

**ГВИЧЧАРДИНИ И МАКИАВЕЛЛИ
У ИСТОКОВ ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ НАУКИ
НОВОГО ВРЕМЕНИ**

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**MACHIAVELLI E GUICCIARDINI
ALLE ORIGINI DELLA SCIENZA STORICA
DEI TEMPI MODERNI**

**ISTITUTO DI STORIA UNIVERSALE
DELL'ACCADEMIA RUSSA DELLE SCIENZE**

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A CURA DI MARK YOUSSEM

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**ИНСТИТУТ ВСЕОБЩЕЙ ИСТОРИИ
РОССИЙСКОЙ АКАДЕМИИ НАУК**

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ОТВЕТСТВЕННЫЙ РЕДАКТОР М. А. ЮСИМ

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**CONFLICT AND POLITICAL DECLINE IN
MACHIAVELLI AND RENAISSANCE
JEWISH HISTORIOGRAPHY**

*Introduction*¹

Recent incidents of police brutality across the world and the Yellow Vest protests in France have stimulated intense debates on the role of social conflict as one of the major causes of political decline. Reflection on this theme has a long lineage in philosophical and political discourse in Renaissance

¹ I would like to extend my thanks to Mark Youssim for his invitation to the International Conference “Machiavelli e Guicciardini alle origini della scienza storica dei tempi moderni” (Moscow, 23–25 September 2019). Due to scheduling conflicts, I was not able to attend the event, but Professor Youssim kindly offered to include my contribution in the proceedings and provided valuable feedback on earlier drafts. This chapter is based on an article originally published as All Roads Lead to Florence: Renaissance Jewish Thinkers and Machiavelli on Civil Strife // *Viator*. Vol. 47. 2016. P. 349–363. I have refined and rethought some of my core arguments and updated my sources and the secondary literature. I am also grateful to Ovanes Akopyan, Daniel Boyarin, Bill Connell, Keith Howard, Fabrizio Lelli, Patricia Springborg, Daniel Stein Kokin, Claude Stuczynski, and Miguel Vatter for their comments and criticisms. This publication partly derives from work related to COST Action CA18140–People in Motion: Entangled Histories of Displacement across the Mediterranean (1492–1923) (PIMo), supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology). The research presented in this chapter was also supported by the Academy of Finland, funding decision 275404 (= Political Power in the Early Modern European and Islamic Worlds research project, 2014–2018).

Europe as well as in the Jewish tradition. Previous scholarship has looked at Jewish concepts of decline and civil strife in connection with the Jewish experience of exile (*galut*) and the expulsion (*gerush*) of Iberian Jewry; the present study recovers and analyzes a body of writings that were produced in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by Jewish political writers and historians (Solomon ibn Verga, Samuel Usque) and discuss the decay and succession of diverse forms of political organization. It also places their ideas in the broader context of Renaissance discourse on the emergence, growth, and decline of empires by comparing them with Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469–1527) political thought.

I argue that a comparative examination of Machiavelli's and the Jewish authors' invocation of examples from the history of ancient Israel, Rome, and Florence can reveal hitherto unexplored points of similarity regarding Italian humanist and Jewish approaches to factional conflict, political intrigues, and the erosion of the civic fabric and military prowess as the principal factors at work in political and social decline, as well as on the role of divine providence in human history. I also show that Ibn Verga and Usque introduce and rely on a scheme for exploring the forces governing the history of diverse political entities that reflects the interplay of a naturalistic conception of history and the belief in divine providence.

In the *Guide of the Perplexed* (II 40; III 27) the great Jewish philosopher Moses Maimonides (ca. 1135–1204) restates Aristotle's idea that human beings are by nature political creatures inclined to create and live in communities. But at the same time Maimonides concedes that the variety of human qualities and dispositions engenders strife. Thus, he highlights the necessity for a ruler able to eliminate friction by maintaining an equilibrium in the actions of the members of political community and to ensure that diversity is tempered with the

existence of laws applicable to all². Similarly, Nissim of Gerona (ben Reuven Gerondi, ca. 1310–ca. 1380), a Talmudic scholar in Spain, echoing earlier debates about the Noahide laws and the duty of all human beings to establish courts of law, underscores the significance of a legal system for an orderly society and the perpetuation of humankind in general. In Nissim of Gerona's view, for the creation and maintenance of political order, God commanded the appointment of judges to settle disputes and adjudicate in accordance with the truly just law as well as with the laws of a king³.

Maimonides' and Nissim of Gerona's approach to the emergence and preservation of social life and civil conflict reflects a pattern of thought around the notion that human symbiosis tends to generate disputes that must be resolved for the community to survive. Jewish meditation on these issues involved the investigation of the rise and fall of empires that was partly inspired by the sequence of four world empires (Babylonian, Median-Persian, Greek-Macedonian, and Roman) expounded in Daniel's interpretation of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2:31–45). This idea evolved into a core element of medieval historical lore, as evidenced, for example, by the references to gentile nations (Persians, Greeks, Romans, and Muslims) and the political organization of the Persian and Roman empires in the *Sefer ha-Qabbalah* (*The*

² Compare *Aristotle*. *Politics*. 1253a2–3; *Idem*. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1097b6–11.

³ *Lorberbaum M.* *Politics and the Limits of Law: Secularizing the Political in Medieval Jewish Thought*. Stanford (CA), 2001. P. 129, 134. On factionalism in the history of Iberian Jewry, see *Ray J.* *The Jews of al-Andalus: Factionalism in the Golden Age // Jews and Muslims in the Islamic World / Ed. by B. D. Cooperman and Z. Zohar*. Bethesda (MD), 2013. P. 253–263; *Idem*. *Whose Golden Age? Some Thoughts on Jewish-Christian Relations in Medieval Iberia // Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*. Vol. 6. 2011. P. 1–11.

Book of Tradition) of the great Spanish-Jewish philosopher and scientist Abraham ibn Daud (ca. 1110–1180)⁴.

