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**Peoples and lords in late medieval Italy. Varieties of Republicanism.**

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In a paper published two years ago in *Political Theory*, James Hankins reconsidered the origins of *republic/respublica* as a republican constitution alternative and opposed to monarchy, an idea he calls 'exclusivist republicanism', typical of modern political vocabulary. The exclusivism of such republicanism is exemplified most neatly, perhaps for the first time so forcefully, in the opening sentence of Machiavelli's *Prince*: «All the states, all the dominions that have held sway over men have been either republics or principalities». For Hankins the history of such a meaning of the word 'republic' is notable for its short span and is to be traced back to the works of Leonardo Bruni and particularly his translation/ semantic repositioning of Aristotle's Greek political vocabulary into Latin, which supplanted the scholastic traditions established in the thirteenth century with the first translations of Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics*.

It is well known that the first translator of the *Politics* into Latin, William of Moerbeke, 'surrendered' to the Greek original in translating all but one of the six names of constitutions. Here is Hankins' useful schematic summary of Moerbeke's lexical choices:

ARISTOTLE'S CONSTITUTIONAL SCHEME IN *POLITICS* III (1279a),  
AS TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM OF MOERBEKE IN 1268<sup>29</sup>

	<i>good politiae</i>	<i>corrupt politiae</i>
one	regia potestas	tyrannia
few	aristocratia	oligarchia
many	politia	democratia

Compare this to the schema of the types of constitutions according to Aristotle as Leonardo Bruni translated them in 1428, where Bruni's choices are

more genuinely Latin, and more ideological, while remaining faithful, for example, to the problematic lexical identity, in Aristotle, of *politia* as ‘constitution’ in general, and *politia* as a particular type of constitution.

Again from Hankins:

ARISTOTLE’S CONSTITUTIONAL SCHEME IN *POLITICS* III (1279a),  
AS TRANSLATED BY LEONARDO BRUNI

	<i>Rectae res publicae</i>	<i>Transgressiones et labes</i>
<i>Unum:</i>	regia potestas	tyrannis
<i>Pauci:</i>	optimatum gubernatio	paucorum potestas
<i>Multi:</i>	respublica	popularis status

Source: *Aristotelis Politicorum libri VIII interprete Leonardo Aretino*, Strassbourg 1469, [f. 118r].

Neither Aristotle’s system of three good and three bad constitutions nor the Polybian and Roman idea of the mixed constitution lend themselves to a clear and exclusive opposition between republic and monarchy. For Hankins, such an opposition is indeed linguistically and conceptually foreign to medieval writers, who operate within an Aristotelian vocabulary and Aristotelian categories, and often praise constitutional arrangements that contain a good balance of the three principles. When they use the word *respublica* or its vernacular cognates they mean ‘the state’. This is true, for Hankins, even in late medieval and Renaissance Italy, where the fact of self-government was so frequent and visible that it elicited an unparalleled amount of explicit written reflection on politics – albeit Hankins is ready to make a partial exception for one author, Ptolemy of Lucca (1236-1327), the continuator of Thomas Aquinas’ (1225-1274) *De regno*, whose way of classifying polities and explicit references to the Roman and Italian republics do suggest, around 1303, the conceivability of a neat binary opposition.

Hankins' thesis is implicitly polemic against the notion of a republican tradition that goes back to the Italian communes while at the same time, with an interesting twist, it seems to rehabilitate Hans Baron's vision of early fifteenth-century Florence, and Leonardo Bruni's writings in particular, as a moment of rupture, a new beginning of momentous importance.

The reason why I began with this brief summary is not to fetishise the idea of 'exclusivist republicanism', but because Hankins' thesis dusts off the core of a historiographical debate that has run through the second half of the past century. It also gives me a point of departure for a brief overview of medieval and Renaissance Italian republicanism that aims to keep together the theory and the practice of politics – a task which will be only very partially fulfilled by this communication.

My plan is to show that Hankins' conclusion goes too far, and that a conceptual dualism existed between republican and monarchic principles in the minds of late medieval Italian writers (and readers) well before Bruni, although it manifested itself under different lexical guises. I would also like to stress, however, that the nature of the dualism itself changed and developed, reflecting the complex interaction between political and institutional instances and their theoretical and ideological framing.

*My fil rouge* in the journey will be a sigle vast treatise, accompanied by a small set of relatively neglected texts, which represent non-Florentine traditions of political language in Italy, since the problem of the role of Florence, and the paradigmatic status of its political parable and class of intellectuals cannot be framed satisfactorily without enlarging the geographical and political context.

