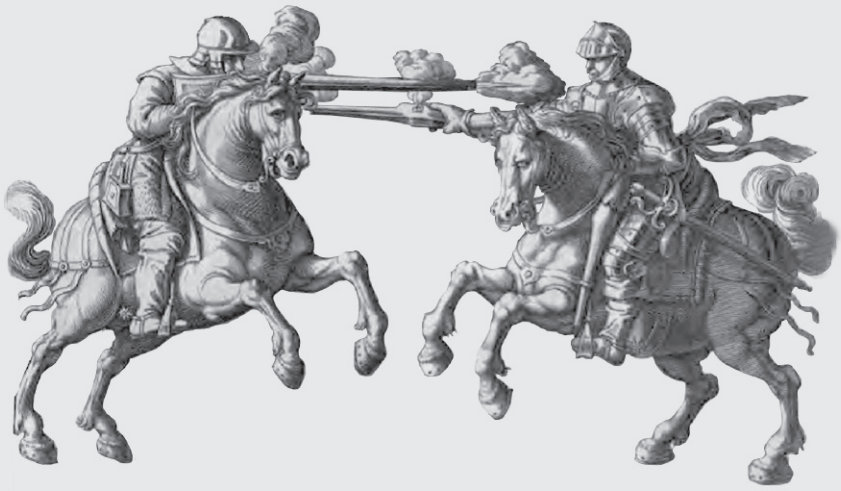
NUOVA ANTOLOGIA MILITARE
RIVISTA INTERDISCIPLINARE DELLA SOCIETÀ ITALIANA DI STORIA MILITARE

N. 1
2020

Fascicolo 3. Giugno 2020

Storia militare moderna



Società Italiana di Storia Militare

Nuova Antologia Militare
Rivista interdisciplinare della Società Italiana di Storia Militare
Periodico telematico open-access annuale (www.nam-sism.org)
Registrazione del Tribunale Ordinario di Roma n. 06 del 30 Gennaio 2020

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Gruppo Editoriale Tab Srl - Lungotevere degli Anguillara, 11 - 00153 Roma
www.tabedizioni.it
ISSN: 2704-9795
ISBN Fascicolo 3: 978-88-31352-61-1

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Borgognotta “a coda d’aragosta” (“zischägge”, “cappellina”, “capeline”) per corazzieri, raitri e archibugieri a cavallo, di derivazione ottomana (szyszak, çiçak). Esemplare olandese, ca. 1630/50, donato nel 1964 dal Dr. Douglas G. Carroll, Jr. al Walters Art Museum di Mount Vernon-Belvedere, Baltimore (MD), kindly licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Stare Alike 3.0 Unported license (wikipedia).

Master and Commander

A Comparison between Machiavelli and Sunzi on the *Art of War*

By Andrea Polegato
California State University, Fresno

A scholar of the Machiavelli's *Art of war* hardly thinks of comparing it to *Sunzi bingfa*, due to the radical diversity between a text placed in a precise and well-known historical context (Machiavelli) and of strong thought, and another (*Sunzi bingfa*) which is a centuries-old stratification of fairly or ambiguous trivia, about which is said that the warlike emperor Kangxi (1662-1723) deemed it completely useless in war. Another fundamental difference is that while Machiavelli has always been studied with extreme philological accuracy also from the point of view of strategic science (think of the essay by Felix Gilbert in the famous *Makers of Modern Strategy: from Machiavelli to Hitler*, Princeton, 1942, edited by Edward Mead Earle), the tradition of philological and strategic study of the Sunzi bingfa inaugurated in 1772 by the translation of the père Amiot in the very important Jesuit collection of the Greek classics, accompanied by the penetrating military comments by de Saint-Maurice de Saint-Leu (État Actuel de *l'Art et de la Science Militaire* à *la Chine*, 1773), has been completely ignored by contemporary literature on strategy, which invented an imaginary *Sunzi*, starting with Basil Liddell Hart's nefarious and cerebral upheaval on the actualizing translation made by Samuel B. Griffith's (a U. S. Marine Officer), which replaced in 1963 that of Lionel Giles (1910). So there are now two *Sunzi bingfa*, the rigorous one of the sinologists, and the imaginary one of the business and military strategists.

There is a prolific productions of books on self-help, business and marketing and military strategy comparing Niccolò Machiavelli, one of the most rep-

NAM, Anno 1 – n. 3
DOI 10.36158/97888313526113
Giugno 2020

resentative figures of the Italian Renaissance and author of "The Prince" (*Il Principe*) and "The Art of War" (*L'Arte della guerra*), and Sunzi, Master Sun, an Ancient Chinese strategist whose name is associated with his popular and influential "The Art of War" (*Sunzi bingfa*). The popularity of such a comparison comes from Machiavelli's and Master Sun's ability to discuss military and political issues in a way that can be easily applied to other fields. Moreover, the political realism guiding their thought gives the impression of unveiling certain unspoken and secretive aspects of power and warfare, whose understanding is crucial for everyone to succeed. In popular cultural, the works of Machiavelli and Master Sun have been widely read and commented by great figures of our Past, from Napoleon to Mao.

