

Dedicatory Letter

Niccolò Machiavelli to the Magnificent Lorenzo de' Medici:

It is customary most of the time for those who desire to acquire favor¹ with a Prince to come to meet him with things that they care most for among their own or with things that they see please him most. Thus, one sees them² many times being presented with horses, arms, cloth of gold, precious stones and similar ornaments worthy of their greatness. Thus, since I desire to offer myself to your Magnificence³ with some testimony of my homage⁴ to you, I have found nothing in my belongings that I care so much for and esteem so greatly as the knowledge of the actions of great men, learned by me from long experience with modern things and a continuous reading of ancient ones. Having thought out and examined these things with great diligence for a long time, and now reduced them to one small volume, I send it to your Magnificence.

And although I judge this work undeserving of your presence, yet I have much confidence that through your humanity it may be accepted, considering that no greater gift could be made by me than to give you the capacity to be able to understand in a very short time all that I have learned

1. lit.: acquire grace. "Acquire" is an economic term that NM often uses to refer to noneconomic gain, especially conquest—here, to the favor or grace that would seem to be in the gift of a prince.

2. NM switches from a singular to the plural, a device he uses frequently.

3. Lorenzo de' Medici (1492–1519), grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1449–92); he became duke of Urbino in 1516. NM had at first intended to dedicate *The Prince* to Giuliano de' Medici, son of Lorenzo the Magnificent and duke of Nemours, who died in 1516. See NM's letter to Vettori of December 10, 1513, printed in the Appendix.

4. *servitù*, a feudal term of submission elsewhere to be translated as "servitude."

and understood in so many years and with so many hardships and dangers for myself. I have not ornamented this work, nor filled it with fulsome phrases nor with pompous and magnificent words, nor with any blandishment or superfluous ornament whatever, with which it is customary for many to describe and adorn their things. For I wanted it either not to be honored for anything or to please solely for the variety of the matter and the gravity of the subject. Nor do I want it to be reputed presumption if a man from a low and mean state dares to discuss and give rules for the governments of princes. For just as those who sketch landscapes place themselves down in the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places and to consider the nature of low places place themselves high atop mountains, similarly, to know well the nature of peoples one needs to be prince, and to know well the nature of princes one needs to be of the people.

Therefore, your Magnificence, take this small gift in the spirit⁵ with which I send it. If your Magnificence considers and reads it diligently, you will learn from it my extreme desire that you arrive at the greatness that fortune and your other qualities promise you. And if your Magnificence will at some time turn your eyes from the summit of your height to these low places, you will learn how undeservedly I endure a great and continuous malignity of fortune.

5. *animo* refers to the "spirit" with which human beings defend themselves, never to a capacity for self-detachment (*anima*, "soul," does not occur in *The Prince*). It can also mean "mind" in the sense of "intent," but not in the sense of "intellect."

OF PRINCIPALITIES



How Many Are the Kinds of Principalities and in What Modes They Are Acquired¹

All states,² all dominions that have held and do hold empire over men have been and are either republics or principalities. The principalities are either hereditary, in which the bloodline³ of their lord has been their prince for a long time, or they are new. The new ones are either altogether new, as was Milan to Francesco Sforza,⁴ or they are like members added to the hereditary state of the prince who acquires them, as is the kingdom of Naples to the king of Spain.⁵

1. Chapter headings of *The Prince* are in Latin, the language of traditional learning and of the Church.

2. *stato* means both status (see the Dedicatory Letter) and state, as today, but the meanings are more closely connected; *stato* is the status of a person or a group while dominating someone else. Although NM sometimes speaks of "the state," he always means someone's state and does not refer to an impersonal state.

3. lit.: blood.

4. Francesco Sforza (1401–66), the mercenary captain, acquired Milan by betraying and overthrowing the Ambrosian Republic of Milan in 1450. In 1447 he had laid claim to Milan with a certain respect for its previous bloodline, through his marriage to Bianca, daughter of Filippo Maria Visconti, then duke of Milan. See NM's account in *Florentine Histories*, V 13, VI 13, 17–22.

