁶ Corinaldo 02.01.1502.

Whatever efforts are deployed to pump him, to get him to say more about the case in hand than he has decided to, he invariably stays on message, which is furthermore often an ambiguous one.¹⁵⁷

Representative, or part of the entourage?

Even when he is striving to be part of the court and Cesare Borgia's entourage, Machiavelli often has to restrain his efforts to extract information, recognizing the limits imposed by the Duca Valentino's attitudes. The main factor remains the rule of secrecy, which nobody is prepared to betray.¹⁵⁸ Indeed it is sustained by well-established practices governing the daily work and activities of the court and by the personal habits of the principal actor, who during the daytime remains secluded with three or four of his closest aides and only appears at the approach of midnight.¹⁵⁹

This observance of secrecy also extends to the interlocutors of the court, in this case Machiavelli. If he is trusted with certain types of information or concrete demands for confidentiality, he will be required to maintain the same level of classification for the contents delivered, and thus to fall back on interpretation if these contents are not sufficiently explicit. For example, when the *amico* has to leave and cut short one of his consultations with Machiavelli to see to some urgent task and just asks for confidentiality regarding the implementation of the matters discussed, he leaves Machiavelli with doubts whether the demands come directly from Cesare Borgia, or whether they just represent his own thinking.¹⁶⁰ As the mission progresses, transparency does not improve – rather the contrary.¹⁶¹ However, and as already highlighted: the acquired access level and opportunities potently compensate for these effects.

Risks of interpretation

With this increase in opacity, the inherent, systemic risk of imagining things, of conjecturing, again surfaces, for example, of reporting and commenting on something that might not exist or, contrariwise, that might not be spotted and consequently not relayed to Florence, something of essential importance to state interests. At the beginning of December 1502, Machiavelli clearly situates his own conclusions in the domain of interpretation:

[...] Neither did he tell me this in clear terms, but I nevertheless deduced it from his way of speaking; and in spite of my efforts to find out, I could not do it, because only generalities were offered as a response [...].¹⁶²

Verbal constructions developed without any guarantee of relationship to realities – the risk, already mentioned above, and finally expressed at the end of December, is that of slipping into creative writing, of *mettere di bocca*.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ Imola 07.10.1502.

¹⁵⁸ Imola 20.10.1502, *id.* 27.10.1502.

¹⁵⁹ Imola 03.11.1502.

¹⁶⁰ Imola 08.11.1502.

¹⁶¹ Imola 13.11.1502.

¹⁶² Imola 06.12.1502.

¹⁶³ Cesena 18.12.1502.

Time and secrecy

At the end of December 1502 another uncertainty, and thus also a potentially interpretation-generating factor, again comes to the surface. This factor, placed at the intersection between secrecy management and time-handling, has already been identified during the first mission to the Duca Valentino. In the very last lines of the mission's correspondence, Machiavelli describes Cesare Borgia's mode of operation. He arrives surreptitiously in a place before it has been noticed that he has left another.¹⁶⁴ The relationship between confidentiality and time management is thus kept close. There are prolonged periods of waiting, conveying an appearance of passivity or indetermination, and leaving ample margins for conjectures to develop. In fact, these periods are just moments of careful tactical preparation. It is never obvious that they are coming to a close. There is no announcement, not even an indicator, of impending operations before they are effectively underway or have definitively been accomplished. The movement from Imola via Cesena towards Senigallia, Sassoferrato and then into the Perugino adds other details to this particular action profile. Having taken care of his enemies at Senigallia, Cesare Borgia leaves town immediately, thus circumventing any possibility of retaliation, and races towards Corinaldo. No time is available for any residual resistance to organize itself, nor for any information to arrive. When he chooses to move, it is thus done with overwhelming speed and efficiency.¹⁶⁵ This rigorous political behavior evidently leaves interlocutors and partners with few other means than guessing as long as action has not been initiated, depriving them, by the sheer speed of performance, of any means of keeping up with him once the move has been initiated.

The Senigallia outcome represents a primary illustration of this combination of secrecy and time management and its consequences: deteriorating conditions for the effective delivery of information and the reinforcement of efforts at interpretation. The massacre takes place without any involvement by hands other than those implicated in neutralizing the four main targets. In Senigallia these are Vitellozzo, Oliverotto da Fermo, Paulo Orsini and the Duke of Gravina Orsini, plus their troops stationed outside Senigallia's fortress and city walls. In Rome it is Cardinal Orsini. This is not only a political project but a strictly military and technical operation, as later conceptualized by Malaparte,¹⁶⁶ performed according to restricted orders, doubtless issued before the departure for Pesaro, Fano and Senigallia. The publicly staged execution of Remirro dell'Orca during the night from the 25th to the 26th of December, before the departure from Cesena, serves as example of what might happen if one fails to meet expectations, whether concerning one's past management of territories or one's current respect for the required confidentiality. This is an endgame marked by a combined handling of confidentiality and time. And the consequence for interlocutors is the production of conjectures.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ Urbino 26.06.1502

¹⁶⁵ Cesena 26.12.1502

¹⁶⁶ *Tecnica del Colpo di Stato* 1931.