However, no matter how much fascinating the topic is, this comparison is particularly difficult to conduct in an appropriate and productive way due to the profound differences between the two authors and their works, in terms of time, space, language, and culture. The risk is to simply juxtapose ideas and opinions taken out from their original and specific context and, consequently, distort and trivialize the two thinkers and their texts. It is therefore important to understand the cultural context in which both thinkers have developed their ideas.

Machiavelli's and Master Sun's life and times

Machiavelli (1469-1527) lived and operated in the city of Florence during the final phase of the Italian Renaissance (ca. 1494 – 1527) and the foirdst phase of the "horrende guerre d'Italia", a time of great and dramatic changes.[1] From a political and military point of view, this epoch was characterized by a series of foreign invasions starting with the military campaign (Machiavelli called it the "passata" at the end of the *Art of War*, from now on *AoW*) of the King of France Charles VIII and the subsequent invasions that destabilized the entire peninsula.[2] Moreover, this was the time in which artillery began to play

1 The year 1494 was considered by the direct witnesses of the Italian Wars such as Machiavelli and Guicciardini, among many others, the beginning of dramatic changes, a sort of 9/11, for the prosperity and balance of powers that had characterized the Italian Renaissance until that moment.

2 Charles' campaign shocked Italians for the big army he managed to build and for the pres-

a more relevant role in warfare while armies in Italy were still heavily relying on mercenary troops. The changes experienced during the Renaissance invested the language as well, with the gradual replacement of Latin with the Italian vernacular in the official documents. Machiavelli too privileged in his writings the vernacular over Latin. It is important to acknowledge this language switch because the new words in vernacular not only replaced their Latin counterparts but also invested them with new meanings adapted to the changing situation.[3] The fluid meaning acquired by words such as "stato", "virtù" or "prudenzia" during the Renaissance — and especially in Machiavelli's works on account of their originality — is emblematic of this switch.

Unfortunately, it is more difficult to accurately contextualize Master Sun and his *sunzi bingfa* (from now on, *SZ*). While Machiavelli is a relativity well-established historical figure and much of his production has been published and/or preserved in archives, it is still debatable that a man named Sun actually ever existed let alone he composed the book bearing his name.[4] For

ence of new pieces of artillery and the use of the Swiss mercenaries' troops. Indeed, as Hall writes (p. 39), "successful pike tactics were introduced into European warfare mainly through France's military adventures and in conjunction with the rise of small arms in the sixteenth century." An important discovery made as a consequence of Charles' military initiative was that "Italian city-states were too weak to resist a determined attack with modem siege artillery" (Hall, p. 158). Finally this campaign started the so called Italian wars making Italy "'the cockpit of Europe,' the region where larger rivalries played themselves out in seemingly endless wars that no one could win and no one could afford to lose" (Hall, p.159). It is worthy to report Francesco Guicciardini's impressions of the use of gunpowder by the French: "The French developed many ... pieces which were even more maneuverable, constructed only of bronze. These were called cannons, and they used iron cannonballs instead of stone as before .... Furthermore, they were hauled on carriages drawn not by oxen as was the custom in Italy, but by horses, with such agility of manpower and tools ... that they almost always marched right along with the armies and were led right up to the walls and set into position there with incredible speed; and so little time elapsed between one shot and another and the shots were so frequent and so violent was their battering that in a few hours they could accomplish what previously in ltaly used to require many days. They used this diabolical rather than human weapon not only in besieging cities, but also in the field, together with similar cannon and other smaller pieces" (Quoted from Hall, p. 159).

3 See Zancarini. Specifically, for the *AoW* see Fournel.

4 The understanding of Machiavelli's thought has provoked heated debates throughout the centuries, see for example in the case of *The Prince*, Giorgini or for the *AoW* the different opinions expressed by Derla, Winter, and Pedullà. For *AoW*, also see the detailed and clear reconstruction of its reception in contemporary and modern scholarships by Ilari.

the sake of our comparison, we will follow the traditional sources according to which Sun Wu (孫武) was a contemporary of Confucius and lived at the end of the Spring and Autumn period (*Chunqiu Shi*, 8th - 5th centuries B.C.E.). The Spring and Autumn was a time of great instability and conflict among ruling households (up to 148) competing in a feudal system for the role of protector of the weak Zhou dynasty. The conflict among clans increased rapidly during the Spring and Autumn period and reached its highest point during the so-called Warring states Period (*Zhangguo Shidai*, 5th century – 221 B.C.E.). The seemly never-ending conflict between states ended in 221 B.C.E. with the unification of the whole country by the state of Qin that managed to conquer the remaining 6 competing states and founded the first dynasty, Qin, under the rule of the first emperor, Shi Huangdi (221-210).

