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Marsilius of Padua and Isaac Abravanel on Kingship: The Medieval Precedents of Republicanism Revisited

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Abstract

This article offers a comparative investigation of Marsilius of Padua's and Isaac Abravanel's ideas on kingship. It looks at how these thinkers transform the "canonical" sources of their respective traditions of political theorizing, i.e., Aristotle's *Politics* and the Bible, to articulate the notion that ultimate authority rests with the citizens/people. It also examines how these two writers' positions on kingship relate to the political realities that prevailed in late medieval Italy. Finally, it illuminates the medieval precedents of modern republicanism in the Christian and Jewish political traditions.

Keywords

Medieval and early modern political thought – Jewish political tradition – republicanism – kingship – Marsilius of Padua – Isaac Abravanel – Aristotle – Ptolemy of Lucca – biblical exegesis

The best form of rule or polity and the significance of kingship for a well-constituted political community are two of the major themes of medieval political writing. Most Christian, Jewish, and Muslim thinkers subscribe to the vision of kingship as the optimal form of government.* This approach was not universal, however: Marsilius of Padua (1270/1290–1342) and the distinguished philosopher and biblical commentator Isaac Abravanel (1437–1508), two key figures of the Christian and Jewish political traditions, respectively, challenged previous ideas on the primacy of kingship and the merits of perpetual rule

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and prefigured modern republican ideas. The aim of this article is to explore how these thinkers set forth a novel reading of the "canonical" texts of their respective traditions, i.e., Aristotle's *Politics* and the Bible,[1] to argue that ultimate authority resides with the citizens/people and that the ruler ought to operate as the executive of the civic body. In addition, I will discuss how these two writers' approaches to the question of kingship relate to the political realities that prevailed in late medieval Italy.

Before pursuing a closer comparison between Marsilius and Abravanel, it is essential to take into account certain differences. First, there is no evidence that Abravanel had access to Marsilius's *Defensor pacis* (*The Defender of Peace*).[2] Second, Marsilius was exposed to the political organization of the Italian city-states already in the early stages of his life, and later, after the completion of the *Defensor pacis* in 1324, he sought refuge at the court of Louis the Bavarian (ca. 1287–1347, r. 1314–47). Abravanel followed a different life trajectory: he began his career by serving as treasurer for King Alphonse V of Portugal, during the period 1472–75. After moving to Spain, he entered the court of Ferdinand and Isabella in Castile, and later he served Ferrante I, king of Naples. In 1503, Abravanel settled in Venice and served as financial advisor

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1 This is not to overlook that Marsilius relies on other ancient (e.g. Cicero) and Christian (e.g. the New Testament and Augustine). The material discussed in this article derives from the fist *dictio* of the *Defensor pacis* and focuses on Marsilius's engagement with the *Politics*. On the sources of the *Defensor pacis*, see Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of the Peace*, ed. and trans. by Annabel Brett (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), lii–lv; Charles W. Previté-Orton, "The Authors Cited in the *Defensor pacis*," in *Essays in History Presented to Reginald Lane Poole*, ed. Henry W. C. Davis (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1927), 405–20. Abravanel, as will be indicated later, does occasionally draw upon Aristotle as well, but his analysis of kingship is embedded in his exegesis of the Bible.

2 References to the *Defensor pacis* are to the edition Marsilius von Padua, *Defensor pacis*, ed. Richard Scholz (= Fontes iuris Germanici antiqui in usum scholarum ex Monumentis Germaniae Historicis, separatim editi; 7) (Hannover: Hahn, 1932/33). Citations will be to discourse, chapter, and/or paragraph. I have consulted the following English translation: Marsilius of Padua, *The Defensor Pacis*, trans. and intro. Alan Gewirth [= Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace*, vol. 2] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1956; repr. 2001).

to the government of the *Serenissima*. Third, the central thrust of the *Defensor pacis* is to identify the "singular" cause of discord in Marsilius's own day, i.e., the papacy's interference in civic affairs. It is not a conventional commentary on Aristotle, but its first *dictio*, the section that outlines the chief principles of Marsilius's thought, is peppered with citations and references to several of Aristotle's works and is heavily indebted to the *Politics*. Abravanel, by contrast, did not develop a systematic political theory nor did he have direct access to Aristotle's *Politics*. His political doctrines must be gleaned from his Hebrew commentaries on the Bible, particularly the commentaries on Deuteronomy (written in the 1460s, completed in 1496), 1 Samuel (written in 1483–84), and Exodus (written in 1505).[3]

Previous scholarship has pointed to linkages between Marsilius and the Jewish philosophical tradition, especially Moses Maimonides (ca. 1135–1204).[4] The present study is the first sustained attempt to place Abravanel in conversation with Christian political writers, such as Marsilius, in the context of medieval discourse on the nature, purpose, and scope of political authority, with an eye to the evolution of republican ideas.[5] Research into the historical, philosophical,

3 I have accessed Abravanel's commentaries via Benzion Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel: Statesman and Philosopher* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 5th rev. and upd. ed. 1998). Abravanel's commentary on the First Prophets was printed by Gershon Soncino in Pesaro in 1511–12. The commentary on the Torah (Pentateuch) was printed by Giovanni Bragadin in Venice in 1579 (the *editio princeps* of the commentary on Deuteronomy was published in Sabbionetta in 1551). See Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 158, 327; and Shnayer Z. Leiman, "Abarbanel and the Censor," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 19 (1968): 49–61.

4 Vasileios Syros, "Did the Physician from Padua Meet the Rabbi from Cordoba? Marsilius of Padua and Moses Maimonides on the Political Utility of Religion," *Revue des Études Juives* 170 (2011): 51–71.

5 For scholarly literature on the medieval precedents of modern republicanism, see, Nicolai Rubinstein, "Le origini medievali del pensiero repubblicano del secolo XV," in *Politica e cultura nelle repubbliche italiane dal Medioevo all'Età moderna: Firenze, Genova, Lucca, Siena, Venezia*, ed. Simonetta Adorni Braccesi and Mario Ascheri (Rome: Istituto storico italiano per l'età moderna e contemporanea, 2001), 1–20—repr. in Nicolai Rubinstein, *Studies in Italian History in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, vol. 1: *Political Thought and the Language of Politics: Art and Politics*, ed. Giovanni Ciappelli (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 2004), 365–81; Quentin Skinner, "The Vocabulary of Renaissance Republicanism: A Cultural longue-durée?" in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, ed. Alison Brown (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 87–110; Antony Black, "Christianity and Republicanism: From St. Cyprian to Rousseau," *American Political Science Review* 91 (1997): 647–56—repr. in Antony Black, *Church, State and Community: Historical and Comparative Perspectives* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), no. XVI; Antony Black, "Republikanismus als europäisches Phänomen," in *Verborgene republikanische Traditionen in Oberschwaben*, ed. Peter Blickle (Tübingen: Bibliotheca Academica, 1998), 13–24—English trans. in Black, *Church, State and Community*, no. XVIII;

and cultural parameters of Abravanel's thinking has centered primarily on affinities with the Scholastic tradition and Renaissance Humanism.[6] Yitzhak Baer, for instance, illustrated Abravanel's dual role as a "Court Jew" and a Renaissance humanist. He highlighted commonalities between Abravanel's biblical commentaries and some of Seneca's epistles to Lucilius. Baer also drew a link between Abravanel's use of classical literary motifs and his critique of kingship.[7] Leo Strauss shifted the focus to Abravanel's reception of medieval Christian thought.[8] Moshe Idel called attention to the influence of Marsilio Ficino's (1433–99) concept of *prisca theologia*.[9] For Ram Ben-Shalom, Abravanel was a purveyor of earlier Jewish ideas on history and laid the foundation for the development of Jewish historiography in the early modern period.[10]

Ulrich Meier, "Vom Mythos der Republik: Formen und Funktionen spätmittelaltelterlicher Rathausikonographie in Deutschland und Italien," in *Mundus in imagine: Bildersprache und Lebenswelten im Mittelalter*, ed. Andrea Löther et al. (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1996), 345–87, esp. 345–54. *Ancient Models in the Early Modern Republican Imagination*, ed. Wyger Velema and Arthur Weststeijn (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017) is also germane.

