

Early Modern Europe, 1450–1789

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Primary Sources

CHAPTER THREE: POLITICS AND POWER, 1450-1600

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1. Niccolo Machiavelli, The Art of War, 1521

Machiavelli's treatise on military training, organization, tactics, and deployment was the only one of his political or historical works printed during his lifetime; he considered it his most important work. It is both a commentary on warfare--"Present wars impoverish the lords that win as much as those that lose"--and a plan for more effective military leadership--"In war, discipline can do more than fury." There are two full versions on the web.

<http://www.constitution.org/mac/artofwar .htm>

http://www.sonshi.com/mach_artofwar.html

2. Statute of Henry VIII Regarding the Shooting of Long Bows, 1511

Machiavelli stresses the importance of training for effective military actions, and many early modern rulers agreed. Though firearms using gunpowder grew increasingly important during the sixteenth century, long- and cross-bows still remained important weapons. In this statute, Henry VIII orders that all men under the age of 60 practice shooting regularly, and that fathers be responsible for providing their sons and young male servants with archery equipment and training. Statutes of the Realm, 3rd Henry VIII, c. 3, p. 25. Spelling and orthography modernized.

The King our sovereign lord, calling to his most noble and gracious remembrance, that by the feat and exercise of the subjects of this his realm in shooting of long bows there hath continually grown and been within the same great number and multitude of good archers which hath not only defended this realm and the subjects thereof against the cruel malice and danger of their outward enemies in time heretofore passed. . . and albeit that diverse good and profitable statutes in the time of his noble progenitors and predecessors kings of this land for the maintenance of

archery and longbows heretofore have been made, amongst which the right famous king of noble memory Henry VII, father to our said sovereign lord by authority of diverse parliaments caused good and noble acts and statutes to be established and made. . . yet nevertheless archery and shooting in longbows is right little used but daily diminishes, decays, and abates more and more. . . And also by means and occasion of customable usage of tennis-play, bowles [lawn-bowling], classhe [skittles], and other unlawful games, prohibited by many good and beneficial estates by authority of parliament in that behalf provided and made, great impoverishment hath ensued. And many heinous murders, robberies, and felonies be committed and done. And also the divine [service] by such misdoers on holy and festival days not heard or solemnized to the high displeasure of the Almighty God.

Wherefor the King. . . hath ordained, enacted, and established that the Statute of Winchester for archers be put in due execution. And moreover that every man being the King's subject not lame, decrepit, or maimed, nor having any other lawful or reasonable cause or impediment, being within 60 years, (except those men, spiritual men, justices of one bench or of the other, justices of the assize and barons of the exchequer) do use and exercise shooting in longbows, and also to have a bow and arrows ready continually in his house to use himself, and do use himself in shooting. And also that the father, governors, and rulers of such as be of tender age do teach and bring upon them the knowledge of the same shooting. And that every man having a man child or men children in his house shall provide, ordain, and have in his house for every man child being of the age of seven years and above till he shall come to the age of seventeen years, a bow and two shafts to induce and learn them and bring them up in shooting and shall deliver all the same bow and arrows to the same young men to use and occupy. And if the same young men be servants that then their masters

shall abate the money that they shall pay for the same bows and arrows of their wages. And after all such young men shall come to the age of seventeen years every of them shall provide and have a bow and four arrows continually for himself at his proper costs and charges, or else of the gift and provision of his friends, and use and occupy the same in shooting as is afore rehearsed. . . And every person that shall be found by inquiry or examination in default or not providing and having bows, arrows, and shafts ready by the space of one month shall forfeit and pay for every such default 12 d. . .

And that all statutes heretofore made against them that use unlawful games be duly put in execution, and punishment had according to the penalties of the same, as well against the offenders and occupiers of such unlawful games as against them that be owners or keepers of houses or other places where any such unlawful games be used. . . And furthermore that all justices of the peace, bailiffs, sheriffs, constables, and all other head officers, and every of them finding or knowing any mans person or persons using or exercising any unlawful games contrary to the said estate, shall have full power and authority to commit every such offender to ward [jail], there to remain without bail to such time he or they so offending be bound by obligation to the king's use in such sum of money as by the discretion of the said justices, mayors, bailiffs, or other head officers shall be thought reasonable that they nor any of them shall not from thence forth use any unlawful games. And that every bower [bow-maker] within this realm always make for every bow of ewe that he maketh to sell at least two bows of elm or other wood of mean [moderate] price.