¹⁶⁷ Corinaldo 01.01.1503.

Undefined policies

Systemic secrecy, strict chancellery discipline and particular time-handling methods are only some of the most obvious and immediate hurdles to acquiring valid information and thus avoid slipping into conjectures concerning the Cesare Borgia Romagna project. There is also a conspicuous policy basis for the efforts at interpretation. Beyond the previous acquisitions – Forlì, Camerino, Urbino, Cesena – the gradual formation of an army is the only concrete manifestation of this project. This build-up, however, is managed without any clear indication of possible priorities: Bologna, the remaining fortresses of local Romagna despots, the Orsini and Vitelli strongholds? Is a war impending without any definition of its concrete targets? The larger and similarly permanent factors of uncertainty have to do with the deliberately unclear profiles of the strategies and policies being pursued. It is never obvious which among them are just pretexts and which are priority options to be implemented effectively. There is the possibility of an agreement with Florence, either in the minimal shape of a renewed *condotta* or in terms of a bilateral central Italian alliance, the different options for which are being discussed nearly daily during the mission. Secondly, there is the idea of a larger political platform, including the region at large – beyond the Papal States, the Borgias' possessions and Florence – Mantova and Ferrara, possibly Bologna, all of them under the protection of France. One month into the mission, this option, with all its details and collaterals, is developed at Imola by the anonymous *amico*.¹⁶⁸ This formula, however, exists in different variants. The uncertainty regarding the alliance models and policies coming out of the Borgia court and camp is the main feature, uncertainty over the different options, uncertainty regarding Cesare Borgia's own thinking, protected as he appears to be by multiple optical and court-style constructs geared to mislead observers.¹⁶⁹ Which are serious, and which are fictitious?¹⁷⁰

In the third place, there is the looming spectre of a revival of understanding between Cesare Borgia and the La Magione conspirators, including Bologna, repeatedly mentioned in the mission reports from November 1502, and based on an indefinitely modified draft travelling back and forth from Bologna and Imola to Rome. This is the text, never leaked, which inspires Machiavelli's remarks of 14 November that such a project would only make sense if it were directed against a third party.¹⁷¹ In this case it could only be Florence because of the resentment of the Vitelli family, of Oliverotto and others, towards the city – another potent engine of speculation, and of interpretation.¹⁷²

Cesare Borgia and his collaborators constantly bring these main paradigms to the attention of their interlocutors in a number of variants, producing a high degree of fuzziness between what might be real and what is a *trompe-l'oeil*, and

¹⁶⁸ Imola 08.11.1502.

¹⁶⁹ Imola 28.11.1502.

¹⁷⁰ Cesena 14.12.1502.

¹⁷¹ Imola 14.11.1502.

¹⁷² Imola 29.10.

naturally prompting constantly renewed conjectures.

Collaterals

In order to enhance visibility in this political landscape of make-believe projects and fictitious operations and to reduce the margin for interpretation, the Florentine headquarters and Machiavelli both look constantly towards what can be defined as 'collaterals', using a financial services metaphor: facts as assets and concrete guarantees, that is, realities on the ground. This is a discourse articulated by things without any appeal to or dissimulation by words: budgetary and payment dispositions, including *condotte*, formal contracts and concluded alliances, effective troop concentrations and movements.

There are many elements in the correspondence from this second mission to Cesare Borgia that stress the contradiction between what is being said and what is being done in reality. One is the effective preparation for action, the obvious build-up of infantry, cavalry and artillery units. In the second place, the mere fact that Cesare remains anchored in his position at Imola and only starts moving south very late, on 10 December, is another important collateral. At Imola he assumes a forward military posture with respect to Bologna, less than six hours' march for an infantry deployment. In any of the scenarios delineated above, the positioning of Bologna is essential. Bologna must be detached conclusively from the La Magione caucus, as ventilated already on 30 October¹⁷³ and effectively formalized at this point in time, the beginning of December 1502. Only now can Cesare Borgia leave his position at Imola and proceed to acquire control of the remaining states along the Adriatic coast, finally exploiting the impromptu opportunity to trap his former allies through a mere coincidence: the decision of the Della Rovere governor of the Senigallia citadel to surrender only to Cesare Borgia in person.

But even facts can be fielded as objects of disguise, thus making reality checks difficult to conduct and leaving actions on the ground open to conjecture. The constant movement of troops and the rumours of French units returning to Lombardy, and later of other French units proceeding to Naples, make it difficult, at any given moment, to assess the effective combat potential of Cesare's forces. At Senigallia these intentionally blurred profiles attain their maximum when the Duca Valentino dispatches his units in multiple directions in order to reduce the optical impression of strength and thus lead his targets to lower their guard at the exact moment of his entry into the citadel.

