FRANCESCO GUICCIARDINI AND PHILIPPE DE COMYNES

Tradition and Innovation

In

Early Modern Historiography

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TO MY FAMILY, AND TO NANCY
INTRODUCTION

The late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries were periods of great change in both France and Italy. The French kingdom emerged from the Hundred Years' War as a fragmented polity; the kings of France were confronted with disloyalty and frequent insurrections on the part of the French nobility. The reigns of Louis XI (1461-1483) and Charles VIII (1483-1498), however, saw the decline of the great nobles of France and the consolidation of France into a unified nation-state under the authority of the king. Italy, too, underwent important changes in this period. The second half of the fifteenth century was a period of relative tranquillity in Italy. Though the peninsula was not without struggle among the kingdom of Naples, the duchy of Milan, the republics of Florence and Venice, and the papal states, its five major principalities, these powers were in a rough state of balance. Italians of the quattrocento stressed the differences between their own institutions and those of ultramontane Europe. Convinced of their cultural and political superiority, they operated in a political sphere which they regarded as largely independent of the rest of Europe. The French invasion of Italy in 1494, made possible in part by the consolidation of the French monarchy, was the beginning of a generation of decline for the Italian powers. At this time, a major aspect of the struggle between Valois France and the Habsburg Empire was fought on Italian soil. The end of this conflict left
most of Italy in the hands of foreign rulers by the early sixteenth century.

An investigation of French and Florentine historiography reveals their development in light of these political changes. The tradition of French vernacular historiography, which began around 1200, reflected for almost three centuries the French feudal mentality, celebrating chivalry and the knightly heroics of noble protagonists. This tradition persisted almost until the end of the fourteenth century. The work of Philippe de Commynes, an adviser to Louis XI and Charles VIII, breaks free from the moribund conceptions of previous French historiography. Commynes was a witness to the decline of the French nobility and the rise of the unified state, and his account of the reign of Louis XI and of Charles VIII's expedition to Italy accurately reflects French politics in his day. He discusses the strengths and weaknesses of French rulers and seeks to analyze causally the events he records in a manner in which his predecessors, constrained by their idealistic attachment to the chivalric ideal, could never have done.

Florentine historiography, from the early fourteenth century to the end of the foreign invasions of Italy, also reflected changes in political affairs. The rise of the Florentine polity in the fourteenth century was accompanied by a self-conscious local historiography. In the fifteenth century, Florentine thought was dominated by humanistic classical learning, manifested in Florentine historiography by the celebration of Florence as the heir of Republican Rome
and by the imitation of classical historical forms. The
invasions of Italy sparked an interest in immediate political
cconcerns among Florentine thinkers, and in the work of Niccolò
Machiavelli politics and history are almost inseparable.
Francesco Guicciardini, an active political figure during this
period, attempted after Italy's foreign domination was con­
ferred to account for these events. In his History of Italy
he abandons the political urgency of the work of his prede­
cessors and the humanists' celebration of their native city
or a particular polity. The Italian powers, after all, had
failed to stem the tide of successive foreign invasions.
Guicciardini seeks a framework for the analysis of the loss of
Italian liberty, but can find none. His history is instead
an investigation of motivations and causes, a work which
finds no positive explanation for thirty years of war, princely
folly, and the subjection of Italy to the yoke of foreign rule.

This paper will assess each author by investigating
the historiographical tradition out of which he emerged. With
this in mind, we will then consider Guicciardini and Commynes
in the light of their continuities with and departures from
the Florentine and French traditions. Finally, the two
historians will be compared in terms of their perceptions
of causation and their schemes of explanation in their accounts
of the first French invasion of Italy in 1494.
CHAPTER I

THE CHANGING FACES OF FRANCE AND ITALY

The Consolidation of the French Monarchy
And the Origins of the 1494 Invasion

During the reign of Louis XI (1461-1483) the de facto authority of the king of France was extended to encompass most of modern France. The reign of his father, Charles VII (1422-1461), had seen the end of the Hundred Years' War and the beginnings of royal consolidation, but it was Louis' reign which saw the monarchy's most notable gains. The king was threatened by the League of the Public Weal, a group of powerful nobles allied against him in defense of the feudal status quo. Their failure to defeat him at the Battle of Montlhéry, in 1465, was a great boost for the king in his efforts to consolidate control of his realm. The death in the 1477 Battle of Nancy of Duke Charles the Bold of Burgundy, the king's most powerful and vexing vassal, allowed Louis to accomplish the "gathering in" of his kingdom. Charles' daughter and heiress, Mary of Burgundy, had neither the men nor the money to oppose the king's determination to annex to the royal domain all of the late duke's French possessions. Upon her death in 1482 it was left to her husband, Austrian Archduke (and later Holy Roman Emperor) Maximilan Habsburg, to sign the Peace of Arras with Louis. By the terms of this treaty, Louis acquired Burgundy proper,
Flemish and Walloon Flanders, Picardy, several Somme towns and the Boulonnais region. Portions of the Low Countries, however, remained in Habsburg hands. By virtue of the death of Duke René of Anjou in 1480 and his son, the Count of Maine, in 1481, the domains of the crown had been further enriched by the duchies of Anjou and Bar and the counties of Maine, Provence, Marseilles and Toulon. By the time of his death in 1483, Louis was well on his way to absorbing these into the administrative jurisdiction of the French crown. The annexation of the duchy of Brittany was the one prize which had eluded the "spider-king;" it would be accomplished by his son Charles VIII. Nonetheless, Louis XI had made unprecedented gains in making himself master of all of France.

The death of Louis was expected by many to signal the end of the consolidation of the French monarchy and the French royal domain. At his accession, Charles VIII was but thirteen years of age and was thought by most people, including his father, to be unfit to rule. In their perception of the young king's weakness, "the commons dreamed of taxes 'beaten down;' the clergy hoped to manage their own affairs as in the palmy days of the Gallican church; the nobles, happiest of all, envisioned a return to the good old feudal universe." Foreseeing these challenges to his son's authority, Louis had named his daughter Anne and her husband, Peter of Beaujeu, as regents for Charles VIII. They proved very capable indeed of overcoming the threats to the monarchy which arose when in 1484, the Estates-General of the realm met and deliberated on nothing less than "the making of a new world." However, their efforts
to effect change in the administration of the kingdom were frustrated by the various members' special interests and when the Estates separated, Anne of Beaujeu resumed without difficulty the government of France, keeping it until 1491.  

Throughout this period, though, Duke Louis of Orléans was a rival to her authority. He undertook a series of ventures against the French regents, forming alliances with Henry VII of England, King Ferdinand of Aragon, and Emperor Maximilian. He sought refuge in Brittany, where Duke Francis was in revolt against the French kingdom. In 1488, the armies of Anne of Beaujeu routed the Breton army and took Louis of Orléans prisoner. Anne increased her power and reputation when in the same year her brother-in-law, Duke John of Bourbon, died, leaving his duchy to Anne's husband and co-regent. Anne steadfastly refused to release Louis from his imprisonment. In 1491, however, after the death of Duke Francis of Brittany had attenuated the threat of a Breton invasion, Charles VIII, now in control of the kingdom, released his cousin Louis from prison. Peter of Bourbon and Louis of Orléans then took joint vows "to hold one another once more in perpetual affection...and to loyally serve King Charles."  

The greatest act that remained to be accomplished in the consolidation of the French nation was the union of Brittany to France. The young Duchess Anne of Brittany, who had entertained the proposals of French, English and German suitors, agreed after extensive negotiations to marry the French king. The terms of this "brilliant and difficult" marriage, concluded in December of 1491, included a clause which gave Charles'
successors her rights to the duchy of Brittany.\textsuperscript{9}

Charles' next major concern transcended the boundaries of the French royal domain. The Italian kingdom of Naples, once the possession of the French house of Anjou, had for half a century been in the hands of a cadet branch of the royal house of Aragon. Charles' thoughts were now directed to the reassertion of the French claim to the Neapolitan throne.

The French claim to the kingdom of Naples dated back to 1261. Charles of Anjou was invited in that year by Pope Urban IV to occupy the throne of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, a papal fief, when its last Hohenstaufen occupant died and his line was extinguished. The royal house of Aragon also had a claim to the throne, established in 1209 when the sister of the Aragonese king had married the Hohenstaufen Emperor Frederick II. The 1282 War of the Sicilian Vespers, a revolt against Angevin rule, resulted in the division of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. Peter III of Aragon assumed control of Sicily, while Angevin rule over the kingdom of Naples continued. Control of the kingdom by the house of Anjou was essentially unchallenged until the late fourteenth century, when a rival branch of the Angevin line and the royal family of Aragon began to assert their claims to the Neapolitan throne. The Angevin queen of Naples, Joanna II, appealed to the French for aid in 1414, but the French, preoccupied with the Hundred Years' War, were unable to assist her. In 1442, after a protracted civil war Alfonso V, of a cadet line of the Aragonese royal family, was invested with the Neapolitan crown by Pope Eugenius IV.\textsuperscript{10}

King Alfonso of Naples rapidly consolidated his control of
his new kingdom, and was soon accepted by Italian rulers as a part of the Italian political scene. He was a signatory twelve years later to the Peace of Lodi, ratified by all five major Italian powers. This treaty ended a period of extended warfare in northern Italy, which primarily had entailed Venetian and Florentine border disputes with the Visconti (and, after 1450, Sforza) dukes of Milan, but in which Naples and the papacy had been involved as well. While there were disputes among the Italian powers in the aftermath of Lodi, the 1454 pact had left them in a state of approximate balance which they all took great pains to preserve. The Triple Alliance of 1480 among Florence, Milan and Naples and the cool diplomacy of Lorenzo de' Medici contributed to the preservation of Italian peace. The death of Lorenzo in 1492 and the specter of invasion by Charles VIII of France, however, contributed to the breakdown of the Italian state-system and the seemingly endless devastating wars which ensued.  

In 1493 a conflict arose between Ludovico Sforza, the regent of Milan's Duke Giangaleazzo and the nephew of Ludovico, and King Ferrante of Naples. Giangaleazzo's wife, Isabella of Aragon, was the daughter of Alfonso of Calabria, son of the Neapolitan king. Isabella complained to her father that Ludovico was depriving her husband of his right to govern the duchy. Alfonso saw an opportunity to assert the tenuous Aragonese claim to the duchy of Milan, obtained in the highly disputed testament of the duchy by its last Visconti duke to the Aragonese house of Naples. In April of 1493, after attempts to reconcile Alfonso and Ludovico failed, Ludovico threatened
to invite Charles VIII to make good his claim to the throne of Naples. Ludovico had at one time claimed to be able to move the rulers of Europe "like pieces on a chessboard," and thought that Charles would not accept his invitation.

Ludovico and the rest of Italy's rulers were accustomed to the Italians' traditional conception of their political affairs operating independently of the powers beyond the Alps. The consolidation of France, the Holy Roman Empire and Spain under single rulers, however, made possible the invasions of Italy by these powers. Previously, it had been cadet branches of Europe's royal houses which had vied for control of parts of Italy; the late fifteenth century saw these concerns taken up by kings. The Aragonese had long been interested in Italian affairs through their involvement in Naples. An Imperial claim to the duchy of Milan had been established through a marriage between the Habsburg and Sforza families. The marriage of the last Visconti heiress to the Milanese duchy to the Duke of Orléans in the 1440's had given the French a second dynastic claim in Italy. This latter claim would be asserted, to no avail, by Louis of Orléans during Charles VII's Italian expedition, but the duke was to make good this claim when he was crowned King Louis XII upon the death of Charles in 1498. Beyond his invitation by Ludovico Sforza to invade Italy, Charles VIII himself desired this expedition. Much of the Flemish and Burgundian territory annexed by his father had been retaken by the Empire in the 1480's, leading to a feeling of encirclement by the growing territories of the Habsburgs. Moreover, the duchy of Anjou had become a royal territory during
the reign of Louis XI. Thus it was no longer a cadet branch of the French royal family which held France's claim to the Neapolitan throne. The invitation by Ludovico to invade Naples was the occasion for the urging of Charles by his "shallow favorites" to "assert the glory of his arms." The king's older advisers (including Philippe de Commynes), who had served his more prudent father, argued that this expedition would not serve French interests. He did not heed their advice, however, and decided to accept the invitation extended to him by Ludovico Sforza.

The Subjection of Italy to Foreign Domination

Charles VIII crossed the Alps in the fall of 1494. Milan had been the power which had invited him to come to Italy; thus he encountered no opposition while crossing Milanese territory. When he reached Tuscany, however, Florentine fortresses opposed his army's progress. Piero de' Medici, who had inherited control of Florence upon his father's death in 1492, had initially sided with Naples in the ensuing conflict, but was forced to reconsider this position when Charles' army threatened Florentine dominions. Following the example of his father, who had journeyed to Naples to negotiate with King Ferrante when the two powers had been at war in 1478, Piero left Florence to meet the French king. Piero, though, was not blessed with his father's diplomatic skill, and surrendered most of Florence's North Tuscan possessions to Charles. Piero also enjoyed little of the support within Florence that his father had possessed, as his failure to support the traditional Florentine alliance with France
had led to the expulsion from France and financial ruin of many Florentine merchants. Outraged by Piero's surrender of Florentine territory, a large coalition of Florence's citizens ousted Piero from power. A new, broadly based republic was formed. King Charles entered Florence in November, 1494 as the man whom the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola had predicted would be sent by God to regenerate Italian politics and the Church. Florentine leaders signed a treaty recognizing Charles as the protector of Florentine liberties, and Florence remained essentially a vassal of the French crown until 1512, when the French were driven out of Italy. Charles' formidable army passed through the papal states without opposition, and in February of 1495 entered the kingdom of Naples. Alfonso, now king, resigned the crown hoping that his more popular son Ferrantino would be able to rally support. The young king, however, was unable to stay the French advance. Charles VIII had won the kingdom of Naples without fighting a single battle, but it would prove more difficult to hold than to win.16

King Ferdinand of Aragon was determined to overthrow French rule in Naples and make good on the long-standing Aragonese claim to the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies. He was instrumental in the organization of the League of Venice in March, 1495. The league was joined by the Pope Alexander VI, Emperor Maximilian, Ludovico Sforza, and the Venetian republic. Its purpose was to provide for the mutual defense of their states against aggression. Formally, it resembled previous treaties among Italian powers, but the inclusion of Spain and the Empire pointed to the fact that Italians no longer controlled
Charles' rule, which involved the installation of his favorites in the Neapolitan bureaucracy, proved extremely unpopular and difficult to maintain. As he was leaving Italy in July of 1495, his armies met those of the League at the Battle of Fornovo, in which both sides suffered heavily. It was not so much a French victory as it was a loss for the League, which in failing to rout the French army had allowed it to return safely to France. Meanwhile, the French occupants of Naples slowly lost control of the kingdom, and by 1496 Ferrantino had regained control of his capital. Charles VIII planned another expedition, but his death in 1498 ended his dream of further conquest.

Charles' successor to the French throne was Louis of Orléans, who became King Louis XII. He, like Charles, coveted the Neapolitan crown but, as mentioned earlier, his aspirations included the duchy of Milan as well. Thus he assumed, in addition to his title of King of France, the titles of King of Naples and Duke of Milan. During the first French invasion he had unsuccessfully attempted to make good his Milanese claim by pressing King Charles to make war upon Milan while the French army was retreating from Naples, and it continued to be his foremost thought. In addition to his own political interest Louis was urged to invade Italy by his chief adviser, the Archbishop of Rouen George of Amboise, who aspired not only to a cardinalate but to the papacy itself.

The reaction of the Italian powers to Louis' plans set the tone of Italian politics for the duration of the period.
of the ultramontane invasions, and indicates the demoralizing effect which Charles' invasion had had upon the Italian powers. Their chief thought was not opposition to Louis, but the use of his intervention to serve their individual interests. Pope Alexander VI hoped that the invasion of Milan would direct the attention of that state away from its southern border and would allow his son Cesare Borgia to gain control of the Romagna at the expense of Milan. Venice, which since Lodi had hoped only to keep its western border intact and focus its attention on its maritime enterprises, now hoped to expand westward. The Venetian government chose to support Louis when he offered Venice several Milanese towns in exchange for its support. Florence, which in 1495 had refused to join the League of Venice and instead aided the French, again supported the French cause, hoping for now for French aid in recovering Pisa, liberated from Florentine domination by Charles VIII in 1494. All but the recently crowned King Federigo of Naples, whose throne Louis XII claimed, and some of the petty despots of the Romagna, who feared Cesare Borgia, supported the French against Milan. Ludovico Sforza's incompetent generals lost garrison after garrison, and finally Milan itself. Sforza fled to the Austrian Tyrol with his two sons Massimiliano and Francesco, under the protection of Emperor Maximilian. A brief attempt by Ludovico to regain power failed and the Battle of Novara in 1500 ended the independent Sforza dynasty in Milan. Ludovico spent the remainder of his life in a French prison.

Louis XII had already made plans for the kingdom of Naples. After prolonged negotiation with Ferdinand of Aragon,
it was agreed by the two kings in the treaty of Granada of November, 1500, that they would partition the Neapolitan kingdom, with the French controlling the northern half, including Naples itself, and Spain controlling the southern half and the island of Sicily. The unfortunate King Federigo of Naples, betrayed by his kinsman Ferdinand, agreed to support Louis in his future undertakings, and was given the duchy of Anjou in return. Disputes among the French and Spanish allies led to the expulsion of the French from Naples in 1504. The kingdom had been reunited under Spanish domination.

Louis XII's Italian expedition had greatly benefited the papacy. Cesare Borgia had made himself master of the Romagna. His plans for domination of Tuscany were thwarted by the Florentine alliance with France, and he considered abandoning his French alliance for Spain. His military career ended abruptly, though, upon his father's death in 1503. Alexander was succeeded by Pope Pius III, who reigned briefly and died. His successor, Julius II, planned to recover all of the states of the Church and then lead an Italian confederation to drive all foreigners from Italy and reassert Italian political independence. His greatest prize was the city of Bologna, which had eluded Cesare Borgia but which was taken by Julius II in 1506. The pattern of alliance on the Italian peninsula, however, was drastically altered when the Empire became involved anew in Italian affairs.

Emperor Maximilian Habsburg had been growing increasingly anxious about Louis XII's desire to secure the papacy for George of Amboise, and wanted to shore up his position in
Italian affairs. In 1507 he announced his intention to travel to Rome to receive the imperial investiture from Julius II, although his claim to the duchy of Milan could not have been absent from his thinking. The Venetian government, seeking to limit the role of foreign powers in Italy, had announced its decision to deny Maximilian passage through Venice's terra firma, but he went ahead with his plan to travel to Rome, by force of arms if necessary. In 1508 his forces were defeated by armies in the employ of Venice, and the Venetian government gained control of several hitherto Habsburg cities. Julius II, irked by recent Venetian inroads against papal territories, now perceived the greatest threat to Italian security to be Venetian expansion. In 1508 he organized the League of Cambrai, which included himself, Louis XII, the Empire, Mantua and Ferrara. That Julius included the French in this league is problematic, since his long-term goal was the expulsion of Louis XII from Italy. Julius felt, though, that it was necessary to end Venice's lust for conquest before such a concerted Italian effort could be made. The forces of the League overwhelmed the Venetian army, and in 1509, at the Battle of Agnadello, Venice lost virtually all of her terra firma possessions.

Gradually, as Venice's former subject cities realized that Venetian overlordship had been preferable to what had followed, they returned to the fold. Julius II, having recovered his possessions in the Romagna, abandoned the League of Cambrai and formed the Holy League against France. The decisive battle of this campaign was the battle of Ravenna, fought in 1512, between the forces of the Holy League and the French army.
It was a victory for the French, for they retained control of Milan, but their victory was made very costly by the death of their brilliant commander Gaston of Foix.

With this battle, the Swiss cantons assume an important role in Italian affairs. Swiss soldiers had hitherto been employed by the French as mercenaries, but a series of trade disputes had cooled their friendship with Louis XII, and they began to feel that unilateral action would best serve their interests. In 1513 the French garrison at Milan was routed by the Swiss in the Battle of Novara. The Swiss had brought with them Ludovico Sforza's elder son Massimiliano, whom the Holy League recognized as Duke of Milan. The Swiss, though, retained real control of the duchy. The recent decline of the French in Italy also meant the end of the francophile Florentine republic and the restoration of the Medici to political prominence. Actually, the French alliance had been of little benefit to the republic, which in 1509 had retaken Pisa exclusively by the force of its own arms. In addition, the refusal of Paolo Soderini, the leader of the republic, to join the Holy League of Julius II against France had incurred the pope's wrath against the city. The resulting discontent within Florence played into the hands of the Medici party. The election in 1513 of Cardinal Giovanni de' Medici to succeed Julius as Pope Leo X consolidated Medici control of Florence. With the Medici family restored to power and the French gone from Italy, the explosiveness of the Italian political scene subsided somewhat. Thus, the next French invasion found Italy unprepared to deal with the resumption of war.
The third French invasion was undertaken by King Francis I, of the house of Valois, who succeeded Louis XII upon his death in 1515. The new king immediately prepared to invade Italy, and crossed the Alps in August of that year. The following month, the French army routed the Swiss at the battle of Marignano and Francis I became Duke of Milan. Pope Leo X renewed the traditional Florentine alliance with France, yielding to the king Parma and Piacenza, cities traditionally disputed by Milan and the papacy, in exchange for a guarantee by Francis to support the Medici in Florence. After Marignano, Spain stood as the only effective rival to the power of the French in Italy, and all that was left within the power of the Italian political leaders during the ensuing Habsburg-Valois struggle was to attempt "to preserve some measure of freedom by playing off one against the other."  