Although both Ibn Verga and Usque acknowledge the influence of divine providence on human history, they subtly play down its role in political affairs, and they prioritize the quest for natural causes. As such, their works are reflective of the transition from a sacred/eschatological to a naturalistic/secular vision of human history, as exemplified by Machiavelli, who affirms that one half of human actions are influenced by fortune, but that humans have the ability to control the other half⁵. Machiavelli implicitly challenges the notion that the ascension, growth, and decline of nations or states follow an inexorable cycle of succession governed by divine providence. He stresses instead that any nation or state can potentially rise to dominance and political or military hegemony by taming and conquering fortune and harnessing virtue (*virtù*). Machiavelli specifically mentions that virtue, which was originally located in Assyria, passed to Media, and afterwards to Persia, and from there it arrived in Italy and Rome. The Romans founded and preserved their empire by displaying exceptional military virtue which enabled them to vanquish and subdue republics that had strong armies and put up tenacious resistance in order to defend their freedom. This strength was further augmented by Rome's organization as established by its first lawgiver. After the fall of the Roman Empire there was no other polity that lasted so long and embodied the entire spectrum of virtue. Subsequently, virtue was

⁴ *Ibn Daud A.* The Book of Tradition (Sefer ha-Qabbalah) / Ed. and trans. by G. D. Cohen. Philadelphia (PA), 1967, Hebrew section: Seder ha-Amoraim. P. 24–32, Eng. trans.: The Succession of the Amoraim. P. 32–42.

⁵ *Machiavelli N.* Il Principe e Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio / Ed. by S. Bertelli. Milan, 1960. Ch. XXV. I have consulted the following English translation of the *Prince: Machiavelli N.* The Prince / Trans. by H. C. Mansfield. Chicago (IL); London, 1998 (2nd ed.). P. 98.

diffused among various nations, such as the Kingdom of the Franks, the Ottoman Empire, the Mamluk Sultanate (Egypt), and in his time in the peoples of Germany, and the Saracen sect earlier⁶.

The first traces of Machiavellian influences on the Jewish tradition can be found in Abraham Portaleone's (1542–1612) *Shilte ha-giborim* (*The Shields of the Heroes*), which echoes Machiavelli's ideas about a citizen militia, as presented in *The Prince*.⁷ A number of themes that occupied Machiavelli and subsequent Italian political thinkers, particularly those associated with the reason-of-state tradition, like Giovanni Botero (1544–1617), who engaged with Machiavelli's thinking, reverberate in the works of Simone Luzzatto (ca. 1580–1663), particularly the *Discorso circa il stato de gl'Hebrei et in particular dimoranti nell'inclita città di Venetia* (*Discourse Concerning the Condition of the Jews and in Particular Those Residing in the Illustrious City of Venice*. Venice, 1638), an apology for Venice's Jewish community; and the *Socrate, overo dell'humano sapere* (*Socrates, or on Human Knowledge*. Venice, 1651), a dialogue among various ancient Greek philosophical figures on a variety of topics related to human

⁶ *Machiavelli N.* Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio. II Preface; II 1–2. I have consulted the following English translation: *Machiavelli N.* Discourses on Livy / Trans. by H. C. Mansfield and N. Tarcov. Chicago (IL); London, 1996. P. 123–133.

⁷ For Machiavelli's reception in the Jewish tradition, see *Melamed A.* Machiavellism and Anti-Machiavellism in 17th Century Jewish Amsterdam: From *Ragione di Stato* to *Razon de Estado* // *Trumah*. Vol. 19 [= *Tora und politische Macht / Torah and Political Power*]. 2009. P. 1–14. Consider also *Idem.* The Perception of Jewish History in Italian Jewish Thought of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: A Re-Examination // *Italia Judaica*. Vol. 2 [= *Gli ebrei in Italia tra Rinascimento ed Età barocca*] (1986). P. 139–170; *Baer Y. F.* Galut. New York, 1947.

knowledge⁸. Ultimately, the present study will yield new insights into possible channels via which Machiavelli's ideas were received in the Jewish tradition as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century as well as into how Jewish authors responded to the very same themes, which occupied Italian humanists, in light of their own experiences with the expulsion from Iberia.

Machiavelli on Conflict

In late medieval political and historical discourse, debates about political and social conflict had a long legacy, especially in the Italian context⁹. The Italian cities suffered from social and political evils similar to those discussed by Jewish authors who focused on the history of ancient Israel and Rome. Power

⁸ Luzzatto S. *Discourse on the State of the Jews* / Ed., trans. and comm. by G. Veltri and A. Lissa. Berlin, 2019; *Idem*. *Socrates, Or on Human Knowledge* / Ed., trans. and comm. by G. Veltri and M. Torbidoni. Berlin, 2019. See, in general, Syros V. *Mercati ex Machina: Prosperity and Economic Decline in Early Modern Jewish Political Thought* // *Republics of Letters* (Stanford University). Vol. 6. 2018. URL: <https://arcade.stanford.edu/rofl/mercanti-ex-machina-economic-prosperity-and-decline-early-modern-jewish-thought-0>; *Idem*. Simone Luzzatto's Image of the Ideal Prince and the Italian Tradition of Reason of State // *Redescriptions: Yearbook of Political Thought and Conceptual History*. Vol. 9. 2005. P. 157–182.

⁹ For further discussion, see, e.g., Syros V. *Marsilius of Padua at the Intersection of Ancient and Medieval Traditions of Political Thought*. Toronto, 2012. P. 51–52; Fasano Guarini E. *Machiavelli and the Crisis of the Italian Republics* // *Machiavelli and Republicanism* / Ed. by G. Bock et al. Cambridge, 1990. P. 17–40; Hyde J. K. *Contemporary Views on Faction and Civil Strife in Thirteenth- and Fourteenth-Century Italy* // *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities, 1200–1500* / Ed. by L. Martines. Berkeley (CA), 1972. P. 273–307, repr. in *Idem*. *Literacy and its Uses: Studies on Late Medieval Italy*. Manchester, 1993. P. 58–86; and Martines L. *Political Conflict in the Italian City States* // *Government and Opposition*. Vol. 3. 1968. P. 69–91.

struggles and intrigues sapped the strength and paralyzed the economies of many of the Italian city-states, led to the erosion of civic bonds, and rendered them vulnerable to interference by foreign powers, particularly Spain and France.

