

***Guest Editor's Preface.***

***Why Machiavelli and the Making of German Identity?***

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A recent wave of interest in German Studies seems to be directed towards the investigation of the Italian legacy in German culture. Either with a view to disclosing new sources and individual debts, or to delivering general surveys,<sup>1</sup> scholars of German literature, philosophy and history have rediscovered an old German passion. After what can be considered a post-war taboo, the cultural relevance of Italian-German relations has gained new weight, becoming a crucial issue from both an academic and a cultural perspective. The increasing attention paid to the making of European identity has prepared the ground for this research trend, which not only complies with the scholarly need to cross disciplinary boundaries such as those between literature and philosophy, on the one hand, and between Italian and German Studies on the other (one could add to this list of disciplines intellectual history and political science); it can also provide European citizens with evidence of their common origins and traditions.

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<sup>1</sup> Amongst the most recent publications see: Ulrike Zeuch, "Herders Begriff der Humanität: aufgeklärt und aufklärend über seine Prämissen? Zur Bestimmung des höchsten Zwecks des Menschen in den *Ideen* und in der *Oratio* von Giovanni Pico della Mirandola", in *Vom Selbstdenken. Aufklärung und Aufklärungskritik in Herders Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit*, Heidelberg: Synchron, 2001, 187–198; *Frankreich oder Italien? Konkurrierende Paradigmen des Kulturaustausches in Weimar und Jena um 1800*, ed. by Edoardo Costadura, Inka Daum and Olaf Müller, Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2008; *Raffaello als Paradigma. Rezeption, Imagination und Kult im 19. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Elena Agazzi, Elisabeth Décultot and Gilbert Hess, Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011; Wolfgang Pross, "Herder und Campanella: *philosophia perennis* und moderne Naturwissenschaft", *Herder Jahrbuch/Herder Yearbook* XI (2012), 37–79; Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, *Opere e lettere. Scritti di arte, estetica e morale in collaborazione con Ludwig Tieck*, ed. by Elena Agazzi, Milano: Bompiani, 2014; Martin Alexander Ruehl, *The Italian Renaissance in the German Historical Imagination, 1860–1930*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.

In relation to Italy and Germany in particular, the Italian Renaissance must be credited with a special value for the later German development, and this role needs to be reassessed within the wider context of early modern history and culture down to the nineteenth century. Clearly, the implicit and ideal ‘terminus ante quem’ is represented by Jacob Burckhardt’s influential *Die Kultur der Renaissance in Italien* (1860), which still underpins our view of the Italian Renaissance, yet was very far from being the first encounter of German culture with fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Italy. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century German authors also dealt with this legacy and appropriated it for their own needs. And what Germans needed the most from the eighteenth century onwards was a national identity.

That is where and why Machiavelli comes into play, and what the present volume aims to assess.

In the following articles, written by established scholars of philosophy, German literature and intellectual history from Europe and the U.S., Machiavelli emerges as a crucial reference point for all those intellectuals who were committed to gaining for a still non-existent Germany its due political identity and cultural independence. Despite radical changes in the international scenario over less than a century, Machiavelli maintained a key role in providing German politicians, thinkers and poets with the appropriate tools for mastering the difficult situation arising from the inner instability of the Holy Roman Empire in the mid-eighteenth century until the Coalition Wars following the French Revolution. Figures who were biographically and professionally distant from one another contributed to the same cultural project, namely, paradoxical as it may seem, the creation of German identity through a foreign, i.e. Italian model: Machiavelli’s fragmented Italy resembled very closely late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Germany, and his call for a powerful individual able to unify those ‘disiecta membra’ when facing the French invader could not but appeal to Germans confronted with the Napoleonic armies. The first six articles deal with this crucial transition. The last essay offers a survey of the German appropriation of Machiavelli during the nineteenth century, and thus represents an appropriate connection to the master chronology of the German reception of Renaissance culture.

Of course, this brief ‘Preface’ does not aim to do justice to the richness and sophistication of all the following articles, nor does this *Special Issue* as a whole aim to exhaust the subject. The former may just serve as a useful clue to understanding the intention underlying the latter as well as a plea for further research. If both aims are achieved, the guest editor’s hopes will be fulfilled.