As for master Sun's masterpiece, we need to keep in mind that, as the majority of Chinese works from this period, *SZ* is more the result of a series of manipulations that lead to the most recent edition of the text under the Sung dynasty (960-1279) rather than the work and ideas of a single author (Ames, p. 10).[5] For this reason, we will consider the text as written in between the end of the Spring and Autumn and the peak of the Warring States period. From a military point of view, as observed by Allen, the *SZ* "emerges in a time of transformation in China's military culture from the seasonal combat of aristocrats in chariots in the Spring and Autumn period to mass infantry bureaucratically organized and served by iron weapons and abundant horsepower in the Warring States period" (Allen, p. 1). So, this epoch is characterized by the overlap between a way of thinking of and waging war that is disappearing but is still based on practices dating back to the Bronze Age of the Zhou Dinasty, and a new way requiring a great army organization, intelligence, and resources management. Ames writes:

> Armies up to the late Spring and Autumn period were still constituted by aristocratic families living in the vicinity of the capital, and ordinary people played a relatively minor role in the actual fighting. The merchant class was also largely excluded. The armies would be led personally by representatives of the ruling families and by high-ranking ministers of royal blood who would be educated from an early age in both civil and

5 The materiality of Chinese texts, made of bamboo strips, certainly contributed to their composite nature.

> military arts. During the increasingly more frequent and brutal conflicts of the Warring States period, a real separation emerged between the civil and the military, with mercenaries from lower classes selling their talents to the highest bidder. Warfare moved from an honorable occupation to a profession and the numbers of those slaughtered on the battlefield and in the reprisals that sometimes followed increased from the hundreds to hundreds of thousands (Ames, p. 34).

It is during this period of great changes in the Chinese military culture that *SZ* is conceived.

The anecdote on Machiavelli

Both authors are associated to spurious anecdotes. It is worthy to report these stories because they tell us something about each author and the traditional reception of their military vision.

Machiavelli is remembered by Matteo Bandello in his *Novelle*, a collection of short stories published between 1554 and 1573.[6] In the *Novelle*, each tale is introduced by a dedication to an important protagonist from Bandello's times. In this dedication, the author evokes the fictional occasion in which he heard the tale. Machiavelli is mentioned by Bandello as the narrator from whom he heard the fortieth tale in book one. The circumstance is a lunch organized by the *condottiere* (commander) Giovanni delle Bande Nere (1498-1526) to which both Bandello and Machiavelli were invited. In addressing Giovanni —who was dead already a long time when the *Novelle* were published— Bandello reminds him when he let Machiavelli drill his 3000 troops according to precepts of his *AoW*. After more than two hours of unsuccessful attempts and having seen that his men were tired and hungry, Giovanni intervened and "in un batter d'occhio e con l'aita dei tamburini" (in a blink of an eye and with the help of the drummers) brought that order Machiavelli failed to impose. Bandello's comment is caustic: "It became clear then how big the difference is between he who knows and never applied what he knows, and he who – besides the knowledge – gets his hands dirty, as it is customary to say" (*Novelle* I, 40, passage quoted in Pedullà, p. 96).

6 For a discussion of this anecdote, see Maestri, Pedullà 96-98,

As Gabriele Pedullà has pointed out, this anecdote: "has served as the basis for building an anti-Machiavellian tradition that derides theoretical knowledge devoid of any real-world experience" (*ibidem*). Moreover, the anecdote is interesting to us because, as we will see later, it is surprisingly similar to the account of Master Sun's interview with an important king of his times.

Machiavelli's AoW

Machiavelli probably composed the *AoW* in 1519 and the book was then published on August 16th 1521 for the Giunti publishing house. This is one of the very few works Machiavelli actually curated from scratch to publication. The title, *L'Arte della guerra*, differs from Machiavelli's own references to the book in his letters, where he refers to it as *de re militari*.[7] The term "art" has two meanings: the first one is "profession", "craft", and this is how we should understand the title; the second one is "deception", "artifice", "stratagem", some uses of "art" within the dialogue can be ascribed to this second meaning.[8]

The *AoW* addresses military topics in the form of a dialogue, set in 1516 Florence. The main protagonist is Fabrizio Colonna, a well-known *condottiero* at that time at the service of Ferdinando the Catholic, King of Spain, who is in Florence to pay a visit to "la Eccellenza del Duca" Lorenzo de Medici (1492-1519), grandson of Lorenzo the Magnificent, who had just been nominated duke of Urbino (1519).[9] The dialogue is set in the so-called *Orti Oricellari*, an Florentine intellectual gathering supported by the aristocrat Bernando Rucellai and, after his death in 1514 , by his sons and nephew.

7 The title "L'Arte della guerra" probably comes from the editor of the volume while Machiavelli in his letters refers to it as *de re militari*. Biagio Bonaccorsi, who copied the manuscript in 1520, and Filippo de' Nerli, in a letter to Machiavelli himself, both refer to the book as "*de re militari*" (Verrier, p. 57 n. 36).