Emperor Maximilian died in 1519; the next phase of the struggle between these two rival houses was for the imperial investiture. Ultimately, it was the superior financial resources of Maximilian's grandson Charles of Austria that won him the election, contested bitterly by King Francis of France.  

Pope Leo X had been supporting the French in Italy, but desiring cooperation with the German princes in the suppression of the Lutheran heresy, he concluded a pact with Charles V, the new Holy Roman Emperor. Later that year their combined forces ousted the French from Milan, and restored once again the house of Sforza, in the person of Ludovico's younger son Francesco, to the duchy. In 1522 the papal-imperial army besieged and pillaged Genoa, the last French stronghold in Italy,
and crippled the French fleet. Leo X had died in 1521, and after the brief pontificate of Adrian VI of Utrecht, the election in 1523 of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici as Pope Clement VII was a great victory for the Emperor, who seemed to have the papacy under his control.

The pattern of shifting alliances continued. Late in 1524 Clement, Venice and Florence, uneasy with Charles V's successes, concluded a secret alliance with King Francis of France. The French army attacked Milan, and the duchy once again changed hands. French control was to prove short-lived, however, as in February, 1525 the French army, in the Battle of Pavia, suffered a crushing defeat at the hands of the Spanish and German armies of the Empire. This battle had immense repercussions. France, since Marignano Europe's pre-eminent military power, was reduced to second-rate status behind Charles V, Europe's new master. Francis I, taken prisoner at Pavia, won his release only by renouncing all of his claims to power in Italy.

The continuing concern of Italian leaders with balance of power and fluid alliances meant, however, that France's defeat attracted allies to her side. In 1526, Clement VII, Francesco Sforza (who had been expelled by the Emperor from Milan in favor of a Habsburg claimant to the duchy), and the governments of Florence and Venice formed the Holy League of Cognac to combat Charles. The army of the league, with Francesco Guicciardini as Commissioner-General, was disorganized and ineffectual. In May, 1527 Charles' armies sacked Rome. The imprisonment of Clement VII meant the end of the current Medici regime in Florence
and the restoration of a republic. The French, however, with Andrea Doria in command of the Genoese fleet, threatened the Habsburgs' control of the kingdom of Naples. When in 1528 Doria, sensing imminent French defeat, defected to the Spanish side, the French army pressing Naples had no alternative but to retire.

Thirty-five years of warfare in Italy had come to an end. By the terms of the 1529 Treaties of Barcelona and Cambrai, a grand settlement was achieved. The Medici were established as Grand Dukes of Tuscany, and the duchy of Milan was returned to Francesco Sforza. Both principalities remained under the domination of the Habsburgs. The two sons of the French King Francis, who had four years earlier become Charles V's prisoners in exchange for their father's liberty, were freed. King Francis was to marry Eleanor of Austria, the sister of the Emperor, and once again renounced his claims in Italy.²³

Perhaps the most salient observation that can be made concerning the affairs of Italy during the period of the invasions is that while the narration of the invasions begins with the recounting of a conflict between Naples and Milan, it ends with a conflict between France and the Holy Roman Empire. Italy had indeed lost control of its destiny.
CHAPTER II

CELEBRATING THE POLITY:
Florentine Historiography, 1300-1525

One of the most important aspects of Italian humanism was the attitude toward history characteristic of this movement. History emerged in the Renaissance as the record of the actions of men, of individuals and groups, acting in a political framework. This had certainly not been the case in much of the historical writing of the medieval period. History was divinely ordained, the notion that God's judgment was everywhere manifest in history was taken for granted by most medieval chronicler-historians.¹

The roots of Renaissance historiography are to be found in the chronicles of fourteenth-century Florence. Medieval Italy differed from much of ultramontane Europe in that it was not characterized by feudalism, scholasticism and monarchy.² Medieval Italy was communal, and within the communes factional strife and disputes over local political issues were intense. These disputes, in which sizeable numbers of lay citizens were often involved, evinced among thoughtful citizens an interest in the history of their communities, fostering an unprecedented, if not uniquely Italian, interest in local historiography. In Italy, then, the emergence of the lay historian's interest in the history of the polity preceded similar
In fourteenth-century Florence, this historiography can be studied most easily in the writings of Giovanni Villani (1297-1348) and others who followed him. Villani's historical consciousness derived from his status as a member of Florence's merchant class and from the recent political experiences of Florence in the affairs of Italy. The merchant class in Florence had recently wrested political control of the city from the aristocratic noble class, and its commercial progress in the early trecento seemed "irresistable." Florence had also been part of the pro-papal Guelph alliance in the thirteenth-century struggle between the papacy and the Empire. This association of Florence with the papacy meant for Villani that Florence merited a "centrality within the scheme of the medieval universe it could not otherwise have had." Thus, it was the coincidence of the newly-acquired self-confidence of Villani's merchant class with an historical background which appeared to justify its claim for a place within the medieval world order that stimulated Villani's historical consciousness and prompted him to write the history of Florence.

While Villani based his discussion of contemporary Florentine political affairs on his own independent and astute observation, his ideas still reflect the conventions of medieval historical thought. He still sets the history of Florence in the context of universal history; his Chronicle begins with the story of the tower of Babel, and he repeatedly sees the hand of divine providence in human events. For Villani, the order inherent in history reflects a grand, cosmic design,
which interweaves natural and supernatural forces into a harmonious whole.\textsuperscript{8}

Villani's cosmic design included fortune as well as God. Fortune served an explanatory purpose, as an agent behind those historical events that defied explanation. The medieval Christian historians viewed fortune as "the undependability and transitoriness of all earthly things;"\textsuperscript{9} it was superseded by divine providence as the ultimate determinant of human events. This was the view adopted by Giovanni Villani. In subsequent Renaissance historiography, man was given a more decisive role in history. Fortune was to acquire a somewhat different meaning, but it retained its basic role as a force to which the inscrutable elements of the historical process were ascribed.

In Villani's scheme, all issues were framed in terms of a choice between right and wrong, the godly and the ungodly.\textsuperscript{10} Fortune was seen as operating in a rhythmic fashion, first rising, then declining. The operation of fortune in Villani's \textit{Chronicle} cannot be separated from the circumstances of the papacy, "the identity of whose interests is the kingpin of Villani's scheme of historical interpretation."\textsuperscript{11} Villani narrates the Guelph struggle against the Hohenstaufen emperors in these terms. After it seemed that nothing could avert his ultimate triumph, the Emperor Frederick II suffered a series of dramatic setbacks. His rise and fall fitted the cyclical pattern of fortune described by Villani. Frederick's ultimate failure was a function of his "wrong" (i.e. contrary to the interests of the papacy and thus of God) actions.\textsuperscript{12} On the death of Conradin, the last of the Hohenstaufen lineage, in 1268, Villani
writes that "it is evident from reason and experience that who-
soever raises himself against the forces of the Church and is
excommunicated must come to a bad end in soul and body."13

One recent historian has said of medieval chronicles
that their organization "tends to organize facts in a one-thing-
after-another way; and so to exclude explanation," adding that
"the favorite connective is not 'because' or 'as a result of'
but 'meanwhile'."14 Clearly, however, Giovanni Villani's
sense of history transcended such a simple formula. In his
cyclical pattern of history, success brings pride, pride sin,
and sin leads to decline.15 In excepting only Florence and the
papacy from the application of this rule, Villani adopts a
scheme of history that ascribes to his own age and the circum-
stances of the Florentine republic a central place in the texture
of time,16 and justifies the parochial focus of his Chronicle
For most of Villani's lifetime, this scheme was adequate for
his purposes of historical explanation. It is now assumed
that he composed his Chronicle beginning in 1322 and continued
writing until he succumbed to the Plague in 1348.17 The last
decade of Villani's life saw events which utterly undermined
the basis for his reading of history. The Buonacors family,
with which he was commercially affiliated, went bankrupt in
1338, leading to Villani's humiliating imprisonment for debt.18
The tyranny of Walter of Brienne, Duke of Athens, an adventurer
who came to power in 1340 after a dispute over a war with Lucca
had internally weakened the Florentine government, was a period
of political eclipse for the merchant class of which Villani
was a member. In 1343, the expulsion from papal service of
the Bardi and Peruzzi, Florence's two most prominent banking families, led to their bankruptcy and the commercial ruin of Florence. More importantly for Villani, this break with the papacy unraveled the Guelph alliance, which had been the thread of his view of Florentine history. The final calamitous event in Villani's life was the outbreak of plague in 1347. These disasters led Villani to abandon in the last books of his *Chronicle* the pattern of interpretation used earlier, in which "the course of events had easily accommodated itself to an interpretation according to which the balance always tipped in favor of the forces of righteousness." Underlying Villani's view that all things ultimately revert to a moral equilibrium had been the original presumption of finite time, bound to culminate in an all-encompassing apocalypse. The events of the last decade of his life, culminating in severe earthquakes in North Italy in 1348, were interpreted by Villani as the "sign that Jesus Christ, preaching to his disciples, predicted should appear at the end of the world." Villani, then, while transcending the medieval style of the strict narration of factual information and positing an overarching scheme for the arrangement of historical evidence, still placed his experience "within the sanctified scheme of the medieval universe."

Trecento chroniclers after Giovanni Villani both borrowed from his thought and made substantive changes in his mode of historical interpretation. His brother Matteo, who wrote from 1348 to 1363, also saw divine retribution as an explanatory agent. For Matteo Villani, however, there was no political attitude that was always morally "right" as the pre-1343 Guelph
alliance had been for his brother. Matteo's chronicle was characterized by a God who did not take fixed sides. God instead favored the side of virtue and punished wrongdoers regardless of who had been injured. His concept of fortune differed from his brother's idea of a monolithic force that always brings down the mighty from power. Instead he saw fortune as a capricious force which, since it obeyed no discernible law, could not be understood. Fortune was seen as the force behind impulsive human behavior. Louis Green makes the important point that in viewing fortune as something that operates essentially randomly, and in attributing individual human actions to fortune, Matteo Villani allows individual events to be invested with their own causal significance. Finally, Matteo Villani turns away from the Guelph identification of Florence as the basis for Florence's exalted status, and instead points to Florence's republican liberty, which he claims she had inherited from the Roman republic. Though this theme would later be adopted by the humanists, Villani's conception stemmed not from the humanists' thorough conversance with Latin authors, but from the need to find a new political identity for Florence when the two pillars of medieval society, the Church and the Empire, were weakened and at odds with the interests of the Florentines.

A crucial link between the work of the trecento chroniclers and that of the quattrocento humanists is found in the work of Gregorio Dati, who composed his *History of Florence* in 1407-8. Dati, who like the Villani brothers was a member of Florence's merchant class, essentially confined the scope of his history to Florence's wars with Giangaleazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan,
and thus covered only the years 1380-1406. Dati's conception of fortune stripped it completely of its association with divine intervention. For Dati, divine providence could still be a factor in history and suspend the workings of nature. Fortune was man's own ability to intervene in natural events. 28

Human passions, however, were given a deterministic quality which detracted from Dati's ability to make a three-dimensional analysis. While on one hand Dati attributes Giangaleazzo's ultimate defeat to his overly ambitious aims, "Giangaleazzo's ambition was given a compulsive character which impelled him irresistibly towards his doom in a way that recalls strikingly the self-destructive tendency of evil in Giovanni Villani's interpretation of history." 29

Dati also compared the Florentine republic with ancient Rome, but, as had been the case with Matteo Villani, this identification stemmed primarily from praise of Florence's communal tradition and not from the literature of classical antiquity.

There remains a link between Dati and Giovanni Villani in the attribution to God of considerable power in the unfolding of events. For Dati, however, God does not rule through immediate intervention, but as the ultimate cause of a material reality which is ruled by its own inherent tendencies. 30 Thus the trecento in Florence ends with historians who reflect an historical consciousness "still inspired by the primitive wonder out of which the apprehension of the order they assume had initially arisen," but who had prepared the way "for the separation of the human world into a self-sufficient universe of its own in which history...could become a new, more selective inquiry into the natural causes of events." 31
If the historiography of the fourteenth century belonged to the merchant-chronicler, in the fifteenth century it belonged to the humanist. Humanism was, above all a focus on classical antiquity. The term humanista was coined during the Renaissance itself, and was derived from an older concept, the studia humanitatis. This term generally referred to a liberal or literary education, and had been used in this sense by such ancient Roman authors as Cicero and Aulus Gellius. Italian scholars of the late trecento revived this meaning of the term, and the studia humanitatis came to refer to a clearly defined curriculum which included moral philosophy, poetry, grammar, rhetoric and history. In all of these fields, humanism emphasized the reading and interpretation of ancient Latin and in some cases Greek authors. This focus on the classics was important in determining the content of humanist histories.

Humanists recognized two kinds of historical writing. The first was the chronicle, whose form had been ascendant in the fourteenth century. The second was the "true history," which was based upon classical models, especially the histories of Sallust and Livy, from whom the humanists derived their exclusive concern with political affairs. From classical historians the humanists borrowed certain stylistic conventions as well. The inclusion of elaborate battle narratives, the use of omens for predictive purposes (not for causal explanations) and the inclusion of set speeches to express the opinions of historical figures and on occasion the historians themselves were all classical inheritances.

Humanist historiography was also exclusively concerned
with heroic actions. From Tacitus, humanist historians learned that "low people, things, or words" were beneath the dignity of history.\footnote{35} This concern can be detected in the preface of Leonardo Bruni's \textit{History of Florence}, which Bruni, as chancellor of Florence, composed between 1428 and his death in 1444. Bruni writes: "I intend to write down the deeds of the Florentine people, their weighty struggles at home and abroad, their renowned deeds in peace and in war."\footnote{36}

Bruni, in focusing on the virtues of Florence in particular, expresses an aspect of what is now termed "civic humanism," a notion whose analysis by Hans Baron in \textit{The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance} was an important contribution to the understanding of humanist historiography. According to Baron, the lone resistance of Florence to the expansive tyranny of Giangaleazzo Visconti encouraged Florence to portray herself as the inheritor and defender of the liberty of the ancient republics of Athens and Rome. In his \textit{Panegyric to the City of Florence}, written in 1403/4\footnote{37} in the immediate aftermath of the war with Giangaleazzo, Bruni writes of the war with Milan that "Florence knew that it was a Roman tradition to defend the liberty of Italy against its enemies."\footnote{38} Praise for Florence as the heir of the Roman republic is an important element of Bruni's writing. This republican interpretation of history, according to Baron and others who accept his idea of civic humanism, could not have emerged fully until the Milanese wars accented Florence's republican glory. Mobilization of this opinion, however, had much deeper roots. It has also been pointed out that the hortatory nature of the \textit{Panegyric} could have borne relevance
as the Florentines fought the final stages of their war with Milan. \( ^{39} \) The breakdown of the Guelph alliance, discussed earlier, which culminated in the Eight Saints' war with the papacy, from 1375 to 1378, and the absence of the empire from any significant role in Italy, highlighted Florence's independent political role. \( ^{40} \) That the humanist historiographers of the fourteenth century celebrated the virtues of their polity can also be explained by the fact that as chancellors of Florence, they were in the employ of the Republic. They were thus unlikely to draw negative conclusions about the Florentine experience or its system of government.

A second interpretation of quattrocento humanism has focused on the humanists as rhetoricians. Paul Oscar Kristeller sees the humanists as inheritors of medieval Italian *dictatores*, officials whose duties included the composition of letters and speeches and who also held chairs of grammar and rhetoric in Italian universities. \( ^{41} \) The *dictatores*, Kristeller, writes, "were no classical scholars, and used no classical models for their compositions. It was the novel contribution of the humanists to add the firm belief that in order to write and speak well it was necessary to study and imitate the ancients." \( ^{42} \) Kristeller, in fact, asserts that the study of history was, for the humanists, subservient to their rhetorical studies: "History was not taught as a separate subject, but formed a part of the study of rhetoric and poetry since the ancient historians were among the prose writers commonly studied in school." \( ^{43} \)

Analysis of humanist historiography must take both the civic and rhetorical aspects of quattrocento humanism into account. In this light, the humanists' propagandistic use of
history becomes clear. The humanists saw history as a means by which their moral precepts could be illustrated and inculcated. Here was the rhetorical aspect of humanist historiography. Bruni's civic history combined rhetoric and a republican view of history, and emerged with an inspiring message for the citizens of Florence. We can see this association in the following speech, found in Bruni's *History of Florence*:

As (the measures needed by the republic that are necessary for our liberty) are easy... and lie in your hands, who is so fallen that he would rather serve in pain and humiliation than be equal to others in right and honor? Our ancestors were not willing to serve even the Roman emperors... When I remember your degenerate passivity I cannot be silent and calm. I only ask you to think of your own liberty and welfare.  

This speech is put by Bruni in the mouth of Giano della Bella, a leader of the Florentine popolo against the city's merchants in a 1292 dispute. In its inspiring call to uphold Florence's age-old position as the defender of republican liberty, it combines the civic and rhetorical aspects of humanist historiography in a message which was as applicable to Bruni's fellow citizens in their ongoing struggle with Milan as it was to the popolo of the late duecento.

The humanists, unlike the chroniclers of the trecento whose livelihood had been Florence's commercial affairs, were generally professional scholars. Often, their search for employment was an important part of their writings. Bruni himself was not a Florentine; his home was Arezzo, and it has been asserted that his *Panegyric to the City of Florence*, written in the very early years of the fifteenth century, was an attempt to secure the chancellory of Florence when it
fell vacant upon the death of the aging chancellor Coluccio
Salutati, or at least to make a name for himself in the Florentine
community. Indeed, there is a strong note of self-consciousness
in the Panegyric:

Once I had seen this beautiful city...I wanted more than
I can tell to try its great beauty and magnificence.
That is why I am writing this panegyric—not to curry
favor or win popular acclaim.

Above all, it is Bruni's commitment to Florence's republic-
ican institutions that forms the basis of his moral purpose in
writing history. He asserts that Florence possessed a civic
virtus, a quality "dependent upon the freedom which allows citizens
to participate directly in the affairs of their city-state."

While the Florentine humanists held to a sense of cultural
superiority based upon Florence's inheritance of the Roman
republican tradition, quattrocento humanism was also character-
ized by a more general consciousness of the inheritance of
Roman antiquity. There was a feeling that all Italians were
somehow superior to the barbarians of ultramontane Europe.

This is evident in Bruni's History of Florence, in which he
describes rather gleefully the defeat in 1401 of a German
army, despite its employ by Florence herself, at the hands
of a Milanese army made up of Italian soldiers.

Armed with a civic-mindedness and a concern with rhetoric,
how did the humanists go about writing history? As was dis-
cussed earlier, they borrowed from classical historians in
focusing on important political events. In its concern with
rhetoric, humanist historiography attempted to demonstrate
how people should act, to teach by example. Writes Bruni in
the preface to his History:
If we think men of advanced age are wiser because they have seen more of life, how much wisdom can history give us if we read it correctly; for there the deeds and thoughts of many ages are visible and we can readily see what to imitate and what to avoid, and be inspired by the glory of great men to attempt like excellence.51

Another concern of the humanists was with causation in history. The views of Polybius are relevant here:

The special function of history consists, first in ascertaining as nearly as possible the words actually spoken and second, in discovering the cause of the failure or success of whatever was done or said; for if only the bare facts about an event are narrated, it may provide pleasant reading but cannot be of any real benefit, while if the cause of the event is duly added the study of history becomes fruitful.52

The humanist view of causation in history differed substantially from the views of the trecento chroniclers. The role of divine providence was greatly diminished; the humanists saw history as the record of human activity, with human motives, and carried out by the force of human reason. The part played by individuals, parties and states was elaborated to a much greater extent than it had been by earlier historians.53 History was seen as the struggle of individual character, or virtù (and Bruni's civic virtus), against external obstacles, or fortune.54 But for Bruni, fortune does not have the purposive quality found in Giovanni Villani's Chronicle, or, for that matter, in Livy, who simply assumed that fortune was on the side of the Romans in their efforts to dominate the world. Fortune in Bruni's History of Florence has no particular pattern, and it rarely assumes major significance.55 In general, the humanists emphasized man's role in forming political institutions and in political interaction.56
The humanists had learned from classical historians that a "true history" should be narrated in annalistic form, and many humanist histories digress to remind the reader of the passing years. In the History of Florence, Bruni makes partial use of the annalistic mode. One reason for the humanists' diminished use of this style is that while the Roman republic had annual consular elections to serve as temporal reference points, Florence's political life had no such annual framework.\(^5\) Another reason, and a more important one, is that the rigidly annalistic mode did not always allow the historian to develop fully a theme. In narrating the story of the rise and fall of Walter of Brienne, Bruni makes an initial statement that the year 1340 is important, but then treats the four-year episode as a single unit within the annalistic framework.\(^5\) Bruni narrates this period, which ends with the expulsion of Walter from his despotism, in terms of Florence's indomitable will to maintain its republican liberty at a time when many other Italian communes were threatened internally by tyrannical regimes.\(^5\) Bruni's concern was to teach a lesson with his narration of this period, and "if history teaches by example, the purpose of history does not require...concreteness in detail."\(^6\) It was permissible for Bruni to abandon the annalistic mode if it constrained him in his civic and rhetorical presentation of Florentine history.