Grey zones

In spite of an optimal level of access, the combined weight of these other factors – pronounced cabinet secrecy, the specifics of time management and intentionally entertained uncertainties over policies, including patterns of alliance and the ongoing blurring of the realities on the ground – places a question mark over the quality and even the overall validity of the information

¹⁷³ Imola 30.10.1502, *id.* 10.11.1502.

acquired. A grey zone emerges, prompting speculation and conjecture, and ultimately placing the aggregated volume of interpretation significantly higher for the second Cesare Borgia assignment than for any other mission correspondence from Machiavelli's hand.

Beyond the uncertain status of projected alliances – with or against Florence? – the major uncertainty and the object of all speculative efforts, conjectures, interpretation and of all the available, but often contradictory signals converge on assessments of the possible outcomes of the ongoing Valentino operation. There are uncertainties regarding the whole direction of the enterprise, including the actual itinerary of an army that does not know where it will be going the next day or which enemy it might be confronting. Finally, in the last days of the mission, there are uncertainties over what Cesare Borgia might want from Florence after his former allies have been eliminated. Here comes the ultimate word of caution to his authorities, though ritually associated with expressions of modesty and lack of experience: not *interpretare*, nor *conietturare* any more, but a higher degree of intelligence certainty through the only recorded use in Machiavelli's diplomatic correspondence of deduce as an infinitive (*inferire*).¹⁷⁴

Orienting the interpretations of others

The practice of interpretation is not only a matter of relaying borrowed or personal conjectures about local events: it may now and then also include a structured effort to modify the interpretations of interlocutors and partners concerning the positioning of Florence. Ambiguity, and the resulting extending of margins for interpretation, is a two-way street whenever Florence is involved. When Machiavelli reaches the stage of *Il Principe* and the *I Discorsi*, the reference to his own experiences of implementing *via del mezzo* policies and assuming vague foot-dragging attitudes often carries a bitter tone.

At the Cesare Borgia court a specific task consists in correcting the prejudicial impressions and conjectures that Florentine ambiguities exert on the Duke and his court entourage. On both sides, the Duke on the one hand and Florence on the other, these ambiguities are rooted in different circumstances. Borgia fuzziness stems from conscious tactics, sustained by disciplined cabinet collaborators and by an array of practices, as delineated above. They are disseminated with a clear view to maintaining uncertainties, hiding policy and attack profiles, obscuring patterns of action and entertaining constant doubts over timing, aims and tactics, thus giving the Duke an advantage, an edge, in exploiting opportunities. Florentine fuzziness, on the other hand, is mainly generated by the nature of the hybrid republic's partly dysfunctional institutions and decision-making procedures, as amply illustrated in the sources of its case-handling, such as the *Consulte e Pratiche*¹⁷⁵ published by Denis Fachard, which also covers Machiavelli's period in office. This system can handle basic allegiances, such as Florence's relations with France as its client and straightforward projects such as the recovery of Pisa. It can rarely if ever

¹⁷⁴ Assisi 08.01.1503.

¹⁷⁵ 4 volumes covering 1495-1512, Droz, Genève

produce a clear-cut line of action when it comes to day-to-day government affairs. The lack of transparency, the completely undefined status of a number of its policies and the ever-present and conspicuous procrastinations also make Florentine attitudes an obvious object of constant interpretation for partners and interlocutors. This gives rise to the specific task, for Florentine envoys, of intervening in those interpretations of Florentine political behavior that are deemed detrimental to the state's interests. Specific efforts must be made to change the Duca Valentino's reading of attitudes and postures in line with the goals of the Republic. Instructions sent by Marcello Virgilio directly refer to such damaging conjectures and appeal to Machiavelli to display *gravità* in order to dispel them.¹⁷⁶ The reference to counterproductive strands of *interpretazione* are explicit – even literal – in the instructions Machiavelli receives during the months of November and December, a time when Cesare Borgia is particularly suspicious of Florentine intentions.

Interpretative anticipation

On this particular mission, however, the ultimate interpretation performance, in the positive sense of an effective prophecy, remains linked to Machiavelli's anticipation of Cesare Borgia's true motives and strategy, including the main piece, namely the early prediction of a sinister end for the La Magione conspirators, finally materializing in the Senigallia massacre. Similarly, the correct conjectures regarding the uncertain goals¹⁷⁷ of the protracted negotiations for an agreement with the former allies, gradually identifying them as elaborate illusions, are aimed at trapping them on a convenient occasion. A few days after his arrival at Imola at the beginning of October, these major interpretative strands have already become clear on the basis of the available indications and sufficiently clear hints by Cesare Borgia himself. They are patiently confirmed as primary hypotheses during November and December: revenge for treason is in the offing.¹⁷⁸ After this ominous opening – a lack of confidence, though waiting to hit later – Machiavelli progressively expands the theme by reading the signals that are constantly emerging from Cesare himself and his entourage. Two weeks into the mission, Machiavelli has already prompted Cesare to reveal the orientation of his thinking further, more than two months before decisive action is taken. No piece of information is delivered, but the basis for speculation is reinforced on 20 October,¹⁷⁹ the message being expanded three days later.¹⁸⁰ Machiavelli now has sufficient indications at his disposal to make more solid conjectures about the tactical character and ephemeral nature of the parallel talks of an accommodation between the Duke and the participants in the La Magione plot.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ Marcello Virgilio guidance for M 15.11.1502.