8 Giorgio Masi who authored the voice "Arte della guerra" in the *Enciclopedia Machiavelliana*, reported the instances in which Machiavelli uses "arte" with this second meaning: *AoW* IV 50, 64, 129; V 109; VI 187, 199; VII 118 and first draft of VI 163. All references to the *AoW* are based on its edition by *Edizione Nazionale delle opere di Niccolò Machiavelli*.

9 Duke Lorenzo is also the dedicatee of Machiavelli's *The Prince*.

Among the participants of the *Orti*, there are the other protagonists of the dialogue with Fabrizio: Cosimo Rucellai, the banker Zanobi Buondelmonti, and the intellectuals Luigi Alamanni and Giovanni Battista Della Palla. Even though Machiavelli participated in the *Orti* since 1515-16, he did not include himself in the dialogue.

The *AoW* is divided into seven books**.** The discussion in book one begins with a reference to the ancients and why and on what they are worthy of imitation. The protagonists also discuss the low performance of the Florentine militia, in particular in the siege of Prato in 1512, allowing Machiavelli to defend a project in which he was particularly involved as secretary of the board in charge of it, before being ousted that year.[10] Book one also declares the goal of the entire work as well as a general index for the whole work, Fabrizio says:

> [115] The purpose of whoever wants to make war is to *be able to fight with any enemy in the field and* to *be able to win a battle*. [116] To want to do this, one must order an army [117] To order the army, one needs to *find the men*, *arm them*, *order them*, and *train them* in *small and in large orders*, *quarter them*, and then *present them*, *either standing or marching*, *to the enemy*. [118] In these things consist all the industry of open-field warfare, which is the most necessary and the most honored. (*AoW*, I, p. 113; the italics is mine)

According to this plan, Fabrizio begins the explanation of each point. Books one and two consider recruitment (the so-called "deletto"), weapons, training, and discipline of the troops. Books three and four analyze the order of battle, in particular the formation to be kept during marches and combats, the tactics and the coordination between infantry and cavalry. The fifth book tackles "the order of march, provisioning, communications and intelligence. In book sixth, Fabrizio addresses problems involved in setting up camp and decamping, with a detailed account of the organization of the Roman military camp, and comments on the use of spies and the importance of discipline. The last book deals with fortifications, sieges, and the advantages and disadvantages of artillery" (HÖRNQVIST, p. 122). This was a particular delicate topic in Renaissance Italy, since the French artillery found the Italian defensive sys-

10 For the involvement of Machiavelli in this project, see Guidi.

tem particularly weak. Book seven ends with "a lament over the failures of the Italian rulers and their responsibility for its continued vulnerability" (*ibidem*) as well as with Fabrizio's bitter hope that his young interlocutors may be able, one day, to counsel and persuade their rulers to restore the "antichi ordini" (ancient orders) as he explained to them throughout the dialogue.

Master Sun's AoW

The traditional SZ is divided in short 13 chapters. The main concept explored by *SZ* is the importance on preserving your own resources while subduing the enemy through a strategy that mainly focuses on manipulating the enemy's alliances, strategies, weakest but also strongest points, and resources while keeping him blind about your own intentions and actual military options. The first chapter states the importance of warfare for the state and lists the seven questions that have to be answered by the commander to assess the possibility of victory. The seven questions are:

> Which ruler makes the better morale prevail (*dao*)?
>
> Which commander has the greater ability?
>
> Which side has the advantages of climate and terrain?
>
> Which army follows regulations and obeys orders more strictly?
>
> Which army has superior strength?
>
> Whose officers and men are better trained?
>
> Which side is more strict and impartial in meting out rewards and punishments? (*SZ*, I, Ames p. 74).

Then, *SZ* introduces five factors which play a major role in conducting to victory or defeat: the morale ensured by a clear relationship between people and its superiors (*dao* 道), weather and territory conditions (*tian* 天 and *di* 地), general's (*jiang* 將) skills, and army organization (logistics, chain of command etc., *fa* 法).[11] The ability of the commander consists in gaining data to accurately answer the seven questions as well as understand the five factors.

11 I follow here Jullien in translatin *dao* with "morale" however *dao* is the most important and complex term in ancient Chinese philosophy (Jullien, p. 21). To get an idea of its complexity, see Graham. Lewis argues that behind the first question (and other passages) there is the idea of transforming the army "into an artificial body guided by the mind of the commander" (Lewis, pp. 104-05).

However, the subsequent step is the most important one for the commander: "Having heard what can be gained from my assessments, shape a strategic advantage (*shi* 勢) from them to strengthen our position. By 'strategic advantage' I mean making the most of favorable conditions and tilting the scales in our favor"[12] (*SZ*, I; Ames p. 74). Consequently, answering the seven questions and considering the five factors do not guarantee victory by themselves, but it is required the additional step of "making the most of favorable conditions" that can be displayed only by engaging the enemy according to the strategy explained in chapter two. Indeed, Master Sun stresses the fact that: "these are the military strategist's calculations for victory: they cannot be settled in advance". This is the reason why the chapter establishes a strong — and famous —link between warfare and deception (*gui* 詭). "[M]aking the most of favorable conditions and tilting the scales in our favor" can be achieved by using the enemy's strengths against himself and, vice versa, by hiding your own's.

