
The Translation of Machiavelli's *Prince* and the Political Climate in Mid Eighteenth-Century Sweden

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Abstract & Keywords

English:

The first translation of Machiavelli's *Prince* into a Nordic language was published in Stockholm by Carl von Klingenberg (1757), together with the translation of its confutation, *The Anti-Machiavel* by Frederick II of Prussia. Klingenberg was an Enlightenment intellectual of a period in Sweden that was characterized by the conflict between the Crown and Parliament. The volume, dedicated to the eleven-year-old Crown Prince Gustaf, the future king of Sweden Gustavus III had a limited influence and circulation notwithstanding the growing interest in Machiavelli's treatise. In this paper other events are also taken into consideration, i.e. the factors which boosted the Swedish book market and helped to loosen censorship. From this perspective, Klingenberg's work can also be seen as an attempt to make Machiavelli's treatise available to a larger public and to achieve personal success.

Keywords: Machiavelli, The Prince, Carl Klingenberg, Sweden, Age of Liberty, Gustavus III

In 1757, the first translation in a Scandinavian language of Machiavelli's *The Prince* was brought out in Stockholm by the publisher Grefing. The centuries-long delay was due – as is well-known – to the fact that the treatise was inscribed in the *Index librorum prohibitorum* but nevertheless circulated more or less clandestinely all over Europe in various Latin translations, from Silvestro Tegli's 1560 version to Herman Conring's of 1660 (Mordeglia 2010). The spread of *The Prince* as far as the Nordic regions[1] was also aided by Amelot's French translation, which eluded censorship by being published in Amsterdam (Machiavelli 1683), and by the success of the refutation of Machiavelli's treatise, the celebrated *Anti-Machiavel* by Frederick II of Prussia, which was published first in a French and then a German translation and contained both works set out in two parallel columns.[2]

The Swedish translation of *The Prince* along with the *Anti-Machiavel* was a work by Carl Klingenberg, a typical Enlightenment intellectual of the age that in Sweden was called *frihetstid* [Age of Liberty], 1721-72. Despite the importance of the work and the long wait for the translation, it should be noted that its impact in Sweden was slight and that no-one in Scandinavia would translate the *Prince* again for over a century – as a stand-alone text the treatise was in fact not translated into Swedish until 1867 by R. Afzelius (Machiavelli 1867).

In a preceding study dedicated to Klingenberg's translation (Marelli 2010), I focused in particular on textual and translation aspects with the aim of identifying the translator's sources and evaluating their use. However, given the singularity of a translation which appears as an isolated case in Scandinavia and was a clear publishing failure, I also dealt with the problem of its function and its reading public. Before taking up again the conclusions and hypotheses put forward at the time, it will be useful to re-examine the figures of the translator and the dedicatee of the work (Gustav II of Sweden, then the Crown Prince), as well as the position of the translation within the political and cultural context of Sweden in the mid-1700s.

Carl Klingenberg (1708-57), an intellectual with wide-ranging interests who had the merit of spreading the ideas of Wolff, Voltaire and other Enlightenment philosophers in Sweden, is remembered for his work in the *Tankebyggarorden* [Order of the Thought-Builders], the first private Swedish literary association. The association is often seen – but not quite correctly – as a sort of alternative and competitor to the *Vitterhetsakademien* [Academy of Belles Lettres], expression of the official culture of the court, founded by Princess Louisa Ulrika, wife of the King of Sweden Adolf Frederick and sister of Frederick II of Prussia. Introduced to the *Tankebyggarorden* by his cousin, the poetess Hedvig Charlotta Nordenflycht, Klingenberg immediately rose to a prominent position (Stålmarek 1986): not only did he become part of the close circle which gravitated around Nordenflycht's "literary salon" and also included two most talented poets – the young counts Gustaf Fredrik Gyllenberg and Gustav Philip Creutz – but he also enjoyed great consideration and respect, to the point of being perceived as a mentor. Thanks to his vast modern culture, he above all fascinated the younger generation and was able to bring the members into contact with the new ideas of the age. Nevertheless, the contribution he made to the association's publications was rather slight: a single prose piece of writing of a theoretical nature, *Avhandling om den rätta Smaken* [Treatise on Good Taste], included in the *Våra Försök III* [Our Experiments III][3] of 1756, an essay which is moreover not distinguished by its originality (Stålmarek 1986: 42-4).