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Giles of Rome's (1243-1316) *De regimine principum* is probably the least read of the truly important political treatises of the thirteenth century. It was written by this master of the Augustinian Hermits – a Mendicant order without

the scholarly manpower of Dominicans and Franciscans – before 1282 and dedicated to the young dauphin Philip the Fair, future Philip IV of France. Giles hailed from Rome, but went to Paris to study, probably under Aquinas among others, and later taught there. He was involved in a major controversy at the university in 1277, then made bishop of Bourges, but throughout his career the most important administrative and pastoral work he performed was in Italy and Avignon, on behalf of his order, of which he became the first official Doctor. Like Marsilius of Padua (1280-1343), Giles of Rome might have been made by historians more Parisian than he was, particularly in his political writings. We don't know where he wrote the *De regimine*; he may well have been in Italy, where he participated in a number of chapters of his order and public disputations around 1281.

Despite being probably the most radical thirteenth-century advocate of kingship, a treatise about princes, and especially kings, their virtues and manners, the *De regimine* – which lacks a modern edition – often addresses explicitly Italian matters, and contributes, I would argue, to debates about forms of governments that would have very limited value in the French context. Importantly, this work enjoyed an immense fortune, in Italy as much as in the rest of Europe, and was translated in Tuscan vernacular by a Sieneese anonymous writer in 1288 – several other *volgarizzamenti* followed the first one.

There are three axes, I would like to suggest, along which discourses on constitutional forms tend to shift from a tripartite to a dualist scheme and adumbrate a notion of republic as opposed to monarchy well before the fifteenth century; all three are represented in the *De regimine principum*.

1) Government of many vs. government of one

2) Election vs. dynasty

3) Freedom vs. subjection

The first polarity, between the government of one and that of many, emerges in part II of book III of Giles' treatise. Having examined the six constitutions, following Aristotle quite faithfully but adding examples from Roman history (the Twelve Good Men as a form of aristocracy) and contemporary Italy («Communiter enim in civitatibus Italiae dominantur multi, ut totus populus» – I cite from the printed edition, Rome 1607) Giles moves to discuss “whether the city or kingdom is better governed by one or several”, a chapter constructed as a scholastic *quaestio*, where he gives four reasons why the government of one is superior to than of several.

Giles follows Aquinas' *De regno* quite closely but, not satisfied with a positive demonstration of the superiority of kingship, adds a second chapter, also structured as a *quaestio*, exploring the other facet of the medal, that is, why the government of the many is inferior to the government of one. Unlike the chapter that precedes it, this second chapter is a rather original collage of three arguments from different parts of book 3 of Aristotle's *Politics* in favour of the government of many, which are first cleverly distorted, then rebuked one by one.

Whatever their argumentative efficacy, with these two chapters Giles sets the ideological debate in firmly dualistic terms. His is not simply a justification of the superiority of kingship as one of six constitutional forms and systems of government, but a contest between the government of one and the government of the many, which seems to be the only alternative that matters.

We have several clues to the fact that the *De regimine principum* was treated as a sort of moral-political encyclopaedia, since portions of it were extracted, abridged, and even inserted by copyists and translators into other, relatively “open”, works. Among these the most significant is Brunetto Latini's (1220-1294) *Trésor*, some French redactions of which contain long portions of the royally-sponsored 1282 French version of Giles of Rome's *De regimine* by Henry de Gauchi.

*Volgarizzamenti*, translations in the vernaculars, deserve a lot more attention on the part of historians of political thought. A *volgarizzatore* is both a reader and a writer; translators, as Umberto Eco famously remarked, are always traitors and their betrayals can reveal the preoccupations of a wider readership. An interesting sample of what a volgarizzamento can suggest is a significant passage of an anonymous translation into Tuscan of Latini's *Trésor*:

*Trésor* (ed. Chabaille)

De seignorie

Seignories sont de iii manieres: L'une est des rois, la seconde est des bons, la tierce est des communes, laquele est la très meillor entre les autres.

[...]

Li governemens de l'ome à sa maisnie esr semblables au gouvernement dou roi à son peuple; car la conversation dou pere à ses filz est semblables au roi entor les gens de son regne; mais la seignorie des bons homes et des grans est aussi comme la seignorie des freres, parce que li frere ne son mie divers se par age non. Et à chascune de ces manieres de seignorie et de subjection convient amor et justice selonc la mesure de sa bonté.