6 The following survey of previous scholarship is based on Cedric Cohen Skalli, "Discovering Isaac Abravanel's Humanistic Rhetoric," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 97 (2007): 67–99, esp. 67–78; and Cedric Cohen Skalli, "Between Yitzhak Baer and Leo Strauss: The Rediscovery of Isaac Abravanel's Political Thought in the Late 1930s," *DAAT* 88 [= *Wissenschaft des Judentums: Judaism and the Science of Judaism; 200 Years of Academic Thought on Religion*, ed. George Y. Kohler et al.] (2019): 61–89. Consult also Isaac Abravanel, *Letters*, ed. and trans. Cedric Cohen Skalli (Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2007).

7 Yitzhak Baer, "Don Isaac Abravanel and His Relation to Historical and Political Problems," *Tarbits* 8 (1937): 241–59 [in Hebrew]. Abravanel's debt to Epistle 90 in particular is clearly recognizable and significant.

8 Leo Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," in *Isaac Abravanel: Six Lectures*, ed. John B. Trend and Herbert Loewe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), 93–129—repr. in Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2: *Philosophie und Gesetz—Frühe Schriften*, ed. Heinrich Meier (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 1997), 195–227, and, more recently, in *Leo Strauss on Maimonides: The Complete Writings*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green (Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 579–613; French trans. by Adrien Barrot, "Sur l'orientation philosophique et l'enseignement politique d'Abravanel," *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale* 4 (1998) [= *Philosophies juives médiévales*], 559–84. Consider also Strauss's "Zu Abravanels Kritik des Königtums," in Leo Strauss, *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 2: *Philosophie und Gesetz—Frühe Schriften*, 233–34 [English trans. by Martin D. Yaffe as "On Abravanel's Critique of Monarchy," in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. Martin D. Yaffe and Richard S. Ruderman (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Appendix E (267–68)].

9 Moshe Idel, "Kabbalah and *Prisca Theologia* in Rabbi Isaac and Yehuda Abravanel's Writings," in *The Philosophy of Leone Ebreo: Four Lectures*, ed. Menachem Dorman and Zeev Levi (Haifa: HaKibbutz Hameuchad, 1985), 73–112 [in Hebrew].

10 Ram Ben-Shalom, *Facing Christian Culture: Historical Consciousness and Images of the Past among the Jews of Spain and Southern France during the Middle Ages* (Jerusalem:

Amos Funkenstein discussed Abravanel's views on biblical kingship against the background of the Scholastic distinction between absolute power (*potentia absoluta*) and ordained power (*potentia ordinata*).[11] Eleazar Gutwirth illuminated the impact of Iberian Humanism.[12] More recently, Cedric Cohen Skalli engaged in a comparative analysis of Abravanel's and Leonardo Bruni's (ca. 1370–1444) ideas.[13]

My goal in this article is to revisit Abravanel's contribution to medieval discourse on kingship and to reveal new and significant parallels to Christian political thought. Additionally, the comparison of Marsilius's and Abravanel's approaches to royal rule will shed new light on the ways in which Jewish writers responded to some of the core themes of political theorizing, such as such as sovereignty and the characteristics of good government, within the Christian and Jewish traditions.[14]

Ben-Zvi Institute and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006); Ram Ben-Shalom, "Myth and Classical Mythology in the Historical Consciousness Medieval Spanish Jewry," *Zion* 66 (2001): 451–94 [both in Hebrew].

11 Amos Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993), 160–65.

12 Eleazar Gutwirth, "Consolatio: Don Ishaq Abravanel and the Classical Tradition," *Medievalia et Humanistica* 27 (2000): 79–98; Eleazar Gutwirth, "Don Ishaq Abravanel and Vernacular Humanism in Fifteenth Century Iberia," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 60 (1998): 641–71.

13 Cedric Cohen Skalli, "Don Isaac Abravanel and Leonardo Bruni: A Literary and Philosophical Confrontation," *European Legacy* 20 (2015): 492–512, 492. Consider also Cohen Skalli, "Fortune and Providence: A Paradigm in Isaac Abravanel's Encounter with Renaissance Culture," in *The Italia Judaica Jubilee Conference*, ed. Shlomo Simonsohn and Joseph Shatzmiller (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013), 13–20; and "Discovering Isaac Abravanel's Humanistic Rhetoric." For a refreshing discussion of Abravanel's ties to the humanist tradition, see also the recent intellectual biography published by the same author, *Don Isaac Abravanel* (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center, 2017) [in Hebrew].

14 On the evolution of the Jewish political tradition in general, see Julie E. Cooper, "The Turn to Tradition in the Study of Jewish Politics," *Annual Review of Political Science* 19 (2016): 67–87; Menachem Lorberbaum, "Medieval Jewish Political Thought," in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 176–200; Michael Walzer, "Introduction: The Jewish Political Tradition" to *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 1: *Authority*, ed. Michael Walzer et al. (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2000), xxi–xxxi; Abraham Melamed, "Is There a Jewish Political Philosophy [Thought]? The Medieval Case Reconsidered," *Hebraic Political Studies* 1 (2005): 24–56—repr. in Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister: Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2012), 16–49 (henceforth cited as *Wisdom's Little Sister*/2012); Abraham Melamed, "Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Philosophy," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), vol. 2: 415–49; *The Quest for Utopia: Jewish Political Ideas and Institutions*

1 Marsilius on Kingship

Marsilius (Marsiglio) dei Mainardini was born in Padua between 1270 and 1290.[15] The scion of a family of legal experts, he broke away from that tradition by choosing to study medicine instead of law. Marsilius studied arts and medicine in Paris, most probably after completing his studies under Peter of Abano (ca. 1250–1315), a seminal natural philosopher at the University of Padua. He was elected rector of the University of Paris for the period between December 1312 and March 1313.[16] During his stay in Paris, Marsilius befriended John of Jandun (ca. 1280–1328), a Master of Arts who taught at the Collège de Navarre and wrote a number of commentaries on Aristotle as well as a panegyric of the French capital under the title *De laudibus Parisius* (1323).[17]

In 1319 Marsilius participated in a delegation sent by Matteo I Visconti (1250–1322) and Cangrande I della Scala (1291–1329), the *signori* of Milan and Verona, respectively, to offer Charles, Count of La Marche (the later Charles IV

Through the Ages, ed. Zvi Gitelman (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1992); "An Introduction to the Jewish Political Tradition," to Daniel J. Elazar and Stuart A. Cohen, *The Jewish Polity: Jewish Political Organization from Biblical Times to the Present* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 1–41; Daniel J. Elazar, "Introduction," and "Covenant as the Basis of the Jewish Political Tradition," in *Kinship and Consent: The Jewish Political Tradition and Its Contemporary Uses*, ed. Daniel J. Elazar (Ramat Gan [Israel] and Philadelphia, PA: Turtledove Publishing, 1981; repr. Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1983), 1–17 and 21–56, respectively; Daniel J. Elazar, "Jewish Political Studies as a Field of Inquiry," *Jewish Social Studies* 36 (1974): 220–33. Consider also *Political Hebraism: Judaic Sources in Early Modern Political Thought*, ed. Gordon Schochet et al. (Jerusalem and New York: Shalem Press, 2008); Alan L. Mittleman, *The Scepter Shall Not Depart from Judah: Perspectives on the Persistence of the Political in Judaism* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 19–45.

15 The following section on Marsilius's life is based on Vasileios Syros, *Marsilus of Padua at the Intersection of Ancient and Medieval Traditions of Political Thought* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 15–24. See also Frank Godthardt, "The Life of Marsilius of Padua," and William J. Courtenay, "Marsilius of Padua at Paris," in *A Companion to Marsilius of Padua*, 13–55 and 57–70, respectively; Frank Godthardt, *Marsilius von Padua und der Romzug Ludwigs des Bayern: politische Theorie und politisches Handeln* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

16 On Marsilius's studies and activities in Paris, see William J. Courtenay, "University Masters and Political Power: The Parisian Years of Marsilius of Padua," in *Politische Reflexion in der Welt des späten Mittelalters*, ed. Martin Kaufhold (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 209–23.