The various causes and repercussions of civil strife are the key concern of a body of political and historical writings produced in Padua, one of the last bastions of Italy's communal tradition. Albertino Mussato (1261–1329), a major political and intellectual figure and leading member of the circle of the Paduan Prehumanists, saw party strife as one of the main causes of the decline of Padua's communal government and the rise of the *signoria*, a type of government in which ultimate authority rested with one person (*signore*). Mussato's ideas are echoed in Marsilius of Padua's (1270/90–1342) *Defensor pacis* (*The Defender of Peace*, 1324), the avowed objective of which is to identify and erase the singular cause of the social and political upheavals that tore Italy apart – a factor which, according to Marsilius, neither Aristotle nor any other ancient political thinker had been able to foresee, i.e., the Papacy's encroachments on civil affairs. Civil discord and instability were often exacerbated by the influence of foreign powers on the political life of the Italian cities. This theme dominates the *Historiarum Florentini populi* (*History of the Florentine People*) of the distinguished humanist Leonardo Bruni (ca. 1370–1444), who served as Chancellor of the Florentine Republic. Like previous Italian political theorists and historians, Bruni ascribed the political and social maladies that afflicted Florence to the conflict between the Papacy and the Empire and affirmed the need for the city to assert its sovereignty, repel outside menaces, and resist the interference of foreign powers in its domestic affairs¹⁰.

¹⁰ See also Ianziti G. *Writing History in Renaissance Italy: Leonardo Bruni and the Uses of the Past*. Cambridge (MA); London, 2012. P. 134–138;

The works of Niccolò Machiavelli, especially the *Istorie fiorentine* (*Florentine Histories*) draw upon prior debates on the conflicts that engulfed the Italian cities, including Florence¹¹. A salient feature of Machiavelli's historiographical project is to elucidate the root causes and consequences of social unrest in Florence and to compare these with the factors

Idem. Challenging Chronicles: Leonardo Bruni's *History of the Florentine People* // *Chronicling History: Chroniclers and Historians in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* / Ed. by S. Dale et al. University Park (PA), 2007. P. 249–272.

¹¹ *Machiavelli N.* *Istorie fiorentine* / Ed. by F. Gaeta. Milan, 1962. I have consulted the following English translation: *Machiavelli N.* *Florentine Histories* / Trans. by L. F. Banfield and H. C. Mansfield, Jr. Princeton (NJ), 1988. On Machiavelli's *Florentine Histories*, see the following studies: *Cabriani A. M.* *Machiavelli's Florentine Histories* // *The Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli* / Ed. by J. N. Najemy. Cambridge, 2010. P. 128–143; *Eadem*. Interpretazione e stile in Machiavelli: Il terzo libro delle *Istorie*. Rome, 1990; *Eadem*. Per una valutazione delle *Istorie Fiorentine* del Machiavelli: Note sulle fonti del secondo libro. Florence, 1985; as well as *Quint D.* Narrative Design and Historical Irony in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine* // *Rinascimento*. Vol. 43. 2003. P. 31–48; *Di Maria S.* Machiavelli's Ironic View of History: The *Istorie Fiorentine* // *Renaissance Quarterly*. Vol. 45. 1992. P. 248–270; *Sasso G.* Niccolò Machiavelli. Storia del suo pensiero politico. Bologna, 1980 (2nd ed.); *Dionisotti C.* Machiavelli storico // *Idem*. Machiavellerie. Torino, 1980. P. 365–409. On Machiavelli as a historian, consider *Sasso G.* Niccolò Machiavelli. Vol. 2: La storiografia. Bologna, 1993; *Rubinstein N.* Machiavelli storico // *Annali della Scuola Normale Superiore di Pisa, Classe di Lettere e Filosofia*. Serie 3. Vol. 17. 1987. P. 695–733; *Najemy J. M.* Machiavelli and the Medici: The Lessons of Florentine History // *Renaissance Quarterly*. Vol. 35. 1982. P. 551–576; *Marietti M.* Machiavel historiographe des Médicis // *Les écrivains et le pouvoir à l'époque de la Renaissance (Deuxième série)* / Éd. par A. Rochon. Paris, 1974. P. 81–148; *Gaeta F.* Machiavelli storico // *Machiavelli nel V centenario della nascita*. Bologna, 1973. P. 137–153; *Gilbert F.* Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics and History in Sixteenth-Century Florence. Princeton (NJ), 1973 [1965].

that led to political tensions in Rome¹². Machiavelli asserts that a republic or a kingdom is susceptible to civil disorders, when the ruler or regime changes, which can cause greater harm than external forces. For even minor changes can potentially lead to the destruction of the most powerful political entities. In Italy and the other Roman provinces, there were changes not only to their forms of government and rulers but also to their laws, customs, habits, ways of living, religion, language, and names, which led to disruption on multiple levels¹³. The aim of the *Florentine Histories* is to provide an account of the political history of Florence from its founding to the death of Lorenzo de' Medici (1449–1492, r. 1469–1492) that would fill the lacunae left by previous historians, notably Bruni and Poggio Bracciolini (1380–1459), author of the *Historia Florentina (History of Florence)*. Machiavelli explains in the preface that after a careful reading of Bruni's and Bracciolini's writings, he realized that they had been diligent in their descriptions of the various wars conducted by Florence against foreign rulers and peoples, but that they had paid little attention to the civil discords (*civili discordie*) and internal enmities (*intrinseche inimicizie*)¹⁴.

All republics are, according to Machiavelli, susceptible to factionalism, but the tribulations which occurred in Florence are the most remarkable: whereas the majority of known republics throughout history were content with one division, which, depending on the circumstances, was a source of suc-

¹² For further discussion, see, e.g., Winter Y. Machiavelli and the Orders of Violence. Cambridge, 2018; Raimondi F. L'ordinamento della libertà: Machiavelli e Firenze. Verona, 2013; Gaille-Nikodimov M. Conflit civil et liberté: La politique machiavélique entre histoire et médecine. Paris, 2004; Bock G. Civil Discord in Machiavelli's *Istorie Fiorentine* // Machiavelli and Republicanism. P. 181–201.

¹³ Machiavelli N. *Istorie fiorentine*. I.5; *Idem*. *Florentine Histories*. P. 14–15.