Bruni's brand of civic humanism could last only as long as Florence could use its republican institutions to back its boast of descent from the Roman republic. The humanist tradition continued, though, as Italian despots and even
ultramontane kings employed humanists in a variety of capacities, including the role of official historiographer. An illustration of the historical work of this type is Angelo Poliziano's Pazzi Conspiracy, which was commissioned by Lorenzo de' Medici around 1480 and narrates the 1478 conspiracy by members of Florence's Pazzi family and Pope Sixtus IV to murder Lorenzo and his brother Giuliano and to overthrow the Medici regime (Giuliano was indeed murdered, but Lorenzo escaped harm and the plot failed). Poliziano simplifies his story and makes his sympathy and patronage clear by relating the story as the struggle between good and evil:

All the Good People were on the side of the brothers Lorenzo and Giuliano...The Pazzi family was hated by citizens and common people alike, they were all extremely greedy, and none could stand their outrageous and insolent nature.

Though the effective diminution of Florence's republican institutions under the Medici was severe, Poliziano, as it suits his political purpose in the Pazzi Conspiracy, compares Florence to ancient republican Rome. He implies a parallel with the events of Sallust's Catiline Conspiracy, and indicates that since Rome had survived a conspiracy, so would Florence. Finally, Poliziano makes extremely selective use of facts to further the propagandistic value of his history. He entirely fails to mention Lorenzo's dispute with Sixtus over the city of Imola, whose control Lorenzo had won, but which each man had wanted essentially for himself.

The accuracy of the humanists also suffered, at times, from their excessive concern with style. The self-perception of the humanist historian was not "as a collector of facts but as an
artist who organized the facts into a coherent and attractive form."\(^65\) Poggio Bracciolini, who as chancellor of Florence from 1453 to 1459 wrote a Florentine History, held a deep veneration for the classical tradition and a particular admiration for Livy. These concerns led him to focus more attention on style rather than on substance; form, not actual historical matter, was of paramount importance.\(^66\)

The humanist historiographic tradition did not survive the fifteenth century entirely intact. The French invasion of 1494 was a jolt to the humanists' conception of Italian superiority and to their overweening faith in their political sagacity based on classical exempla. It also necessitated a sharpened interest in practical politics, since the invasions threatened directly the very existence of quattrocento civic liberty, whatever its constitutional form. The cinquecento was to see an historiography which, while it borrowed some elements of the humanist tradition, also diverged sharply from it.

Quattrocento Florentine historical writing was steeped not only in the quattrocento admiration of classical antiquity, but in Italian politics itself. Throughout the fifteenth century, the workings of Italian politics were known and calculable to the intelligent observer; those who knew how to balance these forces were successful in politics.\(^67\) Pre-humanist historiography had proceeded, essentially, from the assumption that history was not within man's control, that fortune or God were the dominant elements. The humanists had asserted that man had the power to influence events, that "by making use of experience he could impress efficiency and perfection on the
political order.  The political events surrounding the invasions of Italy which began in 1494 were unprecedented, though, and action based on past observation and republican "reason" could no longer dominate politics.

The victory of French arms over Italian reason for control in the political arena meant that force, which had previously been given only a partial role in the determination of events, had to be seen as the decisive factor in political struggles. The Prince and the Discourses on Livy of Niccolo Machiavelli, the towering Italian political analyst of this period, made "an appeal to recognize the crucial importance of force in politics." That the Italians had lost control of their political destiny also led them to search for an inscrutable element in politics. The motives of the ultramontane rulers who now controlled Italian events were as inscrutable to early cinquecento Italian historians as God's will had been to their predecessors. Within the arena of Florentine politics, they fell back on an analysis of the motives of the great states in terms of the "personal qualities and inclinations" of their rulers. This sort of "psychological" analysis of political events would later be taken up by Guicciardini.

The restoration of a republican regime in Florence in 1494 had vast implications for political and historical thought. If history were to continue to instruct men in the art of politics, it had to take into account the new tensions of Florentine political life. The humanist prescription for writing history proved inadequate for the immediate political analysis made necessary by the unprecedented nature of contemporary
political events,\textsuperscript{73} and historians of this period adopted new forms for the writing of history. The work of Piero Parenti took the form of a diary, with entries every two or three months. In it, Parenti took note of the Florentine political scene, discussing debate over laws, the conduct of magistrate's meetings, and shifting alliances among political leaders. In calling his work a \textit{Florentine History}, he apparently felt that he was still writing in an historical framework.\textsuperscript{74} The work of Bartolomeo Cerretani, whose \textit{Florentine History} was published in 1512, was partially within the humanist tradition. In the first part of the work, he employs set speeches, and his intent is to "give good examples to readers." But the second section of the work, much lengthier than the first, is a detailed description of Florentine politics from 1492 to 1512, focusing especially on events which took place in the councils of the republic.\textsuperscript{75}

Machiavelli, perhaps more than any other writer of this period, was aware of these matters of political immediacy. The questions he addresses in \textit{The Prince} and the \textit{Discourses on Livy}: what form of government is best for Florence, the benefits of mercenary armies and the importance of force were questions that were being discussed as he wrote.\textsuperscript{76} Politics was the tangible reality with which Machiavelli was concerned. He saw politics as an autonomous sphere of human activity,\textsuperscript{77} and employed history only insofar as it could provide fodder for political analysis. He felt that without a purely empirical foundation all insight into the true nature of politics and comprehension of the laws behind political phenomena were
impossible, 78 though as we will see, his "empiricism" was not as resolute as it might have been when it could not fully illustrate the laws he sought to discern. History, then, subserved his aim of political analysis; he always moved from the description of historical events to more general considerations. Each episode of history was seen as a manifestation of something which was unchanging: the perennial struggle for power, in other words, politics itself.79

Machiavelli had several aims in his writings. Foremost was his desire to earn himself employment in the restored Medici government of 1512. His service to the republic had made the Medici suspicious of his political leanings, and he had been expelled from government and even tortured by Medici leaders. After 1512, almost all of his writing was done for the eyes of those who were in a position to facilitate the resumption of his career in politics.80 In a letter written after the completion of The Prince in 1513 he expressed

the desire I have that these Medici princes should begin to employ me, even if at first it were only something menial; for if then I did not gain their favor, I should blame myself. And if they have read this work of mine, they would see that the fifteen years I have spent in the study of politics, I have not wasted or gambled away; and anyone ought to be glad to use a man who has gained a great deal of experience.81

Machiavelli was steeped in the humanist tradition, and his writings bear a relationship to those of the quattrocento humanists. One similarity is the civic nature of his work. In the Discourses, published in 1520, he writes, "I believe that the greatest good one may do and the most pleasing to God is the good one does to one's native land."82 He also felt that his work could be used as a guide to politics by the leaders
of the city. In his introduction to *The Prince* he bases his authority on "long experience in modern affairs and continual reading in ancient ones." Like the humanists of the quattrocento, then, Machiavelli found classical wisdom applicable to the contemporary world. The *Discourses* are a commentary on the work of a classical author and contain a passage borrowed from Polybius. Many humanist histories had been commissioned by governmental leaders, both in Florence and elsewhere. Machiavelli's *History of Florence* was also a commissioned work; it was undertaken in 1521 upon the request of Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, later Pope Clement VII. Actually, it is somewhat problematic why a staunch republican accepted a commission whose terms obviously included favorable portrayal of the Medici family. In writing the work, Machiavelli employed the humanist formulae for omens and battle narratives. Recently, Felix Gilbert has suggested that Machiavelli used the humanist form for set speeches to reveal, in disguised fashion, his anti-Medici sentiment. Machiavelli attributes to Piero de' Medici (Lorenzo's father, not his son), as his death approached in 1468, the following speech to his supporters:

I believed myself to be associated with those who would set some bounds to their avarice, and who, after having avenged themselves on their enemies and lived in their country with security and honor, would be satisfied. But now I find myself greatly deceived, unacquainted with the ambition of mankind, and least of all with yours; for, not satisfied with being masters of so great a city, and possessing among yourselves those honors, dignities and emoluments which used to be divided among many citizens, not contented with having shared among a few the property of your enemies, or with being able to oppress all others with public burdens, while you yourselves are exempt from them and enjoy all the public offices of profit, you must still further load everyone with ill-usage. You plunder your neighbors of their wealth; you sell justice; you evade the law, you oppress the timid and exalt the insolent...
Machiavelli, while describing such activities by those who supported the Medici and governed the supposedly republican institutions of the Medici government, fulfills the terms of his commission by exonerating Piero himself. He laments that Piero's "honorable designs" to check such outrageous behavior were frustrated by his death. 87 In combining certain aspects of humanist historiography with distinctly un-humanist criticism of Florence, Machiavelli is "a son of humanism," but also "a prodigal son who never returned." 88

Machiavelli also departed from the humanist tradition in his views on the patterns of causation in history, and on history itself. The humanists had seen history as a man-made process, controlled by the force of human reason. Machiavelli, however, saw history as operating in a predestined direction, not fully within man's control. In the History of Florence he posits a meta-historical framework borrowed from the work of Polybius:

> It may be observed, that provinces amid the vicissitudes to which they are subject, pass from order into confusion, and afterward recur to a state of order again, for the nature of mundane affairs not allowing them to continue in an even course, when they have arrived at their greatest perfection, they soon begin to decline. In the same manner, having been reduced to disorder, and sunk to their utmost state of depression, unable to descend lower, they, of necessity, reascend, and thus from good they gradually decline to evil, and from evil again to good. The reason is, that valor produces peace; peace, repose; repose, disorder; disorder, ruin; so from disorder order springs; from order, virtue, and from this, glory and good fortune. 89

Despite his belief in this cyclical pattern of history, Machiavelli still gave human choice a role in political events. This idea, and his ideas on fortune are expressed in The Prince:

> Many have been and still are of the opinion that the affairs of this world are so under the direction of fortune and of God that man's prudence cannot control them...This opinion has been the more accepted
in our times, because of the great changes in the state of the world that have been seen and are now seen every day, beyond all human surmise. Nevertheless...I think it may be true that fortune is arbiter of half our actions, but that she still leaves the control of the other half, or about that, to us. 90

In describing how man might control fortune to the greatest possible extent, Machiavelli reverts to the role of force in politics:

I am of the opinion that it is better to be rash than overcautious because fortune is a woman and, if you wish to keep her down, you must beat her and pound her. It is evident that she allows herself to be overcome by men who treat her in that way rather than by those who proceed coldly. 91

Gilbert has speculated that this idea and Machiavelli's ideas on history's cyclical nature were to be the ultimate point of the History of Florence. Machiavelli narrates Florence's decline over a period of centuries, and in his own time Florence appears to be at the nadir of an historical cycle. Gilbert points out that the History is an unfinished work, and that Machiavelli presented to Clement VII in 1525 a plan to arm the people of the Romagna in an attempt to reverse the gains of foreign rulers in Italy. Gilbert writes that "it is not far-fetched to assert that Machiavelli wanted to end the Florentine History as he had ended his other political writings:..." With the idea that "the desperate situation in Italy could be remedied if the Italians themselves took up arms." 92

Machiavelli the historian remains subject to Machiavelli the political analyst. In giving expression to his political ideas in an essentially humanist mode of historical writing, his history loses loses some of its "historical" flavor. His history is diffuse; his focus is on individual episodes which
he considers illustrative. In proceeding straight from facts to considerations of a more general nature, he neglects causation in history. His analysis of the Pazzi conspiracy provides an example. By way of insight, he writes that plots on the life of a prince rarely succeed, and most commonly involve the ruin of those concerned in them, while they frequently contribute to the aggrandizement of those against whom they are directed. Thus the prince of a city attacked by conspiracy, if not slain (as had been Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza of Milan ten years earlier) . . . . . almost always attains to a greater degree of power, and very often has his good disposition perverted to evil. The proceedings of his enemies give him cause for fear; fear suggests the necessity of providing for his own safety, which involves the injury of others; and here arise animosities and not infrequently his ruin.

Machiavelli, in deriving his lessons in politics from the events of history, did not scruple to fit facts to his theories, and in his choice of sources and events to narrate he sought facts which best illuminated his political ideas. Given this approach, he overlooks the specific motivations for the Pazzi conspiracy itself in his desire to glean from it more general truths. Even his highly admiring biographer criticizes his historical writing for its insistent concern with politics:

When people and events leave him indifferent as a man and as a politician, his narrative dozes off or moves by as a fits and starts . . . . but style and thought revive miraculously whenever he divines beneath the garb of a Theodoric or even of a Walter of Brienne his myth of a new prince.

Machiavelli remains, above all, a political analyst, more comfortable deriving lessons from history than writing it. This is due in part to his own ardent interest in politics, but this interest can also be seen as a product of the period in which he wrote. He wrote as the struggles started by the French
invasion of 1494 were still being fought and when, in his own estimation, political action could still save Italian liberty. It was only after the treaties of Barcelona and Cambrai, which confirmed Italy's domination by ultramontane powers, that such political writing lost its immediacy and history could once again be separated from it. It was to be the task of Francesco Guicciardini, writing in the 1530's, to discuss the history of the invasions as an investigation into the natural causes of political events.
CHAPTER III

FRANCESCO GUICCIARDINI

Francesco Guicciardini (1483-1450) wrote his History of Italy in the last years of his life, after the events of the previous forty years had confirmed Italy's subjection to foreign rulers. In this work, he approached history in a novel way, developing a view of history that was unprecedented in the historiography of the Italian Renaissance. However, to assert as has one historian that Guicciardini's numerous earlier writings were merely "trial runs" for his masterpiece is to ignore the development of an extraordinarily analytical mind in the context of early cinquecento Italian history.

Guicciardini was born in 1483 into a prominent Florentine aristocratic family. He was trained as a lawyer and gave up a flourishing practice when he was called upon by the republic to serve as its ambassador to the court of King Ferdinand of Aragon. This appointment, in 1512, was the beginning of a long political career. Unlike Machiavelli he was retained in the service of the Medici when the family was restored to power, largely because his family had traditionally remained aloof from the partisanship of Florentine politics. He remained for a short time Florence's ambassador to Spain, but then moved into the direct employ of the Medici popes. From 1516 to 1527 he held a number of positions in the papal service; first as
governor of Modena, Reggio and Parma in papal Romagna, then as President of the Romagna, and finally as Lieutenant-General of the papal army which suffered defeat at the hands of Emperor Charles V in 1527. He was severely ostracized by the Florentine republic of 1527, but returned to government in 1530 as an adviser to the Medici dukes. He left government in 1527 and worked on the History of Italy until his death in 1540.  

Guicciardini's varied career is reflected by his writings. His points of view change throughout his career in a manner which takes into account the varied political scene of which he was a part. The despair that characterizes the History of Italy reflects his reaction to Italy's subjugation to foreign rule and the political eclipse of the patrician class to which he belonged.

No Florentine thinker of Guicciardini's time was unaffected by the tradition of quattrocento humanism. His education conformed closely to the humanist curriculum, though the ancient writers he read most diligently were Rome's historians.  

Guicciardini was familiar with humanist political and historical theory and used it in much of his writing. While he did not adhere to all humanist principles, he used some of them selectively to shape his work. He clearly rejected the dominant element of humanist thought, the uncritical admiration of Roman antiquity:

How mistaken are those who quote the Romans at every step. One would have to have a city with exactly the same conditions as theirs and then act according to their example. That model is as unsuitable for those lacking the right qualities as it is to expect an ass to run like a horse.

Implicit here is also a rejection of the humanists' confidence in the use of past examples to guide conduct, and in the ability
of contemporary figures to draw lessons from the past, an aspect of Guicciardini's thought which will be addressed later.

In his early *History of Florence*, Guicciardini borrows freely from the humanist tradition of writing history to reinforce civic pride. This work, written between 1508 and 1510, "conveys the sense that the author considers Florence the center around which events take form and from which events derive their meaning." Even after 1494, when Italian politics came to be dominated by ultramontane powers, Guicciardini still shapes his narrative around Florence's ongoing effort to recover control of Pisa. At this point in his career, Guicciardini approached his role as an historian in much the same way as had Bruni and Poggio; history was a civic monument and a celebration of civic virtue. Like the post-humanist historians discussed in the last chapter, he also saw history as a vehicle of political analysis. In the *History of Florence*, he analyzes Florence's history from 1378 to 1509 in terms of governmental forms, and emerges as an advocate of oligarchical republicanism, an ideal restated in his later works that is perhaps the only position that remained a constant in his thought.

Guicciardini came from a long line of Florentine patricians. His early work derives from loyalty to his family as well as his class. He begins the *History of Florence* with the statement that "In the year 1378, when Luigi Guicciardini was Gonfaloniere of Justice, the Ciompi rebellion took place." He proceeds to narrate Florentine history with an emphasis on the achievements of its patrician leaders. The period from 1393 to 1420 was the political heyday of the aristocracy of
Florence. About this period he writes that "Florence was successful both at home and abroad; at home, because it remained free, united, and governed by well-to-do, good and capable men." He was disdainful of republican government by "the people," whom he was later define as "a mad, wild creature, full of infinite errors and confusion, without judgment, loyalty, or stability." On the Florentine republic in 1497, he writes that the government of the city "was in great disorder. The Great Council preferred to fill all offices with good and common people who would cause no trouble rather than with citizens who had more authority and experience." Guicciardini is also critical of Medici ascendancy in Florence, and laments the erosion of liberties during their rule.

Guicciardini formally elucidates his principles for the government of Florence in his Discourse of Logroño, written during his embassy to Spain. In this work, he proposes a government for Florence on the Venetian model, with a gonfaloniere elected for life, a senate, composed of aristocrats, which would initiate all legislation and control the government's treasury, and a grand council with the power to affirm or reject the senate's proposals. This constitution, which is composed of elements of monarchy, aristocracy, and democracy, also corresponds to the ideas of Aristotle and Polybius and differs little from Machiavelli's ideal in the Discourses and from his own proposal for a Florentine polity drawn up for Pope Leo X. However, Guicciardini bases his views on government not upon admiration for classical antiquity, seeing them
instead as a "demand of rational efficiency."\textsuperscript{14}

In his \textit{Dialogue on the Government of Florence}, written in 1520, Guicciardini proposes once more this same formula for government in an historical analysis characteristic of the post-humanist tradition. This work contains none of the idealism or certainty of humanist treatises; rather, it analyzes political personalities in terms of their "capacity to use the possibilities inherent in the political situation" which they confront.\textsuperscript{15} He strips politics of the moral goals and imperatives prescribed by the humanists, and develops the concept of "reasons of state" to justify political action. In contrast with the studied ambivalence toward Lorenzo de' Medici which he had shown in the \textit{History of Florence}, in the \textit{Dialogue} Guicciardini is highly laudatory of Lorenzo, whom he sees as having governed very capably in the situations he faced.\textsuperscript{16} Guicciardini was aware of the demands of politics; one of the characters in the \textit{Dialogue} speaks of harsh measures taken by Florence against Pisa acknowledges that "he has not spoken as a Christian but according to the reason of state."\textsuperscript{17} While he was writing the \textit{Dialogue} Guicciardini was serving the papacy as governor of Modena and Reggio, and his views were largely derived from his experiences there. In a letter written to Cardinal Giulio de' Medici during the same period, he describes his attempts to act justly in his post, writing that "I have not shown favor except when forced to by needs of state."\textsuperscript{18}

Despite his recognition of these "needs of state," Guicciardini never longed for a prince who would serve as the redeemer of Italy. Instead he remained a staunch advocate of an aristocratically
led republic. In his Considerations on the Discourses of Machiavelli of 1530 he writes that

...if it were necessary to give a city a government either of nobles or of plebs, I believe it would be better to choose the nobles, for as they have greater prudence and good qualities, one may hope that they will evolve some reasonable constitution, whereas a people full of ignorance and confusion, and possessing many bad qualities, can only be expected to overthrow and destroy everything.19

This theme is recapitulated in the History of Italy, where Guicciardini writes that since "those citizens of greatest quality and esteem were held in less esteem than seemed proper," the republic in 1497 had failed to make "provisions of moderation" (i.e. inclusion of optimates in the government) which would "prevent the republic from being thrown into disorder by the ignorance of the multitude."20 Guicciardini remains a quintessentially elitist aristocrat.