An academic of no particular distinction at the University of Uppsala, where he was overshadowed by figures of much greater prestige, Klingenberg obtained some modest recognition thanks to his friendships with exponents of the "Hats" party [*hattpartiet*][4], in particular Carl Gyllenberg, leader of the party and uncle to the poet Gustaf Fredrik. In 1754, he began to devote his attention to the translation of some scientific studies from French and English on subjects relating to medicine and economics, published by Salvius (Marelli 2010: 250). Then, at the beginning of 1757, just before his death on 28 January of that same year, his translation of *The Prince* and the *Anti-Machiavel* came out, distinguishing itself significantly from the rest of his literary and scientific works, which were on the whole unexceptional and lacking in originality.

The prestige of the publication was further enhanced by the long dedication to the Crown Prince, the future King Gustav III of Sweden and nephew to Frederick II of Prussia, author of the *Anti-Machiavel*. In the dedication Klingenberg praises at length not only Prince Gustav, but also the noble author of the *Anti-Machiavel* and invites the young prince on the one hand to take inspiration from the virtuous ideas expressed by the sovereign of Prussia, and on the other hand to stay away from Machiavelli's dangerous political ideas and the princes he cites as models.

The impression created by the dedication is that the translator's interest is directed more towards the *Anti-Machiavel*; but on the frontispiece the position of the title of Machiavelli's work (*Machiavels Prins* [Machiavelli's Prince]), at the top and in large type, is in contrast to the vague indirect mention in much smaller type of the *Anti-Machiavel* (*med undersökningen deraf* [with its analysis]), where the word *undersökning* refers to the French title of some of the first editions of the work (*Anti-Machiavel, ou Examen du Prince de Machiavel*). The word *undersökning*, however, returns in Frederick II's preface to the *Anti-Machiavel*, *Erinran vid undersökningen af Machiavels Prins* [Notice on the Analysis of Machiavelli's Prince], and in the internal title, *Undersökning af Machiavels Prins* [Analysis of Machiavelli's Prince], where the work of Frederick II assumes a dominant position with respect to Machiavelli's treatise. Add to this the fact that Klingenberg eliminated not only Amelot's preface – till then one of the clearest and most decisive apologies of the *Prince* – but also his dedication to the Grand-duke of Tuscany and Machiavelli's dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici, and it is quite evident that a conscious act of censorship was carried out of all the parts of *The Prince* or its translations which appeared in the *Anti-Machiavel* and contained words of praise for the Italian treatise and its author or which were not directly confuted by Frederick II. Moreover, the elimination of the dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici completely decontextualizes Machiavelli's work, suggesting that Klingenberg had little interest in understanding *The Prince* within the Italian historical context and that he attributed greater importance to its confutation.[5]

In light of these observations, the dedication to the Crown Prince does not appear to be a mere formality or an act of deference towards the future king of Sweden, but seems to indicate that the book is effectively addressed first of all to the dedicatee. In any case, no-one could have been more interested in the two works than Prince Gustaf, certainly out of a desire to gain a better understanding of a famous political treatise – a perennial subject of discussion – and its just as famous confutation, written by his esteemed uncle Frederick II of Prussia at a time when he was also Crown Prince. What we cannot know is whether the translation was commissioned by the Prince himself (or by the Royal Family), or whether it was assigned by his tutors in order to guide the young heir to the throne towards a more prudent reading of Machiavelli's treatise, which might otherwise have had a dangerous influence on him (Marelli 2010: 258)[6].

In this regard, it ought to be considered that the translation of *The Prince* appeared at a time of serious difficulty for the Swedish Royal Family: power was in fact held by Parliament (in particular, by the "Hats" Party), which, against the wishes of the Royal Couple, pushed the country into war against the Prussia of Frederick II, who in August 1756 had invaded Saxony, thus sparking what was to become the Seven Years' War. The crisis between the Crown and Parliament had in any case already culminated in June 1756, when, following a failed attempt at a coup d'état organized by the "Court Party" [*hovpartiet*], the king was further deprived of his powers and new tutors were imposed on the princes. Responsibility (as *guvernör*) for the education of the young princes was assigned to the unwelcome Carl Fredrik Scheffer, who brought with him a series of instructors and courtiers. Some of the latter were recruited from the *Tankebyggarorden*: Prince Gustaf was assigned Gustaf Fredrik Gyllenberg, nephew, as mentioned above, of one of the founders of the "Hat" Party[7], and Axel Gabriel Leijonhufvud (Marelli 2010: 256). The translation therefore may have been commissioned by Scheffer as part of the young prince's educational programme and entrusted, perhaps on the advice of Gyllenberg, to Klingenberg, who did not miss the opportunity to make himself known at court and readily accepted this prestigious assignment.