¹⁴ Machiavelli N. *Istorie fiorentine*. Preface; *Idem*. *Florentine Histories*. P. 6.

cess or destruction, Florence experienced multiple divisions. In Rome, after the expulsion of the kings, the constant struggles between the Plebeians and the Patricians remained a source of vitality and strength until the demise of Roman imperial power. The same was true for Athens and other republics of the ancient world. In Florence, though, first the nobles were divided, then the nobles and the people were separated, and finally there occurred a rift between people and the plebs. Often the party that prevailed was subdivided into two factions. Such divisions led to more deaths, exiles, and the ruin of families – as compared to any other city in history¹⁵.

Machiavelli illuminates the background of the causes of disunity in Italy and Florence, starting with Pope Gregory VII's decision [Machiavelli refers erroneously to Alexander II] to excommunicate and suspend Henry IV from office. Some Italian cities sided with the Pope and others Henry. This division led to the emergence of two parties, i.e., the Guelphs and the Ghibellines, throughout Italy and caused a series of civil wars¹⁶. Machiavelli remarks that serious disputes arose between the people and the nobles when the latter aspire to command and the former refuse to obey. Disparity in the inclinations and interests of the various parts of society generated friction¹⁷. In the *Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, Machiavelli elaborates on the upheavals that occurred in Rome from the time of the death of the Tarquins to the estab-

¹⁵ Machiavelli N. *Istorie fiorentine*. Preface; *Idem*. *Florentine Histories*. P. 6–7.

¹⁶ Machiavelli N. *Istorie fiorentine*. I.15; *Idem*. *Florentine Histories*. P. 25–26. On Machiavelli's ideas about the civil wars in Italy and the role of the Church, see *Barbuto M. A.* *La Chiesa romana di fronte alla "repubblica cristiana"*. "Discorsi", I, XII, 12–14. // *Filosofia Politica*. Vol. 1. 2008. P. 99–116; *Cutinelli-Rèndina E.* *Chiesa e religione in Machiavelli*. Pisa; Rome, 1998.

¹⁷ Machiavelli N. *Istorie fiorentine*. III.1; *Idem*. *Florentine Histories*. P. 105.

lishment of the tribunes. He argues that those who condemn the discord between the nobles and the plebs are oblivious to the factors which enabled Rome to retain its freedom. In every city, in Machiavelli's view, there are two main opposing groups, the people and the nobles; as such, all laws promulgated to guarantee freedom originate from the antagonism between these factions. In Rome, he points out, during the three centuries between the rule of the Tarquins and that of the Gracchi, tumults rarely resulted in such phenomena as banishments, bloodshed, or violence detrimental to the common good; instead, they gave birth to good laws and ordinances that safeguarded public freedom and were the foundation of good education which, in turn, produced numerous instances of virtue¹⁸.

In his discussion of the struggles around the Agrarian Law, Machiavelli notes that social tensions in Rome were resolved through the enactment of a law which enhanced military virtue and facilitated the transition from a condition of equality

¹⁸ *Machiavelli N.* Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio. I 4.1; *Idem.* Discourses on Livy. P. 16–17. Machiavelli compares Rome to the ancient cities of Athens and Sparta, both of which had strong armies and solid legal systems, but never achieved the greatness and glory of the Romans. The Roman Empire was more vulnerable to internal dissension and tumults and appeared not to be so well ordered as those cities – Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio. II.iii; Discourses on Livy. P. 134. Machiavelli also acknowledges the salutary effects of political disorders as one of the driving forces behind Rome's rise as a world power. Sparta, on the other hand, preserved its unity and cohesion because it was ruled by a king and a small senate, had a small population, abided with Lycurgus' laws, and did not let foreigners settle in its territory. But its power was fragile: after taking over the whole of Greece, it proved to be unstable even because of minor disturbances. As soon as other Greek cities rebelled, following the example of Thebes which was instigated and spearheaded by Pelopidas, its dominion fell apart – Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio. I.vi.3–4 ; II.3; Discourses on Livy. P. 21–22, 134.

to one characterized by great inequality and diversity. In Florence, by contrast, social friction resulted in the banishment and death of many citizens, dissipated the city's military vigor, and led from inequality to absolute equality. Machiavelli traces these different outcomes back to the different goals each city pursued: in Rome, the people sought to partake of and share the highest honors with the nobles; in Florence, the people were only interested in taking over power at the expense of the nobles. Since the ambitions of the Roman people were more reasonable, the offenses against the nobles were moderate, and the latter readily surrendered without putting up any resistance. After some disputes, both groups eventually consented to the promulgation of a law which was meant to satisfy the people and, at the same time, allow the nobles to retain their dignity. The demands of the Florentine people, by contrast, were so exorbitant and unjust that they provoked a strong backlash, resulting in bloodshed, the ostracism of a number of citizens, and the creation of laws that were clearly intended to promote the interest of those who prevailed and not the public good¹⁹.

Machiavelli observes that in Florence there is no unity or friendship among the citizens, except among those who are involved in evil actions against their city or specific persons. Religious sentiment and fear of God have vanished, so oaths and promises are honored only as long as they are reckoned to be beneficial or help deceive others. The more effective the deceit is, the more glory and praise accrue to those who practice it; wicked persons are celebrated as virtuous, and the good are looked down upon and despised. The cities of Italy have, according to Machiavelli, become a hotbed of corruption: the young are idle, the old are lascivious, and everyone succumbs to bad habits which even the good laws cannot correct or

¹⁹ *Machiavelli N. Istorie fiorentine. III.1; Idem. Florentine Histories. P. 105.*

eliminate because they (the laws) are not applied properly. The citizens are driven by avarice, and there is desire not for genuine greatness but for unworthy benefits. All this leads to hostility, disputes, fragmentation, and, ultimately, to the death, banishment, and the victimization of good persons, while wicked persons gain the upper hand. And good persons are too self-confident and do not feel the need to look for protection or honors and, as a result, get ruined²⁰.