Despite Guicciardini's differences from previous Florentine thinkers, Guicciardini the political analyst must still be placed within the post-humanist tradition. His sympathies remained essentially republican, as opposed to the courtly sycophancy reflected by others at the time. His interweaving of politics and history was also commonplace in this period. It is Guicciardini's historical thought which reveals his departure both from humanist historiography and its Machiavellian sequel.

"Small and insignificant beginnings," writes Guicciardini, "are often the origin of very great disasters, or even great good fortune, hence it is extremely prudent to notice and ponder well everything, however small."21 This belief led him to see every event in history as causally significant. The systematic
study of cause and effect is an essential feature of Guicciardini's historiographical vision, and one that distinguishes him from his predecessors. Even in his early History of Florence, in his description of the Pazzi conspiracy, Guicciardini is concerned with historical causation and effect. He describes in considerable detail the conflict over Imola which aroused the enmity of the pope and the Pazzi family toward Lorenzo de' Medici.22 He also seeks to understand how, when alternatives existed, Lorenzo's enemies came to decide to assassinate him in order to overthrow his government:

In their discussion of the best way to realize their objective, the conspirators decided that a war against Florence would not be suitable, for it would take too long and would be too dangerous and uncertain. Besides, other Italian powers would surely come to the aid of the city. There was only one way, and that was to kill Lorenzo. 23

Guicciardini shows a similar concern with causation in assessing the outcome of the conspiracy:

This tumult nearly cost Lorenzo his power and his life; and yet he gained so much reputation and profit from it that the day may be called a lucky one for him. His brother Giuliano, with whom he would have had to divide his property and contend for power, was now dead...his power became such that from then on he acted as a free and complete arbiter, indeed almost as lord of the city. His power, which until that day had been great but suspect, was now supreme and safe.

That is the way civil discord and strife end: the one side is exterminated, the head of the other becomes lord of the city. His supporters and adherents, once companions, become almost subjects; the people and the multitude become slaves; power is passed on by inheritance and very often it passes from a wise man to a madman who then plunges the city into the abyss. 24

There is a clear difference between Machiavelli's assessment of the conspiracy, described in the last chapter, and Guicciardini's account. Machiavelli begins his description of the conspiracy with a general statement about conspiracies,
their usual failure, and their results. He uses the specific example of the Pazzi conspiracy, devoid of details which would detract from his point, to illustrate the political principle in question. On the other hand, Guicciardini describes the events and then draws his more general conclusions, which, upon close examination, are not so general as they may seem. He refers specifically to Lorenzo's consolidation of power and its inheritance by Piero, whom he chooses to label a "madman." His entire account of the conspiracy derives "from his mental habit of looking at history with an eye for explanations: events are viewed as the results of a series of causes, and then as the causes of a further series of effects."25 A final difference is that while Machiavelli makes an implicit reference to the assassination of Duke Galeazzo Maria Sforza twelve years earlier, Guicciardini makes no such use of examples.

Indeed, Guicciardini holds none of his predecessors' enthusiasm for the notion that history can, or should, teach by example. He constantly stresses the singular nature of each episode in history. In discussing the Italian reaction to the presence of King Charles VIII in Italy, Guicciardini mentions that Pope Alexander VI informed Charles through a papal legate that he desired to see the French king out of Italy at once, and the removal of the newly-installed French bureaucracy out of Naples. "Otherwise," writes Guicciardini, he would have to appear personally before the Pope at Rome under those spiritual penalties with which the Church makes its threats.

Such a remedy had been previously attempted by popes
in ancient times...But since there was now lacking that reverence and majesty which the sanctity of the popes' lives had aroused in men's hearts, it was ridiculous to expect similar effects from such dissimilar manners and examples.26

Another instance in which Guicciardini questions the use of past examples by historical figures is his treatment of the journey undertaken by Piero de' Medici in 1494 to negotiate with Charles VIII, whose armies had reached the borders of the Florentine contado. Piero based his trip upon his father Lorenzo's successful negotiations with King Ferrante of Naples when in the aftermath of the Pazzi conspiracy, the two powers had been at war. In the History of Florence, Guicciardini writes that Piero attempted to follow his father's example despite the fact that "this time the circumstances were different and the trip made little sense."27 By the time Guicciardini finished his Ricordi(maxims) in 1530, events had made him extremely unsure of man's ability to guide his action by past example:

It is entirely fallacious to judge by examples, for if they are not alike in every detail they are useless, since every slightest variation in the case makes a very great difference in the result, and to distinguish these minute differences requires a very keen and perspicacious eye.28

At this point in his life Guicciardini, while stressing the times are quite different from the past, still believes that it is within human capacity to discern these "minute differences" between situations. By the time he wrote the History of Italy, he had abandoned even this possibility. On Piero's trip, he writes that

governing oneself by examples is undoubtedly very dangerous if similar circumstances do not correspond, not only in general but in all particulars, and of other things are not managed with similar judgment,
and if, aside from all other fundamentals, one does not have similar good fortune on one's side. 29

Fortune, indeed, plays a sizeable role in Guicciardini's History of Italy, as he found these events explicable in no other terms. He had long been inspired by his belief in man's power to control events and in his own talent to manage his affairs. Therefore the events of 1527 were a shock to him, as well as to all who believed in the ability of Italian reason to control history. 30 Moreover, the restoration of the republic in Florence in 1527 was a personal disaster for Guicciardini. Because of this association with the Medici he suffered a variety of indignities at the hands of the Republic. He was at first proscribed from service to the new government, then had much of his personal wealth confiscated by the government.

The imprisonment of Pope Clement VII in the Castel Saint Angelo in Rome had been the event which caused the downfall of Medici rule in Florence and gave rise to the restored republic. In the History of Italy, this event is described with reference to fortune. When Guicciardini has occasion, earlier in the work, to mention the pope when he was still Cardinal Giulio de' Medici, he notes that the cleric's ecclesiastical career "was to prove a notable example of the vagaries of fortune." 31

The loss of Italian liberty engendered by the outcome of the invasions produced in Guicciardini a profound sense of resignation and defeat. While in the History of Florence Guicciardini states only briefly the events surrounding the imprisonment of Ludovico Sforza in the tower of Bourges by
King Louis XII of France after Louis had made himself Duke of Milan, his comments on these events in the *History of Italy* reflect both the despair and the sense of irony, found especially in the *Ricordi*, which Italy's defeat had instilled in him. Guicciardini writes that Sforza was sent to the castle of Bourges,

which had been, two years earlier, the prison of the very same king who was now imprisoning him; so varied and miserable is human destiny and so uncertain to everyone are his own conditions in times to come.32

One historian has argued that the strongest impression Guicciardini meant to impart in the *History of Italy* "is that of the helplessness and impotence of man in the face of fate."33 While this impression is present, as illustrated above, to term it Guicciardini's major point is to overstate the case. There is no sense of inevitability in the events which lead to the foreign domination of Italy. Guicciardini opens each book of the *History of Italy* by showing that there was renewed hope for peace, although war always resumes and the increasing desperation of Italy's plight is readily discernible.34 Nonetheless, even as late as 1527, when the sack of Rome was imminent, Guicciardini had not abandoned hope. He is extremely specific in demonstrating how poor military preparation and Pope Clement's confidence in an untrustworthy commander doomed the defense of Rome against the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V.

Guicciardini explicitly rejects a deterministic view of history. The workings of fortune are truly unfathomable and not subject to the one-dimensionality of fortune common to fourteenth-century chronicles or to a meta-historical pattern
It is a great mistake to speak of the affairs of this world without distinction and absolutely, and, so to say, by rule; as every case is different and exceptional because of the variety and circumstances which cannot be judged by the same measure. Such distinctions and exceptions are not written in books but must be revealed by discernment.  

The "discernment" to which Guicciardini alludes is taken up in his study of causes and effects of particular events and, as will be shown below, his study of the motives of historical figures. The rest he leaves up to fortune.

In one sense, then, fortune plays a large part in Guicciardini's historical analysis. In another sense, however, its role as an explanatory force is small. On the 1495 Battle of Fornovo, he writes:

...the power of fortune is most great in all human affairs, even more in military matters than any others; where a badly understood command, or a poorly executed order, or an act of rashness or a false rumor, sometimes coming from even the simplest soldier, will often bring victory to those who already seem to be defeated; and where unnumerable accidents unexpectedly occur which cannot be foreseen or controlled by the captain's orders.

In this specific instance, a sudden turn of interest among Italian soldiers from fighting the French to plundering their camp, and the contagion of this spirit through the Italian army, is attributed to fortune. On another occasion, the thick fog which hung over Rome before its sack in 1527 and thus made it easy for the foreign armies to capture the city is also explained in terms of fortune. Guicciardini, in fact, questions fortune's true explanatory value within the text of the History of Italy itself. Charles VIII, in his conquest of the Florentine contado in 1494, was able to capture
the fortress of Sarzana despite its extremely strong fortifications. Writes Guicciardini: "It was ordained, whether by good fortune or at the orders of some higher power (if man's imprudence and faults deserve such excuses) that a sudden remedy would intervene to remove this obstacle." Two important facets of Guicciardini's thought can be discerned here. The first is that he attributes the military victory of the ultramontane ruler to Charles' own good fortune, not to the bad fortune of the Florentines. Guicciardini is clearly quite far removed from the exclusively civic orientation of humanist historiography and his own early work. The second is that Guicciardini expresses concern about the limits of fortune's explanatory power, questioning even his own use of it. That "fortune is invoked only as a last resort" is "the result of his determination to see human affairs in terms of man." On the very first page of the History of Italy Guicciardini informs the reader that

Numerous examples will make it plainly evident how mutable are human affairs,...and how pernicious, almost always to themselves but always to the people are those ill-advised measures of rulers who act solely in terms of what is in front of their eyes: either foolish errors or short-sighted greed.

Mark Phillips makes the important observation that twentieth-century historians seek broad explanations of major historical events, "and for that reason we may be inclined to see the princes as the scapegoats rather than the true culprits of history." But Guicciardini, he points out, held a view of history based on particular factors, and especially upon personalities. "Psychology and self-interest," writes Phillips, "guide the flow of events in the History. For Guicciardini,
then, princely cupidity is a perfectly serious explanation and it is backed up by a clear picture of the psychology of rulers." Describing Charles V in the aftermath of the Battle of Pavia, Guicciardini writes that

As far as one could understand from external signs, the Emperor's actions appeared clearly to indicate a very moderate state of mind: a man not easily swept away by his good luck, an attitude that seemed incredible in so powerful and young a prince, who had never known anything but felicity. Here, Guicciardini expresses surprise at moderation on the part of any inexperienced and victorious prince, especially given "the insolence which commonly accompanies victories." Moreover, his use of the term "state of mind" illustrates the depth of his interest in the psychological explanation of events. Indeed, one of the great achievements of the History of Italy in the sphere of Italian historiography is Guicciardini's establishment of "a close causal connection between history and human psychology."

One feature of the mind-set of princes which Guicciardini investigates is ambition. To ambition he attributes a large role in shaping events. He says that King Ferrante of Naples desired peace in Italy before 1494 "despite the fact that quite often in the past he had revealed ambitions not conducive to maintaining the peace," and describes Ludovico Sforza as "restless and ambitious." Ambition continues to be a prominent cause of Italy's woes. According to Guicciardini, the fundamental cause of the resumption of war in Italy in 1521, after three years of peace, was the "ambition of two most mighty kings (Francis I and Charles V), puffed up with
with mutual jealousies, which incited them to exercise all
their disdain in Italy." 49

Guicciardini does not think that ambition *per se* is a
bad quality. The nature of a person's ambition is the important
factor:

Ambition is not to be condemned, nor should one revile
the ambitious man's desire to gain glory by honorable
and worthy means. Such men as these do great and outstanding
things, and anyone who lacks this urge is inclined
rather to idleness than to effort. Ambition is pernicious
and detestable when its sole end is power. This is
usually true of those princes who, when they set it
up as an idol to achieve what will lead them to power,
set aside conscience, honor, humanity, and all else. 50

Another of Guicciardini's primary concerns was motivations
of actors in history, and he takes great pains to discover
the reasons for their actions. Before he wrote the *History of
Italy*, he worked briefly on a "Commentary" which was to be an
account of his own involvement in the affairs of 1525-27,
and was later incorporated into the *History of Italy*. In it
he describes the purpose of writing history:

The true value of history consists more in understanding the
motives and the origins of things than in knowing the effects... What actually happened is well-known to
everyone whereas the origins and motives are hidden. 51

A moment of reflection on what he had written must have led
Guicciardini to abandon his commentary in favor of the *History
Of Italy*. Given his interest in "the origins of things" the
work at hand would have been insufficient for his full under-
standing of the events of 1525-27; he felt he had to return
to before the beginning of the invasions to seek an explanation
for Italy's ruin. The interest in motivation expressed here is
also plainly evident in the *History*. Seeking an explanation
of Piero de' Medici's decision to oppose Charles VIII's designs on the kingdom of Naples in 1494, Guicciardini attributes it to Piero's belief that King Ferrante's stable hold on Naples could be a prop for his own control over Florence. Although Guicciardini frequently ultimately attributes the actions of rulers to ambition or cupidity, he also tries to understand their motives in terms of their specific designs and interests. Ludovico's invitation to the French is seen as princely folly, but Guicciardini extends his analysis and perceives Sforza's actions as part of an intricate design:

...his plan was, once he had made himself Duke of Milan and brought the French army into Tuscany, to then interpose and bring about some agreement, whereby Alfonso would acknowledge himself tributary to the crown of France with suitable guarantees to the king, and after having dismembered perhaps the lands which the Florentines held in Limigiana, the king would then return to France. Thus the Florentines would have been beaten; the King of Naples weakened in force and authority; and he, Ludovico, having become Duke of Milan, would have achieved as much as was necessary to maintain his security without the impending danger of a French victory.

For Guicciardini, "personal interest is the mistress that drives all men." He describes the peace in Europe in 1518 and Pope Leo X's plan to bring together the rulers of Europe in a crusade against the westward-expanding Ottoman Empire:

Everyone declared himself to be against the Turk and to be ready (if the others concurred) to lend all their strengths to so just a cause, nevertheless, since each of them considered the danger uncertain and very far off, and relating more to one state than to another, and since it was very difficult, and required a long time to introduce such a sense of zeal to so universal a union, private interests and advantages prevailed.

Here Guicciardini's idea that "self-interest—the satisfaction of the *particolar*-—was basic to man's nature, and its only permanent element," is given application. Myron Gilmore,
in his general Renaissance history The World of Humanism, 1453-1517, entitles the chapter of the period of the invasions of Italy "The Particular Interests of the Christian Princes." This could well have served as a subtitle for Guicciardini's History of Italy, a work which "reveals a state of affairs in which the element of self-interest runs amuck on an international scale."  

Guicciardini's retrospective history of the invasions of Italy began as a work, entitled Florentine Affairs, in which he intended narrate a parochial, Florentine view of the Italian tragedy. By his later years he had realized that it would not be possible to treat these affairs without a much broader, Italian scale. It has been observed that a reading of the History of Italy leaves open the question of the author's native city; Florence itself has a large but not disproportionate place in the narrative. In addition, Guicciardini brings into his work the affairs of all of Europe insofar as they affect occurrences in Italy:

Perhaps it would seem beyond the bounds of my proposal not to deal with events occurring outside of Italy, if I make mention of what happened in France in that same year (1512); but because our concerns are affected by what has happened there, and because the successes of one are often conjoined with the successes and decisions of the other, I cannot pass over French events in silence.  

While in the History of Italy Europe may be a "thin, fitful presence," Guicciardini's recognition of the need to transcend the history of a single city-state is a great departure from the historiographic tradition he had inherited.

There are other respects in which Guicciardini takes leave of the humanist and Machiavellian historiographic
prescriptions from which he emerged. Humanist historians made little use of documentary materials, usually relying upon a single source of their choosing. Not believing that archives were particularly useful for their purposes, they consulted only documents that were readily available to them. Guicciardini, on the other hand, made use of documents throughout his career as an historian. He had used family archives in composing his History of Florence. In his Florentine Affairs he used fifteen previous histories as well as his father's papers and the Commissioni of Rinaldo degli Albizzi, a Florentine leader in the pre-Medici era. He had with him as he wrote the History of Italy the entire archives of the Dieci, the organ of Florentine government responsible for foreign policy. His biographer writes that in composing the History of Italy, "Guicciardini used documents with a method more rigorous than any had done before him and few did after."

Though Guicciardini surpassed humanist historiography in certain respects, he was also very much in its debt. He intended to write a "true history;" on a page opposite the text of his original manuscript are excerpted the sentences on historical writing found in Cicero's De Oratore. In addition, one may speculate as to whether he would have adopted his broad Italian perspective and mentioned European affairs had not humanist historiography emphasized foreign affairs.

Guicciardini, however, is clearly aware of the limitations of a number of aspects of humanist historiography, and
modifies or qualifies their use on frequent occasions. He uses the classical-humanist technique of inventing speeches and attributing them to historical figures, but on the first such occasion in the History of Italy he attributes the speech to its orator only "in substance," admitting conscientiously to his readers that he has made up the speech. He uses the familiar annalistic form in the History, but the change of years is not given much significance when it does not correspond to important events, and his references to each new year rarely coincide with his division of the work into twenty separate books.

Unlike the humanists, Guicciardini is relatively unconcerned with the literary qualities of his work. He writes in long sentences, but they are not the balanced and periodic sentences of his humanist predecessors. Indeed, his prose tends to "stretch continuity and attention to the breaking point." The following sentence, in which Guicciardini describes the fears of Italian leaders in the aftermath of the Battle of Pavia, constitutes an entire paragraph:

They were less reassured by what many divulged regarding the good intentions of the Emperor, and of his inclination toward peace, and not to usurp the states of others, than terrorized by considering the great danger that he, moved either by ambition which ordinarily is natural among princes, or by the insolence which commonly accompanies victories, and spurred likewise by the hotheadedness of those who governed his affairs in Italy, and finally by the persuasions of his council and court, would on such an occasion (which was sufficient to kindle the coldest spirit) turn his thoughts toward making himself lord of all Italy; knowing how easy it is for every great prince, and most of all for a Roman emperor, to justify his enterprises with appearances that seem honest and reasonable.

Plodding sentences such as these are not the result of
Guicciardini's inability to express himself clearly. On the contrary, they reveal his desire to control his analysis and make the truths he discovers as precise as possible. The humanist historiographers had been professional writers. In a work such as Bruni's Panegyric to the City of Florence or his didactic History of Florence, the force of the rhetoric, and hence the style, were central concerns. Machiavelli wanted to make his derived political laws memorable, so he wrote in a witty and acerbic style. Guicciardini's concerns were only accuracy and exhaustive detail.

A frequent humanist ornamental technique was the inclusion of omens which preceded battles and other momentous events, which were used to foreordain the chances of success or failure. Guicciardini himself employs this convention. During Charles VIII's preparations to invade Italy, Guicciardini relates, "in Puglia one night, three suns appeared in the sky." Thus, "the very heavens" were involved in predicting the future woes of Italy." Clearly, though, Guicciardini views this literary device as excess humanist stylistic baggage; in his own mind he had rejected the value of extra-rational portents:

Philosophers, theologians, and all the others who examine things unseen or beyond nature, talk all kinds of nonsense, because in fact men are in the dark over these matters, and this investigation has served and still serves to exercise the intellect rather than to discover the truth.

For Guicciardini, the truth lies not within the realm of the extra-rational, nor in the patterns which lie beneath the historical process, because no such patterns exist. He offers none of the lessons or prescriptions with which the humanists had infused their histories. One lesson he does
offer is a demonstration of the mutability of history, but this is seen as a given and not subject to human control. He instead turns his narrative to the affairs of individuals, and is led to his conclusions about human selfishness and the folly of princes. In focusing his attention on the causes and effects of human motivation, "Guicciardini offers us the explanatory force of the narrative itself, and the explanation of the Italian collapse is the History of Italy."
CHAPTER IV

THE MIRROR OF FEUDALISM:
FRENCH VERNACULAR HISTORIOGRAPHY, 1200-1477

The French late medieval historiographic tradition differed greatly from the Italian historiography discussed earlier. Throughout much of the medieval period, however, the two traditions had been essentially the same. As was the case in Italy, early French historiography was the work of clerics writing in Latin. Moreover, it shared with its Italian counterpart an all-embracing, universal view of Christian history, concerned with "the lines of succession from the holy apostles and the periods that have elapsed from our saviour's time to our own." This type of history survived through the thirteenth century and beyond, but was eventually eclipsed by vernacular histories which treated well-circumscribed areas rather than narrating a universal history. This shift has been attributed to the "Ockhamist Crisis" of the fourteenth century, which called into question the applicability of all universal frameworks. However, the tradition of French vernacular historiography began a century earlier, with Geoffrey of Villehardouin's The Conquest of Constantinople, a history of the Fourth Crusade. Subsequent vernacular histories took a variety of forms, but they had an important feature in common. They were for and about the noble classes of the feudal world. Perhaps, then, it is a
rising self-consciousness among the feudal nobility which stimulated this new historiography, for, as will be shown later, the decline of the French nobility at the end of the Hundred Years' War marked the end of this type of history.