5. Ferdinand the Catholic, after agreeing by treaty in 1500 to share the kingdom of Naples with Louis XII of France, drove out the French in 1504 and joined that kingdom to Spain.

Dominions so acquired are either accustomed to living under a prince or used to being free; and they are acquired either with the arms of others or with one's own, either by fortune or by virtue.⁶

6. In this translation *virtù* is consistently rendered "virtue."



Of Hereditary Principalities

I shall leave out reasoning on republics because I have reasoned on them at length another time.¹ I shall address myself only to the principality, and shall proceed by weaving together the threads mentioned above; and I shall debate how these principalities may be governed and maintained.

I say, then, that in hereditary states accustomed to the bloodline² of their prince the difficulties in maintaining them are much less than in new states because it is enough only not to depart from the order of his ancestors, and then to temporize in the face of accidents. In this way, if such a prince is of ordinary industry,³ he will always main-

1. A reference to NM's other chief work, the *Discourses on Livy*, in which he reasons with the use of materials from Livy's history of the Roman republic, among other sources. NM does in fact discuss republics in *The Prince* (e.g., on "the Romans," Chapter 3 below), but not "at length."

2. lit.: blood.

3. *industria* for NM means diligence combined with skill or adroitness which is not necessarily visible.

tain himself in his state unless there is an extraordinary and excessive force which deprives him of it; and should he be deprived of it, if any mishap whatever befalls the occupier, he reacquires it.

We have in Italy, for example, the duke of Ferrara, who, for no other cause than that his line was ancient in that dominion, did not succumb to the attacks of the Venetians in '84, nor to those of Pope Julius in '10.⁴ For the natural prince has less cause and less necessity to offend;⁵ hence it is fitting that he be more loved. And if extraordinary vices do not make him hated, it is reasonable that he will naturally have the good will of his own. In the antiquity and continuity of the dominion the memories and causes of innovations are eliminated; for one change always leaves a dentation⁶ for the building of another.

- the necessity
to offend
- ordinary
vices
are OK.

4. NM speaks of two dukes of Ferrara as if they were one: Ercole d'Este (1431-1505) and his son Alfonso d'Este (1476-1534). Ercole was defeated by the Venetians in 1484, and Alfonso was temporarily deprived of his principality by Pope Julius in 1510.

5. *Offendere* is not merely to slight, but to harm so as to cause offense.

6. A dentation is a toothed wall left on the side of a building so that another building may be attached to it. NM's metaphor compares the hereditary, or "natural," principality to a row of houses continually added to but never finished and, as it were, not begun from the beginning.



Of Mixed Principalities

But the difficulties reside in the new principality. First, if it is not altogether new but like an added member (so that taken as a whole it can be called almost mixed), its instability arises in the first place from a natural difficulty that

exists in all new principalities. This is¹ that men willingly change their lords in the belief that they will fare better: this belief makes them take up arms against him, in which they are deceived because they see later by experience that they have done worse. That follows from another natural and ordinary necessity which requires that one must always offend those over whom he becomes a new prince, both with men-at-arms and with infinite other injuries that the new acquisition brings in its wake. So you have as enemies all those whom you have offended in seizing that principality, and you cannot keep as friends those who have put you there because you cannot satisfy them in the mode they had presumed and because you cannot use strong medicines against them, since you are obligated to them. For even though one may have the strongest of armies, he always needs the support of the inhabitants of a province² in order to enter it. Through these causes Louis XII of France quickly occupied Milan, and quickly lost it; and Ludovico's own forces were enough to take it from him the first time.³ For those people which had opened the gates to him, finding themselves deceived in their opinion and in that future good they had presumed for themselves, were unable to tolerate the vexations of the new prince.

It is indeed true that when countries that have rebelled are later acquired for the second time, they are lost with more difficulty, because the lord, seizing the opportunity offered by the rebellion, is less hesitant⁴ to secure himself by

1. lit.: these are.

2. "Province" refers to a country or region that may be larger or smaller than a "state."