Ibn Verga on Political and Military Decline

The theme of political failure in the context of Jewish history and Jewish-Christian relations dominates Solomon ibn Verga's (1460–1554) *Shevet Yehudah* (*The Scepter of Judah*, ca. 1520), which includes a fictional dialogue between Alfonso, a Spanish king, and his wise advisor Tomás about the misfortunes that befell the Jews in the past²¹. Ibn Verga was born

²⁰ *Machiavelli N.* Istorie fiorentine. III.5; *Idem.* Machiavelli, Florentine Histories. P. 110.

²¹ *Ibn Verga S.* Schevet Jehuda: Ein Buch über das Leiden des jüdischen Volkes im Exil // Übersetzung von Me'ir Wiener / Hrsg. von S. Rauschenbach. Berlin, 2006. On the *Shevet Yehudah* and Ibn Verga's theory of history, see *Cohen J.* A Historian in Exile: Solomon ibn Verga, Shevet Yehudah, and the Jewish-Christian Encounter. Philadelphia (PA), 2016; *Wacks D. A.* Empire and Diaspora: Solomon ibn Verga's *Shevet Yehudah* and Joseph Karo's *Magid Meisharim* / *Idem.* Double Diaspora in Sephardic Literature: Jewish Cultural Production before and after 1492. Bloomington; Indianapolis (IN), 2015. P. 151–181; *Gutwirth E.* The Expulsion from Spain and Jewish Historiography // *Jewish History; Essays in Honour of Chimen Abramsky* / Ed. by A. Rapoport-Albert and S. J. Zipperstein. London, 1988. P. 141–161; *Yerushalmi Y. H.* "Diener von Königen und nicht Diener von Dienern": Einige Aspekte der politischen Geschichte der Juden. München, 1995. S. 33–37; *Idem.* *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory.* Seattle (WA), 1982. S. 57–69; *Idem.* The Lisbon Massacre of 1506 and the Royal Image in the Shebet Yehudah. Cincinnati (OH), 1976; *Faur J.* In the Shadow of History: Jews and Conversos at the Dawn of Modernity. Albany, 1992. P. 176–209;

and lived in Spain until 1492. After the expulsion of the Jews, he moved to Lisbon and later to Italy. The *Shevet Yehudah* considers two explanations for Jewish decline. First, Ibn Verga refers to divine retribution due to the sins of ancient Israel, but he refutes this interpretation, arguing that many nations which committed more grievous sins were not punished and, in fact, enjoyed great prosperity. For example, those who lived in the region around the Rhine, he notes, worshipped the moon; the Croatians and Bosnians the sun; the Chaldeans the fire; and the inhabitants of certain islands worshipped the earth – and they all flourished. The Romans worshipped various gods, and still they managed to create an empire that extended from the Nile to the ends of the earth, conquering places no one had ever managed to subdue, including the peoples of Germany and Burgundy, the most formidable warriors that had ever existed²².

The second explanation is informed by the concept of natural cause (*ha-sibbah ha-tiv'it*) and focuses on the successful conduct of war. The first prerequisite is the ability to conceive and develop strategies and military plans. Given, Ibn Verga states, that the Jews are commonly considered to be the most intelligent and astute of all nations, Ibn Verga states, it is unlikely that their military failures were due to the lack of these

Idem. Imagination and Religious Pluralism: Maimonides, Ibn Verga, and Vico // *New Vico Studies*. Vol. 10. 1992. P. 36–51; *Awerbuch M.* Zwischen Hoffnung und Vernunft: Geschichtsdeutung der Juden in Spanien vor der Vertreibung am Beispiel Abravanel und Ibn Vergas. Berlin, 1985. P. 48–52, 87–112; *Flusser D.* The Anatomy of Antisemitism: On Solomon Ibn Verga's *Shebet Yehuda* // *Immanuel*. Vol. 9. 1979. P. 77–80. Consider also *Baer Y. F.* Untersuchungen über Quellen und Komposition des Schebet Jehuda. Berlin, 1923 (repr. Berlin, 1936).

²² *Ibn Verga S.* *Shevet Yehudah* / Ed. by A. Schochat. Jerusalem, 1947. P. 11–12; *Idem.* *La Vara de Yehudah (Sefer Šebeṭ Yehudah)* / Intr., trad. y notas por M. J. Cano. Barcelona, 1991. P. 36–37.

qualities. The second condition is valor and military power. Emperor Titus praised the fortitude of the Jews, considering how three young brothers defended one of the gates of Jerusalem for three days against the Roman forces until the emperor, indignant and frustrated, mobilized the entire population, who in turn took up arms, attacked, and, after incurring significant losses, managed to apprehend the three brothers. The third prerequisite is the financial resources that are necessary for sustaining the army. Among the Jews there were some wealthy enough to offer wheat supplies to the army that would suffice for two years. When a foreign ruler attacked the Jews, they petitioned him to end the war by offering him all the silver and gold that were stored in the Temple. Within a year they were able to recoup all the precious metals they had given away; if something similar had occurred in Spain, the people would have needed seven years to recover. The fourth factor is a large and resourceful population. According to the biblical exegete Nicholas of Lyra (Nicolaus Lyranus, ca. 1270–1349), during the time of Judah the Jewish army consisted of 600,000 foot soldiers armed with swords, 800,000 bowmen and lancers, and it surpassed the armies of all the kings of other nations together. Thus, the second reason adduced in the *Shevet Yehudah* does not suffice to explain the decline in Jewish fortunes²³.

Ibn Verga employs natural causality as a heuristic device for exploring the factors that led to the downfall of the Jewish state and Roman occupation: mutual alienation; self-indulgence; complacency; overconfidence; and neglect of military organization. He sets forth the idea that the very growth of the state carries the seeds of its decadence and destruction and eviscerates its human capital. Greatness and power cause

²³ *Ibn Verga S. Shevet Yehudah*. P. 12–13; *Idem*. *La Vara de Yehudah*. P. 38–39.

states to sink into an inevitable cycle of corruption and decay, just as a tree, as it grows taller, is shaken by the wind and collapses. Likewise, the Jews were led astray by the “wind of pride” in their relations with one another, driven apart, and “separated themselves from their hearts”. Pride spawned hatred, which in turn generated factional struggles, since everyone was vying for power. As a consequence, they brought in foreigners who, after learning their secrets and realizing how vulnerable they were, held them in disrepute and turned against them. Jews were not able to repel their enemies, because when every great nation starts shrinking, its power diminishes, and it turns into a “swarm of mosquitoes”²⁴.

