

NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI

COMPANION STUDY GUIDE | KEY FACTS - TIMELINE - QUESTIONS - SOURCES



Who was Machiavelli? Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) served the Florentine Republic for fourteen years as an official and diplomat. After the Medici returned to power in 1512 he lost office; in 1513 he was imprisoned and tortured after being suspected of conspiracy. In retirement he wrote *The Prince* and later the *Discourses on Livy*, works that made his name inseparable from arguments about power, institutions, republican government and political necessity.

Questions from the Hall

- Why did later generations turn Machiavelli's name into an adjective?
- Does *The Prince* describe power as it is, prescribe how rulers should behave, or do both?
- How does the republican Machiavelli of the *Discourses* complicate the popular image of the ruthless schemer?
- Why do the lion and the fox remain such memorable symbols of force and cunning?
- What happens when a quotation becomes more famous than the writer's actual words?

A SHORT ROUTE THROUGH THE STORY

1469 Born in Florence.

1498 Appointed Second Chancellor of the Florentine Republic; begins years of diplomatic service.

1502-03 Observes Cesare Borgia at close range during diplomatic missions.

1512 The Medici return; Machiavelli loses office.

1513 Imprisoned and tortured after suspicion of conspiracy; later writes *The Prince*.

1510s Develops the *Discourses on Livy*, a major work on republican politics.

1521 *The Art of War* is published.

1525 Completes the *Florentine Histories*.

1527 Dies in Florence.

Ideas and works to know

The Prince	A short work on acquiring, holding and using political power.
Discourses on Livy	A broader exploration of republican institutions, conflict, liberty and civic endurance.
Virtù	Capacity, initiative, judgement and effective action.
Fortuna	The unpredictable element of events that tests human judgement and adaptability.
Lion and fox	An image for combining force with the ability to recognise traps.
Machiavellian	A later reputation that often reduces a more complicated writer to cunning and deception.

Visual route through the film



Principal research anchors

- Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*.
- Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “Niccolò Machiavelli”, for biography, context and scholarly debate.

Vicarii Productions: surviving evidence first; later reputation and doubtful quotations are identified as such.