This historiography was above all concerned with chivalry, which Johan Huizinga defines as "a sublime form of secular life." This emphasis is discernible throughout these works; we read of gallant feats of arms and fidelity to the feudal bond. Feudal knights were constantly at war. It was not only an obligation, it also provided diversion in an idle and monotonous life, and was highly celebrated. In reflecting this feature of French life, medieval French historians glorify knightly bravery and virtues. Writes Huizinga,

The conception of chivalry constituted for these authors a sort of magic key, by the aid of which they explained to themselves the motives of politics and history. The confused image of contemporaneous history being too much complicated for their comprehension, they simplified it, as it were, by the fiction of chivalry as a moving force.

This point, however, must not be overstated. These authors merely reflected the goings-on in French noble society. Each of these authors also had his own reasons for writing history, and his work was colored as much by these particularities as it was by the chivalric ideal. In all cases, though, the underlying admiration for and celebration of chivalry is evident.

Villehardouin's The Conquest of Constantinople, written in the first or second decade of the thirteenth century, has been the subject of much controversy among historians. Villehardouin, the Marshal of Champagne, was an important figure in the Fourth Crusade. The subject of his role in the decision of the crusaders to divert their mission from Syria
to Zara and to the Byzantine Empire, which resulted in the conquest of Christian territory by the crusaders, is a much-debated one. It seems, though, that Villehardouin did deliberately omit from his chronicle information about the decision to divert the crusade which may have cast a negative light on his own role in the affair.

Villehardouin, like many lay chroniclers, was a member of a feudal nobility which was largely unaware of Latin learning and the Latin universal history. Villehardouin's style derives largely from the popular forms of the chansons de geste and the traditional epic. The soldiers in Villehardouin's work fight not for eternal glory but for earthly merit, which derives from the fulfilment of the feudal chivalric ideal. His imitation of the epic form may be unconscious, as the entire crusading army may well have identified itself with the popular literature of the times and measured their successes and reverses against those of epic heroes. In a device familiar to the reader of French epic works, Villehardouin frequently employs hyperbole in his description of the crusade: "Never was so great an enterprise undertaken by any people since the creation of the world." Villehardouin's style also reveal an affinity with the prose conte, an epic tale of imagined or real knightly heroics, recited by professional story-tellers. The text of Villehardouin's work contains many devices widely used in the oral presentation of such epics. Transitional phrases such as "Now let us for this present speak of them no further but speak of the pilgrims," or the omnipresent anticipatory phrase "as you will shortly hear" were commonplace in the prose conte.
The Conquest of Constantinople was not an imagined story, but the narration of an actual crusade, and a failed one at that. Thus, as the narrative progresses and both author and reader are made increasingly aware of the failure of the crusade, Villehardouin's enthusiasm diminishes; Villehardouin changes his tone to a more strictly narrative one. The book ends abruptly and arbitrarily as the author can find no conclusion appropriate to the epic format.

The prime mover in Villehardouin's history was God. His use of divine will to explain events was formulaic and common to crusade chronicles. The crusades were, after all, holy missions, and to their own minds the crusaders acted with the protection of God. When the outnumbered French crusaders defeat a Greek army, Villehardouin writes: "...our Lord orders battles as it pleases him. By his grace and by his will, the Franks vanquished the Greeks." Villehardouin did not, however, attribute all actions undertaken by the crusaders to God's will. Only those who were on the "right" side, in Villehardouin's biased reminiscence of the crusade, were guided by divine will. Villehardouin argues that the crusade could not proceed to the holy land because some of the barons who had taken the cross sailed from Flanders instead of Marseilles, and thus the crusaders were unable to meet the terms of the contract they had undertaken with the Venetians, who were to transport the crusading army to the holy land. God had nothing to do with the decision by these barons to sail from Flanders; Villehardouin attributes actions of which he disapproves to human failure and
"ill-advice." Their actions were contrary to the divine purpose of the crusade. According to Villehardouin they failed Christendom by sailing from northern ports.

Their actions are also contrary to their feudal obligations, which for Villehardouin are bound closely to religious ones. Thus Villehardouin writes of these "misguided" crusaders: "...ill did they keep the faith they had sworn to the count" (Baldwin of Flanders, one of the leaders of the crusade). Throughout The Conquest of Constantinople, Villehardouin shows an obsessive concern with loyalty to feudal obligations. He mentions a group of nobles who went directly to Syria and vowed to return, but he makes no mention of their successes or failures. We only read that they did not return and thus failed to keep their oath. Villehardouin defends the brutal sack of Zara, a Christian city, by referring to the company's compelling obligations. The defeat of the crusading army in their siege of Adrianople is attributed to the failure of some segments of the army to "keep to what had been settled the night before." The theme of faithlessness to the feudal bond (traison) was a frequent one in the epics whose style Villehardouin borrowed, as was the emphasis on reputation discernible throughout his work. The failure of men is seen as the failure of the religious and feudal underpinnings of the chivalric ideal. When the booty from the final sack of Constantinople is being collected, Villehardouin writes:

Some brought in loyally, and some brought in evil sort (i.e. they kept some of the booty for themselves), because covetousness, which is the root of all evil, let and hindered them...Ah God! how loyally they had borne themselves up to now.
Villehardouin, it is true, proceeds from the assumption that the sack of Constantinople, indeed the entire conduct of the crusade, was justifiable and divinely sanctioned. It is within this framework that he discusses the actions of those who took the cross. While he may not have consciously measured the actions of the crusaders against the codes of chivalry, the heroes of *The Conquest of Constantinople*, if there are any at all, are those who served God and fulfilled their feudal bond with the most loyalty and faith.

Villehardouin's emphasis on the character of the feudal nobility, while clearly recognizable, is not overt. His work was predominantly a history of a military expedition, and an apologia for actions that certainly were called into question by many of his contemporaries. Later chronicles were more forthright in their emphasis on the chivalrous calling of the feudal nobility. An example of such a work is Jean of Joinville's *History of Saint Louis*, which is in part a personal crusade chronicle and in part a flattering portrait of King Louis IX of France. Joinville, like Villehardouin, was a noble from the Champagne region of France. He took the cross with King Louis in 1248 and returned to France in 1254. In the 1270's he began to write a chronicle of the Egyptian crusade. The scope of his work was expanded when in 1298, during the process of Louis' canonization, he was asked by the French queen Jeanne of Navarre to write a book containing "the holy words and good deeds of Saint-Louis." Joinville's *History* became a three-part work. The first section is a portrait of the saintly king, sovereign, the second is a narrative of the crusade itself, and
the third is a summary of able administrative decisions made by the king after his return to France.

Joinville's chronicle, however, is less a work about Louis IX himself than it is about the noble class and the fulfillement of the obligations of chivalry by those who took the cross. 27 Joinville asserts at the outset of his History that this would be his concern (Oddly, the division he proposes differs from the structure of the finished work): "The first part telleth how he ruled himself all his days by God and the Church, and to the profit of his realm. The second part of the book speaketh of his knightly emprises and his high feats of arms." 28 What emerges most plainly from the History of Saint Louis is the outlook of a French nobleman at the end of the epic era of the crusades. 29 The self-consciousness of the nobility, its aspirations, and the author's view of his class's place in the feudal world are discussed within the framework of a royal portrait and a crusade chronicle.

Unlike Villehardouin, Joinville does not have a propagandistic purpose in narrating the crusade itself. Therefore, he recounts the victories and defeats of the crusaders dispassionately. Villehardouin had to place the sailors from Marseilles in God's favor to emphasize the rightness of their conduct and justify their actions. While God, in Joinville's History, is not present every step of the way, He makes occasional appearances, though as a broad, general cause rather than in a specific sense. Joinville thus attributes his survival of numerous perils, including a last-minute reprieve when his execution by his Egyptian captors seems certain, to God's grace:
"And these things will I have written that they that hear them may have trust in God in their afflictions and tribulations; and God shall aid them even as me." In Joinville's work, though, divine will is rarely invoked; unlike Villehardouin, he did not either thank God or lament God's will with each description of a battle won or lost.

Joinville's focus, then, is primarily the actions of men and not of God, and the characters in Joinville's history are drawn so as to represent the earthly division of society into three distinct orders: the nobility, the clergy, and peasant and burgher class. For centuries these social classes and the calling which inhered in each had been described in these terms. The duty of the nobles, or defensores, was to uphold the faith with the sword; the clerics or oratores upheld it with prayer and discourses. The duty of the third class, or laboratores, was to preserve itself and perpetuate the classes above it. As Saint Paul had said, the duty of a Christian was to be aware of his place in the social ordo and conform to it "in the state in which he was called" (I Corinthians 7:20). For Joinville and for Louis IX, fulfilling the duties of their rank meant governing themselves according to the chivalric code, or being a prud'homme.

Being a prud'homme was no mean task, for to be one a man had to maintain a balance between courage and prudence, honor and excess zeal, and worldliness and Christian piety. A prud'homme had to be both a warrior and a courtier, a man of both resolute judgment and complete integrity. Service to God was crucial for such a man. King Louis himself makes a
clear distinction between

a brave man and a man of worth, a preux-homme and a prud'homme. For there are many brave men, knights in the land of the Christians and of the Saracens, that never believed in God or in his Mother. Wherefore I tell you... that God giveth a great gift and a great grace to the Christian knight whom he suffereth to be valiant in body and that he endureth in his service keeping him from mortal sin; and he that thus demeaneth himself should men call prud'homme, a man of worth, for this prowess cometh to him from God. And them of whom I have spoken may men call brave men, preux-hommes, for they are valiant, and fear neither God nor mortal sin. 33

The code of a prud'homme, however, left no room for excessive zeal. Too much striving for preudomie yielded a lesser, not a greater sum of virtue. 34 Thus, according to Joinville, those who advised King Louis to undertake a new crusade in 1267 committed a "mortal sin." 35

To be a prud'homme was to be aware of one's calling. King Louis and Joinville alike are conscious of their own noble rank and the obligations inherent in it. To a knight bested in theological debate with a Jew, Louis declares vehemently:

And so I say to you that no man, unless he be a very good clerk, should argue with them; but the layman, when he heareth the Christian law reviled, should not defend it but by his sword, wherewith he should pierce the vitals of the reviler as far as it will go. 36

Louis thus defined the calling of the clerical and noble classes; on another occasion he presents his view of the calling of the laboratores. When Joinville admonishes the king that he should endure an ill-behaved but faithful groom because of long years of service, Louis replies, "He hath not served us, but we have served him when we have endured him about us." 37 Thus it was a privilege for the common people to serve the feudal class, and it was the responsibility of the prud'homme to recognize this social order.
In addition to being a manual of *preudomie*, Joinville's *History* is also a more rarefied celebration of knightly heroics and feudal loyalty. He celebrates a battle simply because it was fought according to the traditional feudal canons: "And know ye that this was a very fair feat of arms: for none shot with the bow or crossbow, but the strife was all with maces and swords between the Turks and our own folk."\(^{38}\) Indeed, the French nobility was clinging to this particular precept long after it became outmoded. As one historian as written, Joinville "is the ancestor of the French knights who lost the Battle of Poitiers because they would fight according to the code of chivalry."\(^{39}\)

Joinville ordinarily took a dim view of martyrdom. On one occasion he scorns the advice of a cellarer who expresses the opinion that "we should let ourselves be killed, for then we should all go hence to Paradise."\(^{40}\) He can bubble with enthusiasm, however, when even a cleric offers himself as a martyr on the battlefield. Describing the death of James of Castel, Bishop of Soissons, Joinville relates that

> When he saw that our men were giving way on the side of Damietta, he who had a great wish to be with God, nor desired to go back to the land wherein he was born, therefore made haste to go to God, and set spur to his horse, and attacked the Turks all by himself, who slew him with their swords, and set him in the fellowship of God, numbered among the martyrs.\(^{41}\)

That Joinville praises such a wish for martyrdom by a cleric but ridicules that of a commoner is indicative of the class prejudice which he, as a member of the nobility, harbored deeply.

The *History of Saint Louis* also reflects a deep concern
for the feudal bond. While Joinville laments the death of a knight who had defied the king's orders and gone unilaterally into battle, he reports that the king, when informed of the incident, "answered that he desired not to have a thousand such, should they disobey his orders as this man had done." Joinville ultimately favors the king's viewpoint in this instance. When the time arrives for the crusaders to return to France, Louis declares that it is out of the question for him to "leave my folk in the hands of the Saracens and not do at least what I can to deliver them." In a final tribute to the king's loyalty, Joinville attributes to a cleric speaking on behalf of Louis' canonization the statement that

Ye may see that he was the most loyal man that ever lived in his time, will I tell you that he was so loyal that even with the Saracens would he keep the covenant... that he had promised...by his word alone; and so it was that if he had not kept it, he would have gained five thousand crowns and more.

Joinville was more of a general observer than was Villehardouin, who dogmatically argued a particular point of view. Moreover, Joinville's work was not exclusively a narrative of a crusade, and he takes time to linger over the splendor of Louis' court. Describing the king's court at Saumour in 1241, he discusses the seating arrangement at a feast, provides a brilliant image of the courtiers' colorful dress, and marvels at the attendance of a "full three thousand knights." Joinville also betrays a note of self-consciousness about his task as a chronicler. The fate of a certain crusader is unknown to him, and he informs the reader that "I made inquiry of those who were about him:" In these last two respects Joinville anticipates the work of Jean Froissart (1330's-1404?).
whose Chronicle of France, England, Spain and Adjoining Countries is undoubtedly the outstanding French chronicle of the fourteenth century.

Froissart's Chronicle covers the period from 1326 to 1400, a period in which "European chivalry flowered in its final glory." The end of the crusades witnessed a diminution in the religious element of chivalry, so that Froissart, himself a cleric but also a poet, could write:

All joy and all honor
Stem from feats of arms, and from love.

While courtly love makes few appearances in Froissart's Chronicle, which focuses on feats of arms, it is the central focus of his extensive poetry.

As courtly love rose to occupy an important place in the chivalric code describe by Froissart, God's role was diminished. The inclusion of the two was not contradictory; rather, Froissart wrote "as though he had too much respect for Providence to connect divine action in any way with the game of war and politics which so engrossed his contemporaries." Between the battles of the Hundred Years' War and the internecine war endemic to late medieval France (a topic which will be addressed later) the French nobility was constantly engaged in battle. Successes and failures in these wars were attributed by Froissart not to God but to fortune. The idea of fortune's role in the governance of affairs waxed greatly in fourteenth-century France as in Italy; the wheel of fortune, depicted even in the stained-glass windows of French cathedrals, reflected a view of fortune's role expressed by Froissart in his poetry:
On the very last page of the Chronicle, Froissart comments on the instability of human affairs. In describing the funeral of King Richard II of England, he writes: "Now consider well, ye great lords, kings, dukes, earls, barons and prelates, and all men of great lineage and puissance; see and behold how the fortunes of this world are marvellous and turn diversely." In this passage, Froissart, by addressing himself to "those of lineage and puissance" reveals both the subject and intended audience of his work. He wrote for a variety of patrons among Europe's nobility: Philippa of Hainaut, the wife of England's King Edward III; Wenceslas of Bohemia; Albert of Bavaria; and Guy of Blois. Thus it is not surprising that Froissart reflects the outlook of the aristocracy. His view of the nobility was cosmopolitan, he admired not just the lords of a single nation but the entire feudal aristocracy of Europe.

Indeed, Froissart's view of society reflects the bias of the nobility. He includes Wat Tyler's rebellion in England in his narrative only "in order that gentlemen and others may take example and learn how to correct such wicked deeds." John Ball, one of the leaders of the peasants' rebellion, is described as "crazy;" Tyler himself is "a bad man and an enemy of the nobility." This is not simply aristocratic disdain for commoners, though. The rebels were revolting against what the nobility perceived to be the divinely ordained pattern of society. Froissart's social attitude may also be illustrated by a comparison of his treatment of two unpleasant occurrences,
the destruction of a city and the death of a knight. The sack of Limoges by the English in 1370 is narrated with utter detachment:

...Then there were to be seen pillagers in active mischief. It was a melancholy business; all ranks, ages and sexes cast them on their knees before the prince (Edward the Black Prince, the English leader) for mercy; but he was so inflamed with passion that he listened to none of them, all were put to the sword.56

Froissart simply cannot become excited about the death of even several thousand burghers; the destruction of their city is but a "melancholy business". On the other hand, upon the death of Sir John Chandos, Seneschal of Poitou, whose death moved his followers to fight "like madmen," the aristocratic chronicler attributes to them the following lament: "Oh Sir John Chandos, flower of knighthood, cursed be the forging of that lance that wounded thee."57 For Froissart, nobles are more real as people than are members of the lower orders of society.

Froissart's primary interest is in gallantry and knightly heroics. The Hundred Years' War was for him a protracted pageant. Froissart himself was a Fleming, serving both English and French patrons, and supporting neither side. He is not interested in the political rights and wrongs of the war, but instead "favored gallantry wherever it was displayed,"58 and wrote his Chronicle "to the intent that the honorable and noble adventures of feats of arms, done and achieved by the wars of France and England, should notable be enregistered and put in perpetual memory."59 He seems bored with topics not directly relevant to his theme. Before discussing the 1385 peace treaty between the count of Flanders and the city of
Ghent, which ended seven years of bloody conflict, he writes, "I shall beg of you to have the goodness to attend to me while I report how peace was brought about." Peace was nothing more than a tiresome interlude between battles.

Froissart's visit to the court of Gaston of Foix provides much material for the *Chronicle*. When Gaston tells him, "...my fair son, more gallant deeds of arms have been performed within the last forty years, and more wonderful things have happened, than for three hundred years before," Froissart continues, "...if I have hitherto dwelt on gallant deeds, on hard-fought skirmishes and battles, and told how castles, forts and towns were attacked and taken, many more will follow." Froissart's ideal, of course, is a conflict such as the 1367 Battle of Navaretta, fought by Edward the Black Prince in an effort to restore King Peter of Castile to his throne, which had been usurped by his brother Henry. In this battle both sides excel:

The loss was immense on both sides and the mighty deeds which were done there are too numerous to be told. The Prince shone pre-eminently, and proved well his noble birth, and the gallantry of his knighthood, by his eagerness to fight the enemy; on the other side King Henry acquitted himself right valiantly in every situation.

In a work largely devoid of religious content, focusing instead on military prowess Froissart can, and does, praise the Saracens for their fine military organization and discipline, writing that "the flower of infidel chivalry was in their town." Froissart is obsessed not only with warfare and chivalry, he also celebrates the trappings that accompany them. His purpose is to entertain the nobility. He wants to recreate for his readers the splendor of the figures and events
described in his Chronicle. His recording of visual impressions has been likened to "a sequential, panoramic 'take'." On the preparations for the Battle of Navaretta, he writes that "It was a beautiful sight to see them approach with their brilliant armor glittering with the sunbeams. It was delightful to see and examine these banners and pennons with the noble army that was under them." Just as Froissart is concerned with his characters' appearances and not their motivations, it is the outward appearance of events, not their meaning, which receives his attention. Describing the preparations made by King Charles VI for his unrealized invasion of England in 1386, Froissart lists no less than forty-two items of arms and provisions readied for the channel crossing, including cheese bowls, ointment, utensils for the buttery, spurs, fat pigs, and "every article necessary for man and beast." Froissart's patient cataloguing of the objects accumulated by the French army can also, to a certain extent, be attributed to his desire to record the efficacy of the French king's preparations. The exhaustiveness of his list also reveals his own seriousness of purpose. Froissart strove for accuracy and objectivity. Thus, on one occasion, he writes, 

Let it not be said that I have corrupted this noble history through the favor accorded me by Count Guy of Blois, for whom I wrote it. No, indeed! for I will say nothing but the truth and keep a straight course without favoring one side or the other.

Froissart's desire to write an accurate chronicle impelled him to travel extensively. He spent several months in Scotland and Brittany, visiting castles and battle sites, and speaking to numerous lords and knights about their experiences in combat.
Thus, Froissart jumps at the opportunity to visit Gaston of Foix. His stay with Gaston will be very fruitful, since "knights and squires from all countries assembled at his court."  

Notwithstanding Froissart's self-consciousness as an historian, which led him to seek accuracy and numerous oral and written sources in the composition of his Chronicle, his work leaves the reader with little "sense of history." His descriptions of battle do not change over the seventy-four year period he covers, and grow tedious. The characters he celebrates never learn, they simply accumulate a glowing record of "high feats of arms."  Froissart betrays no sense that the society he celebrates was rapidly changing, indeed on the verge of extinction. P.S. Lewis has recently argued that to a great extent the Hundred Years' War was as much a civil war of the French kingdom as it was a national war between England and France. The issue which underlay the Hundred Years' War concerned the French king's theoretical sovereignty over his kingdom. In its most pronounced manifestation, this conflict was initially a struggle between Edward III of England and Phillip VI of France, not so much over the crown of France but over the long-disputed question of Edward's sovereignty over his continental possessions. The legitimacy of Edward's feudal claims gave many French nobles the opportunity to back the side by whose victory they stood to gain the most. Indeed, many French nobles supported the English kings throughout the course of the war. In both a military and political sense, however, the nobility depicted so glowingly in Froissart's
chronicle was a social order in decline. In England, the concept of the "feudal army" had been supplanted by the more extensive use of paid professional military companies, and the noble style of battle was decisively altered by the long bow. In France, customary feudal warfare lasted longer, but the conditions of its service differed little from that of the professional companies. By the 1440's Charles VII of France had created a national army; the political consolidation of the realm would not be complete, however, until Louis XI and Charles VIII quelled the unrest of the duchies of Burgundy and Brittany, long the French crown's two most powerful vassals. This crisis of the military order of society is reflected in Froissart's Chronicle. Gone from his conception of chivalry is the emphasis on feudal honor which had characterized the work of Villehardouin and Joinville; military undertakings had become much more particularistic and their celebration refers almost exclusively to the military prowess which they displayed, not their service to a suzerain.