3. Fillipo Vadi, *Ars Gladitoria* (The Fighting Arts) 1480s, translation by Luca Porzio



Along with bows, swords remained important weapons well into the sixteenth century, often used in conjunction with pistols by noble fighters. This manual of swordsmanship was written by Fillipo Vadi, a northern Italian master-at-arms of the late 15th century who served at the court Guidobaldo da Montefeltro, the Duke of Urbino. Vadi's Introduction justifies his manual in ways that fit with the humanism of his day:

He, with a generous heart, who sees my work should love it as a jewel and treasure and keep it in his heart, so that never, by no means, this art and doctrine should fall in the hands of unrefined and low born men. Because Heaven did not generate these men, unrefined and without wit or skill, and without any agility, but they were rather generated as unreasonable animals, only able to bear burdens and to do vile and unrefined works. For

this reason I rightly tell you that they are in every way alien to this science, while the opposite is true, in my opinion, for anybody of perspicacious talent and lovely limbs, as are courtesans, scholars, barons, princes, dukes and kings, who should be called to learn this science, following the principle of Instituta, which says: the imperial majesty has not only to be honored with arms, but also with sacred laws.

And do not think that in this book can be anything false or enveloped in error, because cutting and taking away dubious things, I only have written those things I saw and experienced personally, beginning to express our intention with the aid and grace of the almighty God whose name be blessed forever.

And because some irrational animals do naturally their actions, without any human science, by nature they lack science as man lacks weapons, so that nature gives man hands, intelligence and thought to make up for the lack of natural weapons, so that he doesn't need other things; and so man has no weapon or artifice, to better learn to use all weapons and artifices.

So man needs, among all animals, intelligence and reason, in which flourish art and science, and in these and other things he surpasses all animals.

But every learned and clever man surpasses other men bigger and stronger, as was correctly said: intelligence surpasses strength, and what is more and nearly incredible, the sage dominates the stars.

The entire manual can be found at:

http://www.chronique.com/Library/Fighting/vadi_translation.html#intro

4. Two views of the conquest of Constantinople, 1453

Descriptions of actual battles were far less glorious than theoretical treatises on military tactics. Several accounts of the conquest of Constantinople survive, which discuss the role of naval bombardment and hand to hand combat. One of these is by George Sphrantzes a courtier and ambassador in the Byzantine empire, and the other by Nicolo Barbaro, a Venetian surgeon who lived in the city.

<http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/sources/constantinople2.htm>

<http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/sources/constantinople3.htm>

5. Contemporary and Tudor Accounts of the Battle of Bosworth

In the battle of Bosworth (August 22, 1485) the Welsh nobleman Henry Tudor defeated the forces of the Yorkist King Richard III, a battle in which Richard himself was killed. Henry became King Henry VII, and Richard was generally vilified. The Richard III Society, with English and American branches, aims to rescue Richard's reputation, but also maintains several excellent websites that include original sources from the period and general information on fifteenth-century England. Among these are a number of contemporary and sixteenth-century accounts of the battle itself, including the account from Polydore Vergil's *Anglia Historia*:

<http://www.r3.org/bosworth/chronicl.html>

6. Henry VIII's speech to Parliament, 1545

Though he was not as shrewd or thrifty a ruler as his father, Henry VIII (shown right) was a master at handling Parliament, as this speech from late in his reign demonstrates. Royal speeches were generally not written down beforehand verbatim, but recorded as they occurred by various listeners. Thus there are often several variant versions, often edited later to make one standard text.

<http://englishhistory.net/tudor/h8speech.html>



7. Anne Boleyn's scaffold speech, 1536

Anne Boleyn (shown left) was Henry VIII's second wife, and the mother of Elizabeth. When she failed at producing a male heir—despite several miscarriages, Henry tired of her, and trumped up a charge of adultery, incest, and witchcraft. She was executed, as were her brother and several associates. This account of Anne Boleyn's speech after execution was made by the Tudor chronicler Edward Hall.