If this hypothesis is true, then Klingenberg's work would appear to have been of an elite nature and served as a manual for the reigning monarchs and those who would reign in the future. (Marelli 2010: 260-261); Machiavelli's treatise would have had a secondary role within the volume, which would rather have been intended as a private initiative concerning the *Anti-Machiavel* and not a work popularizing Machiavelli's *Prince*. [8] Nevertheless, the very fact that it was a translation into Swedish is an indication that it was meant to be disseminated, in line with the enlightened principles of the translator, who, moreover, in his preface to the translation – where he speaks exclusively about the *Prince* and his primary source, Amelot's translation – refers to certain stylistic choices made to facilitate a wider reading public. It is also quite likely that prince Gustaf already had one or two copies of the *Anti-Machiavel*, both in French and German, and that he was capable of reading them. [9] In addition, it is worth repeating that the frontispiece clearly gives more importance to Machiavelli's work, in contrast to the apparent focus of the volume itself; a fact which is significant as the cover and frontispiece are elements which often explicitly reveal the purpose of a book and who its intended readers are.

In my opinion, Klingenberg's translation is rather ambiguous, in the sense that on the one hand it seems to be an elitist and individual initiative, with a very precise educational purpose and with an anti-Machiavellian intent, while on the other hand it seems to have been conceived with the aim of popularizing Machiavelli's treatise, never before translated into a Scandinavian language. This ambiguity resides in the very nature of the *Anti-Machiavel*, a work which, under the pretext of a point by point confutation of Machiavelli's assertions, actually offers an international public the possibility of reading *The Prince* in French and in German; [10] while its author is an "enlightened" sovereign who through his work promotes a virtuous image of himself, and is at the same time a military genius who has no scruples in challenging the greatest European powers on the battlefield. I believe therefore that Klingenberg's translation of the two works has a dual function: we have discussed its educational and elitist purpose, regardless of who took the initiative and commissioned it; but as far as its potentially popularizing and commercial function is concerned, we need to consider whether the conditions to undertake such an initiative actually existed in mid eighteenth-century Sweden.

As is well-known, the book market in Sweden until 1740 was rather limited and appeared so even to Danish eyes. Despite the growth in the number of readers, at least in Stockholm and the other larger cities, the book market was hindered by a series of factors until the mid-1700s (Schück and Warburg 1926: 99-114; Lindroth 1978: 76-83). First of all, the binders, well-organized in corporations and protected by the "Caps" party, enjoyed exclusive rights to the sale of bound volumes and aimed at cost-cutting rather than quality. On the other hand, printers who were also publishers, or aspired to become such by publishing quality literature, could only sell unbound books despite being protected by the "Hats" party. In 1752 Salvius, the main publisher in Stockholm,

obtained on behalf of the printers the right to sell books produced by them in their workshops, whether or not they were bound, although the effects of this ordinance were felt only over time. In 1756 Salvius requested (and a year later obtained) the right for publishers to sell and lend any book, including those printed abroad, in their bookshops; but this concession didn't bring any immediate results either because the other publishers preferred to sell only their own books.

Another obstacle lay in costs: the price per sheet was too high, again due to the binders' monopoly, and few people could afford to purchase a book. In 1756 the issue reached the government and a maximum price was established, but this provision also had no effect because the binders and private publishers never put it into practice, citing the increase in costs and salaries (which in actual fact increased only in the following decade).

The market for foreign books was much thwarted by the government, which was suspicious of ideas coming from abroad. All books imported by booksellers were subject to scrutiny by the censor, as were their private collections and sales by auction. Since there was a great demand for foreign books in Sweden but not as much for Swedish books abroad (except for scientific writings), Salvius started to exchange Swedish books for foreign ones. In 1756 the government granted a bonus of 15% for Swedish books sold abroad, a measure which had a beneficial effect on the market. This also contributed to the rapid growth in the number of booksellers, especially in Stockholm between 1755 and 1770. Despite the economic hardships they faced, the number of sales led to greater interest in reading and as a result the production of books increased as well.

In the first half of the 1700s, scientific and academic writings could be published with state support or with the help of a patron, while literary texts often remained unpublished because of a lack of publishers, financiers and readers. Moreover, the poor quality of the bookbinders' publishing ventures did little to promote literature. Many authors thus published at their own expense and sold copies by subscription, giving the remaining copies to bookshops, which asked for very low commissions. The state gave very little funding for non-scientific literature, most of the time permitting only the privilege of publishing at one's own expense.