*Tesoro volgarizzato* (ed. Carrer)

De li tre principati

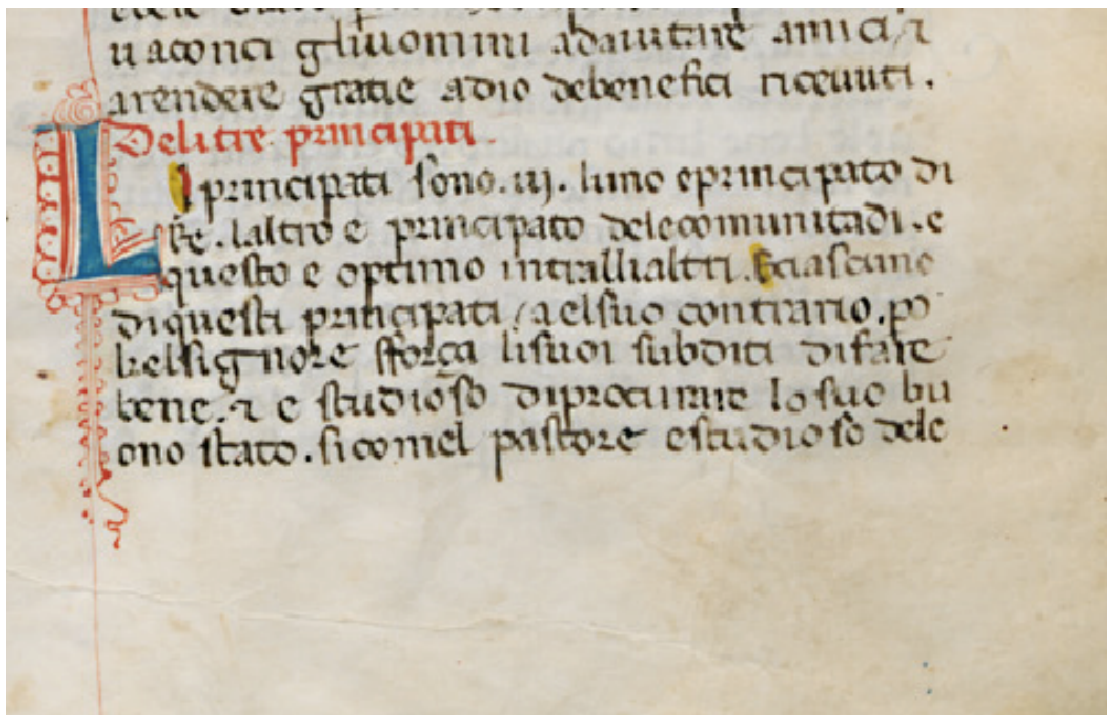
Li principati sono iii. L'uno è principato di re. L'altro è principato delle comunitadi, e questo è ottimo in tra gli altri. Il terzo si è il principato del padre sopra i figliuoli.

[...]

E lo reggimento dell'uomo alla sua famiglia si è simigliante al reggimento del re al suo popolo, perciocché la conversazione del padre alli suoi figliuoli si è simigliante al re cogli uomini del suo regno. E perciò si dice che il principato del re si è principato del padre, e lo principato dei grandi uomini, ovvero dei buoni, si è principato dei fratelli, perciocché li fratelli non sono divisi insieme se non per l'etade. E ciascuno di questi due modi di vivere, cioè di signoria e di suggezione, si ha la giustizia, secondo la misura della sua bonità.

In the chapter that translates *Trésor* II.6, the announced three types of constitution become two: the Tuscan version speaks of the government of the king and that of communes; the latter is deemed best, in both versions. The government of fathers over children is confusingly added to the list, probably merely to present a tripartition.

The vast manuscript tradition of the Italian *Tesoro*, one of the messiest in the messy domain of romance philology, is the reason why neither a critical edition, nor even a stemma of the *Trésor*'s Italian vernacular translation(s?) is available. The text I copied above is the one of the 1475 *editio princeps* of the *Tesoro*, but the oldest manuscript of the same family that must have been used for the 15<sup>th</sup>-c. printed edition (Florence, Laurenziana, Plut. XLII, 19, c. 53v) contains the same slippage from three to two constitutional forms, and no mention of the regime of fathers over children as one of the three forms of good government. This manuscript allows us to date this particular variant to at least the the second quarter of the fourteenth century.