Good Christian people, I am come hither to die, for according to the law, and by the law I am judged to die, and therefore I will speak nothing against it. I am come hither to accuse no man, nor to speak anything of that, whereof I am accused and condemned to die, but I pray God save the king and send him long to reign over you, for a gentler nor a more merciful prince was there never: and to me he was ever a good, a gentle and sovereign lord. And if any person will meddle of my cause, I require them to judge the best. And thus I take my leave of the world and of you all, and I heartily desire you all to pray for me. O Lord have mercy on me, to God I commend my soul.

After being blindfolded and kneeling at the block, she repeated several times: To Jesus Christ I commend my soul; Lord Jesu receive my soul.

8. Elizabeth's Speech at Tilbury, 1588

Henry's disappointment at Elizabeth's birth and the execution of her mother did not prevent her from attaining a fine education. She wrote letters, prayers, poems, and translations, and gave many speeches, which were written down for the official records or survive in listeners' notes. This is a speech she apparently gave after the English defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, when reviewing her troops at Tilbury. In her actions and her words, Elizabeth skillfully used her unusual status as a virgin queen and a person who combined masculine and feminine qualities. Her rhetoric is also reminiscent of her mother's scaffold speech.

My loving people: We have been persuaded by some that are careful of our safety, to take heed how we commit ourself to armed multitudes, for fear of treachery; but I assure you I do not desire to live to distrust my faithful and loving people. Let tyrants fear, I have always so behaved myself that, under God, I have placed my chiefest strength and safeguard in the loyal hearts and good-will of my subjects; and therefore I am come amongst you, as you see, at this time, not for my recreation and disport, but being resolved, in the midst and heat of the battle, to live and die amongst you all; to lay down for my God, and for my kingdom, and my people, my honour and my blood, even in the dust. I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman; but I have the heart and stomach of a king--and of a king of England too--and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe, should dare to invade the borders of my realm; to which rather than any dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge, and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field. I know already, for your forwardness you have deserved rewards and crowns; and We do assure you in the word of a prince, they shall be duly paid you. In the mean time, my lieutenant general shall be in my stead, than whom never prince commanded a more noble or worthy

subject; not doubting but by your obedience to my general, by your concord in the camp, and your valour in the field, we shall shortly have a famous victory over those enemies of my God, of my kingdom, and of my people.

9. Last letter of Mary Queen of Scots, 1587

Mary Queen of Scots was implicated in the plot that killed her husband, and fled to England in 1567, where she was imprisoned by Elizabeth. The portrait (shown on the next page) was painted by an unknown artist during her long imprisonment. Mary became the focus of Catholic plots to depose Elizabeth, and finally was tried for conspiring to kill Elizabeth, and executed at Fotheringhay Castle. Her last letter was addressed to Henry III of France, her former brother-in-law, and was finished just hours before her execution. In it, she asks him to provide wages to her loyal servants, and comments: "I scorn death and vow that I meet it innocent of any crime, even if I were their subject. The Catholic faith and the assertion of my God-given right to the English crown are the two issues on which I am condemned." The full text of the letter can be found at:

<http://englishhistory.net/tudor/maryqos-letter.html>



10. Commentary on the estates in France, 1561

The papacy and Italian city-states were the first governments to send permanent diplomatic representatives to other courts. These ambassadors were expected to make regular reports to their home government. In 1561, the Venetian ambassador to France, Michele Suriano, included these comments on the three French estates in his report.

The condition and quality of the people are threefold, and hence there are three estates of the realm. The first is that of the clergy; the second that of the nobility, and the third has no special name, but because it is composed of various ranks and professions one can give it the general name of “the estate of the people.” The clergy includes many of the third estate... A considerable part, however, comes from the nobility, because second- and third-born sons of princes and lords, having little share in the family inheritance, which goes by primogeniture, enter the Church in order to acquire wealth and reputation at the same time.

By nobles are meant that who are free and do not pay any kind of tax to the king; they have only the obligation of personal service in time of war... The estate of the people includes men of letters (who are called “men of the robe”), merchants, artisans, plebians, and peasants. Among the men of the robe, whoever has the rank of judge or councillor or similar office is considered as noble and privileged and is so treated throughout his life. The merchants, being in these times the money-masters, are favored and caressed, but they have no distinction of dignity because any pursuit of gain in this kingdom is held to be unworthy of the nobility. Therefore even this rank of men is counted in with the lesser people and the plebians, and pays taxes like the non-nobles and the peasants, who are more oppressed than any other class, both by the king and by the privileged.