Until copyright laws were established in 1810, neither the authors nor the publishers had ownership rights on the works published, but only a concession of brief duration. In any case, a book printing regulatory provision of 1752 (*Boktryckerireglementet*) improved conditions for publishers and authors: the latter could request a lien on the work, as well as its extension, and they could sell it to a publisher for any price they wished. In addition, the authors could receive a fee from the publisher if the volume was dedicated to an important person, which generally consisted in a certain number of sample copies that they could sell freely, and later of a sum of money in cash. The fees started to increase only towards the mid-1700s, even though those written in Latin and German were paid more because the works could be sold abroad. Translators were paid less, but not as little as literary authors. In any case, it was in this period that a readership interested in literature and willing to pay for a book of poetry started to grow.

As far as censorship was concerned, it is true that it was greatly feared and that it represented a serious limitation on freedom of the press, but in the 1700s this was considered normal, a fact which everyone had to take into account. All the more so since the corruptibility of the censors, and in particular of Oelreich (censor from 1746 to 1766), made it possible to get around this obstacle regardless of one's political affiliation (Schück and Warburg 1926: 59-61; Lindroth 1978: 82-3). The system's inefficiency was one of the reasons which led to the abolition of censorship in 1766, which left the problem of a new regulation; and it was King Gustaf III who re-introduced it as early as 1772. With regard to Klingenberg's publication, censorship was no danger, not only because the rank of the illustrious dedicatee guaranteed the granting of the *imprimatur*, but also because the *Anti-Machiavel* was considered a work of unquestioned virtue and morality. Moreover, the political censorship carried out by Oelreich in the years 1755-7 affected above all the exponents of the Court party, while supporters of the "Hats" like Klingenberg, were not at risk.

We may thus conclude that precisely in the years 1755-7 conditions were created that favoured the development of the book market, a fact which led publishers and authors to publish new works, including those of a literary nature. One of these was without doubt the translation of the *Prince* and the *Anti-Machiavel* by Klingenberg. The reasons why the publication was not a success were probably the same reasons for which no one considered translating the *Prince* again until the second half of the nineteenth century: the few erudite and wealthy people who were interested could already read it in one of the many Latin, French or German translations which circulated in Europe; while for the merely curious the cost of the volume was too prohibitive. Klingenberg was probably aware of all this, but he did not worry about the costs of publication, evidently sustained by others, nor about any possible profits, content with the personal prestige that the work granted him and which he needed for his career.

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Notes

[1] That Machiavelli's treatise was well-known to Danish and Swedish scholars as well as royals in the sixteenth century has been noted in a number of studies, from Andersson (1931) to Larsson (2002).

[2] *Anti-Machiavel. Oder Prüfung der Regeln Nic. Machiavells Von der Regierungskunst eines Fürsten. Mit historischen und politischen Anmerckungen. Aus dem Französischen Übersetzt*, Göttingen, Königliche Universitets Buchhandlung, 1741.

[3] Miscellany publications where disparate works of members of the Order were published, with poetic compositions placed side by side with essays of a philosophical or didactic nature.

[4] The dominant party within the *Tankebyggorden* as well. The party of the "Hats" and that of the "Caps" [*mösspartiet*], which competed for the majority in Parliament during the Age of Liberty, rather than representing social classes were more than anything two power factions. The contrast between the two parties consisted above all in their different positions on questions of foreign and economic policy (the "Hats", supporters of mercantilism, were more aggressive, while the "Caps" were more prudent). In the 1750s, the "Hats" took a clearly anti-monarchical position to protect the independence of Parliament, but Sweden's military failures in the Seven Years' War brought about their decline.

[5] It can thus be said, in other words, that Klingenberg deletes some paratextual elements (Genette 1989) primarily connected with Machiavelli's *Prince* (the dedication to Lorenzo De' Medici, Amelot's preface), while he retains others directly connected with the *Anti-Machiavel*, like Frederick II's autograph preface, if one wishes to consider it a paratext; he also substitutes the omitted elements with other paratexts functional to the reading of the *Anti-Machiavel* as the foremost text.

[6] This observation summarizes one part of my conclusions mentioned above (Marelli 2010).

[7] It should be noted however that Gyllenborg was not interested in politics and that once the initial hostility was overcome, he established a loyal friendship with the prince which lasted the rest of his life.

[8] What is said here summarizes one of my conclusive hypotheses referred to above (Marelli 2010).

[9] As the translator himself underlines in the dedication to the Crown Prince.

[10] Within this perspective, one may consider the *Anti-Machiavel* almost as a paratext in comparison with *The Prince*, or better, as a parallel or accompanying text, as a cover for a scandalous work not authorized for publication.

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