¹⁷⁷ Imola 27.10.1502.

¹⁷⁸ Imola 12.10.1502, *id.* 17.10.1502.

¹⁷⁹ Imola 20.10.1502.

¹⁸⁰ Imola 23.10.1502.

¹⁸¹ Imola 27.10.1502.

During the next two months, this projected line of action – no forgiveness, an impending vendetta rather than an agreement – is confirmed. Machiavelli puts it in perspective with respect to the different political illusions that are meant to distract the attention of the La Magione conspirators and lead them into a trap. Five interpretative references in the dispatches covering the period from October 29th to December 14th deliver nothing precise but testify to the stability of Cesare's resentment and his general attitude towards the La Magione conspirators, authorizing any kind of speculation implying that they will experience a dramatic end.¹⁸² Machiavelli increasingly takes personal responsibility for this hypothesis as well. At the end of November it is no longer only an interpretation based on his meetings with the Duke and the members of his entourage. He increasingly endorses this piece of interpretative insight as his own educated guess: '*One cannot but believe that something bad will happen ...*'¹⁸³

This strategic purpose now being more solidly established, all that remains are the interrogations on the when and the how: the tactics for implementation. The answer to the former, the question of timing, is provided only hours before Cesare Borgia effectively shuts up his victims in Senigallia. On the latter, the method, different opinions continue to be generated in the course of December.¹⁸⁴ The end game, and especially its time management, echoes the early Soderini-Machiavelli characterization of the Duca Valentino's behavior as reported during the first mission to the Cesare Borgia court: arriving in one place before being seen to leave another. A prodigious acceleration of time sequences leaves little room for any further conjectures. This is the moment when the facts speak for themselves, and rapidly: a speedy move into Senigallia, carry out the blow, and then proceed immediately to Corinaldo. Little is left to the imagination and the conjectures of the court. The only instance of interpretation – a safe guess, again assumed on Machiavelli's own responsibility – is the prediction that the prisoners will not survive the night.¹⁸⁵

Other missions with elements of interpretation

Rome 1503

Several passages in the autumn 1503 Rome correspondence include yet other specific cases of temptations to make conjectures. The nature of the mission, modified at the last moment before Machiavelli's departure from Florence to take account of the death of Pius III, makes it a typical observation assignment, only marginally affected by the concrete business purpose related to the *condotta* of Baglioni. The factual situation on the ground is now dominated by a papal election – a typical opportunity to elaborate scenarios that are made so much more volatile by cardinals tending to say one thing when they are inside the conclave and another when they are outside,¹⁸⁶ offering a large field for

¹⁸² Imola 29.10.1502, *id.* 03.11.1502, 08.11.1502, 10.11.1502, 20.11.1502.

¹⁸³ Imola 28.11.1502, Cesena 14.12.1502.

¹⁸⁴ Imola 02.12.1502.

¹⁸⁵ Senigallia 31.12.1502, Corinaldo 01.01.1503.

¹⁸⁶ Rome 29.10.1503.

different interpretations. Beyond the systemic uncertainties of such elections and of the different forms of confidentiality management in this context, there are other factors of doubt. These concern the nature of the promises given to cardinals and other actors, primarily the temporal powers, the barons of Rome having favored the election of the Cardinal of San Piero in Vincula, Giuliano della Rovere. They also concern the willingness of the new pope to deliver on his promises, including with respect to Cesare Borgia. Right from the beginning of this process, these doubts extend to the profile of new policies, if any, to regain administrative control of the Romagna region and to handle relations with other potentates with interests there, namely France and, above all, Venice. In the case of this mission to Rome, the incentive to interpret, on top of the compulsory reporting of information from primary and secondary sources, is not due to obstacles placed in the way by others: it has to do with fundamental uncertainties concerning political options, yet to be formulated and implemented, after a protracted period of turbulence and the decease in rapid succession of two popes. And it is favored by the large and comfortable guidance given to Machiavelli on this occasion. The corpus of these instructions is largely devoted to the question of the Baglioni *condotta*. Otherwise Machiavelli is given a free hand:

[...] On particular matters we do not have anything else to entrust you with, except to keep us informed with due diligence on everything happening and worthy of notice [...] ¹⁸⁷