Master Sun addresses the problem of *zhan* 戰, the actual confrontation, by establishing the preference for a quick victory rather than a prolonged war based on the importance of preserving human, material, and financial resources of yours as well as your enemy's (*SZ*, II).[13] In the Chinese history of those centuries, there were too many examples of a successful state that suddenly became pray of its neighbors because of its too costly military campaigns. On account of these considerations, *SZ* sets up the priorities for a successful strategic plan: "to attack strategies; the next to attack alliances; the next to attack soldiers; and the worst to assault walled Cities" (*SZ*, III, Ames p. 79). The ideal is to "subdue the enemy's forces without going to battle (*zhan*)". For this reason, master Sun stresses the importance of knowing the size of enemy's forces and the ability to act accordingly, the clear relationship and division of responsibilities between political and military power, between the commander and his troops. The commander is defined as "the side-guard on the carriage of state" because he is at the center of all the aforementioned relationships that can lead to victory or defeat. The chapter contains the famous maxim: "he who knows the enemy and himself / will never in a hundred battles be at risk".

12 As for the development of *shi* as a special military term see Ames, *The Art of Rulership*, pp. 66-72. For *qi* and *zheng*, see Sawyer, pp. 55 and ff.

13 For an interesting analysis of the term *zhan*, see Wu.

Another important topic addressed in *SZ* is the differences between attack and defense, either choice is based on the assessment of the enemy's strength (*SZ*, IV). Victory prediction is based on the five factors: calculations, quantities, logistics, the balance of power, and the possibility of victory. Whoever takes these five factors in account gains the strategic position (*xing* 形) that lead to victory. A "seminal chapter" (Sawyer, p. 62) in *SZ* is chapter 5, it is also one of the most difficult chapters to understand due to the density and originality of the two concepts, surprise/unhortodox, *qi* 奇 and straightforward/orthodox, *zheng* 正, employed by master Sun in connection with the strategic advantage, *shi*, we have already encountered in chapter 1: "For gaining strategic advantage (*shi*) in battle, there are no more than 'surprise' (*qi*) and 'straightforward' (*zheng*) operations, yet in combination, they produce inexhaustible possibilities". According to Sawyer "'orthodox' tactics employ troops in normal, conventional, 'by the book' expected measures" while the "'unorthodox' is primarily realized through tactics that employ forces, especially flexible ones, in imaginative, unconventional, and unexpected ways. Therefore, in the context of Spring and Autumn warfare unorthodox tactics would consist of mounting flanking thrusts instead of direct chariot attacks" (Sawyer, p. 63). The strategic advantage, gained by combining *qi* and *zheng*, has to be intended in a broad sense. Indeed, it is through strategic advantage that cowardice and courage are determined as well as victory and defeat: "The expert at battle seeks his victory from strategic advantage (*shi*) and does not demand it from his men" (*SZ*, V; Ames, p. 87). Master Sun also discusses how to manipulate the enemy and, at the same time, how to avoid being manipulated by him in one of the longest chapters in the book, chapter six. The last part of the chapter is particularly interesting because the author introduces another concept: "The ultimate skill in taking up a strategic position (*xing*) is to have no form (*wu xing* 無 形)." The "no form" disposition is part of Master Sun's "sophisticated theory of 'deception and formless'" according to which the latter can be achieved, for example, by "creating facades and displaying false appearances" (Sawyer, p. 59). The objective is to prevent the enemy of using the same strategy you are applying to him: "If your position is formless (*wu xing*), the most carefully concealed spies will not be able to get a look at it, and the wisest counsellors will not be able to lay plans against it" (*SZ*, VI; Ames, p. 91).

To sum up, while Machiavelli was facing the problem of how to restore the

ancient (military) virtue in a country traumatized by the infamy of constant foreign invasions and the ineffectiveness of its own mercenary troops, Sunzi and his text face the problem of an escalating interstate violence that forces the most enlightened strategists to re-think war in terms of preservation of natural and human resources to prevent the risk of weaken their own state after conducting a military campaign, even a successful one, and, consequently, becoming a pray for other states.

Even though there would be many subjects that could be tackled in order to compare Machiavelli and Master Sun, in this contribution I would like to focus on one aspect that is central in both authors and tell us something about the culture climate in which they developed their ideas: the problem of the "profession" of arms.

War as an "Art" and the Political Power in Machiavelli

The aspect I would like to address in comparing the two "arts of war" is the term "art" (*arte*) discussed by Machiavelli and the use of the honorific title of "master" (*zi* 子) for master Sun in the *SZ*. The two terms do not seem to have anything in common, however, if we consider the cultural and political context and issues to which both texts represent their authors' response, it is possible to establish a meaningful comparison.