If by the turn of the fifteenth century the medieval notion of chivalry and the historiography which celebrated it had grown overripe, the last gasps of these forms, after the Hundred Years' War had ended and "the day of the medieval nobility was over," showed that these institutions had grown fully rotten.

By the middle of the fifteenth century, the customs of chivalry were observed only at the courts of princes. The last two dukes of Burgundy, Philip the Good (1419-1467) and Charles the Bold (1467-1477), employed historians who served
as narcissistic mirrors for the anachronistic aspirations of these still-powerful vassals of the French king. Courtly splendor was celebrated as never before. Olivier de La Marche, whose copious Memoirs span the period from 1435-1502, devotes over one hundred pages to the wedding celebration of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York. Georges Chastellain, the Burgundy dukes' official historiographer from 1455 to 1475, call Duke Philip: "France's most magnificent prince since Charlemagne," and "the most renowned duke the world has seen in a thousand years." He writes that "none of the Roman emperors, even the best among them, had ever been surrounded with as much ceremony, honor, and reverence as he was." Huizinga considers the work of Chastellain to be the supplanting of truth by a "fairy-story," a work of fantasy and splendor.

La Marche's description of the "Pheasant's Banquet" held at the Burgundian court shows the dukes' continued sense of self-importance at its most pronounced. The nobles of the duchy vow, with Philip "that if it please our most Christian and victorious king (Charles VII) to take the cross... I shall personally serve with him in this holy crusade." The entire Pheasant's banquet is a showy, empty, charade, a "magnificent illustration of verbal fantasy posing as action." As Paul Archambault writes:

The Burgundian word was a surrogate deed, providing both a sense of accomplishment and an excuse for inactivity... One measures the height from which the thirteenth-century ideal of preudomie has fallen when one recalls King Louis' remark to Joinville that heretics are to be refuted not by subtle arguments but with a deep sword-thrust through the belly.

Both Chastellain and La Marche and their patrons clung to a reality which in truth no longer existed. The feudal world
of Joinville's time and long been eclipsed by the inexorable consolidation of the French monarchy. The new reality was perceived by Philippe de Commynes, who knew "men and their motives too well to impute to them high-minded, dispassionate ideals," and instead "saw them as they are, not as he would have liked them to be." It is to his work that we now turn.
Philippe de Comynes (1447?–1511) had more political experience than any of the French chroniclers discussed in the last chapter, more even than Machiavelli, and the extent of his career indeed rivals that of Guicciardini's. His Memoirs, the first six books of which cover all but the first three years of the reign of King Louis XI of France and were written from 1487 to 1491, and whose last two books are an account of King Charles VIII's expedition to Italy and were written from 1495 to 1498, provide an insider's view of French royal politics in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Comynes' virtual abandonment of chivalry as a "magic key" for understanding history brought French historiography "up to date," as it were, in the way in which it reflected French society and politics.

Comynes was a minor Burgundian nobleman who entered the service of Duke Charles the Bold in 1464. He served Charles as an adviser and chamberlain until he switched his allegiance to King Louis XI, whom he served in a similar capacity and as an ambassador, until the king's death in 1483. He sat briefly on the young King Charles VIII's council of regency, but fell from favor and was for a short time imprisoned by Charles' elder sister and regent Anne of Beaujeu when he participated in the intrigues of Louis of Orléans (later King Louis XII)
against the young king. His fall was the occasion of the writing of the first six books of the *Memoirs*. In 1494 he found himself back in royal favor and accompanied Charles on his expedition to Italy. After completing his *Memoirs*, he retired to his estate at Argenton, where he died in 1511.¹

A central issue in all consideration of Commynes is his switch of allegiance from the duke of Burgundy to the king of France. One historian has termed Commynes' desertion an act of treason which is minimized in the *Memoirs* by his description of such acts as commonplace.² To an extent, the *Memoirs* present evidence of Commynes' sense of guilt about this act. He mentions the act of his desertion of Charles only casually: "About this time (which was in the year 1472) I entered the service of the king..."³ That he makes very few references to it afterward, and none at all in his discussion of Louis XI's habit of luring people into his service, is quite striking. Also, he refers to himself only as "some friend of the king" when he describes his secret assistance of the king before his switch in allegiance.⁴ A less critical historian has questioned whether Burgundy was a country against which one could, in theory, commit treason, and adds that as king, Louis had always been Commynes' ultimate suzerain.⁵ However, Commynes himself extends the concept of treason to encompass more than desertions of a regional sovereign,⁶ and on one occasion terms Burgundy a country.⁷ There are other occasions when the accuracy of Commynes' description of his own questionable conduct is called into question. To his collusion with Louis of Orléans he makes only two implicit references.⁸ The only reference to his imprisonment is made in the context of a discussion of Louis XI's notorious iron
cages, when he glibly says of the king's building of these facilities for his prisoners: "A number of people have cursed him since then, including me, for I tried one of them out for a period of eight months under our present king." 9 On another occasion Commynes lies outright about this matter when he declares that nobody rose up against the newly crowned King Charles. 10 Commynes' Memoirs clearly reflect self-consciousness, perhaps even an unsettled conscience, about these two treacherous acts of his public career.

Why, then, if it disturbed his sensibilities, did Commynes abandon Charles the Bold to enter the service of the "spider-king?" One reason was that he was poorly paid by the duke. Louis, on the other hand, offered him a huge pension, a sizeable estate, and a wealthy bride. 11 Probably a more compelling reason, though, was Commynes' estimation of the two rulers. Charles was proud and self-reliant, and refused to heed Commynes' counsels against the duke's continued war-making. Commynes was conservative and opposed to violence, and a central message of his Memoirs is that

one should be wary of making a battle unless it is unavoidable, and, if it becomes absolutely necessary, then all things should be seriously considered before starting. And most of the time, those who act cautiously and use good foresight obtain better results than those who proceed with great arrogance. 12

Commynes clearly respected the king's calculating methods more than he did the duke's lust for battle. 13 Charles sought on the battlefield the same honor and glory which received such naive praise in earlier fifteenth-century chronicles; it was noted in the last chapter that Chastellain and La Marche spent their careers in service to the dukes of Burgundy. Commynes,
however, took a dim view of this by-now moribund conception. When the duke's English ally asks him to cease his aggression against Germany, Commynes writes that "he could not bring himself to do this, however, claiming that his honor would be trampled underfoot if he left, and offering other lame excuses."\(^{14}\)

Commynes' conception of political affairs reflected his awareness of the decline in political relevance of the chivalric ideal. It his distillation of this new reality that gives his Memoirs their trenchancy as a work both of political theory and of historiography.

Commynes' new approach to politics entailed a new approach to history. His break with previous French historiography, however, was not a complete one. On a stylistic level, the conceptions of his predecessors can be recognized in the Memoirs. Commynes' use of an expression such as "as you will hear,"\(^{15}\) hearkens all the way back to Villehardouin and the prose conte. Commynes also glorifies an event's legendary connotations. Of the army with which King Edward IV of England crossed the channel in 1475, he writes, "Never since the days of King Arthur had any king of England taken so many men at once to the other side of the sea."\(^{16}\) France in Commynes' day was still organized strictly along feudal lines; thus he shares with his predecessors the societal convention of referring to any nobleman superior in rank to himself as "my lord." Commynes more clearly expresses his own feudal outlook in describing his service to Louis XI during the king's illness in 1479: "I waited on his table for fifteen days and attended his person like a valet-de-chambre, which I considered a great privilege.
and was bound to do."

The Memoirs also reflect the same class prejudices evident in previous histories. Commynes tells of a minor friar who "had a private audience with the pope, which was a great honor for such a small man," and takes it amiss that Louis should send his barber to negotiate with Mary of Burgundy, calling him "a minor personage, who was unsuited for the management of so important an affair." In a limited way, the tradition of French historiography is still visible on Commynes' narrations of military affairs. He could still write that Charles the Bold assembled a "train of artillery fine and mighty for the time," and on another occasion relates that the duke's army "made a beautiful sight for those who were still at the rear to behold." After a battle undertaken by Charles, Commynes mentions that 120 men were lost, but only mentions by name the highest-ranking casualty of the day's fighting. Death, met nobly, could still be praiseworthy. Of plans by the citizens of Liège to sally forth and kill both Charles and Louis, who were encamped near the city during its siege in 1468, he writes that "They were confident that they would obtain great victory, or if worse came to worse, a most glorious death." Commynes also still recognizes the sanctity of the feudal word of honor, despite its inconsistency with his own behavior. When Charles the Bold betrays the Count of Saint Pol, an acknowledged enemy, into the hands of the king, Commynes writes:

all the excuses which I could muster up in this case could not extenuate the disloyal and dishonorable act which the duke committed when he sent a good and valid safe-conduct to the (count) and nevertheless seized him
On another occasion Commynes relates that when in 1475 Louis XI made peace with the English, "the duke became incensed;... and referred to several brave deeds of former kings of England who had invaded France and the pains which they had taken to acquire honor there." The invocation of chivalric honor here is not Commynes' own, however; it is the hotheaded duke's. This temperament, and its manifestations in Burgundy's conduct, had been part of of Commynes' reason for deserting Charles in 1472.

If Commynes' Memoirs can be placed stylistically in the tradition which preceded them, the author clearly broke from this tradition as well. His work is relatively free of visual ornamentation. He occasionally mentions that a particular castle is beautiful, but even his most elaborate visual description, that of Venice, where he spent eight months as Charles VIII's resident ambassador is not protracted. He describes Charles the Bold as "very ostentatious in his dress and in everything else—a little too much." While for Froissart this would have occasioned an elaborate and colorful description of the duke's wardrobe, right down to his drawers, for Commynes Charles' dress was merely pretense and a prince's peccadillo. Commynes also does not automatically venerate rank: "There are some lords with income of less than thirteen silver livres who are proud to say: 'Speak to my servants' and by this they think that they imitate very important people." Omitted entirely from the Memoirs is any mention of Commynes' selection by Charles as one of the twenty-five Burgundian knights who participated in a ceremonial joust on the occasion of his
marriage in 1468. Indeed, "Commynes had no use for the decorative aspects of knighthood." Finally the prose of the Memoirs is quite removed from the elegant style of Froissart and Chastellain, who were both poets and wrote with the intent to entertain. By the end of the following paragraph of the Memoirs, in which Commynes describes the contents of a letter he wrote to two members of the Venetian council, the reader can easily have forgotten the original idea being related:

In accordance with what we had decided, I wrote to them the substance of what I had told the major-domo; (I said that) I had found occasion to continue my office as a good mediator, as I had agreed to do at my departure from Venice, and that this was most agreeable to the king and seemed to me to be necessary, too, for there are always enough people around to trouble affairs, but there are few who have both the occasion and will to reach agreement about a great dispute or who are willing to endure all the words that are spoken by those who transact such affairs; for in such armies many different opinions exist.

Here, Commynes' style of writing is much more comparable to that of Guicciardini than it is to that of any of his French predecessors.

Commynes' concerns, too, reflect his abandonment of the feudal-chivalric ideal. His interest, as will be discussed later in greater detail, is in practical conduct, irrespective of imposed patterns for behavior. Thus he treats, though sparingly, the administrative capacities of Louis XI. He notes the king's establishment of a national postal service, and describes his efforts to centralize the monarchy. It was the king's "singular desire," writes Commynes,

to be able to establish a new policy in this kingdom, principally in regard to delays in legal proceeding, and in this respect to put strong controls over the court of Parlement... He was also very anxious to see used in this
kingdom one customary law and a single system of measures, and to have all the customary laws written in French and put in a beautiful book, so as to circumvent the ruses and robberies of lawyers, which are so great in this kingdom that none other can compare with it in this respect... If God had granted him the grace to live another five or six years without being too handicapped by illness, he would have done much good for his kingdom. 32

Commynes' description of the 1465 Battle of Montlhéry, in which Louis' army held its own against the League of the Public Weal, gives a clear indication of his concerns. The feudal formalities characteristic of war led to catastrophe, as did Charles the Bold's hasty cavalry charge, or they are immaterial; Commynes does not eulogize the numerous lords killed there. It is not customary chivalric valor described coloristically, but the wit, skill, and tactics of the various commanders that interest Commynes. 33

Commynes undertook his Memoirs not as an independent work, but as a testimony which Angelo Cato (1430's-1496), a Neapolitan humanist who entered the service of Louis XI in 1476 and who was rewarded with the Archbishopric of Vienne, planned to incorporate into a Latin history of the king's reign. 34 Thus Commynes' original intention was only to provide the archbishop with "an account of what I have known and heard of the acts of King Louis XI." 35 Commynes on occasion praises the king excessively; in a semi-eulogistic passage describing the gravely ill king he writes that Louis was "so wise that one could not go wrong with time, provided that one simply obeyed what he commanded, without adding anything of one's own." 36 In order for Commynes to exculpate himself from wrongdoing in entering Louis' service it was necessary for him to portray
the king favorably. In general, though, his praise for Louis is more modest. In describing what he considers errors in judgment on the king's part, he writes:

Chroniclers commonly write only things which reflect credit on those whose actions they record, and they omit many things...it is good to think that there is no prince so wise that he does not err once in a while.\textsuperscript{37}

Commynes clearly hopes that his supposedly objective outlook on the king's character will be reflected in Cato's reliance upon his testimony in composing his history.

Commynes did not see himself as an historian in the formal sense. He acknowledges that "I am not observing the order of writing used in histories, and I am not mentioning the years of the exact times during which the events took place."\textsuperscript{38}

Indeed, Commynes'\textit{Memoirs} are fraught with chronological errors and mistaken names and places. He himself is aware of these failings, and on one occasion begs the reader's forgiveness for, he says, "I wish only to make no errors as to substance."\textsuperscript{39}

Note, however, that he leaves the validity of his judgments open to question: After one of his frequent didactic asides on the conduct of diplomacy, he writes that "I realize that there are many persons more qualified than myself to speak about it, but at any rate this is what I would do."\textsuperscript{40}

Commynes' self-consciousness about his historical technique stems from his view of himself as both a participant in and an outsider to the French historiographic tradition. In his pursuit of causal explanations and his search for meaning in history he far surpasses his predecessors. Among French medieval historical writers he was "one of the few, if not the
only one, to bring a critical mind to bear on the narration of events."  

Commynes' causal analysis of events operates on two quite distinct levels. In the first, God is a distant arbiter of earthly events, playing the determining role in a meta-historical scheme which allows no prince or kingdom to become too powerful:

All things considered, it seems to me that God has created neither man nor beast without establishing some counterpart to oppose him, in order to keep him in humility and fear...To the kingdom of France he has opposed England; to the English he has opposed the Scots, and to the kingdom of Spain, Portugal...To the princes of Italy...God has opposed the communes of Italy...which are often against the lords, and the lords against them, so that neither may grow. Commynes' attribution to God of a role in his "quasi-mechanistic view of equilibrium" corresponds to the momentousness of the changes he describes. The fall of Burgundy was of enormous importance to Commynes, thus he asserts not once, but several times, that the decline of the duchy of Burgundy after Charles' death was "equal to their former measure of felicity." For Commynes, "historical events, such as divine compensation, human revenge, political balance of power and the tragic collapse of men and kingdoms are merely complementary arcs of the pendulum of history." Commynes attributes many of his ideas to his master Louis. Thus he writes that "King Louis had a saying, and in my opinion a wise one, according to which when pride rode before, shame
and destruction were soon to follow closely." Machiavelli had borrowed the ideas of Polybius in formulating his meta-
historical scheme, which operated by the force of its own mo-
mentum. Commynes, on the other hand, was not nearly so well
read in ancient literature, though he refers in certain in-
stances to ancient histories. In tone and in theory, however,
the meta-historical ideas of the two writers are ultimately
not so very different.

With God as a factor in his causal framework, Commynes
can also posit a religio-moral framework for historical
causation. Rather deterministically, he attributes mis-
fortunes of rulers to their lack of piety. This note is
struck in his account of the fall of Charles the Bold:

I have not seen any reason why he should have incurred the
wrath of God, unless it was because he considered all
the graces and honors which he had received in this
world to have been the result of his own judgment and
valor instead of attributing them to God, as he
should have.49

Ultimately, it is this framework, with its balancing concept
of divine justice, that Commynes uses to explain the outcome
of the affairs narrated in the first six books of his Memoirs.
Throughout the work Commynes expresses his disapproval of
the scheming intrigues of England's notorious "kingmaker,"
the Earl of Warwick, and the Count of Saint Pol, whose attempts
to play off Louis XI, Charles the Bold, and England's King
Edward IV against one another result in rare agreement among
the three princes in their common desire to see him dead, is
also condemned by Commynes for his conduct. Commynes sees
the death of these two characters as punishment at the hands
of God. This religio-moral framework, in which people are
rewarded for virtue and punished for vice, receives its final recapitulation upon the death of King Louis. According to Commynes,

God had granted him some grace, for just as he had created him wiser, more liberal, and more virtuous in all things than the other princes who ruled with him and in his time, so that he surpassed them in everything, so also he surpassed them in length of life. 50

The second level on which God operates in Commynes' conception of historical causation concerns not the great changes in the status of princes and peoples, but contingencies in day-to-day affairs. Whenever events transpire in a manner contrary to what is anticipated, Commynes discerns the hand of God. Thus he writes of Mary of Burgundy's decision not to marry into a French house, "God...decided to bring about another marriage, and we probably still do not know why he willed it so." 51 Besieging Liège in 1468, Charles the Bold won a great victory despite the fact that his troops were outnumbered and their morale was low. Charles' victory "came to him solely by the grace of God, against all human odds." 52 These invocations of divine will to explain events differ markedly from the examples given earlier. In those instances, the events described are in keeping with Commynes' overarching conception of divine justice, and he places them in that context. In the latter, examples, though, Commynes does not refer to this theme. Charles' victory is contrary to the ultimate resolution of divine justice which favors Louis XI and brings ruin upon the duchy of Burgundy, and Commynes finds Mary's marriage not relevant to it. In these instances, the actions of God cannot be placed in any framework; Commynes sees them as beyond
human understanding. A Machiavelli or a Guicciardini would have attributed these events to an impersonal quirk of fortune. Commynes, however explicitly rejects fortune as an explanatory agent. On the fall of Saint Pol, he writes:

One might say that fickle fortune had turned against him. However, to be more correct, one should say that such mysteries do not derive from fortune; besides, fortune is nothing more than a poetic fiction, and it must have been God who had abandoned him.53

While in this case, in which events correspond to Commynes' "divine justice" pattern, one would not expect Commynes to attribute the outcome to any force other than God, he rejects fortune entirely as an explanatory aid, and attributes the unexpected outcome of Mary's courtships to God despite the event's irrelevance to his religio-moral framework.

Commynes' dependence on God and rejection of fortune as for causal explanation can be attributed to a variety of factors. One, his relative lack of familiarity with classical learning, has already been mentioned. A second, posited by two recent historians, takes into account Commynes' own career. Writes Paul Archambault, "Only in prison, smarting over his social and political fall from grace,"54 could Commynes have written that despite man's efforts, God concludes things at his own pleasure.55 Samuel Kinser perceives after Commynes' imprisonment "a turn toward piety in a man who until then may have been accustomed to thank only his own talent and sharp sense of occasion for his spectacular career," especially since "this assertion stands in such discontinuity with his didactic emphasis on the necessity for calculation and watchfulness in political life."56
While not rejecting this latter argument, I should like to suggest another possible interpretation of Commynes' causal analysis of the events he narrates. A comparison of his views on causation in the two distinct sections of his Memoirs reveals subtle yet substantial differences in his use of God's will, human action and fortune to explain, on the one hand, the events of Louis XI's day and on the other, the Italian expedition of Charles VIII.

It is important to note that Commynes does not explain the events of either section of his Memoirs exclusively in divine terms. While attributing to God the final outcome of events in England's Wars of the Roses, Commynes also discusses in an extremely pragmatic fashion the machinations of the Earl of Warwick. While the demise of the Count of Saint Pol is accounted for in Commynes' religious framework, as described earlier, Commynes also views the disesteem earned by the count as a function of his own behavior. He describes the count's elaborate posturing to his own exclusive benefit, writing "thus you may see in what position he had placed himself among these three great men."

Thus it is not without precedent that Commynes explains events in human terms in the latter part of the work. As we will see, though, he relies much more heavily on human explanation in describing Charles VIII's Italian expedition than he does in describing Louis XI's reign.