Siena III, 1505

Within the limits of a short and compact mission to Siena during the summer of 1505, the third out of five, the interpretation sections occupy a relatively significant portion (10.3%). On this particular occasion, the surge in conjecture is a response to yet another variant of interlocutor behavior. Cesare Borgia may have managed a disciplined court, maintaining secrecy and holding his cards close to his chest, mixing indirect menaces with caresses, now and then misleading partners, and forcing envoys to look elsewhere for signs indicating his probable course of action. The case of Pandolfo Petrucci, *moderatore* of Siena, is different. No signs whatsoever emerge from him, nothing other than sequences of words, faithfully reported by the interlocutor, but without their being accompanied by the indications that might permit one to guess how action might ultimately be linked to words. Thus, the interpretation sections of the reports on this particular mission do not consist only in referring to the thinking of others or in endorsing a specific conjecture, but also in identifying this personal peculiarity. Pandolfo Petruccio obviously speaks in a deliberately neutral mode, putting no particular stress on this or that element, conveying the impression that perhaps he does not mean what he says or is hiding what he really thinks.¹⁸⁸ Writing to Guicciardini in later years, this is a capacity that Machiavelli will end by claiming for himself:

¹⁸⁷Marcello Virgilio guidance for M 23.10.1503.

¹⁸⁸ Siena 17.07.1505, *id.* 19.07.1505, 21.07.1505.

[...] I never say what I believe, and never believe what I say, and even if I now and then tell the truth, I hide it among so many lies that it is difficult to discover [...].¹⁸⁹

Two hundred years later, in a French manual of diplomatic practice, such perfectly neutral postures as those of Pandolfo are singled out by the author as essential paradigms for negotiator behavior. In his *De la manière de négocier avec les souverains* (1716), De Callières associates these skills with the example of Cardinal Mazarin:

[...] This cardinal had such complete control over all those external effects that passions usually produce, that neither by his discourse nor by any change of facial expression or any other sign would one ever discover what he thought, and this quality, that he possessed to a supreme degree, contributed much to make him one of the greatest negotiators of his time [...].¹⁹⁰

Without explicitly going verbatim, and avoiding reporting his own answers, Machiavelli simply refers to the collected elements, indicating the different possible interpretations without giving more credit to one than to another. However, he isolates those messages that are deemed reliable or can be confirmed by himself or through other sources.¹⁹¹ In cases such as Pandolfo Petruccio's, interlocutors must make conjectures.

Germania 1507-08

There are also moments when interpretation seems to be the only available discursive channel, but when nothing of the sort happens. Thus, another important assignment, in 1507, at Bolzano, in an apparently similar situation to the second Cesare Borgia mission, gives rise to no interpretations, to no conjectures. Maximilian is described in similar terms to Cesare Borgia, characterized by secrecy, diffidence, dissimulation, and sudden and surreptitious action. Vettori and Machiavelli are left completely in the dark concerning the Emperor's intentions regarding the realization of his Italian projects. For extended periods of time they are even isolated from court, and from each other, by order of the host authorities. The screen between the interlocutors is opaque. Even more than in the case of the second Cesare Borgia mission, the seduction of interpretation should therefore have worked.

The reason why the two envoys do not indulge in conjecture is twofold: on the one hand, and contrary to the Cesare Borgia observation assignment, the

¹⁸⁹ Private letter from M to Guicciardini, Carpi 17.05.1521.

¹⁹⁰ ... Ce Cardinal (Mazarin) s'étoit rendu si absolument maître de tous les effets extérieurs que les passions ont accoutumé de produire, que ni par ses discours, ni par aucun changement sur son visage, ni par aucun autre signe, on ne découvroit jamais rien de ce qu'il pensoit, & cette qualité qu'il a possédée au suprême degré a beaucoup contribué à le rendre l'un des plus grands Négociateurs de son temps, op.cit. p. 41.

¹⁹¹ Siena 18.07.1505.

Maximilian mission is strictly operational, possibly having direct financial consequences for Florence. Leaving elements of interpretation in a dispatch would prove uncomfortable in a post-agreement situation where a definition of responsibilities for a given course of action could be required. Vettori is always keen to make this responsibility felt in order to preempt any insinuations or accusations of light-heartedness in handling his mission. On the other hand, the difficulties in reading the situation encountered in Bolzano are of a different kind than those established by Cesare Borgia on the way from Imola to Senigallia. Whereas the latter effectively hides something and actively works to divert the attention of observers to fictitious objects, the stage-management in the Maximilian case is not so much a construction of a *trompe-l'oeil* than a veiling procedure regarding the realities of German decision-making processes and budgeting. Whereas Cesare is in full command of his policies and projects, Maximilian is limited in his actions by the structural constraints of the Empire and the necessity to obtain the financial support of the diets – princes, *Gemeinde* etc. At any given point in time, he is far from knowing himself what he will be able to do in the longer, medium or even short term. In this fluctuating situation, and possessing no clue, Vettori and Machiavelli have to stay clear of venturing any slippery interpretation. They choose the only professional way of carrying out their instructions: advise a course of action to cover any possible outcome and guarantee a moderate, balanced and reasonable degree of expenditure, whatever the extent and nature of the deployment of imperial forces downwards from the Trentino. They also mention the probability that this southern expedition towards Rome will not take place at all, as finally turns out to be the case.