Ibn Verga contends that the Jews, as God’s chosen people, enjoyed divine grace and did not bother to learn military techniques, because they felt they had no need for them. But after they sinned, God turned his back on them, and they suddenly found themselves unprotected. Unlike the Romans and the Greeks, they did not have machines for tearing down walls, nor did they have iron battering rams and elephants with towers. In fact, they had never used or seen them before and did not know how to protect themselves against such threats. Thus, Ibn Verga concludes, factionalist tensions and lack of military power, after the Jews had been abandoned by God, caused the demise of the Jewish polity²⁵.

Although Ibn Verga rejects the idea of active retribution against Israel, he does not entirely dismiss the notion that God abandoned Israel because of its sins, and he does seem to hint at a kind of passive divine retribution. From Ibn Verga’s claim

²⁴ *Ibn Verga S. Shevet Yehudah*. P. 28–29; *Idem*. *La Vara de Yehudah*. P. 60–61. See also the remarks by *Kohn M.* *Jewish Historiography and Jewish Self-Understanding in the Period of [the] Renaissance and Reformation*. PhD diss. University of California. Los Angeles, 1978. P. 31–34.

²⁵ *Ibn Verga S. Shevet Yehudah*. P. 33; *Idem*. *La Vara de Yehudah*. P. 67–68.

that the sins committed by other nations were more grievous than those of Israel it would be possible to infer that he negates the idea that God had special expectations of Israel. He narrates, however, the challenges that confronted Israel as soon as it was deprived of its special status and divine protection. In a sense, Ibn Verga inverts the Machiavellian view that necessity drives virtue and innovation, and he argues that Israel had never experienced necessity and, as a result, neglected the art of war, failed to innovate, and was left unprotected²⁶. Another crucial affinity between Ibn Verga and Machiavelli concerns their approaches to mercenaries. Ibn Verga sees neglect of the military and dependence on foreigners as one of the major causes of the downfall of ancient Israel. Machiavelli too denounces the practice of recruiting mercenaries and criticizes the Church's role in the political divisions and the emasculation of the military ethos in Italy. Thus, he emphasizes the need for a sagacious prince to be in charge of his own army and for a republic to rely on citizen militia, since mercenaries are not to be trusted. Machiavelli adduces examples of cities and states, such as Carthage, Thebes, and Milan, which fell into ruin because they enlisted mercenary forces for their defense and let foreign commanders interfere in their military affairs and ultimately deprive them of their freedom and subdue them. Similarly, after the Church and a few republics took over most of Italy and began to hire foreign soldiers, Italy became susceptible to the influence and attacks of foreign powers, i.e., the French, the Spaniards, and the Swiss²⁷.

Samuel Usque and Machiavelli on Conspiracies and

²⁶ I am grateful to Daniel Stein Kokin for earlier discussions on this point.

²⁷ *Machiavelli N. Il Principe*. Ch. XII; *Idem*. *The Prince*. P. 48–53. Consider also *Discorsi sopra la prima deca di Tito Livio*. I 43; II 20; *Idem*. *Discourses on Livy*. P. 91, 175–177.

the Fall of the Roman Empire

Whereas Ibn Verga's focus is on the decline of ancient Israel, other Jewish writers, such as the Portuguese-Jewish historian Samuel Usque (ca. 1500–1555), discussed the various causes, such as divine intervention, social pathology, and factional disputes, that led to the decline of the Roman Empire. Most details about Usque's life derive from the preface to his *magnum opus*, the *Consolaçã̃m às Tribulaçõ̃es de Israel* (*Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel*)²⁸. After the establishment of the Inquisition in Portugal in 1531, Usque moved to Italy and settled in Ferrara. The *Consolaçã̃m* was published in Ferrara in 1553 (a second edition appeared in

²⁸ On Samuel Usque's life and works, see *Consolations aux tribulations d'Israël, 1553* / Éd. par C. Wilke. Paris, 2014; *Couto P. Witnesses and Victims of Massacre: The Literary Testimony of Samuel Usque and Etty Hillesum // Spirituality in the Writings of Etty Hillesum* / Ed. by K. A. D. Smelik et al. Leiden; Boston, 2010. P. 335–350, esp. 335–342; *Lorenzo Lorenzo E. Poetic and Rabbinical Responses in Consolaçã̃m às Tribulaçõ̃es de Israel*. PhD diss. Indiana University, 2005. P. 7–13; *Guerrini M. T. New Documents on Samuel Usque, the Author of the Consolaçã̃m as tribulações de Israel* // *Sefarad*. Vol. 61. 2001. P. 83–89; *Yerushalmi Y. H. A Jewish Classic in the Portuguese Language // Usque S. Consolação às tribulações de Israel* (= edição de Ferrara, 1553). Lisboa, 1989. Vol. 1. P. 15–123; *Pina Martino J. V. de. Consolação às Tribulações de Israel de Samuel Usque: Alguns dos seus aspectos messiânicos e proféticos. – Uma obra-prima da Língua e das Letras Portuguesas // Usque S. Consolação às Tribulações de Israel...* P. 125–404; *Neuman A. A. Samuel Usque: Marrano Historian of the Sixteenth Century* // *To Doctor R. Essays Here Collected and Published in Honor of the Seventieth Birthday of Dr. A.S.W. Rosenbach, July 22, 1946*. Philadelphia (PA), 1946. P. 180–203, repr. in *Idem. Landmarks and Goals: Historical Studies and Addresses*. Philadelphia (PA), 1953. P. 105–132. Usque's views on divine retribution are discussed in *Friedman J. Samuel Usque's Jewish-Marrano Nicodemite-Christian Apology of Divine Vengeance // The Process of Change in Early Modern Europe* / Ed. by M. Usher Chrisman et al. Athens (OH), 1988. P. 117–134.

Amsterdam in 1599) and was dedicated to Doña Gracia Nasi (ca. 1510–1569), a leading figure of the Portuguese-Jewish diaspora.