3. Ludovico Sforza, il Moro, was duke of Milan from 1494 until Milan was seized from him in September 1499 by Louis XII. He recaptured Milan in February 1500 but was betrayed by his Swiss mercenaries at Novara, when the French acquired it in April "for the second time." The French then lost Milan in 1512 after the battle of Ravenna to the Holy League led by Pope Julius II, "the whole world."

4. *rispettivo* is also translated as "cautious"; see especially Chapter 25.

natural is the
necessity to
offend

punishing offenders, exposing suspects, and providing for himself in the weakest spots. So it was that, if one Duke Ludovico stirring up a commotion at the borders was enough to make France lose Milan the first time, to make him then lose it the second time, the whole world had to be against him, and his armies eliminated or chased from Italy: this arises from the causes given above. Nonetheless, both the first and the second times it was taken from him.

The universal causes of the first have been discussed; it remains now to say what were the causes of the second, and to see what remedies there were to him, which someone in his situation could use so as to maintain himself better in his acquisition than France did. Now I say, that such states which, when acquired, are added to an ancient state of him who acquires them, are either of the same province and same language, or not. When they are, they may be held with great ease, especially if they are not used to living free; and to possess them securely it is enough to have eliminated the line of the prince whose dominions they were. For when their old conditions are maintained for them in other things and there is no disparity of customs, men live quietly—as it may be seen that Burgundy, Brittany, Gascony, and Normandy, which have been with France for so long a time, have done;⁵ and although there may be some disparity of language, nonetheless the customs are similar, and they can easily bear with one another. And whoever acquires them, if he wants to hold them, must have two concerns: one, that the bloodline of their ancient prince be eliminated; the other, not to alter either their laws or their taxes: so that in a very short time it becomes one whole body with their ancient principality.

But when one acquires states in a province disparate in language, customs, and orders, here are the difficulties, and here one needs to have great fortune and great industry to

5. Burgundy since 1477, Brittany 1491, Gascony 1453, and Normandy 1204.

hold them; and one of the greatest and quickest remedies would be for whoever acquires it to go there to live in person. This would make that possession more secure and more lasting, as the Turk has done in Greece. Despite all the other orders observed by him so as to hold that state, if he had not gone there to live, it would not have been possible for him to hold it. For if you stay there, disorders may be seen as they arise, and you can soon remedy them; if you are not there, disorders become understood when they are great and there is no longer a remedy. Besides this, the province is not despoiled by your officials; the subjects are satisfied with ready access to the prince, so that they have more cause to love him if they want to be good and, if they want to be otherwise, more cause to fear him. Whatever outsider might want to attack that state has more hesitation in doing so; hence, when one lives in it, one can lose it with the greatest difficulty.

The other, better remedy is to send colonies that are, as it were, fetters of that state, to one or two places, because it is necessary either to do this or to hold them with many men-at-arms and infantry. One does not spend much on colonies, and without expense of one's own, or with little, one may send them and hold them; and one offends only those from whom one takes fields and houses in order to give them to new inhabitants—who are a very small part of that state. And those whom he offends, since they remain dispersed and poor, can never harm him, while all the others remain on the one hand unhurt, and for this they should be quiet; on the other, they are afraid to err from fear that what happened to the despoiled might happen to them. I conclude that such colonies are not costly, are more faithful, and less offensive; and those who are offended can do no harm, since they are poor and dispersed as was said. For this has to be noted: that men should either be caressed or eliminated, because they avenge themselves for slight offenses but cannot do so for grave ones; so the offense one does to a

man should be such that one does not fear revenge for it. But when one holds a state with men-at-arms in place of colonies, one spends much more since one has to consume all the income of that state in guarding it. So the acquisition turns to loss, and one offends much more because one harms the whole state as one's army moves around for lodgings. Everyone feels this hardship, and each becomes one's enemy: and these are enemies that can harm one since they remain, though defeated, in their homes. From every side, therefore, keeping guard in this way is as useless as keeping guard by means of colonies is useful.