France III, 1510

The stretching of lines of communication is often another variable. However, during the third mission to Louis XII of France in the summer of 1510, the obstacles to the sharing of reliable information and of slipping into interpretation arises out of yet other circumstances. On this occasion, the pursuit of specific political interests is undoubtedly the main factor. Against the background of the acute tensions between the King and the Pope and the new perspectives for a big-power division of Italy that result, the French court is not the best place to collect information and arrive at firm judgments of the situation. The natural tendency under such conditions is to indulge in interpretation. However, the quality of these conjectures is doubtful. As Spain and the Empire are primed to counter French interests in Italy, the tactical choice of both Ferdinand II and Maximilian I, namely to avoid leaks and counterproductive intrigues, is to keep their ambassadors at the French court out of the loop. Machiavelli therefore only participates in these attempts at interpretation with fundamental reservations, again pointing to headquarters as a better location for conjectures.¹⁹² Once these markers are brought into position, however, Machiavelli feels free to develop his own thoughts on the

¹⁹² Blois 26.07.1510.

situation as viewed from Blois.¹⁹³

¹⁹³ Blois 27.08.1510.

ANALYSIS

Another notable fact, in an author predominantly associated with political-historical theory: the overall proportion of broad political analysis in the dispatches, at a comparable level to that in the post 1512-works and encompassing the main political factors and variables of the period, represents little more than 0.5% (0.54%) of the total diplomatic correspondence. In only four cases – marginally in Valentino I (summer 1502) and Valentino II (autumn 1502), more directly in the Rome mission (autumn 1503), and again succinctly in the Julius II mission (autumn 1506) – are there genuinely analytical, albeit short passages written on Machiavelli's own responsibility, though of course shared with Francesco Soderini in the case of the first Cesare Borgia mission.

None of these assignments have any specific goal of negotiation. They are all considered observation missions by Florence. In the case of Valentino I this meant detecting, while accompanying the Bishop of Volterra at Urbino, the first moves in Romagna by Cesare Borgia and putting them in context with regard to the wider European situation, particularly with respect to the positioning of the main powers, France and the Empire. In the case of Valentino II it meant measuring the factors and variables of the strength and time aspects related to the Borgia power base. In the case of Rome it meant reading the general political context as seen from Rome during the turmoil following the death of Alexander VI. The situation after the short pontificate of Pius III and the election of Julius II provides an opportunity to display the larger picture of European politics as illustrated by the two conclaves. In the case of Julius II, finally, it means accompanying the whims of his expedition through Umbria and Romagna towards Bologna in a situation where he has not made any final determination regarding which alliances to maintain and conclude: papal policies and performance as an object of prospection and analysis.

My restrictive definition of the object only marginally explains these modest proportions of the analytical material. Machiavelli's restraint in his correspondence on this point is systemic and – as was the case with respect to interpretation – it doubtless reflects the cautious and disciplined attitude of a medium-level government functionary commissioned to work on cases with external interlocutors, send in his reports and leave it to his superiors to arrive at an overall view and assessment of general affairs. As is so often stated at the end of a report, it is '...for you to interpret and to judge...' The ritual closing formulas of dispatches endlessly illustrate this division of labor in public administration.

Near-analysis situations

There is, however, an oblique attempt at analysis consisting of examples of complete analysis, borrowed from others, without taking personal responsibility for their formulation or contents. These are situations in which Machiavelli, directly or indirectly, subscribes not only to judgments and evaluations but to elements of analysis attributed to other sources. Examples of this category take the form of direct and especially indirect recommendations. The *amico* sections of the reports on the second Cesare Borgia mission, as well

as other contexts in which Machiavelli relies on references to the authority of close colleagues and collaborators, include analytical and near-analytical passages, conveniently rendered as the responsibility of somebody else. Such elements can also be aired in an otherwise information-dominated section, where the piece of analysis, for instance, appears in the shape of the juxtaposition of different lines of thinking. One such example occurs on the third mission to France, where there are conflicting readings of the broader picture, without Machiavelli putting more weight on one than on others. His analysis takes no responsibility for choosing among different scenarios by endorsing one rather than another of diametrically opposed assessments.¹⁹⁴

Autonomous and independent analysis

Cesare Borgia I & II, 1502-03

It is primarily the fully autonomous and encompassing style of analysis, delivered under the sole authority of the envoy, that represents an exception in the dispatches and instructions of the LCSG. This style defines not only the theoretical and historical work that emerges from 1512 onwards, but also the corpus of texts representing broad summaries of a political theme, or the status of an interlocutor court and country, as in the case of ambassadors' end-of-mission reports. In this category may be grouped the items commonly described as 'minor political writings', including the country profiles of Germany and France.¹⁹⁵

In the continuation of this discursive grey zone, between the mission reporting back and the historical description, one might also place the final items from the second Borgia mission, consolidated texts resuming previous reports that have supposedly gone missing and already tend towards the construction of a 'story'. The prototype of the narrative will later become a frequent publishing companion to *Il Principe: Il modo che tenne il Duca Valentino per ammazzar Vitellozzo, Oliverotto da Fermo, il Signor Paulo e il Duca di Gravina Orsini in Senigaglia*.