17 For Jandun's life and works, see Jean-Baptiste Brenet, *Transferts du sujet: La noétique d'Averroès selon Jean de Jandun* (Paris: Vrin, 2003); 11–13; Ludwig Schmugge, *Johannes von Jandun (1285/89–1328): Untersuchungen zur Biographie und Sozialtheorie eines lateinischen Averroisten* (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann, 1966), 1–38. Consult also the recent study by C. Philipp E. Nothaft, "Glorious Science or 'Dead Dog'? Jean de Jandun and the Quarrel over Astrology in Fourteenth-Century Paris," *Vivarium* 57 (2019): 51–101.

of France) the leadership of the Ghibelline league and solicit his support against Robert of Anjou (1278–1343), the king of Naples, who had formed a political and military alliance with Pope John XXII (r. 1316–34). The mission was abortive and the French did not endorse the plan.[18] In 1324 Marsilius completed the *Defensor pacis*, which he addressed to Louis the Bavarian. Marsilius clearly indicates that he was the sole author of the work, but Jandun was long believed to be the co-author—despite the differences between Marsilius's and Jandun's ideas.[19]

In the summer of 1326, Marsilius and Jandun fled from Paris to the court of Louis the Bavarian. In April 1327, Marsilius and Jandun were requested to appear before the papal court in Avignon, but did not react. Pope John XXII issued the bull *Licet iuxta doctrinam* in October of the same year, which condemns a number of propositions of the *Defensor pacis* as fallacious and heretical. In the spring of 1327, Louis the Bavarian launched his expedition to Italy. Marsilius and Jandun accompanied Louis, and most probably Marsilius capitalized on his personal connections to the Ghibellines to promote Louis's plans. A series of events in Rome attest to Marsilius's involvement in Louis's coronation as emperor. Due to increasing opposition, Louis and his retinue were forced in 1329 to leave Italy. Marsilius spent the rest of his life at Louis's court and died in 1342.

Marsilius's philosophy of government is predicated on the notion that the *legislator humanus*, i.e. the entire body of the citizens—or, its "weightier (preponderant) part" (*pars valentior*)—is the sole legitimate source of sovereign authority.[20] The ruler is the executive organ of the *legislator humanus* and

18 Charles W. Previté-Orton, "Marsilius of Padua and the Visconti," *English Historical Review* 44 (1929): 278–79; Schmugge, *Johannes von Jandun*, 28–29.

19 *Defensor pacis* I.i.6. Noël Valois, "Jean de Jandun et Marsile de Padoue, auteurs du *Defensor pacis*," *Histoire littéraire de la France* 33 (1906): 528–623, supported the assumption about Jandun's contribution to the composition of the work. On the other hand, there is a substantial body of scholarship that has challenged this interpretation: Alan Gewirth, "Philosophy and Political Thought in the Fourteenth Century," in *The Forward Movement of the Fourteenth Century*, ed. Francis L. Utley (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1961), 125–64, 141–50; Alan Gewirth, "John of Jandun and the *Defensor pacis*," *Speculum* 23 (1948): 267–72; Carlo Dolcini, "Marsilio da Padova e Giovanni di Jandun," in *Storia della Chiesa*, vol. 11: *La crisi del Trecento e il papato avignonese* (*1274–1378*), ed. Diego Quaglioni (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 1994), 435–46; Ephraim Emerton, *The Defensor Pacis of Marsiglio of Padua: A Critical Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1920; repr. 1951), 17–19.

20 E.g., *Defensor pacis* I.xii.2–3; xiii.1, 8; xv.2–7. Marsilius's notion of the *pars valentior* has been a controversial topic. Some scholars have construed the phrase to signify the numerical majority. According to another line of interpretation, Marsilius uses the term to designate the group of the most outstanding citizens. Although in certain places in

operates with the authority granted to him by the latter.[21] Marsilius relies on Aristotle's teaching about the sovereignty of the multitude, as expounded in Book 3 of the *Politics*. However, while Aristotle's doctrine concerns the task of appointing, inspecting, and calling the ruler or rulers and various officeholders to account, Marsilius extends its application to legislation.[22]

Carrying on the ancient Greek tradition, Aristotle conceives of the lawgiver (*nomothetēs*) as a sagacious individual who promulgates laws and can also be involved in the founding of a new political order.[23] Marsilius, by contrast, challenges this idea and insists that the "primary and proper efficient cause" of the law, is the entire body (*universitas*) of the citizens or their "weightier part" that adequately represents it.[24] Marsilius outlines a universal model of political organization which is adaptable to changing political and social exigencies and provides the basis of all legitimate types of government (kingship, aristocracy, and polity). Although once in the *Defensor pacis* Marsilius suggests that kingship is "perhaps" the best form of rule, he does not express a preference for a particular governmental form nor does he share his predecessors' predilection for kingship.[25]

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the *Defensor pacis* the term has quantitative connotations, Marsilius's definition of the *legislator humanus* involves both the qualitative and quantitative criteria. A more detailed discussion of these issues can be found in Vasileios Syros, *Die Rezeption der aristotelischen politischen Philosophie bei Marsilius von Padua: Eine Untersuchung zur ersten Diktion des Defensor pacis* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 193–212. A survey of previous scholarship appears in *Marsilio da Padova*, ed. Elvio Ancona and Franco Todescan (Padua: CEDAM, 2007), 57–61. It is more plausible, though, that Marsilius's objective is to articulate a model of political organization that can be tailored to different conditions. Hence, he deliberately refrains from offering an exact definition of the *pars valentior*. On this point, see also Cary J. Nederman, *Community and Consent: The Secular Political Theory of Marsiglio of Padua's Defensor Pacis* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995), 15, 19–20; Conal Condren, *The Status and Appraisal of Classic Texts: An Essay on Political Theory, Its Inheritance, and the History of Ideas* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1985), 189–97.

21 *Defensor pacis* I.xv.4.

22 For further discussion, see Vasileios Syros, "The Principle of the Sovereignty of the Multitude in the Works of Marsilius of Padua, Peter of Auvergne, and Some Other Aristotelian Commentators," in *The World of Marsilius of Padua*, ed. Gerson Moreno-Riaño (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 227–48, esp. 235–48. In my presentation of Aristotle's and Marsilius's ideas about the authority of the whole citizen body, I use the concept of sovereignty to refer to the highest legislative and executive authority.

23 E.g., Aristotle, *Politics* II.12 (1273^b27–1274^b31).

24 *Defensor pacis* I.xii.3.

25 *Defensor pacis* I.ix.5. See also Alan Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy* [= Marsilius of Padua, *The Defender of Peace*, vol. 1] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951), 11.

Marsilius's avowed aim in the *Defensor pacis* is to expose the singular cause of strife of his own day. Such a strong preoccupation with the efficient causes of political phenomena has important ramifications for Marsilius's concept of unity: unlike Aristotelian commentators and Scholastic writers who are concerned with the moral implications of civic unity, Marsilius elucidates its functional aspects. As he phrases it, the unity of the political community is a unity of order, not an absolute unity. It is a plurality of several individuals who are perceived to be and are called "one" not because they are literally one in number, but because they collectively act for a specific purpose, i.e., the task of governing. Marsilius infers from this that it is necessary for the political community to have only one supreme government with respect to office, not to the number of rulers.[26] He therefore allows for the possibility of a single government that consists of multiple persons—as is the case with aristocracy and polity.[27]

For a fuller understanding of Marsilius's theory of kingship, it is instructive to look more closely at chapter I.xvi of the *Defensor pacis*, which argues for the superiority of elective over hereditary monarchy. Marsilius's treatment of this topic must be viewed against the background of the rise of the *signoria*, an issue that sparked intense debates in Padua on the legitimacy of single-person rule vis-à-vis communal government.[28] Just a few years before

26 *Defensor pacis* I.xvii.11.

27 *Defensor pacis* I.viii.3; I.xvii.2.