Since manuscripts of the *Tesoro* belonging to a separate family adhere to the usual list of three good constitutions, this could therefore be simply a major scribal error, persistently transmitted, despite the generally good quality of this manuscript's version of the *Tesoro*. The same variant could also be the sign, however, that a tripartite constitutional scheme is less interesting and/or less meaningful to this Tuscan reader working before 1350, than the simple opposition between kingly and communal government, the government of one and the government of many, the paternal regime and the fraternal regime – Brunetto himself, in the French version, speaks about three constitutional forms but offers a family analogy for only two of them. It seems significant that the French word *seignories* is translated here with *principati*, not with *signorie* – Aquinas and Giles use the word *principatus* in translating Aristotle's *politie* and this is a vocabulary that evokes Roman Law, which in the 1340s was producing a theory of the *civitas* as itself a *princeps*.

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A regime of one could be imagined in several ways in late medieval Italy. One of Giles' slightly younger contemporaries, the Paduan Albertino Mussato (1261-1329), presents us with a contrast between one and many that is very close indeed, even lexically, to the semantics of *respublica* that Hankins traces to Leonardo Bruni. In his philosophical dialogue *Contra casus fortuitos* written in the late 1320s, 'Mens' and 'Timor' (Mind and Fear) debate, among other things, the problem of Padua's relationship with the Emperor in the recent past. Mussato had witnessed his city's voluntary transfer of seignorial powers to the citizen Jacopo da Carrara, first, and, in a far less voluntary manner, to Cangrande della Scala, lord of Verona. The dilemma between Padua's party and class divisions, on the one hand, and the loss of the 'republic', on the other, occupied Mussato's autobiographical and historiographical work in his last years:

«Timor: Tua respublica ad unius dominium transferetur.

Mens: Bene enuntias, si ad regem, cuius omnes politias superat principatus.»



(ed. Dazzi)

Fear says: «Your republic will be transferred to the property/lordship of one.» And Mind replies: «You speak well, if [it goes] to a king, whose principate surpasses all polities.»

In Mussato, author of the Senecan anti-tyrannical tragedy *Ecerinis*, member of the first self-conscious group of Italian humanists, the rediscovery of Livy's text had reawakened an interpretation of ancient Roman history as strongly structured around the transition from kingdom to republic (*libertas*) and then again from republic to Empire (*principatus*) – the second transition more ambiguous than the first, certainly, since Augustus' principate co-existed with republican institutions. Mussato's conflicted republicanism is reflected in his sophisticated hybrid vocabulary, that contrasts *respublica* (which is not a synonym of *politia*) with *dominium*, while still acknowledging the superiority of kingly government of the Aristotelian tradition.

The government of one, in the Italian context, could be that of the Emperor, as in Dante's (1269-1321) *Monarchy*, as well as that of a magistrate, like the foreign rector resembling a *podestà* that Brunetto Latini refers to, in his *Trésor*, as *sire*. The government of one could also be that of a native supreme magistrate, whose tenure was for very long periods or life, such as the doge of Venice, and later Genoa, or the *rettori* of Ragusa. Finally, and obviously, for many, the government of one could be that of a *signore*, a lord, either foreign or native.

So, if we look at a little-known author such as Paolino Minorita (1270-1344), a Venetian friar, ambassador and later bishop of Pozzuoli, who around 1313 composed in Venetian vernacular a treatise *De regimine rectoris* dedicated perhaps to Marino Badoer, we should not find it paradoxical that Paolino's work is in fact a *volgarizzamento* and compendium of Giles of Rome's treatise, one which shows an impressive coherence in adapting Giles' monarchic theses to his readership on the lagoon. Giles' *rex* is here renamed *rector*, of course, but must cultivate the same virtues and master the same passions; Giles' distinctive

hendiadys *civitas et regnum* (itself a tendentious rendering of Aristotle's *politia*) becomes in Paolino *citade e chomunanza* (city and commune/community). *Consilium* sounds more like council than counsel (the word in both Latin and Italian vernaculars is the same for both concepts): the king's counsellors become a sort of senatorial 'consejo de multi savi' (council of wise men), complemented by a 'consejo de la citadhe' (a city council). Paolino can conduct his ideological battle in favour of the government of one, the government of a strong doge, while remaining within what we would define a republican constitutional framework.

