Review of Niccolò Machiavelli: An Intellectual Biography

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/brian-maxson/13/
Vivanti offers a comprehensive analysis of the thought of Machiavelli situated against the backdrop of political and biographical developments in the early 16th century. The author argues that, much like contemporary transformations brought about by the Protestant Reformation, voyages of exploration, and consolidation of the northern monarchies, Machiavelli’s writings transformed political thought. In particular, Machiavelli was instrumental in the formulation of the concept of a “civil society,” a crucial aspect of Western democratic societies in which people were empowered through “institutions” with “rights and powers.” Few writers possess better qualifications to write this study. Vivanti was the editor of the works of Machiavelli and a premier Italian historian of the early modern period before his death in late 2012. The book is accessible as an introductory text, although even visitors to the voluminous historiography on Machiavelli will identify controversial points on specific works, as well as in Vivanti’s overarching claims. It will be a useful addition to other synthetic works on Machiavelli, such as John Najemy’s recent Cambridge Companion to Machiavelli (2010). Summing Up: Highly recommended. Lower-division undergraduates and above.

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