As we have mentioned, Fabrizio Colonna at the very beginning of the dialogue with the participants of the *Orti Oricellari* condemns the idea of "war as a full-time profession", i.e., war as an "art", which can appear surprising for a treatise on war. Fabrizio says:

> [51] … as *this is an art* by means of which men cannot live honestly in every time, it *cannot be used as an art except by a republic or a kingdom*. *And the one and the other* of these, when it was well ordered, *never consented to any of its citizens or subjects using it as an art*, nor did any good man ever practice it as his particular art. [52] Because he will never be judged good who engages in a career in which, by wanting to draw utility from it in every time, he must be rapacious, fraudulent, violent, and have many qualities that of necessity make him not good. (*AoW*, I, 13; the italic is mine)

Fabrizio's criticism is in line with several humanist works before the *AoW* denouncing the damage in employing mercenary troops. As secretary of the

second chancery and the ten of war, Machiavelli himself experienced, even firsthand, how counter-productive and, ultimately, harmful the employment of *condottieri* (warlords) and their troops could be for a state, especially a weak one such as the Florentine Popular Republic. His criticism moved from the mercenary troops' bad and cruel behavior (acting too often against the people they were supposed to protect than against the enemy), to the "cold" performances in battle. In his *Florentine Histories*, Machiavelli mentioned the famous battle of Anghiari, a fight lasted for almost an entire day but ending with only one casualty: a man trampled to death after falling from his horse (*FH*, V, 33). Full chapters of his masterpiece, *The Prince*, composed in 1513, were dedicated to this issue, like chapters 12-13, or partial ones such as chapters 7 and 19. In chapter 12, Machiavelli recalled the shock provoked by the poor performance of Italian mercenary troops, commonly employed by the Italian city-states in their interstate conflicts, in the first confrontation with the French army in 1494; the secretary wrote:

> These arms once made progress under certain captains, and they seemed gallant when they fought among themselves, but when a foreigner came, they showed what they really were, so that Charles, the king of France, was able to seize Italy "with a piece of chalk" (*The Prince*, ch. 12, p. 74).

However, Machiavelli's criticism against the profession of arms did not spring from historical observations only but also from ethical considerations. According to Machiavelli, Italian rulers and their armies have lost the virtue possessed by the ancients and, instead of imitating them in what really counts, many of them follow the ancients only in "the delicate and soft" things, as Fabrizio regrettably remarks:

> [17] How much better they would have done, may it be said with everyone's leave, to seek to be like the ancients in the strong and harsh things, not in the delicate and soft ones, and in those that they did under the sun, not in the shade, and to take up the modes of the true and perfect antiquity, not the false and corrupt one. (*AoW*, I, p. 16)

"The strong and harsh things" in which the Romans — "i miei Romani", Fabrizio says—should be imitated are stated by the *condottiere* as follows:

> [33] To honor and reward the virtues, not to despise poverty, to esteem the modes and orders of military discipline, to constrain the citizens to love one another, to live without sects, to esteem the private less than the public, and other similar things that could easily accompany our times. (*AoW*, I, p. 34)

To sum up, the introduction to *AoW*, by focusing on the importance of imitating the Romans in order to reinstate the lost virtue in the Italic rulers and people, works as a trigger for the following discussion on warfare. To reinstate the modes and orders of military discipline, Fabrizio has in mind a new kind of army that applies the best practices of Roman warfare to modern warfare in a hybrid model that is *unique* in the history of military treatises.[14] The very first factor Fabrizio takes into consideration is his own status as full-time professional by pointing out how the Romans, to preserve their institutions, never allowed their citizens to make a living from their military service, at least until the Roman Republic managed to avoid corruption:

> [69] those who were captains, contented with their triumph, used to return to private life with desire; and those who were members used to lay down their arms with a greater will than they picked them up. (*AoW*, I, p.15)

The profession of arms can be harmful not only to those citizens or subjects directly affected by the bad behavior of mercenary troops in their territory but to the state itself, republic or kingdom, because it gives to private citizens the power to threaten the political order and/or to influence its decisions. According to Machiavelli/Fabrizio, to prevent the formation of a professional military body it is necessary to recur to the "ordinananza", i.e. the prescription, and, consequently, end the bad practice of the "provvisioni", i.e. the hiring of mercenary troops. Therefore, the ideal army described in *AoW* is a popular army made of civilians who are trained for war but, during peaceful times, they resume their main profession: "smiths, ferriers, carpenters, butchers, hunters, and the like" (*AoW*, I, 193).

As we have seen, Machiavelli's criticism against full-time war professionals is deeply rooted in historical and ethical considerations that influence his vision of warfare but also politics, since his criticism of the professionalization of arms pairs with his criticism against Italian rulers who encouraged and implemented those practices, persuaded that:

> it was enough for a prince to know how to think of a sharp response in his studies, to write a beautiful letter, to show wit and quickness in his

14 On this subject, and in particular Machiavelli's contribution on the *restitutio* — rather than its opposite, the *imitation* — of the ancient orders, see Ilari, in particular pp. 35 and ff.