One of the tasks of the historian is to seek order in the historical events he narrates. We have seen that Commynes posits an overarching divine framework to explain the reign
of Louis XI. His description of Charles VIII's undertaking also finds him attempting to seek such a framework for his narrative. The peg on which Commynes hangs the second section of his memoirs is the concurrence of the words of the Dominican friar Girolamo Savonarola and the course of the French expedition to Italy. Savonarola was a dynamic orator who attracted an extremely large following after his arrival in Florence in 1490. He preached against the corruption and abuses of the Church and against the tyranny of Italian rulers. His prophecies of the imminent appearance in Italy of an avenger who would reform the church by force of arms seemed vindicated when Charles VIII crossed the Alps. Commynes was not unaware of Savonarola's role in Florentine affairs; in fact the two men met on two occasions. It is in a very limited sense, however, that Commynes uses Savonarola's vision as an organizing principle. While he points out that Charles' Italian expedition was predicted in Savonarola's prophecies, he never extends this concept to account for Charles' decision to invade Italy or the king's initial successes in terms of divine will in accordance with the friar's words. Commynes does, however, explain Charles' successful retreat from Italy by referring to Savonarola's answer to an inquiry Commynes made before Charles prepared to return home. Commynes relates that I asked him whether the king could pass(out of Italy) without danger to his person, in view of the large assembly(of soldiers)that the Venetians were making...He replied to me that he would meet with some difficulties on the way, but...that God, who had led him when he came, would lead him again on his return.

Throughout his narration of Charles' retreat from Italy, Commynes
refers to this prophecy to explain the king's narrow escapes from perilous circumstances. For example, when the French successfully traverse a treacherous mountain pass at Pontremoli, Commynes writes

...it seemed that what Brother Girolamo had told me was true; that God led him by the hand until he was safe; for it seemed that his enemies were blinded and stupefied, since they were not defending the pass.62

Commynes himself is astounded at the French army's survival of numerous close calls in its retreat from Italy. The predictions of Savonarola give him an opportunity to make comprehensible these events. While placing Charles' retreat within this overarching framework, though, Commynes cannot sustain the use of this scheme. He recognizes that the prophecy on which Savonarola's successes had hinged, the reform of the Church in Italy, was not achieved by the French expedition to Italy.63 He is also decidedly neutral in his ultimate assessment of the friar. After describing Savonarola's ignominious execution for heresy in 1498, he writes: "I do not know whether to excuse him or accuse him, and I do not know whether they did well to have him die."64 Commynes' inability to schematize fully under a divine rubric his narration of the events in the second section of his Memoirs, especially the failures of the French in Naples, leads him to rely much more heavily upon human actions and to introduce, though sparingly, fortune to explain events.

While in explaining the French loss of Naples his overarching conclusion is that "God had entirely withdrawn from the king the grace which he had granted him on the journey to Italy,"65 at the same time Commynes attributes
the loss of the kingdom to irresolution on the part of the French. Charles neglected to send his army sufficient funds to keep it manned because "his servants who were involved with this had little experience and they were lazy." Commynes also sees too much discussion and too little action by the French army as instrumental in the loss of Naples. Finally, he relates that after the French had retreated from Italy, King Charles "confessed freely that he had made many mistakes there, and he enumerated them." Commynes thus explicitly and decisively gives human action a role in the loss of the kingdom of Naples.

This section of the Memoirs also finds Commynes no longer averse to assigning fortune a role in the shaping of events. When Piero de' Medici left Florence in 1494 to negotiate with Charles and ended up being ousted from power, it was because "on that day he began to tempt fortune." While at first the French were successful and welcome in Naples, the year 1495 saw great changes: "Throughout the kingdom people began to change their minds and fortune began to change when two months before it had been the contrary." Here Commynes uses fortune not so much to explain incomprehensible events, as would Guicciardini, but more in the sense of a "wheel of fortune," varying cyclically. It is likely that his willingness to invoke fortune results from the failure of the French in Naples. The first section of the Memoirs are an account of the successes of a French king, thus he could write that "God takes a special interest in this kingdom." In light of the French failure in Naples, this assertion could no longer be made, thus fortune
enters into his causal scheme.

While Commynes' explanations of both Franco-Burgundian affairs and the French expedition to Naples employ divine and human causation, the human agent is more tangible and more explicit in the latter section of the Memoirs. Moreover, Commynes makes use of fortune to explain events. Perhaps these differences can be attributed to differences in the events themselves, and in Commynes' assessment of them.

Commynes clearly sees the reign of Louis XI in a positive light. Louis was very successful both in dealing with his enemies and in the administration of his realm. Commynes' framework for divine action and divine justice is in keeping with the king's successes, as it is with the actions and misdeeds attributed to Warwick, Charles the Bold, and the Count of Saint Pol. On the other hand, Charles VIII's expedition to Italy, which Commynes opposed from the outset, was largely a failure. Its human and material cost to the French was high and nothing ultimately was achieved. Commynes' earlier scheme of historical explanation cannot be made consonant with these events, and the outcome of the expedition and Savonarola's ultimate fate do not allow him to elaborate fully his narrative in terms of the friar's preachings. Thus he speaks of the highly transitory assignment and withdrawal of divine grace, quite similar to the Italian concept of fortune, and on occasion invokes the concept of fortune himself. In addition, he spends more time explaining events in terms of human factors. He sees no consistency in the course of the French invasion of Italy; thus his causal scheme is fragmented
Commynes, in part, explained events in terms of human actions. He was also an observer of human character, and made human psychology a part of his narrative. Charles VIII, according to Commynes, "had his heart set" on the Italian expedition. In describing the antagonism of Louis XI and Saint Pol, he speaks of the king's "uneasy frame of mind," and goes on to say that "if the two persons of whom I am speaking had many worries, the king of England and the duke of Burgundy, for their part, had no fewer." These, however, portraits of purely internal emotional states. Commynes displays a still keener psychological ability in relating such emotional states to external appearances and actions. When King Louis receives an English herald with the intent of proposing a peace treaty between England and France, Commynes writes that "many people were anxious to hear what the king would say and to see what sort of expression he would have on his face when he came out of the inner room," and concludes this dramatic episode by describing the king's emergence from his meeting with the herald: "His face appeared to reflect great confidence, and he showed no trace of fear, for he was very happy about the reception which his propositions had found with the herald." On one occasion, Commynes' psychological insight is truly astounding. He writes that while many French nobles appeared happy and relieved upon the death of Charles the Bold, in actuality they were uneasy about the prospect of the king's increased power. He bases this conclusion, with remarkable perception, on the lords' conduct at the dinner table, remembering
that on this occasion "no one ate even half his fill."\textsuperscript{76}

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, Commynes' pre-eminent concern was with the practical results of political conduct, largely divorced from outdated feudal codes. Commynes gives high praise to Mohammed II, the Turkish caliph from 1451 to 1481, calling him "a wise and valiant prince, who made more use of sense and cunning than of valor and boldness."\textsuperscript{77} Such cunning, for Commynes, is a great political virtue: "Great princes, or at least the wise ones, always look for a good pretense and one which is not too obvious."\textsuperscript{78} This trait is for Commynes the very basis of diplomacy. Describing a particular case of diplomatic maneuvering between Charles and Louis, he relates that "many envoys were sent from both sides to contrive all sorts of bargains by intrigue and to obtain the best terms from each other."\textsuperscript{79} It is not surprising, then, that Commynes' favorite adjectives for describing treaties are "advantageous" and "disadvantageous." These two words, and not "honorable" and "dishonorable," describe diplomatic affairs.

Only an analyst with an eye toward efficacy and advantage could write, as did Commynes, "I shall reveal an example of deceit, or a shrewd piece of business, or whatever you wish to call it, for it was wisely managed."\textsuperscript{80} It is on this basis that Commynes admires King Louis XI. While Joinville had praised King Louis Louis IX for his prudomie, Commynes praises his master for playing upon men's avarice (as he had done with Commynes himself) to bring them into his service:

He was not discouraged if a man he was trying to win over at first refused to cooperate, but he continued
his persuasion by promising him many things and actually giving him money and dignities which he knew the other coveted.\textsuperscript{81}

Certainly no prud'homme would share Commynes' opinion that it is a great virtue to know "how to flee at the right time."\textsuperscript{82}

There is no better illustration of Commynes' abandonment of his predecessors' feudal-chivalric precepts than his recurrent statement to the effect that "those who win get all the honor."\textsuperscript{83}

To operate efficiently in Commynes' world it was necessary to possess experience. Commynes laments his own political naiveté during his first years with Charles the Bold, at the Battle of Montlhéry: "I was amazed that anyone dared defend himself against the prince to whom I belonged; and I believed him to be the greatest ruler of all. Such are those without experience."\textsuperscript{84} Commynes also perceived a great value in history as a means to educating oneself about the ways of the world:

It seems to me (and I speak on the basis of what I have seen in this world, which includes eighteen years or more experience in close relationship with princes, having had intimate knowledge of the greatest and most secret affairs which have been transacted in the kingdom of France and in neighboring territories) that one of the surest ways to make a man wise is to have him read ancient history and learn how to conduct and guard himself and how to manage his affairs wisely, according to histories and examples of our ancestors. For our life is so short that it cannot give us the necessary experience in so many matters.\textsuperscript{85}

Here, in composite form, is an expression of Machiavelli's own source of authority, "long experience in modern affairs and continuous reading in ancient ones,"\textsuperscript{86} with which he justified his advice-giving in \textit{The Prince}, in a work which antedates Machiavelli's by some twenty years. Commynes himself
cannot overemphasize the importance of the study of history: "...one can learn more in three months' time from reading a book than twenty men living successively could observe and understand from experience." 87

Commynes derived from contemporary affairs as well as from history many lessons to benefit the "wise prince," and through his own experience he felt qualified to impart these lessons. He assumes "that stupid or simple people will not amuse themselves by reading these memoirs; but princes or courtiers will find some good advice in them." 88 Commynes' reliance upon history's examples is not unflinching, though; he acknowledges that "enemies and princes are not always alike." But, he continues, "their affairs are often of a similar nature, and therefore it is useful to be well-informed of things past." 89 He describes King Edward IV's forced flight from England in 1470 as a result of unreliable advice on the trustworthiness of the Earl of Warwick, and goes on to write:

This is a fine example for princes who never fear nor suspect their enemies and who would consider it beneath their dignity to do so. Most of their servants agree with them in order to flatter them. And they believe that they will be more respected and esteemed for it, and that people will say have spoken with courage. I do not know what people will say to their face, but wise persons will surely consider such words very foolish. It is all to one's credit to have well-grounded fears and to protect oneself well against danger. It is invaluable for a prince to have a wise and trusted man in his entourage; he should be allowed to speak the truth and the prince should believe him. 90

In this case, Commynes makes a single observation and draws from it numerous corollaries whose relevance is, admittedly, questionable. The Memoirs are indeed full of such sententiae
on political conduct. Some are straightforward and so uncontroversial as to be banal: "If people were always wise they would be so moderate in their words in times of prosperity that they would not have cause to change in time of adversity."\textsuperscript{91} Most, though, like Commynes' precepts for the conduct of diplomacy, reflect his awareness of the questionable morality of his age:

"...for one messenger or ambassador whom they would send me, I should send them two in return... For there is no better nor safer way to send a spy, nor could he be in any better position to see and hear everything. And if you send two or three men together, it is hardly possible that the enemy could be so cautious as to prevent one or the other from obtaining some useful information, secretly or otherwise... One should expect a wise prince to see to that one or more friends are constantly about the enemy..."

It may be objected that as a result of this treatment your enemy will become all the more proud. It does not matter to me if he does. In this manner I shall know more about his designs. For when all is said and done, he who collects the profits from such affairs will also have the honor.\textsuperscript{92}

In the end, Commynes' Memoirs are a work of extraordinary historical and political insight, as far removed from his predecessors' empty praise of institutions grown hollow as was Louis XI's saigesse from Louis IX's preudomie. With Commynes, French historiography can be said to have "caught up" with, or even anticipated the future of, its Italian counterpart. It is fitting, then, that it is an historian largely of Italian affairs who in discussing Commynes' interest in "the practical wisdom of the prince" writes that "the modernity of this emphasis scarcely needs comment."\textsuperscript{93}
CHAPTER VI

GUICCIARDINI AND COMMynes ON THE 1494 INVASION:

COMPARISON AND CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis of Commynes' *Memoirs* in the light of their composition in two distinct sections has explained that Commynes' inability to find a fully workable substructural explanation for the course of the French expedition to Naples in divine or meta-historical terms led him to rely heavily on human action to explain these events. Like Guicciardini, who in his *History of Italy* discerns no order at all in these events, Commynes frees his narrative from all-encompassing transcendental underpinnings. The two works are also similar in they are both attempts to explain failures: Commynes relates the failure of the French in Naples in 1494-95, and Guicciardini the failure of Italy in the face of foreign invasion. Thus the two authors no longer reflect the national or civic bias of their earlier works. While Guicciardini harbors his contemporaries' view of Italian superiority, this is not the axiomatic principle that it was for his humanist predecessors. Thus he can describe the French army which descends on Italy in glowing terms. He writes that while King Ferrante of Naples proclaimed publicly his great power, he "realized full well" that the French were "greatly superior in cavalry, infantry,"
sea power, artillery, money and men most ardent to confront every peril for...their king."¹ Likewise, Commynes describes Charles VIII's actions in terms of his incompetence in handling affairs, for example in his remarks on the king's seemingly infinite capacity to procrastinate, which made perilous the French retreat from Naples.² In their accounts of the Neapolitan expedition, the two historians' attempts at dispassionate and particularistic explanations lead them to make many similar observations and draw many similar conclusions from the events they narrate.

Both Guicciardini and Commynes see through French attempts to justify the expedition as the first step towards a crusade. Guicciardini writes that Charles' advisers

filled his head with vain thoughts to the effect that this would provide him with an opportunity to surpass the glory of his predecessors, for once having acquired the kingdom of Naples, it would be easy for him to conquer the Turkish empire.³

Commynes is much more direct in expressing his opinion of the chimerical nature of Charles' expression of a desire to use the conquest of Naples as a stepping-stone to a crusade: According to Commynes, "this was a very bad thing(to say), because it was a lie..."⁴ Commynes and Guicciardini also provide similar descriptions of Charles' decision to assert his Neapolitan claim and his preparations for the expedition. Writes Commynes: "The enterprise seemed most unreasonable to those who were wise and experienced."⁵ In fact, says Commynes, only three people approved of the expedition. The first was the king himself. The second was Etienne of Vesc, "a man of petty lineage who had never heard or seen
anything." The third was a receiver of taxes named Briconnet, who advocated the expedition because he stood to gain a cardinalate and many benefices. Charles was also, according to Commynes, ill-prepared for the expedition: "All the things necessary for such a great enterprise were lacking. For the king was very young...(and) feeble in person. He had few wise persons about him. He had no ready cash...(The army) had neither tents nor pavilions..." On a later occasion Commynes adds that this was Charles' first venture outside of his own kingdom. After reading Commynes' catalogue of why the expedition should fail, it is surprising that the French army makes any headway at all in Italy. Commynes is forced to "conclude that this trip...was led by God because the judgment of the leaders...was hardly of any use to the expedition." Here Commynes is invoking God in a manner different from that of Villehardouin, who described events he himself considered to be part of a divine purpose. Commynes is also invoking God in a manner unlike that in the earlier part of the Memoirs. God here guides events that transpire contrary to what should be expected. Though, as we have seen, he uses Savonarola's prophecies to explain some of the French army's successes, these instances are not numerous, and this theme is not sustained throughout his account of Charles' Italian adventure. To a larger extent, Commynes discerns here inscrutability in history, more in line with his later comment on unforeseen events while Charles VIII was at Rome: "God showed how all these things were beyond man's understanding." This appraisal of God's role in history has more in common with Guicciardini's concept of fortune than it has with any
notion of a discernible pattern of divine causation.

Guicciardini's account of the circumstances of the French decision to undertake the war, and their preparation for it, is strikingly similar to that of Commynes. He says that while some of the king's advisers favored the expedition, people of greater wisdom judged that such a war would inevitably prove very difficult and dangerous inasmuch as the armies had to be brought to a foreign country, very far from the kingdom of France...

Added to this was the lack of money, of which it was considered a great deal would be necessary.12

Guicciardini goes on to say of those who advised the were that they were "stirred by hopes either of acquiring property in the kingdom of Naples or obtaining certain ecclesiastical preferments and revenues."13 Finally, he concludes that "King Charles was eager to make war in Italy, preferring the rash counsels of inexperienced and vulgar men over the example of his father, a prudent king of long-proven experience."14

Guicciardini, like Commynes, thinks ill of Charles, and prefers the wisdom of Louis XI, who at the outset of his reign had shocked his Angevin and Orleanist subjects by declaring that Italy was best left to the Italians.15

The similarity of the two authors may be explained partly by Guicciardini's consultation of Commynes' Memoirs in his preparation of the History of Italy,16 though there are doubts about the accuracy and completeness of the editions of the Memoirs which were available to Guicciardini.17 But this fact cannot account fully for Guicciardini's sympathy for Commynes' outlook as, for example, Guicciardini's praise
for Louis XI seems all his own, in line with his own view of gratuitous war-making. He was also aware, before his reading of Commynes' *Memoirs* of Charles VIII's character, having written some thirty years earlier in his *History of Florence* that Charles was "a bold young king" who "was by nature inclined to this sort of enterprise." Moreover, Guicciardini was not constrained to use Commynes as his source. Had he been so inclined, he could have used instead the account of Andre de la Vigne, a court historian of Charles VIII, who kept a daily chronicle of the French expedition to Italy. In this work, "Charles VIII and his nobles are types of Christian knights engaged in the first preliminaries of a gigantic struggle to free the holy land from the invaders." The fact that Guicciardini chose to use Commynes' account must be seen as a result of the two men's common outlook on what is important in political affairs and historical investigation, for, as we will see, their concerns concur in almost all particulars.

Even their political conceptions have a great deal in common. Guicciardini's *Discourses of Logroño*, written while Florence was ruled by a broadly based republic, advocates reform in favor of aristocratic control of the processes of government. His model state is based upon his interpretation of the constitution of Venice. Commynes shares Guicciardini's view of the merits of locating power in the hands of the aristocracy and his admiration for Venice's government. The Venetians, writes Commynes,

> do not have civil strife in the city, and this is the greatest wealth that I can see that they have. And they have
marvelously well provided for that in many respects, for...the people have no influence and are not consulted in any matter and all the office-holders are gentlemen with the exception of their secretaries.  

Their similarity of outlook on what constitutes a wise prince is evident in Guicciardini's condemnation of Piero de' Medici in the History of Florence: "If he did decide to trust someone or take advice, he never sought out men who had any great experience in government." This recalls strikingly Commynes' emphasis on a prince's need for sound advice discussed in the previous chapter. Guicciardini, like Commynes, spent part of his career as an ambassador. His insights into the conduct of diplomacy, culled from his experience at the court of King Ferdinand of Aragon, are similar to those which Commynes distilled into his advice to princes on the nature of an ambassador's duties. Guicciardini, in his Ricordi, observes that "the tyrant does everything possible to uncover the secret of your mind, by flattery, by long conversation, and having you observed by others who by his orders make friends with you."  

It is in the two men's historical descriptions and historical judgments, however, that the affinity of their ideas is most apparent. For a Frenchman, Commynes' description of Medici political power is most penetrating: Lorenzo was possessed of great power, but he wielded this power with great moderation, for... he was one of the wisest men of his age. But the son thought this (power)was his by right, and he made himself feared by means of (his)guard; he perpetrated violence at night and fights, and he helped himself abundantly to their public monies. So had the father, but so shrewdly that they were almost happy about it.

Guicciardini, who gives Lorenzo high praise as the guardian of Italy's pre-1494 peace, writes that Piero, on the other hand,
was not "capable of governing with that moderation with which his father had proceeded in both domestic and foreign affairs." 

Likewise, just as Commynes describes Florence's motivation for overthrowing Piero in 1494 in terms of the Medici's undermining of Florentine liberty, not especially emphasizing the French expulsion of Florentine merchants as might be expected, Guicciardini relates that many Florentines "highly disapproved of the present government, and the fact that a single family should have arrogated the power of the entire republic to itself."

Most events are explained by the two historians in similar terms. Describing Piero de' Medici's trip to negotiate with Charles VIII in 1494, Guicciardini relates that Piero capitulated to all of Charles' "numerous and excessive demands... All the French were greatly amazed that Piero had so lightly complied with such important demands; for the king undoubtedly would have been satisfied with easier terms." Guicciardini has clearly drawn upon Commynes' account of the negotiations, but spares the reader from some of the more undignified details of the events. Commynes relates that Piero agreed to everything without consulting his companions... this amounted to putting their state and their power into our own hands. Those who dealt with Piero told me about it, making fun of him and expressing shock at how he granted such great things, things which they never had expected."

