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Machiavelli's political science in view of his early works

When Machiavelli entered the Chancellery of Florence in 1498, he was already a mature man, age 29. By the time he lost his office in 1512, age 43, he was an experienced politician, which he never failed to emphasize. Within a year *The Prince* was ready. Did Machiavelli mature into an outstanding political thinker during this forced idleness, as many historians have supposed, or was he already one before? The paper proposes to re-investigate some of the famous documents of his political ideas, like the letter to Becchi (1498), the draft sermon on the problem of the rebellious subjects of Arezzo (1503), or the even more famous *Ghiribizzi to Soderini*, a draft letter of political advice (1506). I will argue that Machiavelli followed political events right from the beginning as a political philosopher keen on abstraction. I will not only show that many of his foundational ideas are detectable already in these early documents but also reveal that Machiavelli as a methodical thinker had already advanced epistemological views, which he would more systematically develop later in the *Discourses on Livy*.