> deeds and words, to know how to weave a fraud, to be ornamented by gems and gold, 113 to sleep and eat with greater splendor than others, to keep many lascivious ones around, to govern subjects avariciously and proudly, to rot in idleness, to give promotions in the military by favor, to despise anyone who may have shown them any praiseworthy way, to want their speeches to be responses of oracles. Nor did these wretches perceive that they were preparing themselves to be the prey of whoever assaulted them (*AoW,* VII, 163).

It took the traumatic experience of 1494 and the subsequent invasions and military campaigns operated by foreign powers to unveil the inconsistency of those beliefs and to call for a solution Fabrizio is eager to share with the young participants of the *Orti Oricellari* but history prevented him to carry out:

> [237] From here then arose in 1494 great terrors, sudden flights, and miraculous losses; and thus three very powerful states114 that were in Italy have been sacked and wasted. [238] But what is worse, those who are left persist in the same error and the same disorder. […] [245] And I complain against nature, which either should not have made me a knower of this, or should have given me the ability to be able to execute it.
>
> [246] Nor do I think that now, since I am old, I can have any opportunity for it. And because of this I have been liberal toward you. If the things said by me please you, in due time you, being young and qualified, could help and counsel your princes to their benefit (*AoW,* VII, 163-4).

Professionalism and Political Power in Master Sun

In *SZ*, Master Sun's awareness of the obsolesce of war rituals, a relic of the past warfare, and, at the same time, the importance of war for the very existence of the state, pushes the author of *SZ* to reflect on a similar problem. To understand Master Sun's position, it is worthy to recall the anecdote about his encounter with king Helü, which is for some aspects, strikingly similar to Bandello's one on Machiavelli but with a quite more dramatic outcome. The story is reported in particular by Sima Qian, the great historian of the Han dynasty, about 400 years after Master Sun's death.[15]

15 For an analysis of this anecdote and a comparison between Sima Qian's report and those of other two sources, see Galvany, A. (2011). «Philosophy, biography, and anecdote: On the portrait of Sun Wu», *Philosophy East and West*, *61*(4), 630–646.

The anecdote is about Master Sun's interview with the king of Wu, Helü, who was considering Sun Wu for the position of general of his troops. Helü asked Master Sun to prove his military skills on the king's concubines. After gathering the women and dividing them into two squadrons, Master Sun appointed head of each group Helü's two most favorite concubines. He then moved to explained the girls the orders he was about to command and subsequently he began the drill. The girls not taking him seriously started laughing. Master Sun then said: "If the orders are not clear and the instructions have not been properly explained, the general is at fault." After re-explaining "several times" the orders, he beat the drum once again and gave the order to march to the left. The situation did not improve: "At this, Master Sun said, 'If the orders are not clear and the instructions have not been properly explained, the general is at fault, but if they have been made perfectly clear and the soldiers still do not obey, then the officers are at fault'". Realizing Master Sun was about to execute his favorite concubines, Helü, who was assisting the drill from a terrace, sent a messenger to implore Master Sun to spare the two women he was particularly fond of, and, at the same time, prizing his skills as military commander. To which, Master Sun replied as follows:

> "I, your servant, have been invested as the commander responsible for these troops, and, as the general in command, I am not obliged to obey you." Then, as a disciplinary measure, he executed the concubines at the head of both units and replaced them by two more. He beat the drum once again and the women, in perfect order, marched left, right, forwards, and backwards, knelt down, and stood up again without a sound".

Once the drill was completed, Master Sun requested the presence of the king to review the troops but Helü, sending a new message, refused and told Master Sun he could now retire. Master Sun replied: "Your majesty enjoys only words, not deeds." Persuaded of Master Sun's military skills, Helü hired him as commander in chief of his troops.

This apparently trivial anecdote contains a series of relevant themes addressed in *SZ*. First of all, it shows the tension between political power, represented by Helü, and military one, represented by Master Sun. This is a subject that is particularly stressed out in *SZ*. In chapter 3, for example, Master Sun lists among the five factors that lead a state to victory the situation in which, "the commander is able and the ruler does not interfere" (*SZ*, 3; Ames, p. 80).

The anecdote illuminates one of the reasons that generate this contrast: the king and his general had two clearly different — if not antagonistic — views on war. The aristocrat Helü showed a persisting tendency to perceive war as a source of amusement rather than a "serious matter" (*dashi* 大事; SZ, ch. 1, p. 73). He chose a "futile exercise" such as training his concubines to test Master Sun's military skills; then, he decided to follow the drill from afar, a terrace, underlining in an even more explicit way the "theatrical and playful dimension" characterizing his perception of war (Galvany, p. 634-35). Finally, he failed to understand the importance and the serious consequences of a logic of war not only for himself but for others, in particular his favorite concubines executed for not following the clear order of their general. On this point, the first lines of *SZ* are particularly blunt in explaining what is at stake:

> War is a vital matter of state. It is the field on which life or death is determined and the road that leads to either survival or ruin, and must be examined with the greatest care (*SZ*, I; Ames, p. 73).