28 See also John K. Hyde, *Society and Politics in Medieval Italy*: *The Evolution of the Civil Life, 1000–1350* (London: Macmillan, 1973), 192–93; John K. Hyde, *Padua in the Age of Dante* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1966), 307–8; and Nicolai Rubinstein, "Political Theories in the Renaissance," in *The Renaissance: Essays in Interpretation*, ed. André Chastel et al. (London and New York: Methuen, 1982), 153–200, 160–61. On the emergence and various forms of the *signoria*, consult *Communes and Despots in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*, ed. John E. Law and Bernadette Paton (Farnham, Surrey, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2010); Trevor Dean, "The Rise of the *Signori*," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 5: *c. 1198–c. 1300*, ed. David Abulafia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 458–78; Philip J. Jones, *The Italian City-State: From Commune to Signoria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Ovidio Capitani, "Dal comune alla signoria," in *Comuni e Signorie: Istituzioni, società e lotte per l'egemonia*, ed. Ovidio Capitani et al. (Turin: UTET, 1981), 135–75; Lauro Martines, *Power and Imagination: City-States in Renaissance Italy* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1979), 94–110; Ernesto Sestan, "Le origini delle signorie cittadine: un problema storico esaurito?" *Bullettino dell'Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo e Archivio Muratoriano* 73 (1961): 41–69—repr. in *La crisi degli ordinamenti comunali e le origini dello stato del Rinascimento*, ed. Giorgio Chittolini (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1979), 53–75; Francesco Ercole, *Dal comune al principato: Saggi sulla storia del diritto pubblico del Rinascimento italiano* (Florence: Vallecchi, 1929); Maude V. Clarke, *The Medieval City State: An Essay on Tyranny and Federation in the Later Middle Ages* (London, Methuen & Co, 1926; repr. Cambridge/New York: Speculum Historiale/Barnes & Noble, 1966), 99–146;

the publication of the *Defensor pacis*, in July 1318, the looming threat of invasion of their city by Cangrande della Scala of Verona prompted the Paduans to appoint Giacomo Grande da Carrara to, effectively, act as their first *signore*.[29] Marsilius enumerates the merits of elective monarchy and addresses potential objections against election. His arguments revolve around three topics: the attributes and conduct of the would-be ruler; his relations with his subjects; and the advantages and disadvantages of election in general. He also highlights the perils of hereditary kingship: dynastic succession does not necessarily yield a perfect or competent leader, whereas election is the best way to assess the skills of the candidates.[30]

Novelty increases admiration and respect, especially when the new ruler comes from another region or city; the people's respect for him, in turn, will enhance their obedience to the government and the laws.[31] The elected ruler will best serve the common benefit, because the *legislator humanus* always strives to elect a person able to foster the well-being of the entire community.[32] He is more likely to pursue his duties more diligently; he will be more virtuous and will fear punishment at the hands of his successors. He will seek to ensure that his children are deserving of election in the future and that they are virtuous and well trained. His children, therefore, will strive to perform their tasks and to have the qualifications and cultivate the skills requisite for effective political agency.[33] Intriguingly, an earlier draft of the *Defensor pacis* features, in this context, a reference to the doges of Venice, which was omitted in later versions

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Ernst Salzer, *Ueber die Anfaenge der Signorie in Italien: Ein Beitrag zur italienischen Verfassungsgeschichte* (Berlin: Ebering, 1900; repr. Vaduz: Kraus Repr., 1965).

29 For the history of the Carrara regime, see *Padova carrarese*, ed. Oddone Longo (Padua: Il Poligrafo, 2005); Benjamin G. Kohl, *Padua under the Carrara, 1318–1405* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Benjamin G. Kohl, "Government and Society in Renaissance Padua," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 2 (1972): 205–21—repr. in Benjamin G. Kohl, *Culture and Politics in Early Renaissance Padua* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001); Andrea Di Salvo, "L'affermazione della signoria cittadina nella percezione dei contemporanei: l'esempio dei Carraresi a Padova nella prima metà del Trecento" (Tesi di dottorato, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, 1997); and, in general, Silvana Collodo, *Una società in transformazione: Padova tra XI e XV secolo* (Padua: Antenore, 1990).

30 *Defensor pacis* I.xvi.12. On Marsilius's account of princely virtues, see *Defensor pacis* I.xiv; and for additional commentary, Vasileios Syros, "Marsilius of Padua on Political Virtues and Aristotle's Absolute Ruler," *Archiv für mittelalterliche Philosophie und Kultur* 13 (2007): 212–29—repr. in *Yavanikā: Indo-Hellenic Studies* 12 (2009): 93–113.

31 *Defensor pacis* I.xvi.16.

32 *Defensor pacis* I.xvi.11.

33 *Defensor pacis* I.xvi.13.

of the work.[34] The ruler who is appointed by election will endeavor to showcase his individual and civic virtues and to enjoy honor, leave a legacy, and secure posthumous fame. Furthermore, he will be less authoritarian than a hereditary ruler, because he will most probably be more prudent, will have less leeway to commit misdeeds with impunity, and will be more easily monitored and, if necessary, corrected.[35]

Aristotle envisions the ideal ruler as an individual who surpasses the other members of the community in moral excellence and political capacity, governs at his own discretion, and cannot be subject to any laws because he himself is the incarnation of justice.[36] Marsilius is of the opinion that an individual or family so outstanding in virtue, benevolence, and dedication to the political community is rare.[37] He considers that no one is unsusceptible to ignorance and perverted emotions and that the human soul is at times afflicted by vices: thus, there is no substitute for the laws. Only as long as a ruler complies with the laws can his judgment be immune from the effects of incomplete or distorted knowledge, malevolent feelings, or bias.[38] Marsilius also believes that an elective monarch is more likely to garner popular support, and he concurs with Aristotle that contempt for those in power and the fact that only the same persons are entitled to rule can lead to friction and factional conflict.[39] Marsilius suggests that resentment toward the ruler and dissent grow when the citizens realize that their rulers are men of less ability than themselves and feel that they are excluded from the administration of civil affairs. This danger is minimized in the case of elective succession, because the citizens are unlikely to plot against the ruler who they themselves have chosen unless they have been gravely wronged; moreover, they will entertain the hope that they themselves might, at some point, be elected to rule. Finally, Marsilius points out that

34 Marsilius of Padua, *The Defensor Pacis*, ed. Charles W. Previté-Orton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), xvii, 80.

35 *Defensor pacis* I.xvi.14–15.

36 Aristotle, *Politics* 1284^{a}3–16; 1288^{a}15–29. Aristotle's ideas on absolute kingship are discussed in, e.g., Carol Atack, "Aristotle's *Pambasileia* and the Metaphysics of Monarchy," *Polis* 32 (2015): 297–320; Richard G. Mulgan, "A Note on Aristotle's Absolute Ruler," *Phronesis* 19 (1974): 66–69; Richard G. Mulgan, "Aristotle and Absolute Rule," *Antichthon* 8 (1974): 21–28; Pierre Carlier, "La notion de *pambasileia* dans la pensée politique d'Aristote," in *Aristote et Athènes*, ed. Marcel Piérart (Fribourg: Séminaire d'histoire ancienne de l'Université de Fribourg, 1993), 103–18.

37 *Defensor pacis* I.xvi.17. See also I.ix.4, 10.

38 *Defensor pacis* I.xi.5–6.

39 Aristotle, *Politics* 1302^{b}25–32; 1264^{b}6–10.

elected rulers have the potential to dispense justice in a more firm and efficient manner and have the courage to bring powerful individuals to justice.[40]

The principal differences between temperate and flawed regimes concern, according to Marsilius, the extent to which they conform to the consent of the citizenry and laws, which are conducive to the general good. Thus, the more a monarch rules over "voluntary" subjects and adheres to laws that serve the public benefit, the more he aligns himself with the principles of true kingship.[41] Only election can produce the best candidate for rulership.[42] An elected monarch can be appointed for his lifetime only; for his lifetime and that of one or several of his successors; or for a limited period specified on a case-by-case basis. He can be granted full control over every aspect of government; alternatively, he can be appointed to a specific office and be, for instance, in command of the army.[43]

Marsilius was certainly not unique in his advocacy of restrictions on royal authority. Like other medieval authors, he also responded to Aristotle's insights regarding the delegation of authority as well as the need for the ruler to co-opt a number of associates, who are well disposed to both himself and the regime, and to allow them to partake of his power.[44] Indeed, there exists a considerable amount of Scholastic literature that emphasizes the need for the ruler to encourage civic participation and, thereby, obtain the good will of the populace. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–74), for example, believes that as long as the nobility and the people have a say in political affairs, the likelihood that the king will degenerate into a tyrant will be minimized and the members of the community will feel that they can play an active role in the pursuit of the common interest. Engelbert of Admont (ca. 1250–1331), albeit defending imperial rule, acknowledges that the longevity of any type of government should be contingent on popular support. Engelbert points to Julius Caesar as a cautionary tale to show how a ruler who sought to sideline the Senate became a tyrant.[45]

Commitment to republican values is found in works written in response to debates about the decadence of communal government and the transition to seigneurial rule. A strong precedent for Marsilius's ideas was set by Ptolemy

40 *Defensor pacis* I.xvi.21–22.