An historian in the French chivalric mode might have attributed Piero's capitulation to his fear of the superiority of French arms, and included a description of the colorful banners and gleaming swords of the French camp. On the Italian side, a sycophantic humanist would have attempted to apologize for Piero's capitulation. Guicciardini, though, attributes Piero's conduct to his poor judgment, and Commynes, making
no reference to divine intercession on behalf of Charles' Neapolitan destiny, explains it only in terms of Piero's personal failure. Both authors look directly at the actions of the actors on the historical stage to explain the course of events.

As we have seen previously, Guicciardini surpassed his predecessors in his interest in motivations for rulers' actions. Commynes, too, was concerned with motivations, and like Guicciardini attributes many actions to cupidity and ambition. Commynes says that as soon as Charles VIII had control of Pisa, Ludovico Sforza "would have liked to have the king out of Italy already." Though in this instance Commynes' explanation does not approach the thoroughness of Guicciardini's, he shares Guicciardini's emphasis on Ludovico's desire to put an end to the French expedition as soon as the king reached Tuscany. An examination of Commynes' and Guicciardini's analyses of the purposes of the Venetian government, in both their initial neutrality in the 1494 war and their subsequent joining of the League of Venice against the French. According to Guicciardini, when before the French expedition the prospect of war hung over Italy,

Only the Venetians determined to remain neutral and await the outcome of this affair, either because it was not to their advantage that Italy should be in turmoil, in hopes that protracted wars of others would give them an opportunity to expand their empire; or because, being so powerful, they were therefore not afraid of easily falling prey to the conqueror; and that it was therefore unwise, with no evident necessity, to become involved in other people's wars.

Commynes' explanation of Venetian motives focuses on the former, avaricious concern, rather than on the latter, prudential one. He asserts that "it seemed to the Venetians
that it would be to their profit if wars would break out between the king (Charles VIII) and the house of Aragon.\textsuperscript{34}

The two writers place the Venetian decision to adhere to the league which bore their city's name at exact same moment. Writes Commynes:

When Venice became aware that the king had the Florentine's places in his hands, and especially Pisa, they began to be afraid, and they discussed (with Ludovico Sforza's ambassadors) means of preventing him from proceeding further.\textsuperscript{35}

Guicciardini concurs:

...after seeing the vehement course of French good fortune, and how the king and his army were passing through Italy like a thunderbolt without any resistance, the Venetians began to consider the misfortunes of others as dangers to themselves, and to fear that the ruin of others would inevitably involve their own; especially the fact that Charles had occupied Pisa and the other Florentine fortresses.\textsuperscript{36}

The context of these analyses in the two works reflects the experiences and the national concerns of the two historians. Guicciardini includes in the History of Italy an extended discussion of Florence's reasons for not joining the League.\textsuperscript{37}

Commynes' description of the actions of the Venetians occurs within a discussion of his own embassy at Venice, where he represented Charles during most of the French stay in Italy and negotiated extensively with the ambassadors of the other Italian powers.\textsuperscript{38} These differences of national emphasis are frequently discernible in the two works. Commynes delves more deeply into the politics of the French bureaucracy in Naples, while Guicciardini discusses extensively Florence's political scene in the aftermath of the expulsion of Piero de' Medici. A page-by-page reading of the two accounts of the events of 1494-95, though, yield no essential discrepancies of fact, and, as mentioned earlier, many similar judgments.
In the previous chapter it was noted that the French loss of Naples is framed by Commynes largely in terms of human causal agents. Commynes writes that Charles was "badly served... by his governors, who have managed their own affairs very well, but his affairs badly," and condemns Charles' policies because "he did not make any effort to take care of the matter personally." As an Italian, with less concern for the nitty-gritty of French affairs, Guicciardini gives a more compact rendition of the same ideas. Charles, he writes, "left the governing of weighty affairs to his courtiers, who, partly as a result of incapacity and partly because of avarice, made a great confusion of all things." It is also worth noting that Guicciardini does not serve national pride by celebrating the efforts of the people of Naples to expel the foreigner. The French lost Naples more than the self-serving Neapolitan barons regained it from them, and Guicciardini acknowledges this fact.

The most important military engagement of Charles VIII's Italian wars was the Battle of Fornovo of July 1495, in which the retreating French army faced the combined forces of the League of Venice. Thus, the treatment given the battle by the two authors is most relevant to any comparison of their views. Commynes, in all likelihood as a result of his familiarity with the work of the historians of ancient Rome, recognizes nature's prophecies concerning the outcome of battles. The night before the battle, he writes, "there was a great rain, lightning, and thunder, so strong that one could not imagine more; it seemed heaven and earth were splitting, or that it signified a
However, it is Guicciardini, more familiar with Roman historians and himself writing a "true history," in the humanist sense, who makes more of these meteorological occurrences, describing their real and imagined significance:

This storm troubled the French more than the Italian army, not only because they were in the midst of mountains and enemies in a place where, if misfortune struck them, they had no hope whatever of saving themselves...but also because it seemed more likely that threatenings from heaven, which usually manifest themselves only for the most important reasons, were primarily directed against than side where the person of so strong a King was to be found.

Similarly, Commynes' Memoirs are not structured independently of the tradition out of which his historiography emerged. Thus it is not unexpected that he should provide a striking visual description of the army fielded by the Marquis of Mantua: "They were all men-at-arms in armor with fine plumes and beautiful bordonasses (a type of lance)."

Indeed, such an observation would have been routinely included in the work of a Froissart or a la Marche. Commynes, however, departs markedly from the French tradition in describing graphically how the pages of the French army were torn, with the hatchets used in the construction of the French encampment, to crack wide open both the helmets and the skulls of armored Italian soldiers.

Aspects of their accounts of the conduct of the Battle of Fornovo also reveal the historians' similar concerns. Both report the suppression of the French army's temptation to pillage the Italian camp by cries of "Remember Guinnegate," a reference to a 1479 battle which Louis XI's nearly victorious army lost its advantage over its German adversary because it was lured away from the battle by the prospect of acquiring
booty. Commynes here also reflects his perception of history's ability to teach by example. While Guicciardini may have included this detail only because he read it in Commynes' Memoirs, this is clearly an instance where his usual skepticism about the wisdom of taking examples from history is mitigated by similarities of circumstance. Both Commynes and Guicciardini mention the speed with the battle progressed, pointing out that this was uncharacteristic of Italian warfare. Both historians perceived this distinguishing feature of the Battle of Fornovo, noting that traditionally, Italian battles pitted single squadrons against each other in succession. Finally, Commynes and Guicciardini concur in their opinion on the outcome of the battle, even though "each side sought to claim victory for itself." Commynes writes that while the Italians who fought alongside the French wanted to remain at Fornovo "to combat those among the enemy who remained," the Frenchmen who were asked about it (Commynes himself was undoubtedly among them) did not agree and said that we had accomplished enough. Guicciardini, writing long after the battle took place, says that

the palm of victory was universally accorded to the French: because of the great difference in the number of the dead, and because they had routed the enemy to the other side, and because they had won free passage to advance, which was the very issue for which the battle had been fought.

Both Commynes and Guicciardini perceive the momentousness of this battle and their analyses penetrate to its very essence. Francesco Guicciardini, in the History of Italy, and Philippe de Commynes, in his Memoirs, represent the development of their respective traditions into the quest for
historical investigation. Guicciardini's tradition focused on the republican ideal of Florentine humanism. This strain was most present in the work of the fifteenth-century humanist historiographers, who exalted Florence's institutions as comparable to those of Republican Rome. This tradition persisted into the early cinquecento historians and Guicciardini's own early work. After Italy's institutions had failed her, Guicciardini realized that an understanding of Italy's subjection to foreign rule could not be reached within this limited setting, and extended his scope to all of Italy and, where relevant, the affairs of Europe. Florence could no longer legitimately be seen as the focus of European politics.

Commynes, too, transcended the bounds of his inherited tradition. His predecessors' formulaic use of chivalry to give meaning to history no longer had any relevance in French politics. He instead sought to understand events on their own terms, with a meaning beyond the heroic feats of historical protagonists. Commynes was able to posit an overarching framework for the reign of Louis XI, the subject of the first section of his Memoirs, but his failure to find a viable framework for the second part of his work led him to examine human causation.

While both Commynes and Guicciardini inherited stylistic and formal traits from their traditions, these were never so pronounced as to interfere with their searches for explanation. They wrote in a heavy plodding style which allowed them to analyze their subject matter as carefully as language would allow.
Both men were participants in the events they describe, and both narrate what were essentially failures. Commynes, unable to find a framework for his narration, blames the French failure in Naples on men who exercised judgments contrary to his own. Guicciardini himself was intimately involved with Italy's vain efforts to stem the tide of foreign domination. He blames Italy's fate on the ambition and folly of princes, but also on the totally unfathomable mysteries of fortune. He sought explanations, but could find none.

The litmus test of an historian's conceptual ability is the capacity to perceive the effects of the events described. In the cases we have been discussing, both historians pass this test. Commynes wrote the second part of his Memoirs in 1496, in the immediate aftermath of his subject-matter, and could little benefit from historical distance. Yet he perceived the total failure of Charles VIII's Italian escapade. His focus is also narrowed by the limited importance of these events to the affairs of France, but he recognizes that "all these wars of Italy had miscarried,... afterwards all was lost." Still, from the French point of view the story would begin completely anew upon Louis XII's 1498 invasion. For Guicciardini, a chain of events had been set in motion that would shatter the very structure of Italy. Writing forty years later, he saw the invasion not as a single episode, but as "the beginning of those years of misfortune, because it opened the door to innumerable calamities, in which ... a great part of the world was subsequently involved." Both historians, to the extent that they could, investigated the effects of historical events. In seeking the causes of events, both good and bad,
in human conduct, they investigated not only past events but sought to investigate the human condition.
Chapter I: The Changing Faces of France and Italy

   (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1971), The king's biographer uses this phrase as the title of the chapter which describes these events.


4. Ibid., p. 373.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.


8. Ibid., pp. 397.

9. Ibid., p. 399.


12. Ibid., p. 350.


17. Ibid., 1:353-54.

18. Ibid., 1:354.


Chapter II: Celebrating the Polity


4 Green, Chronicle into History, p. 10.


6 Louis Green, Chronicle into History, p. 11.


8 Louis Green, Chronicle into History, p. 85.

9 Louis Green, "Historical Interpretation in Fourteenth-Century Florentine Chronicles," p. 164.

10 Louis Green, Chronicle into History, p. 7.

11 Louis Green, "Historical Interpretation in Fourteenth-Century Florentine Chronicles," pp. 165-66.

12 Ibid., p. 164.

13 Villani, Chronicles in Green, Chronicle into History, p. 24.

15 Louis Green, "Historical Interpretation in Fourteenth-Century Florentine Chronicles," p. 165.

16 Louis Green, *Chronicle into History*, p. 3.

17 Ibid., p. 169.

18 Ibid., p. 13.

19 Ibid., p. 37.

20 Ibid., p.

21 Villani, *Chronicles* in Green, *Chronicle into History*, p. 38.

22 Louis Green, *Chronicle into History*, p. 4.

23 Ibid., p. 54.

24 Ibid., pp. 48-9.

25 Ibid., p. 49.

26 Ibid., p. 84.

27 Hans Baron, in *The Crisis of the Early Italian Renaissance*, puts Dati "more in the quattrocento than do most historians. This is probably a result of Baron's focus on Florence's Giotto's work as a watershed in the development of humanistic thought. See below, p. 28. Louis Green sees Dati's thought still belonging to the trecento, but on the verge of a new view of history.

28 Louis Green, *Chronicle into History*, p. 119.

29 Louis Green, "Historical Interpretation in Fourteenth-Century Florentine Chronicles," p. 175.

30 Louis Green, *Chronicle into History*, p. 143.

31 Ibid., p. 143.


34 Ibid.

35 Peter Burke, *The Renaissance Sense of the Past*, p. 105. Burke goes on to write that "the consequences of this prejudice were extremely important; it distorted political history, as Descartes pointed out, and it prevented social history from emerging at all until the eighteenth century."

37. Baron, first in *The Crisis* and later in "Leonardo Bruni: 'Professional Rhetorician' or Civic Humanist?", *Past and Present* 36 (1967), 21-38 maintains that Bruni's *Panegyric* was written after the war with Milan had been concluded. A different interpretation is provided by Jerrold E. Seigel, in "'Civic Humanism' or Ciceronian Rhetoric? The Culture of Petrarch and Bruni," *Past and Present* 34 (1966):3-48. Seigel, emphasizing the hortatory nature of the *Panegyric*, argues for the works completion before the end of the Grangaleazzo wars.


39. See note 37.


42. Ibid., 43. Ibid., p. 109.


45. Jerrold E. Seigel "'Civic Humanism' or Ciceronian Rhetoric?".


51. Ibid., pp. 27-28.

53 Ferguson, *The Renaissance in Historical Thought*, p. 4.


56 Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 94.


58 Ibid., p. 113.

59 Baron, *Crisis*, p. 33.

60 Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*.


64 Ibid., p. 299.


66 Ibid.


69 Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 139.

70 Ibid. 71 Ibid., p. 129. 72 Ibid., p. 154.

73 Ibid., p. 32.
74 Ibid., pp. 28-9, 228.  
75 Ibid., pp. 228-29.  
76 Ibid., pp. 231-32.  
77 Ibid., p. 155.  
78 Ibid., pp. 176-77.  
84 Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 158.  
87 Ibid., p. 371.  
91 Ibid., p. 176.  
93 Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, p. 239.  
97 Ibid., p. 197.  
98 Ibid., p. 195.
Chapter III: Francesco Guicciardini


3 Ibid., pp. 5-6.


9 Ibid., p. 8.

10 Ricordi, p. 37.

11 History of Florence, p. 127.

12 Bondanella, Francesco Guicciardini, p. 15.

13 Ibid., pp. 43-45.

14 Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, pp. 95-7.

15 Ibid., p. 121. 16 Ibid.


18 Ridolfi, Life of Guicciardini, p. 77.

19 Guicciardini, Considerations on the Discourses of Machiavelli, in Grayson, Selected Writings, p. 71.


22 History of Florence, pp. 28-31. 23 Ibid., p. 31.

24 Ibid., p. 36.

28. Ricordi, p. 32.
29. History of Italy, p. 57.
31. History of Italy, pp. 275-6. 32. Ibid., p. 155.
35. History of Italy, pp. 379-82.
39. Ibid., p. 56.
41. History of Italy, p. 3.
42. Phillips, Francesco Guicciardini, p. 130.
43. Ibid.
44. History of Italy, p. 348. 45. Ibid., p. 346.
47. History of Italy, p. 7. 48. Ibid., p. 7. 49. Ibid., p. 326.
52. History of Italy, p. 36. 53. Ibid., p. 43.
55. History of Italy, p. 301.
Nicolai Rubinstein, "The Storie Fiorentine and the Memorie di Famiglia", Rinascimento 4 (1953) shows a close connection between the content of these two works.

65 Phillips, Francesco Guicciardini, p. 95.


67 Ibid., p. 259.

68 Gilbert, Machiavelli and Guicciardini, p. 272.

69 Ibid., p. 298.

70 History of Italy, p. 48; and Alexander, p. 48n.


72 Ibid., p. 175.

73 History of Italy, p. 346.

74 Phillips, Francesco Guicciardini, p. 179.

75 History of Italy, pp. 43-4.

76 Ricordi, p. 33.

Chapter IV: The Mirror of Feudalism


11. Ibid., p. 43.


16. Ibid., pp. 57-8.

18. Villehardouin, The Conquest..., pp.13, 73. "Ill advice" is a recurrent explanation for suspect conduct in this work.

19. Ibid., p. 15.


22. Ibid., p. 25.

23. Ibid., p. 23.

24. Ibid., p. 94.


26. Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, p. 42.

27. Ibid., pp. 55-6.


31. Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, p. 52.


34. Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, p. 52.


36. Ibid., p. 16.

37. Ibid., p. 201.

38. Ibid., p. 68.

39. Evans, Introduction to Joinville's History, p. xxv.

40. Joinville, History, p. 95.

41. Ibid., p. 117.

42. Ibid., pp. 51+2.

43. Ibid., p. 195.

44. Ibid., p. 229.

45. Ibid., p. 29-30.

46. Ibid., p. 121.


49. Shears, Froissart, p. 110.

50. Ibid.


53 Fox, Literary History of France, p. 286.

54 Froissart, Chronicle, trans. Thomas Johnes (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1961), pp. 207-9; this translation is cited for the rest of this paper.

55 Dunn, Introduction to Froissart's Chronicle, p. 10.

56 Froissart, Chronicle, p. 11.

57 Ibid., p. 128.

58 Dunn, Introduction to Froissart's Chronicle, p. vi.


60 Ibid., p. 288.

61 Ibid., p. 293.

62 Ibid., p. 108.

63 Ibid., pp. 479-80.

64 Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, p. 63.


66 Ibid., p. 346.

67 Froissart, in Shears, Froissart, p. 103.

68 Shears, Froissart, pp. 21, 40.

69 Froissart, Chronicle, p. 292.

70 Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, p. 69


72 Ibid., pp. 32-34.

73 Ibid., pp. 39-41.

74 Ibid., p. 47.


77 Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, pp. 74-5.

78 Chastellain, Chronicles, in Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, pp. 81.

79 Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages, pp. 15-16.

80 La Marche, Memoirs, in Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, p. 81.

81 Archambault, Seven French Chroniclers, p. 81.

82 Ibid., p. 82

83 Fox, Literary History of the Middle Ages, p. 289.
Chapter V: Philippe de Commynes


4. Ibid., p. 178.


7. Ibid., p. 326.  

8. Ibid., pp. 92, 594.  

9. Ibid., p. 442.

10. Ibid., p. 360.  


15. Ibid., p. 159. Examples are numerous throughout the text.

16. Ibid., p. 399.  

17. Ibid., p. 408.  

18. Ibid., p. 408.


20. Ibid., p. 100.  

21. Ibid., p. 119.

22. Ibid., pp. 237-38.  

23. Ibid., p. 186.

24. Ibid., p. 317.  

25. Ibid., p. 275.  

26. Ibid., pp. 488-93.

27. Ibid., p. 325.  

28. Ibid., pp. 131-32.


31. Ibid., p. 327.

32. Ibid., pp. 396-97.

33. Kinser, Introduction to Memoirs, p. 64.

34. Kinser, notes to Commynes' Memoirs, p. 91.

35. Memoirs, p. 91.  

36. Ibid., p. 394.  

37. Ibid., p. 335.


39. Ibid., p. 383.  

40. Ibid., p. 226.

135


Archambault, *Seven French Chroniclers*, p. 111.


Kinser, Introduction to the *Memoirs*, pp. 14-16


*Ibid.*, p. 515; Kinser, p. 515n, points out that the Venetian Senate had decreed that its army should not be risked beyond the Apennines. Additional mention of Savonarola in this context is found in the *Memoirs*, pp. 526, 530, 536, 539.

*Memoirs*, p. 592


*Memoirs*, p. 199.


83 Memoirs, p. 325.
84 Ibid., p. 108.
85 Ibid., p. 169.
87 Memoirs, p. 170.
88 Ibid., p. 228
89 Ibid., p. 233.
90 Ibid., p. 218.
91 Ibid., p. 227
92 Ibid.
93 Bouwsma,"The Politics of Commynes," p. 327
Chapter VI: Guicciardini and Commynes on the 1494 Invasion

2Commynes, Memoirs, pp. 508-521.
3History of Italy, p. 21.
4Memoirs, p. 562. 5Ibid., p. 534.
6Ibid. 7Ibid., pp 437-8
8Ibid., p. 438. 9Ibid., p. 453.
10Ibid., p. 438. 11Ibid., p. 475.
12History of Italy, p. 22. 13Ibid., p. 24.
14Ibid., p. 25.
15Kendall, Louis XI, p. 344.
16Ridolfi, Life of Guicciardini, p. 259
17Kinser, Introduction to the Memoirs, p. 81.
18Guicciardini, History of Florence, p. 84
20Bondanella, Francesco Guicciardini, pp. 43-45.
21Memoirs, p. 493.
22History of Florence, p. 90.
23Guicciardini, Ricordi, p. 28
25History of Italy, p. 4 26Ibid., p. 10.
27Memoirs, p. 467.
28History of Italy, p. 57. 29Ibid., p. 58
32History of Italy, p. 452; the passage in question appears on p. 59 above.
33Ibid., p. 37
34 Memoirs, p. 452. 35 Ibid., p. 494
36 History of Italy, p. 86. 37 Ibid., pp. 87-8.
40 Ibid., p. 573.
41 History of Italy, p. 88.
42 Gilmore, Humanists and Jurists, p. 49.
43 Memoirs, p. 525.
44 History of Italy, p. 98.
45 Memoirs, p. 528.
46 Ibid., p. 532.
47 History of Italy, p. 102; Memoirs, p. 533. See pp. 51-3 above for Guicciardini's opinions on example.
49 Memoirs, p. 534, History of Italy, p. 100.
50 History of Italy, p. 104.
51 Memoirs, p. 535.
52 History of Italy, p. 105.
53 Memoirs, p. 580.
54 History of Italy, p. 32
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