The brief analytical moments in the reporting from the first and second Borgia missions do not move beyond the horizon of the state-generating project of Cesare Borgia in central Italy. Their particular relevance is due to the circumstance that Machiavelli moves in to take responsibility for a particular analytical perception of a certain situation. It is not what this or that interlocutor or colleague thinks, but the plain indicative stating an analytical fact: that which *is*; or that which *I* judge to be (*...io giudico*). This authoritative analytical mode is used in reports on the first Cesare Borgia mission from the combined hand of Francesco Soderini and Machiavelli,¹⁹⁶ and again in the autumn mission to Imola, where Machiavelli is on his own, describing the structural features of the Borgia power base and overall military and political

¹⁹⁴ Blois 05.09.1510.

¹⁹⁵ *Edizione Nazionale delle Opere I/3, L'Arte della Guerra, Scritti Politici Minori*, Salerno-Roma 2001.

¹⁹⁶ Urbino 26.06.1502.

project.¹⁹⁷ Less than a week later, another brief analytical evaluation is made, issued on his own.¹⁹⁸ And one month later, there is an analogous remark on an important modification in the background attitudes of Cesare Borgia, to be measured against the more optimistic and categorical statements of the first mission, to Urbino.¹⁹⁹

Rome 1503: full analytical style

The official reporting from the two Cesare Borgia missions includes remarks on the actions and orientations of the main continental actors, such as the King of France. These reports, however, remain focused on questions of regional political importance, distinguishing factors and variables within a limited timeframe and a well-defined location, central Italy. At the beginning of the Rome mission, in autumn 1503, a passage of a different nature appears, an authentic analytical construct combining an evaluation of the factors and variables of the larger European context with a similar reading of local circumstances on the Italian peninsula. As in other discursive categories – information, operational, direct and indirect recommendations, interpretation – the analytical mode is being sneaked in. Nonetheless the privileges of headquarters regarding this discursive mode have to be formally respected. In this case the sneaking in occurs through the pretext of summarizing previous reports, but immediately thereafter Machiavelli assumes a position of general analytical authority. He enunciates what *is*, in absolute objective and indisputable terms, drawing the same conclusions that anyone looking at the case would also come up with:

“... Who (ever) considers these Rome affairs, as they are, can see that everything of importance in present times is being managed (right) here [...] and the effects are there to prove it.”²⁰⁰

In this same passage, there is also an analytical approach to the, often multiple, political identities of popes and their obligations, financial and other, to the main secular actors. The Pope must stick to the middle of the road and please all of them. His Holiness is considered French by inclination, though he behaves to Spain in such a way that no complaints are issued. Moreover, the nature of times is such that everybody excuses him.²⁰¹ The passage seems a distant echo of the remarks received eleven months earlier by the ambassador of Venice from another pope, Alexander VI:

‘[...] It may well be, Ambassador, that this illustrious Signoria wants to keep her ears shut and not fulfill [her engagements], doing what we have multiple times required her to do, nor trust us who do not desire anything else than having with her a good and specific understanding? [...] we state that, in spite of being of the Spanish nation, and in some respects appearing to be

¹⁹⁷ Imola 23.10.1502.

¹⁹⁸ Imola 29.10.1502.

¹⁹⁹ Imola 02.12.1502.

²⁰⁰ Roma 11.11.1503.

²⁰¹ *id.*

French, we are nevertheless Italian: our base is in Italy, and here we have to live [...].²⁰²

But Machiavelli does not stay in the present tense: he also moves into a prospective future, anticipating the consequences of this or that political scenario and implying all the main factors and variables of contemporary Italian politics. The possible restructuring of the Romagna states, Venice's Terra-Ferma projects, the temporal ambitions of Pope Julius II, the uncertain future of Cesare Borgia, the role of the barons of Rome, the Orsini and Colonna: all of this is geared to form a basis for Florentine positioning in the current situation.²⁰³ The analysis is linked to an immediate operational task – a possible recycling and instrumentalization of Cesare Borgia in the emerging collective effort to contain Venetian expansion in the Romagna – and it ends with a couple of tactical pieces of advice in this respect.²⁰⁴ Nevertheless it remains articulated in a comprehensive, overarching perspective. A few days later another piece of analysis is delivered when Machiavelli explains Cardinal Soderini's background motives for acting as he does with respect to Cesare Borgia in the tumultuous situation following the death of Pius III and the election of Julius II, but before the latter's coronation as the new Pope.²⁰⁵

Julius II – Romagna, 1506

Occasionally, analysis-near sections appear inside the interpretation passages. This, for instance, is the case with the reporting from the Julius II Romagna expedition, where Machiavelli's reading of the Pope's motives and probable course of action comes close to an autonomous analytical style. The political framework is the same as in the two Cesare Borgia missions and as regards the situation in central Italy. But this is not simply a moment for sharing court evaluations, whether authoritative or random. Machiavelli appears in character, defining the parameters of handling power in Perugia for Gianpaulo Baglioni and assessing the relative weight of the forces on the ground. Who holds the stronger position, and who is at the mercy of whom – the Pope or Baglioni? Will considerations of political interest and power prevail, or will Baglioni's good nature and humanity – irony is not always absent from Machiavelli's dispatches – have the last word? And then there is a reference back to earlier Baglioni utterings that put his present attitude with respect to the Pope in perspective. In the end this is not a choice between power and humanity, but rather one between the use of force and tactical humility.²⁰⁶

The following day he is back in a more careful mode, reporting the interpretation and analysis of others. Without relinquishing the aim of being objective, he quotes others rather than offering a piece of fully independent analysis:

²⁰² Roma 13.10.1502.