41 *Defensor pacis* I.viii.2; I.ix.5.

42 *Defensor pacis* I.ix.7.

43 *Defensor pacis* I.ix.5.

44 Aristotle, *Politics* $1287^{b}8$–11 and 25–35.

45 James M. Blythe, "'Civic Humanism' and Medieval Political Thought," in *Renaissance Civic Humanism: Reappraisals and Reflections*, ed. James Hankins (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30–74, 42–43, 62.

of Lucca (Tolomeo Fiadoni, ca. 1240–1327) in his *De regimine principum* (*On the Government of Rulers*, ca. 1300), the continuation of Thomas Aquinas's *De regno ad regem Cypri* (*On Kingship to the King of Cyprus*).[46] As will be shown later, Ptolemy concurs with Abravanel in opposing kingship and, in general, any kind of permanent rule. Ptolemy notes that Aristotle distinguishes two modes of rule, political and despotic, and he equates royal and despotic rule. In regal government (*regimen regale*), the king carries the laws inscribed in his heart and is restrained solely by natural law. The head or chief of constitutional government (*rector*), by contrast, must comply with the statutes and laws promulgated by the civic body. Furthermore, he is bound by oath and subject to penalties if he is found to have acted or judged contrary to the laws. Ptolemy also determines the principles for the occupation of the offices: alternation; brief terms; and proper remuneration.[47]

Both Ptolemy and Marsilius were inspired by the republican ethos that prevailed in many cities of central and northern Italy. Marsilius's conception of the

46 Cohen Skalli, "Don Isaac Abravanel and Leonardo Bruni," 17–18, has also drawn attention to general affinities between Abravanel's and Ptolemy of Lucca's political ideas. On the authorship and content of the *De regimine principum*, see Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers: De Regimine Principum; With Portions Attributed to Thomas Aquinas*, trans. James M. Blythe (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 1–5. On Ptolemy's life and works, consult James M. Blythe, *The Life and Works of Tolomeo Fiadoni* (*Ptolemy of Lucca*) (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), 155–77. Ptolemy's political ideas and his reception of Aristotle are discussed in the following studies by James M. Blythe: *The Worldview and Thought of Tolomeo Fiadoni* (*Ptolemy of Lucca*) (Brepols: Turnhout, 2009); "Aristotle's *Politics* and Ptolemy of Lucca," *Vivarium* 40 (2002): 103–36; and James M. Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 92–117. For a reappraisal of Ptolemy of Lucca's republicanism, see Cary J. Nederman and Mary E. Sullivan, "Reading Aristotle through Rome: Republicanism and History in Ptolemy of Lucca's *De regimine principum*," *European Journal of Political Theory* 7 (2008): 223–40. Consider also Charles T. Davis, "Roman Patriotism and Republican Propaganda: Ptolemy of Lucca and Pope Nicholas III," *Speculum* 50 (1975): 411–33; Charles T. Davis, "Ptolemy of Lucca and the Roman Republic," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 118 (1974): 30–50—both repr. in Charles T. Davis, *Dante's Italy and Other Essays* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984), 224–53 and 254–89, respectively. Bee Yun has challenged previous interpretations of Ptolemy as an advocate of civic republicanism and argues instead that his political ideas were animated by his pro-papal sentiments. See Bee Yun, "Ptolemy of Lucca—a Pioneer of Civic Republicanism? A Reassessment," *History of Political Thought* 29 (2008): 417–39; and "Ptolemy of Lucca's Distrust in Politics and the Medieval Discourse on Government," in *Trust and Happiness in the History of European Political Thought*, ed. László Kontler and Mark Somos (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2017), 33–52.

47 "De regno ad regem Cypri," in *Sancti Thomae de Aquino Opera Omnia* (= Editio Leonina; 42), ed. Hyacinthe François Dondaine (Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1979), II.8.1–6; IV.1.2–6; IV.8.5–6; Ptolemy of Lucca, *On the Government of Rulers*, 120–23, 216–18, 239.

paradigmatic political order exhibits a number of shared features with Padua's political organization in the period of its communal government.[48] Ultimate authority in Padua resided with the body of the citizens (*comunanza*), which was represented by the Great Council (*Consiglio Maggiore*), which can be construed as the equivalent of the *pars valentior*. The city's highest administrative officer was the *podestà*, usually a nobleman of foreign descent with legal expertise, who was elected and appointed by a special committee, which acted on behalf of the *Consiglio Maggiore*. The *podestà* pledged to abide by the statutes of the city; his primary function was to handle civil and criminal cases based on those same statutes. His authority was circumscribed by multiple councils; his actions and decisions were scrutinized at the end of his tenure; if he was found guilty of transgressions or abuse of power, he was subject to penalties.[49]

In similar fashion, Marsilius insists that the governing part (*pars principans*) of the political community must be elected by the civic body. Thus, the ruler's duty is the administration of justice and the application of the laws;[50] otherwise he will face correction, suspension, and, potentially, deposition, depending on the gravity, frequency, and legal determination of his demerit or misdeed.[51] Marsilius's model ruler operates as a judge who is animated by respect for the laws, acts with prudence, and displays equity in cases not foreseen by the laws. Marsilius conceives of the ruler as an administrator—indeed, as an executive in the truest sense of the word—patterned more after the *podestà* of the Italian cities than the kings of the European monarchies.[52]

48 For further discussion, see, e.g., Syros, *Die Rezeption der aristotelischen politischen Philosophie bei Marsilius von Padua*, 214–19, 238–39, 293–97; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, vol. 1: The *Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 60–5; Alan Gewirth, *Marsilius of Padua and Medieval Political Philosophy*, 23–31; 196–98; Alan Gewirth, "Republicanism and Absolutism in the Thought of Marsilius of Padua," *Medioevo* 5 (1979): 23–48. According to another line of interpretation, Marsilius was an apologist for imperial rule—see George Garnett, *Marsilius of Padua and 'the Truth of History'* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 11–12; Jeannine Quillet, *La philosophie politique de Marsile de Padoue* (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 84–91. Consider also Gianfranco Maglio, *L'idea costituzionale nel Medioevo: Dalla tradizione antica al 'costituzionalismo cristiano'* (Negarine di San Pietro in Cariano [Verona]: Gabrielli Editori, 2006), 137–61; and Cary J. Nederman, "From *Defensor Pacis* to *Defensor Minor*: The Problem of Empire in Marsiglio of Padua," *History of Political Thought* 16 (1995): 313–29.

49 For further discussion, see Hyde, *Padua in the Age*, 210–11.

50 *Defensor pacis* I.xv.4.

51 *Defensor pacis* I.xviii.2–7.

52 *Defensor pacis* I.v.7; xv.1–6; xiv.2–7; xvii.1–4; II.viii.6.

2 Abravanel on Kingship

The son of a financial agent to the Portuguese Court, Abravanel was born in Lisbon in 1437 and died in Venice in 1508.[53] He served as King Alphonse V of Portugal's (1432–81, r. 1438–81) treasurer from 1472 until 1475. After Alphonse's death, Abravanel was accused by the former's son and successor John II (1455–95, r. 1481–95) of being involved in the plot of Ferdinand II, Duke of Braganza (1430–83, r. 1478–83), against the crown. Abravanel's property was confiscated, and in 1483 he fled to Castile. He entered the court of King Ferdinand V