Usque's rumination on the succession of empires is to a certain extent derivative of the *Book of Daniel*: all nations and rulers who mistreated the Jews, laid hand on their sacred objects, or seized their land had a notorious fate. For example, a substantial number of Egyptians were drowned in the Red Sea, and those who survived were nearly annihilated by the Babylonians; the Babylonians were conquered by the Persians and the Medes, and all vestiges of their rule were erased; the Persians' name was obliterated by the Macedonians; and the Macedonians were conquered by the Romans²⁹. Usque argues that God consented to these events; otherwise, no power would have been able to take over or destroy ancient Israel³⁰. The Romans suffered a cruel punishment and ended up killing one another. Calamities befell the Pompey, who had entered the Temple with his cavalrymen: he suffered a crushing defeat at the Battle of Pharsalus at the hands of his father-in-law, Julius Caesar, and was murdered on the orders of King Ptolemy of Egypt who delivered his head to Julius Caesar. Since Pompey could not alone bear divine punishment, God's will ordained that the entire Roman army would be present in the Pharsalian Fields, where all those who had inflicted harm

²⁹ *Usque S. Consolaçam ás tribulaçoens de Israel / Com revisão e prefacio de J. Mendes dos Remédios. Coimbra, 1906. Vol. 2. P. xl–xli; Samuel Usque's Consolation for the Tribulations of Israel (Consolaçam ás tribulaçoens de Israel) / Trans. from the Portuguese by M. A. Cohen. Philadelphia (PA), 1977. P. 159.*

³⁰ *Usque S. Consolaçam... P. xli; Samuel Usque's Consolation... P. 161. A similar point is made by Flavius Josephus (ca. 37–100 AD) – for further discussion, see Lange N. R. M. de. Jewish Attitudes to the Roman Empire // Imperialism in the Ancient World / Ed. by P. D. A. Garnsey and C. R. Whitaker. Cambridge, 1978. P. 263.*

upon the Jews perished from hunger and were subjected to fearsome cruelties. The depravity and desperation wrought upon the Romans was astounding; anyone who displayed to the general his father's head impaled upon a spear was considered to have achieved something exceptional³¹.

In addition to divine retribution, the Roman Empire suffered from dissent and intrigues. Usque references a number of prominent Roman political and military figures who committed suicide or fell victim to conspiracy. Cato the Younger, for instance, committed suicide; Caesar, who had won numerous battles and became ruler of almost the entire world, was cruelly murdered in a temple by his associates; Brutus, a great statesman, committed suicide in order not to fall into the hands of Octavian. Cassius asked one of his servants to kill him; Caligula was stabbed thirty-multiple times by his own people³². Due to incessant rivalries and vicious struggles for power, the Roman Empire was left impoverished. It became a barren waste and lost its prowess and grandeur. The Goths avenged all the nations that had suffered under the yoke of Rome: they massacred its population, sacked its wealth, tore down sumptuous buildings and palaces and the statues of the emperors and illustrious generals. For an entire year, Rome was desolate and all remnants of its glorious past were swept away³³.

Usque's references to the conspiracies and conflicts that were a persistent feature of Roman imperial history and brought about the fall of the Roman Empire evoke strong affinities with Chapter XIX of Machiavelli's *Prince*, which

³¹ *Usque S. Consolaçam...* P. xl; Samuel Usque's *Consolation...* P. 159–160.

³² *Usque S. Consolaçam...* P. xl–xli; Samuel Usque's *Consolation...* P. 160–162.

³³ *Usque S. Consolaçam...* P. xlii–xliii; Samuel Usque's *Consolation...* P. 162.

highlights the need for the ruler to avoid contempt and hatred. Like Usque, Machiavelli mentions various plots that led to the downfall and violent death of a number of Roman emperors. Specifically, he remarks that a prince is confronted with two challenges: one that is domestic and is related to his subjects; and the other that is external and posed by foreign powers. He can defend himself from the latter by creating a powerful army and forging good and lasting alliances. Military power can help make good friends and attract allies. As long as the ruler is able to keep external affairs in order, he will be able to guarantee domestic tranquility, unless there is a conspiracy. But even if things outside are in turmoil, he can secure his hold on power by avoiding to incur hatred and seeking to satisfy the people. Thus, a prince should not be concerned with plots if he has earned the loyalty of his people, but he must be cautious and never let his guard down when the people resent and turn against him³⁴.

Machiavelli reviews the lives, actions, and deaths of various Roman emperors and shows why they fell victim to conspiracies and were removed from power or were assassinated. He notes that while other states had to satisfy the interests of the nobles and the insolence of the people, the Roman emperors were faced with an additional challenge, i.e., the cruelty of the army. As a result, many emperors who failed to satisfy both the military and the people were ousted from power. For the people privileged peace and opted for moderate rulers, whereas the army preferred bellicose rulers who were cruel and rapacious. As a consequence, those emperors, who by birth or education did not have great reputation and did not manage to exercise control over both the people and the military were overthrown. Furthermore, most of them, particularly those who came new to the principate, realizing this peril, pri-

³⁴ *Machiavelli N.* The Prince. P. 72–73.

oritized the needs of the army and paid little attention to the people. That was a necessary course of action: a prince cannot avoid being hated by one sector of the populace and must primarily try to avoid incurring the hatred of all the people. And if he cannot achieve this, he must at least refrain from alienating those groups that are the most powerful. Hence, those emperors who were new and needed support, focused on nurturing the loyalty of the military rather than of the people and benefited from the support of the army as long as they were able to retain control over them³⁵.

Machiavelli notes that certain emperors like Commodus, Severus, Caracalla, and Maximinus, displayed extreme cruelty. In order to meet the demands of the army they did not hesitate to inflict every possible kind of harm on the people. All of them, with the exception of Severus, had a tragic end³⁶. For example, Commodus who succeeded Marcus Aurelius, would have been able to maintain his rule if he had emulated the example of his father and sought to satisfy both the military and the people. Instead, he was reckless, and his only concern was to ingratiate himself with the soldiers and make them licentious in order to vent his rapacity toward the people. He also compromised his dignity by often going down into the theatres to fight with gladiators and doing other vile things that were not appropriate for the imperial majesty and incurred the contempt of the military. Being hated by the people and despised by the army, he fell victim to a conspiracy and was assassinated³⁷.