²⁰³ Roma 11.11.1503.

²⁰⁴ *id.*

²⁰⁵ Roma 14.11.1503.

²⁰⁶ Perugia 13.09.1506.

‘... it does not appear that ... rather evident signs ... everybody believes ... everybody is in doubt ... many doubt ... many others say that ... and I believe not to be mistaken by writing, beyond the notices from here, the reasoning of these courtiers and experienced and wise men...’²⁰⁷

On 25 September, from Urbino, the analysis is again purloined from others and reported in the 3rd person:

‘...those who know these moods think that he (Pope Julius II) is likely to rush (into the enterprise of reestablishing obedience to the Church in Romagna and purge the region of its tyrants) [...] and that this precipitation is the least dangerous [...] and (they) arrive at this conclusion [...] that either he succeeds, according to his first intention, or he rushes into some easier place, or that he buys the illusions of an honest agreement, if not real, at least apparent. This apparently honest agreement seems difficult to find according to his first desires [...] nobody believes in the French [...] doubts remain about the rush.’²⁰⁸

²⁰⁷ Perugia 14.09.1506.

²⁰⁸ Urbino 25.09.1506.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

In his *Renaissance Diplomacy* of 1955, Garrett Mattingly delineated the contours of diplomatic traditions and practices preserved from their period of gestation from the last two thirds of the fifteenth century up until the present. The place: Italy, dominated on the one hand by the conditions of the preceding centuries, with secular states largely left alone by the Empire, by an absent Pope and by a French King too busy handling his confrontation with the English crown to bother about Italy. On the other hand there is the contemporary political framework established by the Peace of Lodi of 1454, resulting in policies of equilibrium and in permanent bilateral diplomatic representation as a means of detecting risks to the maintenance of the existing balance of power. Not a diplomacy linked to prestige nor commercial interests but one of proximity, geared to handle long term, mid term and even daily risks to the status of rulers, to the state, in terms of aggressions, disruptions and changes of alliances. A practice conducted by permanent representation, by resident envoys, often sending numerous weekly reports on matters of relevance for their respective authorities. An institution thus born as an instrument of security policy.

Both products, equilibrium and permanent bilateral representation, find a broader field of application among the larger powers of the continent beyond the Peace of Westphalia. Mattingly also made a couple of points, and omissions, that may be recalled here to put the findings of the present work in perspective. The first is the historical stability, resilience and general applicability of the practices put in place in Italy during the fifteenth century. Secondly, there are the occasional dangers that challenged the system to the point of neutralizing it, such as the Wars of Religion. Sticking, however, to his main sources, the treaties and manuals on diplomatic practice, he did not take the step of examining the actual technical construction of the written piece, the object of this study.

Machiavelli's correspondence is situated at the very end of this period of gestation in European bilateral diplomacy, when the Italian system starts to be disseminated throughout the continent, including north of the Alps. His strict ways of discriminating among discursive layers are one of the essentials of his inheritance. Without the capacity to separate information clearly from interpretation and other aspects, this profession may face degeneration. This is what Mattingly shows with reference to a development during the Wars of Religion, which relegated diplomats to the role of spies, opinion-generating operatives and partisan-oriented actors. Today similar risks and challenges exist in the shape of public diplomacy on the one hand and in an appreciable increase in performative political discourse on the other. Efforts are being made to stress individual policy profiles and gesturing, rather than continuing to look for common ground and refraining from signaling divisions that might delay the production of results.

This orientation in public diplomacy, coupled with populist and at times neo-nationalist tendencies, represents one of the more consistent actual risks for inheritances such as Machiavellian discursive practice, with its clear distinction among the actual modes of speech that are deployed. It points to a type of

diplomacy more akin to that of the Wars of Religion. The actual bases of information and negotiated results recede in the face of performative activities related to individual manifestations, opinion-generation and the exacerbation of divisions. This orientation entails a risk for its proper practices because it tends to blur the limits between discursive categories, as does journalism, with its propensity to base its discourse on 'leads'. At this point in time Machiavelli's correspondence and other administrative pieces from his hand remain with us as powerful reminders of a tradition that is in continuing health and is capable of distinguishing clearly between what *is* and what entertains less certain links with reality. This involves consideration of the entire scale of information reliability, as well unambiguous approaches to interpretation, analysis and operational matters.