King Francis I of France dressed as a god. In this painting, Francis is shown wearing clothing and carrying equipment from many different gods, including Athena's helmet, Mercury's sandals, and Mars' armor. Such portraiture was part of the creation of ideologies of royal absolutism. Original at:

<http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/bnf/bnf0004.html>

11. Simon of Trent and the Blood Libel

On Easter Sunday, 1475, the dead body of a two-year-old boy named Simon was found in or near a Jewish family's house in Trent, Italy. Town magistrates arrested Trent's Jewish men, and one woman, charging them with killing a Christian child in order to drain his blood for ritual purposes. This charge—now called the “blood libel”—was a standard part of prejudice against Jews, and emerged in a number of places across Europe in the Middle Ages and early modern period. In this case the accused were tortured until they confessed, and they were then executed; Trent's Jewish women were forced to convert and their children taken from them. The prince-bishop of Trent wanted to make Simon a saint, and allowed continued actions against Jews. In 1478, Pope Sixtus IV intervened, ordering that “no Christian...should presume to kill, mutilate, wound, or unjustly extort monies from them [the Jews], or prevent them from observing their rites, permitted by law.” The whole text of the papal order may be found at:

<http://www.earlymodern.org/workshops/summer04/presentations.html?innerpage=stow/bull/intro.html>

A discussion of the events written a century later by the Jewish historian Yosef Ha-Cohen is at:

<http://www.earlymodern.org/workshops/summer04/presentations.html?innerpage=stow/bull/intro.html>

Simon was formally beatified by Pope Sixtus V in 1588. His name was taken from the calendar of saints in 1965, but anti-Semitic groups still regard him as a saint and view his death as ritual murder.

12. Expulsion of the Jews from Spain, 1492

Immediately after the conquest of the Muslim state of Granada, Ferdinand and Isabella ordered all Jews to leave Spain. Historians estimate that about 200,000 Jews left, many to North Africa and the Ottoman Empire and the rest dispersed throughout Europe. This account of their expulsion was written by an Italian Jew in 1495.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/jewish/1492-jews-spain1.html>

13. Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq: The Turkish Letters, 1555-1562



Busbecq was the ambassador of the Holy Roman Emperor at the court of Suleyman the Magnificent (shown left) in Istanbul from 1555-62. Like the letters of Italian ambassadors (Source 10), his letters provide a great deal of information about the Ottoman Empire. Busbecq is generally very favorable toward the Ottomans and was trying to implement some of their practices in the Empire.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1555busbecq.html>

14. Court case involving confiscation of property, Denmark 1553

Royal courts were an important tool in the expansion of centralized power by early modern monarchs. This involves a dispute between a noble widow and one of the king's councilors. She had confiscated tools and horses from some urban residents who were cutting down trees in a forest she regarded as rightfully belonging to her and her children; the king's councilor argues that the forest belonged to the king, and that he had granted the townspeople the right to cut wood there, in return for fees. Thus this case sets noble prerogatives (including freedom from taxation) against those of a monarch. (Original in the Danish National Archives. Additional copies in manuscript collections in the Royal Library, Copenhagen, Denmark. Most recent edition in *Danske Domme* 13 75-1662, *De private Domssamlinger*, I: 13 75-1553. *Det danske Sprog- og Litteraturselskab*. (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1978), pp. 361-362. Translated by Grethe Jacobsen and Pernille Arenfeldt)

Was presented to us at our King's Bench our dear Byrge Trolle of Lillo, our faithful Lord and Councillor and had summoned our dear Lady Anne, widow of Axel Ugerup of Ugerup, and charged her for some axes, horses and carts that she had ordered to be seized from some burghers in our town of Væ in their own forest, which they have been granted by us and for which they render us and the Crown tax and manorial rent, and Byrge Trolle was of the opinion that she had done them injustice thereby.