53 On Abravanel's life and works, see, e.g., Cedric Cohen Skalli, *Don Isaac Abravanel: An Intellectual Biography* (Brandeis University Press; forthcoming); Eric Lawee, *Isaac Abarbanel's Stance Toward Tradition: Defense, Dissent, and Dialogue* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 9–25; Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 3–91; Roland Goetschel, *Isaac Abravanel conseiller des princes et philosophe, 1437–1508* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996); Filena Patroni Griffi, "Circolazione di élites nel Mediterraneo occidentale: le attività economiche degli Abravanel in Italia meridionale (1492–1543)," *Revista d'historia medieval* 6 (1995): 111–21, esp. 111–12; and Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, "Don Isaac Abravanel: Financier, Statesman and Scholar 1437–1937," *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 21 (1937): 445–78—repr. in Erwin I. J. Rosenthal, *Studia Semitica*, vol. 1: *Jewish Themes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 21–56, and in *Judaism, Philosophy, Culture: Selected Studies by E. I. J. Rosenthal* (Richmond: Curzon, 2001), 21–54. Abravanel's political thought has received extensive scholarly attention. In addition to the bibliography mentioned on pages 4 and 5, see the following studies by Abraham Melamed, "The De-Legitimation of Monarchy in Don Isaac Abravanel's Political Thought," in *The Legitimation of Political Power in Medieval Thought*, 239–52; "The Problem of Political Disobedience in Isaac Abravanel's Biblical Commentaries," in *Religious Obedience and Political Resistance in the Early Modern World: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Philosophers Addressing the Bible*, ed. Luisa Simonutti (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 53–70; *Wisdom's Little Sister: Medieval Jewish Political Thought* (Raanana [Israel]: Open University Press, 2011), 242–81 [in Hebrew]; *The Philosopher-King in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2003), 62–63, 67–74, 113–22; as well as Cedric Cohen Skalli, "Don Isaac Abravanel and the Conversos: Wealth, Politics, and Messianism," *Journal of Levantine Studies* 6 (2016): 43–69; Cedric Cohen Skalli, "Abravanel's Commentary on the Former Prophets: Portraits, Self-Portraits, and Models of Leadership," *Jewish History* 23 (2009): 255–80; Ágoston Schmelowszky, "Messianic Dreams and Political Reality: The Case of Don Isaac Abravanel," in *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants*, ed. Aziz Al-Azmeh and János M. Bak (Budapest: Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies, 2004), 137–54; Aviezer Ravitzky, *Religion and State in Jewish Philosophy: Models of Unity, Division, Collision and Subordination* (Jerusalem: The Israel Democracy Institute, 2002), 85–121; Marianne Awerbuch, *Zwischen Hoffnung und Vernunft: Geschichtsdeutung der Juden in Spanien vor der Vertreibung am Beispiel Abravanels und Ibn Vergas* (Berlin: Institut Kirche und Judentum, 1985), 38–47; Ephraim E. Urbach, "Die Staatsauffassung des Don Isaak Abrabanel," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 (1937): 257–70.

(1452–1516, r. 1474–1504) and Queen Isabella (1451–1504, r. 1474–1504) and was entrusted with the administration of the finances. Abravanel's efforts to persuade the Spanish rulers to revoke the edict about the expulsion of the Jews from Spain in 1492 bore no fruit.[54] Subsequently, he left for Naples, where he became advisor to King Ferrante I (1423–94, r. 1458–94). Following the conquest of the city by the French army in 1495, he moved to Sicily. After short stays in Corfu and in Monopoli (Apulia), both of which were under Venetian rule, Abravanel settled in 1503 in Venice and played a major role in trade negotiations between the *Serenissima* and Portugal.

Abravanel refutes previous thinkers who underscore the advantages of monarchical rule (unity, continuity, and absolute authority) and liken the ruler's function in the body politic to that of the heart in a living organism or to the relation of the First Cause to the universe. He dismisses the association between God's rule over the world and absolute power as logically fallacious, because, from his point of view, the analogy between God (necessary existence) and human beings (possible existence) is not valid. Moreover, Abravanel negates the parallels between the dominant function of the heart in the living organism and that of the king. Drawing on Galen's physiological theory, he refers instead to the existence of three principal organs in the human body, i.e., the liver, heart, and brain.[55] Abravanel and Marsilius are alike in affirming that it is feasible to have a cohesive political entity governed by a plurality of rulers acting together. Concerning the argument that a royal regime is a guarantee of

54 Elias Lipiner, *Two Portuguese Exiles in Castile: Dom David Negro and Dom Isaac Abravanel* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1997), 46–79; and Haim Beinart, *The Expulsion of the Jews from Spain*, trans. from the Hebrew Jeffrey M. Green (Oxford: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2002). See, in general, also Maria José Pimenta Ferro Tavares, *Os Judeus em Portugal no século XIV* (Lisbon: Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Facultade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas, 1982), 1: 215–395.

55 *Comm. on Deut.* 17.14; Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 173–74; Ravitzky, *Religion and State in Jewish Philosophy*, 107–10; *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 1: *Authority*, 150–51; *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, ed. Ralph Lerner and Muhsin Mahdi (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 265. For further discussion, see also Abraham Melamed, "Isaac Abravanel and Aristotle's *Politics*: A Drama of Errors," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 5:3/4 [= *The Sephardic Political Experience*] (1993): 55–75, 64; Abraham Melamed, "The Organic Theory of the State in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought," in *Ideal Constitutions in the Renaissance*, ed. Heinrich C. Kuhn and Diana Stanciu (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2009), 117–51, 140–45—repr. in Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister*/2012, 140–74. On Galen's embryology, consult Diethard Nickel, *Untersuchungen zur Embryologie Galens* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1989); Rudoph E. Siegel, *Galen's System of Physiology and Medicine: An Analysis of his Doctrines and Observations on Blood Flow, Respiration, Tumors and Internal Diseases* (Basel and New York: Karger, 1968). Consider also Syros, *Marsilus of Padua at the Intersection of Ancient and Medieval Traditions of Political Thought*, 108–10.

continuity, Abravanel believes that this objective is better served by temporary and limited leadership, which renders the ruler's conduct subject to scrutiny and punishment by his successors. Finally, Abravanel argues that a single person holding supreme political authority is more prone to commit misdeeds than is a multiplicity of individuals.[56]

As discussed earlier, Aristotle's doctrine of the sovereignty of the multitude is wedded to his idea of collective wisdom.[57] A similar notion of collective wisdom/prudence underpins Marsilius's thesis that the laws should be produced by the citizenry or its "weightier part". Intriguingly, Marsilius refers to the *Metaphysics* to illustrate the correlation between civil legislation and the accrued wisdom of the citizenry.[58] Abravanel does not seem to have had access to William of Moerbeke's Latin translation of the *Politics* (1260s), and all his references to the *Politics* were most probably mediated by Thomas Aquinas, Paul of Burgos (ca. 1351–1435), or other Christian authors.[59] Abravanel too grounds

56 *Comm. on Deut.* 17.14; Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 174; *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, 266.

57 On Aristotle's idea of collective wisdom, see, e.g., Jeremy Waldron, "The Wisdom of the Multitude: Some Reflections on Book 3, Chapter 11 of Aristotle's *Politics*," *Political Theory* 23 (1995): 563–84—repr. in *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Kraut and Steven Skultety (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 145–65; J. T. Bookman, "The Wisdom of the Many: An Analysis of the Arguments of Book III and IV of Aristotle's *Politics*," *History of Political Thought* 13 (1992): 1–12.

58 *Defensor pacis* I.xi.3; Aristotle, *Metaphysics* $993^{a}30$–$993^{b}4$. Consider also Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations* $183^{b}27$–33.

59 On this point, see also Syros, *Marsilus of Padua at the Intersection of Ancient and Medieval Traditions of Political Thought*, 89. Abravanel's exposure to Aristotle's political ideas is discussed in the following studies by Abraham Melamed: "Aristotle's *Politics* in Medieval and Renaissance Jewish Political Thought," in *Well Begun is Only Half Done: Tracing Aristotle's Political Ideas in Medieval Arabic, Syriac, Byzantine, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Vasileios Syros (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2011), 145–86, 170–80—repr. in Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister*/2012, 78–119; "Isaac Abravanel and Aristotle's *Politics*"; and Abraham Melamed, "Jethro's Advice in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish and Christian Political Thought," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 2 (1990): 3–41—repr. in Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister*/2012, 175–211. Consult also Funkenstein, *Perceptions of Jewish History*, 160, 164–65; Aviezer Ravitzky, "Political Philosophy: Nissim of Gerona versus Isaac Abrabanel," in Aviezer Ravitzky, *History and Faith: Studies in Jewish Philosophy* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996), 46–72, 48, 54 [first published as "Kings and Laws in Late Medieval Jewish Thought: Nissim of Gerona vs. Isaac Abrabanel," in *Scholars and Scholarship in Jewish History: The Interaction between Judaism and Other Cultures*, ed. Leo Landman (New York: Yeshiva University Press, 1990), 67–90. The reception of Aristotle's moral and political thought in the Iberian Jewish tradition is surveyed in the following studies by Jean-Pierre Rothschild: "L'appropriation de l'*Éthique à Nicomaque* par le judaïsme espagnol: le travail des préfaces (Me'ir Alguadez, Joseph ben Shem Tob Ibn Shem Tob)," *Iberia Judaica* 8 (2016): 61–122, and "La contestation des fins de la politique selon Aristote chez quelques auteurs juifs

his theory about collective leadership in the notion of collective wisdom, but he relies on the *Metaphysics* instead of the *Politics*, and he asserts that truth can be more easily attained through the cumulative endeavors of a number of persons.[60]