Whoever is in a province that is disparate, as was said, should also make himself head and defender of the neighboring lesser powers, and contrive to weaken the powerful in that province and to take care that through some accident a foreigner as powerful as he does not enter there. And it will always turn out that a foreigner will be brought in by those in the province who are discontent either because of too much ambition or out of fear, as once the Aetolians were seen to bring the Romans into Greece; and in every other province they entered, they were brought in by its inhabitants. And the order of things is such that as soon as a powerful foreigner enters a province, all those in it who are less powerful adhere to him, moved by the envy they have against whoever has held power over them. So with respect to these lesser powers, he has no trouble in gaining them, because all together they quickly and willingly make one mass with the state that he has acquired there. He has only to worry that these lesser powers may get too much force and too much authority; and with his forces and their support he can easily put down those who are powerful, so as to remain arbiter of that province in everything. And whoever does not conduct this policy well will soon lose what he has acquired, and while he holds it, will have infinite difficulties and vexations within it.

The Romans observed these policies well in the

provinces they took. They sent out colonies, indulged the lesser powers without increasing their power, put down the powerful, and did not allow foreign powers to gain reputation there. And I want the province of Greece alone to suffice as an example. The Achaeans and the Aetolians were indulged by the Romans; the kingdom of the Macedonians was brought down and Antiochus was chased out. Nor did the merits of the Achaeans or those of the Aetolians make the Romans permit them to increase any state of theirs; nor did the persuasions of Philip ever induce them to be his friends without putting him down; nor could the power of Antiochus make them consent to his holding any state in that province. For the Romans did in these cases what all wise princes should do: they not only have to have regard for present troubles⁶ but also for future ones, and they have to avoid these with all their industry because, when one foresees from afar, one can easily find a remedy for them but when you wait until they come close to you, the medicine is not in time because the disease has become incurable. And it happens with this as the physicians say of consumption, that in the beginning of the illness it is easy to cure and difficult to recognize, but in the progress of time, when it has not been recognized and treated in the beginning, it becomes easy to recognize and difficult to cure. So it happens in affairs of state, because when one recognizes from afar the evils that arise in a state (which is not given but to one who is prudent), they are soon healed; but when they are left to grow because they were not recognized, to the point that everyone recognizes them, there is no longer any remedy for them.

Thus, the Romans, seeing inconveniences from afar, always found remedies for them and never allowed them to continue so as to escape a war, because they knew that war may not be avoided but is deferred to the advantage of

6. lit.: scandals.

others. So they decided to make war with Philip and Antiochus in Greece in order not to have to do so in Italy; and they could have avoided both one and the other for a time, but they did not want to. Nor did that saying ever please them which is every day in the mouths of the wise men of our times—to enjoy the benefit of time—but rather, they enjoyed the benefit of their virtue and prudence. For time sweeps everything before it and can bring with it good as well as evil and evil as well as good.

But let us return to France and examine whether he has done any of the things spoken of. I will speak of Louis and not of Charles,⁷ as the steps of the former, because he held his possession in Italy longer, may be seen better. And you⁸ will see that he did the contrary of the things that should be done to hold a state in a disparate province.

King Louis was brought into Italy by the ambition of the Venetians, who wanted to gain half the state of Lombardy for themselves by his coming. I do not want to blame the course adopted by the king; for since he wanted to begin by gaining a foothold in Italy, and having no friends in this province, indeed, having all doors closed to him because of the conduct of King Charles, he was forced to take whatever friendships he could get. And having firmly adopted this course he would have succeeded if in managing other things he had not made some error. Thus, when he had acquired Lombardy, the king regained quickly the reputation that Charles had taken from him: Genoa yielded, and the Florentines became his friends; the marquis of Mantua, duke of Ferrara, Bentivoglio, Madonna of Forlì, the lords of Faenza, of Pesaro, of Rimini, of Camerino, of Piombino, the Luccans, Pisans, and Sienese—everyone came to meet him so as to become his friend. And then the Venetians

7. Of Louis XII, not of Charles VIII; the latter's invasion of Italy in September 1494 lasted only until October 1495.

8. The formal or plural you.