Instead, the king Helü is a representative of "the earlier model of aristocratic combat, characteristic of the early Chunqiu period" according to which war was "the favorite setting of the social elite for competing in honor, valor, and virtue" (Galvany, p. 634-35). The "playful dimension" of war was part of this world in which the combatants could even "exchanged greetings, gifts, challenging gestures, bluster, petulance, and insolence" according to rules both parties were willing to accept, as participants in a game usually are (Galvany, pp. 635-36). On the contrary, Master Sun is the bearer of a new —and more dramatic— logic of war, imposed by the increasing competition among states growing in seize, complexity and needs in the crucial passage from the late Spring and Autumn and the beginning of the Warring States. This is how Galvany describes this new epoch:

> Going into battle in this new epoch called for formidable logistics and seamless bureaucratic functioning. Only a highly centralized state could generate and maintain an army consisting of masses that required a huge outlay of economic resources, an efficient recruitment or drafting system, and rational institutions (Galvany, p. 635).

The anecdote is revealing of this new dimension of warfare extended to social categories that were not used to be involved. If, previously, only male aristocratic warriors had the privilege of the use of armies, as we have seen,

the growing interstate conflict ended up absorbing any resource of the state and affecting the whole population who began to participate more directly in it.

In the antagonistic way of understanding military matters represented by Helu and Master Sun, it important to notice that both anecdote and *SZ* bestowed the honorific title of *zi*, master, to Sun Wu. This title is important for two reasons: it underlines the expertise of Sun Wu in warfare, but at the same time, considering that Sun Wu was a contemporary of Confucius, the title inevitably establishes a link between Sun and the most famous and influential master of ancient China.

Zi was used to indicate "the second-to-lowest title in the hierarchy of hereditary ranks" of the Zhou dynasty but political and social evolution made it become a "courtesy title among low-level aristocrats" (Mayer and Wilson, pp. 156-7). According to Mayer and Wilson, the Masters "appropriated […] and redefined" the term in a process of social invention in contrast with "the aristocratic ethos of the Bronze Age" based on "gentility of birth and valorous conduct" when the actual direction of warfare was going toward a growing bureaucratization and mass conscription. Mayer and Wilson argue that Master Sun – or, better, the author of *SZ*- was trying to legitimate a new form of military authority, "general, commander" (*jiang* 將), precisely like Confucius was trying to legitimate a new idea of gentleman, the *junzi* (君子), based on moral characteristics rather than an inherited status. As a matter of fact, *SZ* gives its first definition of the commander's skills in pure Confucian terms (Ames, p. 60):

> Command is a matter of wisdom, integrity, humanity, courage, and discipline (*SZ*, I; Ames, p. 73).

In the interpretation proposed by *SZ*, the military counterpart of *junzi*, *jiang*, opposes the conventional usage of the term of Western Zhou and Spring and Autumn periods, according to which the title of commander was a "wholly interchangeable task passed from aristocrat to aristocrat as the occasion or the whims of the monarch demanded" (Mayer and Wilson, p. 159). *SZ* did not open this position to anybody but to a specific individual possessing the required "extraordinary knowledge and skills" (ibidem) to lead an army to victory and defend the state and its ruler. This man is "the side-guard on the carriage of state" (SZ, III; Ames, p. 80), "the nation's treasure" (*SZ*, X; Ames,

p. 110). In this sense, the *jiang* is an individual who is willing to put his abilities under the service of a ruler, i.e., he is a professional of arms, but he also possesses the moral superiority of a *junzi* to the point that he is independent from his ruler's will:

> […] if the way (*dao*) of battle guarantees you victory, it is right for you to insist on fighting even if the ruler has said not to; where the way (*dao*) of battle does not allow victory, it is right for you to refuse to fight even if the ruler has said you must (*SZ*, X; Ames, p. 108).

To conclude, both Machiavelli and Master Sun reflected on warfare and its impact on society (and vice versa) and, in proposing an answer to the dramatic crisis of their times, realized the necessity of challenging two very well-established ideas, respectively war as a full-time *arte* and *jiang* as an ordinary task requiring only "gentle birth" (Allen, p. 1). Despite the differences, both Machiavelli and Master Sun aimed at reconnecting the civil and military worlds at a higher level — the level of the common good:

> [The] […] *only concern* [for] a *commander* (*jiang*) *is to protect his people and promote the interests of his ruler*, [he] is the nation's treasure (*SZ*, X; Ames, pp. 109-10; the italic is mine).
>
> [1] Many have held and hold this opinion, […] that *there are no things less in agreement with one another* or so dissimilar *as the civilian and military lives*. […] [4] on the contrary, *good orders without military help* are disordered no differently than *the rooms of a proud and regal palace when*, by being uncovered, *they have nothing that might defend them against the rain*, even though [they are] ornamented with gems and gold. (*AoW,* preface, 3-4; italics is mine).

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