According to Abravanel, the authority of the ruler should be restricted and exercised in accordance with the laws. He explains that Rome rose to world dominance while it was ruled by consuls who were appointed with limited tenure, but that it fell into decline as soon as Caesar took over power. Abravanel also invokes various Italian cities, particularly Venice, Florence, Genoa, Lucca, Siena, and Bologna, in which government is entrusted to officials appointed for a fixed term. These cities flourish thanks to these arrangements and their wisdom, perspicacity, and experience.[61] Like Ptolemy of Lucca, who contrasts the functions of the king and the head of constitutional government, Abravanel undertakes a comparison of the office of the king with that of the judge. Some of the points of comparison chosen by the two authors, moreover, are very similar: first, royal rule involves hereditary succession, but the office of the judge does not. Second, the king enjoys a more elevated status. Third, one of the king's main responsibilities is to command the army in war; he has supreme authority in the administration of justice; and he can act according to his own discretion in exceptional situations.[62] Fourth, the king is entitled to raise taxes and generate revenue, both for the conduct of government and war-time expenses. Embezzlement entails the death sentence, and the assets of those who are executed devolve to the king. The same applies to the territories that the king acquires through conquest.[63]

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du moyen âge tardif en Espagne," in *Well Begun is Only Half Done*, 187–221. Consider also Vasileios Syros, "Absalom's Revolt and Value-Neutral Advice in Profiat Duran," *History of Political Thought* 30 (2009): 60–74; and Ann M. Giletti, "The Reception of Aristotelian Philosophy among Latin Iberian Scholars during the Thirteenth and Early Fourteenth Centuries" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 2002); Hava Tirosh-Rothschild, "Jewish Philosophy on the Eve of Modernity," in *History of Jewish Philosophy* [= *Routledge History of World Philosophies*, vol. 2], ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 499–573.

60 *Comm. on I Sam*. 8.4. See also Strauss, "On Abravanel's Philosophical Tendency and Political Teaching," 114.

61 *Comm. on Deut.* 17.14; Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 174; Ravitzky, *Religion and State in Jewish Philosophy*, 108–09; *The Jewish Political Tradition*, vol. 1: *Authority*, 151; *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, 266–67.

62 *Comm. on Deut.* 17.14. On the following, see Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 175. By comparing the office of the king with that of the judge Abravanel implicitly reworks the biblical narrative, in which these two offices are chronologically distinct (i.e. an era of judges followed by an era of kings). I am grateful to Daniel Stein Kokin for earlier discussions on this point.

63 *Comm. on Judges*, intro.

The very fact that royal rule is perceived to epitomize unity, dynastic continuity, and full power indicates that the king's authority is, in effect, absolute and that his decisions are binding. The king's actions conform to the laws only in theory, because, in practice, he has unfettered authority: he retains the power to annul the verdicts pronounced by judges, whereas no judge has the right to question the decisions made by the king.[64] For this reason, Abravanel recommends that the candidates for rulership should have sincere intentions and exhibit moral integrity. The true king should be the exemplar of respect for the laws, piety, and modesty; he should display justice, gentleness, love of peace, and mercy. The ruler, though appearing to be the lord of his subjects, should actually become their servant and prioritize their welfare. Abravanel agrees with Marsilius that a person endowed with these qualities is exceptional. Like Marsilius, he also claims that no one is impervious to the corrupting influence of political power; each person will eventually be inclined to abuse his authority and to privilege his own interests. Thus, precautions were taken to guarantee that he does not overstep the limits of his authority: to prohibit him from having many wives; acquiring many horses; and amassing excessive wealth.[65]

Just as Marsilius depicts the ruler/government as the executive agent of the entire civic body, so too Abravanel stresses that the authentic ruler should, in practice, act as a servant of the people, rather than as their master. Similar sentiments are echoed by Abravanel's contemporary Isaac Arama (ca. 1420–94), a prominent rabbi and preacher from Aragon, who moved to Naples in 1492. Arama's most important work, the *ʿAqedat Yitsḥaq* (*The Binding of Isaac*, written in the 1480s, printed in Salonika in 1522) is a collection of sermons, philosophical homilies, and biblical commentaries, and includes a discussion of election as one of the pillars of the legitimacy of royal rule.[66] The exemplary

64 *Comm. on Judges*, intro. The following paragraph is based on Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 177–78.

65 *Comm. on Judges*, 10.14; and *Comm. on Deut.* 17.14. The provisions referenced by Abravanel derive from *Deut*. 17.14–20 (The Law of the King).

66 The following account is based on Michael N. Rony, "Social and Political Ideas in Early Modern Jewish Philosophical Commentaries on the Story of the Tower of Babel," in *Tradition, Heterodoxy, and Religious Culture: Judaism and Christianity in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Chanita Goodblatt and Howard Kreisel (Beer-Sheva: Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2006), 167–84, 170–75; and Michael N. Rony, *Issues in Political Philosophy in Rabbi Yitzhak Arama's Commentary on the Torah* (MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University, 2000), 64–68 [in Hebrew]. Consider also *Akeydat Yitzchak: Commentary of Rabbi Yitzchak Arama on the Torah*, trans. and condensed by Eliyahu Munk (Jerusalem and New York: Lambda Publishers, 3rd rev. ed. 2001), vol. 1: *Bereshit—Shemot*, 86–7, 115, 198, 437–41; vol. 2: *Vayikra—Bamidbar—Devarim*, 749, 756–60, 849–54; as well as Bernard Septimus, "Yitzhak Arama and Aristotle's *Ethics*," in *Jews and Conversos at the Time of Expulsion: Collection of Essays*, ed. Yom Tov Assis and Yosef Kaplan (Jerusalem: Zalman Shazar Center for Jewish History, 1999), 1–24; Menachem M. Kellner, "Gersonides and his

polity, as envisioned by Arama, is founded on laws and aims at the well-being and security of all of its members. A legal system and an elected ruler reflect the character of a given society. The ruler should embody the moral, spiritual, and intellectual qualities related to righteous government, especially political wisdom. Moreover, he should aspire to legitimacy and popular support. The ruler's foremost task is to uphold unity and justice and to create all the physical and material conditions conducive to the welfare of his people. He is expected to provide the members of society with the means that will allow them to realize their spiritual and intellectual potential.

As noted above, Marsilius's interpretation of Aristotle's political theory culminates in the vision of the entire body of the citizens as the locus of ultimate political authority. In a similar vein, Abravanel formulates a republican conception of political organization by setting forth a new reading of the biblical text.[67] In his commentary on *Exodus* 18.13–27, Abravanel glosses Moses's selection and appointment of rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. Abravanel explains that Jethro advised Moses to select and appoint the rulers according to his own discretion, but that Moses opted to ask the people to choose the officials. He also argues that in a large and complex polity some affairs fall under the purview of a body of one thousand persons; others should be adjudicated by one hundred persons; others by fifty or forty persons; and some can be entrusted to ten persons who have ultimate authority in political affairs.[68]

In Deut. 1.12–17, Moses exhorts the Israelites to select sagacious and discerning men with experience and appoint them as their leaders, whereas in Exod. 18.13–27, Jethro calls upon Moses to do so. In the more "authoritarian"

Cultured Despisers: Arama and Abravanel," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 6 (1976): 269–96, esp. 273–78—rev. repr. in Menachem M. Kellner, *Torah in the Observatory: Gersonides, Maimonides, Song of Songs* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 305–32; and Israel Bettan, *Studies in Jewish Preaching: Middle Ages* (Cincinnati, OH: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939; repr. Lanham, MD, and London: University Press of America, 1987), 130–91.

