

Niccolo Machiavelli

Italian diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli is best known for writing *The Prince*, a handbook for unscrupulous politicians that inspired the term "Machiavellian" and established its author as the "father of modern political theory."

Synopsis

Born on May 3, 1469, in Florence, Italy, Niccolò Machiavelli was a diplomat for 14 years in Italy's Florentine Republic during the Medici family's exile. When the Medici family returned to power in 1512, Machiavelli was dismissed and briefly jailed. He then wrote *The Prince*, a handbook for politicians on the use of ruthless, self-serving cunning, inspiring the term "Machiavellian" and establishing Machiavelli as the "father of modern political theory." He also wrote several poems and plays. He died on June 21, 1527, in Florence, Italy.

Early Life and Diplomatic Career

Niccolò di Bernardo dei Machiavelli was born in Florence, Italy, on May 3, 1469—a time when Italy was divided into four rival city-states and, thusly, was at the mercy of stronger governments throughout the rest of Europe.

The young Niccolò Machiavelli became a diplomat after the temporary fall of Florence's ruling Medici family in 1494. He served in that position for 14 years in Italy's Florentine Republic during the Medici family's exile, during which time he earned a reputation for deviousness, enjoying shocking his associates by appearing more shameless than he truly was.

After his involvement in an unsuccessful attempt to organize a Florentine militia against the return of the Medici family to power in 1512 became known, Machiavelli was tortured, jailed and banished from an active role in political life.

Authoring 'The Prince'

Though it was initially a dark period for his career, Machiavelli's time away from politics gave him the opportunity to read Roman history and to write political treatises, most notably *The Prince*. The main theme of this short work about monarchical rule and survival is man's capacity for determining his own destiny in opposition to the power of fate, which has been interpreted as the political philosophy that one may resort to any means in order to establish and preserve total authority. The work has been regarded as a handbook for politicians on the use of ruthless, self-serving cunning, and inspired the term "Machiavellian." While many believe that the book's title character, "the prince," was based upon the infamous Cesare Borgia, some scholars consider it a satire.

Pope Clement VIII condemned *The Prince* for its endorsement of rule by deceit and fear. One excerpt from the book reads: "Since love and fear can hardly exist together, if we must choose between them, it is far safer to be feared than loved."

In addition to *The Prince*, Machiavelli wrote the treatise *On the Art of War* (1521), among others, and several poems and plays, including 1524's satirical *The Mandrake*.

Later Years and Legacy

In his later years, Niccolò Machiavelli resided in a small village just outside of Florence. He died in the city on June 21, 1527. His tomb is in the church of Santa Croce in Florence, which, ironically, he had been banned from entering during the last years of his life. Today, Machiavelli is regarded as the "father of modern political theory."