To this the aforementioned Lady Anne answered that the axes, horses and carts she had ordered to be seized from the burghers of Væ had been taken from them in her own forest and property which belongs to her and her children, because they [the burghers] had entered and chopped trees in her forest without her permission and she had not let anything be taken from them on their own property and forest, which they have [been granted] by us. Lady Anne further explained that [some] noblemen have

been ordered to examine the circumstances regarding the forest and forest boundaries over which they dispute and that the same forest which they dispute shall therefore remain physically and legally inviolate until a decision has been reached.

Then upon address and reply and the circumstances of the case, the court declared that if Lady Anne, [widow of] Axel Ugerup has taken any axes, horses or carts from the aforementioned burghers of Væ on the field belonging to their own town, of which they pay taxes and render us services, and this can be proven with satisfaction, then she has done them injustice, but because [some] noble men have been ordered to decide on the property and forest, which they dispute and [which] is declared inviolable, and no conclusion has been reached regarding it, then the land shall remain inviolate until it is decided who has the right to the land and that person shall have whatever is confiscated on the land.

Given in Copenhagen, on the Monday on the Feast of Saint Boniface [June 5th], in the presence of our dear Lord Mogens Gyldenstjerne, Knight, Tage Thott, Verner Parsbjerg, Christoffer Hvidtfeldt and Lord Lauge Brahe, Knight, our faithful men and Councillors. 1553.

15. New City Ordinances, Yarmouth 1491

In the later sixteenth century, towns and cities in many parts of Europe combined what had often been a rather haphazard group of laws and ordinances into more comprehensive city law codes, often titled “reformations.” On the continent, this desire for uniformity was influenced by the spread of Roman Law, as the lawyers and officials who drafted them had often attended university law schools, which increasingly focused on Roman Law. This was not the case in England, but this period did see reforms and expansion in many city codes. This is the preamble for a 1491 law code from Yarmouth. The entire code can be found at:

<http://www.trytel.com/~tristan/towns/yarmlaws.html>

August 1491

Because disagreements and discords have arisen among the burgesses and community of the town of Yarmouth, and have increased due to lack of good government and maladministration of, or failure to uphold, the ordinances and laws in earlier times made, ordained and established by wise and sensible men (burgesses of the town);

And because [of the need] to resolve and quieten the said disagreements and discords, with the goal of restoring and building an amicable peace and unity to the honour of Almighty God, and to the increase of the common good and prosperity in the town;

The bailiffs, burgesses and community of the town, assembled on Tuesday before the feast of Easter in the 6th year of the reign of our sovereign lord king Henry VII , by the good and sensible advice of the right worshipful James Hobart, the king's attorney, then being present, intending to provide a remedy in this matter, it was fully decided and agreed by their common assent that two burgesses, John Peers and John Tanne, should nominate

and select 10 other well-disposed burgesses to join them, and those 12 should after consultation amend and reform the old ordinances and apply their discretion to formulating other ordinances and reforms such as to prevent the difficulties that recently caused the said disagreements and discords.

Whereupon John Peers and John Tanne nominated to join them John Russe, William Albon, William Aldrich senior, Robert Baret, Christopher Moy, Nicholas Moore, Stephen Watson, John Borell, William Patenson, and Richard Osteler, well-disposed burgesses of the town. Which 12 burgesses thus selected took upon themselves, for the honour of God and the increase of the common good, the task of reforming the old ordinances and creating additional ordinances, as follows, to endure perpetually by the grace of God.

16. War in the Italian city of Perugia in 1495

In many Italian city-states, there were frequent conflicts among elite families for power, which often escalated into open warfare. In 1495, for example, the city of Perugia was under the rule of the Baglioni family, but their main rivals, the Oddi family, attempted to regain control of the city by military action. Francesco Matarazzo, a professor at the University of Perugia during this period, described the battle itself very much in the traditional of chivalric literature: “Then were done marvellous deeds of prowess; and so loud was the clash of arms and the clangor of cruel blows that the tongue of man cannot tell it; and the noise went up to heaven.” His discussion of the preparations and the decisions to go to war are much less heroic.

<http://www.deremilitari.org/resources/sources/perugia.htm>



Remains of city walls in Lucca, Italy. Frequent warfare and other issues of security led cities to build walls, and expand and modify them as the city's population grew and weaponry changed. This aerial view shows the form of the outer walls of Lucca clearly. Built between the mid sixteenth and the mid-seventeenth centuries, they have now been replaced by parks.