By the time Uque's *Consolaçãm* was published in mid-sixteenth century, Machiavelli's works were enjoying a broad circulation and had become the subject of intense debates in

³⁵ Machiavelli N. *Il Principe*. Ch. XIX; *Idem*. *The Prince*. P. 76.

³⁶ Machiavelli N. *Il Principe*. Ch. XIX; *Idem*. *The Prince*. P. 77–78.

³⁷ Machiavelli N. *Il Principe*. Ch. XIX; *Idem*. *The Prince*. P. 80.

the Iberian context as well. The first Spanish translations of Machiavelli's writings included those of the *Dell'arte della guerra* (Florence, 1521) in Captain Diego de Salazar's adaptation *Tratado de re militari* (1536) and of Juan Lorenzo Ottevantí's Castilian translation of the *Discourses*, which was dedicated to King Philip II of Spain (1527–1598, r. 1556–1598) and was published in 1552, i.e., one year before the *Conso-laçãm*³⁸. But it is also possible that ideas contained in other

³⁸ *De Salazar D.* *Tratado de Re Militari* / Ed. crítica e intr. E. Botella Ordinas. Madrid, 2000; *Discursos de Nicolao Machiaueli: Juan Lorenzo Ottevantí's Spanish Translation of Machiavelli's Discourses on Livy (1552)* / Ed. by K. D. Howard. Tempe (AZ), 2016. The following section is based on *Howard K. D.* *The Reception of Machiavelli in Early Modern Spain*. Woodbridge (Suffolk, UK), 2014. For Machiavelli's Iberian reception, see also: *Howard K. D.* *Fadrique Furió Ceriol's Machiavellian Vocabulary of Contingency // Renaissance Studies*. 26. 2011. P. 641–657; *García E.* *Istorie Fiorentine de Maquiavelo: una primera definición moderna de corrupción // Quaderns d'Italià*. Vol. 15. 2010. P. 117–126; *Maquiavelo y España: Maquiavelismo y antimachiavelismo en la cultura española de los siglos XVI y XVII* / Eds. J. M. Forte y P. López Álvarez. Madrid, 2008; *Arbulu Barturen M. B.* *Recepción y fortuna de Il principe de Maquiavelo en España / La recepción de Maquiavelo y Beccaria en ámbito iberoamericano* / Ed. de M. B. Arbulu Barturen y S. Bagno. Padua, 2006. P. 3–43; *Maravall J. A.* *Maquiavelo y Maquiavelismo en España / Idem.* *Estudios de historia del pensamiento español*, vol. 3: *El siglo del Barroco*. Madrid, 1999. P. 41–72; *Puigdomènech Forcada H.* *Maquiavelo en España: Presencia de sus obras en los siglos XVI y XVII*. Madrid, 1988; *Fernández-Santamaría A.* *Reason of State and Statecraft in Spanish Political Thought, 1595–1640*. Lanham (MD), 1983; *Bleznick D. W.* *Spanish Reaction to Machiavelli in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries // Journal of the History of Ideas*. Vol. 19. 1958. P. 542–550; and, in general, *Butters H. C.* *Conflicting Attitudes towards Machiavelli's Works in Sixteenth-Century Spain, Rome and Florence / Communes and Despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* / Ed. by J. E. Law and B. Paton. Farnham; Burlington (VT), 2010. P. 75–87; *Esposito R.* *Ordine e conflitto: Machiavelli e la letteratura politica del Rinascimento italiano*. Naples, 1990; *Macek J.* *Machiavelli e il machiavellismo*. Florence, 1980; *Gaeta F.* *Appunti sulla fortuna del pensiero politico di Machiavelli in Italia / Idem.* *Il pensiero politico di Machiavelli e la sua fortuna nel mondo*.

works by Machiavelli, especially those published posthumously – the *Discourses* (Rome and Florence, 1531), *The Prince* and the *Florentine Histories* (both Rome, 1532) – circulated in Spain earlier, in fact, even during Machiavelli's lifetime. Knowledge of the Italian language, which was spoken in core territories of the Spanish Empire, and the ability to read Italian works in the original and speak the Tuscan dialect were perceived as signs of education. Italy was a destination for those aspiring to serve in the imperial administration or the Church, or pursue the study the sciences or the arts. There were Spanish delegations and colonies in various Italian cities, such as Naples, Rome, Venice, Milan, and Siena, as well as military officials who could have been receptive to Machiavelli's ideas about warfare. Spain saw an influx of Italian men of letters, artists, and merchants, many of whom were associated with the court and played a major role in Spain's intellectual, political, and economic life. Traders of books and booksellers were particularly instrumental in the dissemination of works produced in Italy and the reception of Italian political thought³⁹.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that Renaissance Jewish writings on the decline of ancient Israel and of the Roman Empire encapsulate valuable insights into the origins, symptoms, and effects of political and social conflict. Although existing evidence about the reception of Machiavelli's political

Florence, 1972. P. 21–36; *Procacci G.* Machiavelli nella cultura europea dell'età moderna. Rome; Bari, 1995; *Idem.* Studi sulla fortuna del Machiavelli. Rome, 1965; *De Mattei R.* Dal premachiavellismo all'antimachiavellismo. Florence, 1969.

³⁹ *Puigdomènech Forcada H.* Maquiavelo en España... P. 16–18, 82–86.

thought in the Jewish tradition derives primarily from late sixteenth-century texts, my analysis demonstrated points of intersection between his ideas and those of Solomon ibn Verga about, e.g., the importance of military power as one of the foundations of political success. Moreover, I argued that the interpretation of episodes from the history of ancient Rome in Machiavelli's and Samuel Usque's works point to striking similarities between their views on the role of factions, conspiracies, the downfall and death of a number of Roman political and military leaders, and the power struggles that led to the fall of the Roman Empire. Previous scholarship on medieval and Renaissance approaches to civil discord has focused on Christian/Latin political theorists and historians, such as Marsilius of Padua, Leonardo Bruni, and Niccolò Machiavelli; the works discussed in this chapter open up new perspectives on the various attempts to identify the causes of factional strife in the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance through the prism of different historical experiences but very similar concerns.