Contrary to his contemporary who wrote the Tuscan *volgarizzamento* of Brunetto's *Trésor*, Paolino has a very concrete understanding of Aristotle's tripartite scheme, as transmitted by Giles of Rome, but impresses a distinctively Venetian stamp on it:

«Here one has to principally learn that the rector can be good or bad in his government. A good rector is called here the one who directs his intention to the good state of the commune; bad is the one who seeks primarily his own utility. If [the regiment] is good, it can be good in iii manners according to Aristotle: one manner is that the rector is only one; the second is when several virtuous men govern; the third is when many and rich men govern. If [the regiment] is bad, in the same way this can be in iii manners: the first is when one governs and is called a tyrant; the second is when rich men reign; the third is when the poor reign.» (ed. Mussafia)

While the first part of Paolino's adaptation works well for the rector/doge he has in mind, the second part of this short chapter switches suddenly and opaquely from the person of the rector to the regime itself. Revealingly, Paolino states that the good 'political' regime is that of many rich men – a definition that is neither in Aristotle nor in Giles of Rome, of course, but that suits the specific condition of the Venetian community, which had restricted access to full citizenship to a fixed, although relatively large, number of wealthy families of merchant origin in 1297, whose names were written on a list.

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Not everything in Giles, however, could be repurposed for Venetian use; one of Paolino's omissions, in particular, is very significant and brings me to the second conceptual dualism prominent in Italian republican experience: election vs. dynastic regime. Following his demonstration of the inferiority of the government of many, Giles devotes a long chapter (of which there is no trace in Paolino's *De regimine rectoris*) to an explanation of the advantages of hereditary government over an elective one.

Giles himself had recognised the equivocal nature of the name 'lords' in Italian republics and explicitly denied that those were true lords: «ibi [in Italy] enim requiritur consensus totius populi in statutis condendis, in potestatibus eligendis et etiam in potestatibus corrigendis; licet enim semper ibi adnotetur potestas vel dominus aliquis qui civitatem regat, magis tamen dominatur totus populus quam dominus adnotatus, eo quod totius populi est eum eligere et corrigere si male agat. Etiam eius totius est statuta condere quae non licet domino transgredi.» (p. 455)

If the people elect their governors, consent to laws and hold their government accountable at the end of its term, then the people are the lord, whatever they may affect to call their governors (and Italian republics called their supreme elected officials *signori*). The same contrast between elected officials in Italy and rectors sent by the king in France and elsewhere, was a core idea of Brunetto's *Trésor*, and was, in fact, the key observation that set Italian communes apart in the earliest texts that commented on Italian self-government, such as Otto of Freising's 12<sup>th</sup>-century history.

Starting in the 1250s, however, small towns in Piedmont, like Alba and Cuneo, then much larger cities like Brescia, then places like Rome, Florence, Genoa all experienced more or less durable foreign *signorie*, which were the result of a decision on the part of the community and were formally regulated by written pacts with the lord. In the decades following 1250 such contracts of

lordship must have truly appeared as a middle way between the government of one and the government of the many. Such temporary 'deditions' took different forms in every locality, but the pattern was a unitary political creation of the Angevin dynasty, before and after Charles I's conquest of Naples in 1266 – and Charles was probably the dedicatee of Brunetto's *Trésor*. Very few of such arrangements, however, proved durable or even fewer were remembered as successful; by the mid-1300s all the communes north of the Appennines had been subjected by hereditary lords.

What about the Emperor and the Pope, all-powerful but elected monarchs? Giles, who was the champion of the cause of papal supremacy during the pontificate of Boniface VIII, avoids all ambiguity by ignoring both as instances of the monarchic form. To Giles a monarch bound by a law that he doesn't make is not a monarch. Election is incompatible with monarchy because for Giles monarchy only means the government of a king and only a hereditary regime is suited to true monarchy, because the kingdom is *of* the king, who will treat it with the love and care we all have for our own property, and will leave it to his (Giles is very opposed to women kings) children, as it is natural (that is, it conforms to natural law) to do. His unusually narrow identification of monarchical power with regal power is quite distant from Aquinas' doctrine of kingship, and, in a way, very republican. Those writers like Dante and Marsilius of Padua, who, only few years after Giles' death, presented an idea of monarchy compatible with freedom or emanating from the *populus* were destined to failure, in a political system that tended, in most if not all cases, towards a *de facto* sharper alternative.

Giles was right, of course, when he stated that the symbolism of dynastic regime was 'natural', easy to understand. Hereditary transmission reveals, better than any other sign, that the community is the property of one, no longer a *res publica*. It is crucial to note that in Renaissance Italian republics, including Medicean Florence, anxieties about a possible transition from republic to principate explode when hereditary succession becomes visible – not when Cosimo de' Medici and his friends take power in 1434, but when the rather less

charismatic Piero 'inherits' Cosimo's hegemony, *just* because he is his son, in 1464.

A dynastic regime, moreover, places not one individual but one family at the political centre-stage, a family with all its members, including the young and the women. The venom that surrounded the young Lorenzo de' Medici's during his early years in power or Alfonsina de' Medici's brief tenure as governor in Florence were an integral part of the Florentine republican ethos, and a deeply important aspect of its republican anthropology, because of the blatant dynastic implications of the prominence of a man in his twenties or, much worse, a woman in the political sphere reserved for *cives*, that is the old and male.

The Venetian governing class in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was terrified by the prospect of the dogeship becoming hereditary. It was this terror that instigated the political reforms that would lead to the *Serrata* of 1297. Venice's innovative response to the dynastic threat was to make political franchise hereditary, inaugurating a very successful model of aristocratic republicanism – indeed the only variety of Italian republicanism to survive into the early modern period.

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I will devote fewer words to the third and final conceptual polarity that structures republican discourse well before Bruni, that of (political) freedom vs. (political) servitude, because it has been rightly central in most studies on Italian republicanism over the last decades. Keeping in mind that in many Italian commercial centres from the thirteenth century onwards slavery was a concrete reality, since even middle-rank families often bought, sold, leased and occasionally emancipated slaves (generally female and foreign), the rhetoric of *libertas/libertà* vs. servitude that accompanied, from the eleventh century, experiences of self-government in Italy is quite distinctive.

Giles's *De regimine* is again a revealing and relatively early witness of debates that revolved around such polarity. Truly a master manipulator, in book III, part II, 34 he attacks those who equate regal power with servitude. «Credunt enim aliqui quod observare leges et obedire regi sit quedam servitus. Sed secundum Philos. 5 Politic. hoc non est servitus, sed libertas. Ignorant enim quid est libertas, dicentes observare leges et obedire regibus esse servitutem.» They don't know what freedom means. They want to live like beasts, «sine freno et sine lege», but beasts are not free, and therefore men who want to live like beasts are slaves, not free.

Who are these people? It was in Rome that *libertas* (of the people, in particular) was the opposite of *regnum*, but never the opposite of obedience to the law. Giles creates another of his opportune hendiadys (“to observe the laws and obey the kings”) and uses the Ciceronian (and Aristotelian) principle that freedom is obedience to the law, as Dante would later do, to rebuke opposition to monarchy as a constitution where *libertas* is impossible. He refers to Aristotle's *Politics*, book V.9, but there Aristotle only asserted the principle that freedom is not to do as one pleases but to live according to the law of the *politia*.

It is hard to imagine that Giles' disingenuous attack was directed at long-dead Roman authors; he must have had in mind adversaries who were very much alive and in the name of the false equation between liberty and absence of a king «caused wars and troubled the peace». Given that they were both very active as ideologues on the papal side of the dispute between Boniface VIII and Philip the Fair, one wonders if Giles ever met, in Florence, Avignon or other cities in northern and central Italy, his fellow Mendicant brother Ptolemy of Lucca, whose continuation of Aquinas' *De regno* from that very Roman equation between liberty and republic (and monarchy and servitude) draws much of its theoretical energy.

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A brief conclusion. Continuities are evident, I think, throughout the later Middle Ages, of dualistic, or 'exclusivist' notions of republicanism as a theory and an ideology opposed to monarchy, and kingship in particular. Ptolemy of Lucca was not an anomaly, even less an isolated figure, in this respect. Giles of Rome is such a good guide to aspects of such dualism precisely because he developed a radically restrictive theory of monarchy, which artificially but attractively excluded a number of existing forms of governments that would have considerably complicated the picture.

Institutional experimentation, in Italy more than elsewhere, was relentless and posed a formidable challenge to the imagination and theoretical coherence of observers. Perhaps the most exciting feature of the political theory of this era is its relatively new ability to move beyond the jargon of professional groups, across languages and spaces. With a work like the *De regimine principum*, its enormous textual *hinterland*, its translations and adaptations, the role of political theory as both a rationalisation of existing structures AND a creator of new ones, both a scalpel and a mould, is particularly evident.