67 On the following, see also Melamed, "Jethro's Advice in Medieval and Early Modern Jewish and Christian Political Thought," in *Wisdom's Little Sister*/2012, 181–91; Abraham Melamed, "The Attitude towards Democracy in Medieval Jewish Philosophy," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 5 (1993): 33–56—repr. in Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister*/2012, 120–39, esp. 138–39. On the use of the Jethro episode in Castilian political discourse, see François Foronda, "Le conseil de Jéthro à Moïse: le rebond d'un fragment de théologie politique dans la rhétorique parlementaire castillane," *Médiévales* 57 (2009) [= *Langages politiques, XII^e–XV^e siècle*, ed. Aude Mairey]: 75–92.

68 Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 166–70; Ravitzky, *Religion and State in Jewish Philosophy*, 100–1; *Medieval Political Philosophy: A Sourcebook*, 259–61.

version, the institution of the judges is credited to Jethro. In the more "republican" version of the tale, the role of Jethro is elided and taken over by God. One is reminded here of Niccolò Machiavelli's (1469–1527) assertion that the voice of a people can be likened to that of God (*Discourses on the First Ten Books of Livy*, 1.58). Abravanel advances an idiosyncratic reading of the political reform tale, reverses the Mosaic hierarchy, and inverts the biblical meaning of "rulers of thousands" etc. The plurals of all these numbers indicate that individual judges (*sarim*) were appointed to oversee groupings of one thousand, one hundred etc. Abravanel, however, transforms these individual judges into distinct legislative bodies consisting of one thousand, one hundred, fifty, etc., and, thereby, gives a republican twist to the Mosaic, or perhaps better, Jethronic political order.

Another novel element in Abravanel's thought, as compared to other Jewish authors, is the analogy he establishes between the references, in *Exodus*, to the leaders of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, who were installed by Moses, and the various bodies which comprised Venice's political system: the *Consiglio Maggiore* (Great Council), which is composed of more than one thousand members; the *Consiglio dei Pregadi*, which is made up of two hundred persons; the *Quarantia* (Council of Forty); and the *Consiglio dei Dieci* (Council of Ten).[69] As with the Jethro story, Abravanel presents the various councils involved in Venice's political organization as being appointed by the people in order to underscore the value of collective leadership. In doing so, Abravanel, in essence, reworked the "Myth of Venice," which was propounded in antecedent literature on the durability and mixed character of Venice's constitution thanks to the combination of the monarchical, aristocratic, and democratic components,[70] and which reverberates with subsequent

69 *Comm. on Exod.* 18.13; Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 166–73; Ravitzky, *Religion and State in Jewish Philosophy*, 100. The *Consiglio dei Pregadi* (Senate) was the main deliberative and legislative organ; the *Quarantia* (Council of Forty) was a special tribunal, which consisted of forty councilors and was the supreme court of appeals; and the *Consiglio dei Dieci* (Council of Ten) included ten officials, who were in charge of economic and foreign affairs as well as of public security and the investigation of crimes against the state. The influence of Venice's political institutions on Abravanel's thought is explored in Umberto Piperno, "Abravanel e le istituzioni politiche della Repubblica di Venezia," *Rassegna Mensile di Israel* 59 (1993): 154–70; Baer, "Don Isaac Abravanel and His Relation to Problems of History and Politics"; and Herbert Finkelscherer, "Quellen und Motive der Staats- und Gesellschaftsauffassung des Don Isaak Abravanel," *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 81 (1937): 496–508 [Breslau: S. Münz, 1937].

70 Such as Pier Paolo Vergerio the Elder's *De Republica Veneta* (written between 1400 and 1403); George of Trebizond's Preface to the Latin translation of Plato's *Laws* (early 1450s); Giovanni Caldiera's *De praestantia venetae politiae* (1473); Francesco Diedo's *Defensio pro*

Jewish authors, such as David de Pomis (1525–after 1594) and Simone Luzzatto (ca. 1580–1663).[71]

3 Conclusion

Marsilius acknowledges that law-bound kingship can be reckoned to be a healthy or legitimate mode of rule. Abravanel takes a more radical stance, obfuscates the (Aristotelian) distinctions between absolute and limited royal authority and between kingship and tyranny, and emphasizes the challenges associated with royal government.[72] More crucially, Marsilius formulates a

re publica Veneta (1481); and Domenico Morosini's *De bene instituta re publica* (ca. 1500). The medieval and early modern reception of the idea of mixed constitution is traced in, e.g., Blythe, *Ideal Government and the Mixed Constitution in the Middle Ages*; and *Le Gouvernement mixte: De l'idéal politique au monstre constitutionnel en Europe* (*XIII^e–XVII^e siècle*), ed. Marie Gaille-Nikodimov (Saint-Étienne: Presses de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 2005). Notable contributions to the study of the "Myth of Venice" include: Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), esp. 13–61; Giovanni Silvano, *La 'Republica de' Viniziani'. Ricerche sul repubblicanesimo veneziano in età moderna* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1993); Felix Gilbert, "The Venetian Constitution in Florentine Political Thought," in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. Nicolai Rubinstein (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 463–500—repr. in Felix Gilbert, *History: Choice and Commitment* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977), 179–214; William J. Bouwsma, *Venice and the Defense of Republican Liberty: Renaissance Values in the Age of the Counter Reformation* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968).

71 Simone Luzzatto, *Discourse on the State of the Jews*. Bilingual edition. Edited, tranlated, and commented by Giuseppe Veltri and Anna Lissa (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019). For further discussion and references, see Giuseppe Veltri, *Renaissance Philosophy in Jewish Garb: Foundations and Challenges in Judaism on the Eve of Modernity* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009), 194–220; Guido Bartolucci, "Venezia nel pensiero politico ebraico rinascimentale: Un testo ritrovato di David de Pomis," *Rinascimento* 44 (2005): 225–47; Benjamin C. I. Ravid, "Between the Myth of Venice and the Lachrymose Conception of Jewish History: The Case of the Jews of Venice," in *The Jews of Italy: Memory and Identity*, ed. Bernard D. Cooperman and Barbara Garvin (Bethesda, MD: University Press of Maryland, 2000), 151–92, esp. 157–59—repr. in Benjamin C. I. Ravid, *Studies on the Jews of Venice, 1382–1797* (Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), no. IX; Abraham Melamed, "The Myth of Venice in Italian Renaissance Jewish Thought," in *Italia Judaica: Atti del I Convegno Internazionale. Bari 18–22 maggio 1981* (Rome: Ministerio per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1983), 401–13—repr. in Melamed, *Wisdom's Little Sister*/2012, 230–43.

72 Compare Reuven Kimelman, "Abravanel and the Jewish Republican Ethos," in *Commandment and Community: New Essays in Jewish Legal and Political Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1995), 195–216, who disputes the idea that Abravanel's republicanism constitutes a rupture with the Jewish political tradition and adduces precedents in other Jewish sources. See also Yair Lorberbaum, *Disempowered*

clearly defined distinction between the spiritual and temporal spheres and upholds the subordination of spiritual to temporal power, whereas Abravanel advocates the supremacy of spiritual power.[73]

Despite these differences, Marsilius and Abravanel are committed to the notion of the ruler as the executive agent of the civic body. Both thinkers, moreover, diverge from previous political authors and bring the negative effects of perpetual rule into sharper relief; both, likewise, refute the idea that kingship is indispensable for societal stability and order. Abravanel goes one step further: he rejects Aristotelian cardiocentrism and, by extension, the analogy between the position of the king in the body politic and the heart's function in the living organism by deploying Galen's physiology and pointing to the existence of three fundamental organs in the human body (liver, heart, and brain).

Abravanel intersects with Marsilius in postulating a correlation between collective leadership and the perfection of knowledge produced by successive generations. Similar to the way in which Abravanel transforms the biblical text, Marsilius proposes a novel interpretation of Aristotle's doctrine of collective wisdom in order to posit the entire body of the citizens as the sole legitimate source of legislative and governmental authority. Finally, the findings derived from the comparative investigation of Marsilius's and Abravanel's attitudes toward kingship reveal substantial affinities between the emergence and iterations of republican ideas in the Christian and Jewish traditions—in connection with the political cultures that evolved in the cities of central and northern Italy in the late Middle Ages.

King: Monarchy in Classical Jewish Literature (London and New York: Continuum, 2011); Gerald J. Blidstein, "The Monarchic Imperative in Rabbinic Perspective," *AJS Review* 7/8 (1982/1983): 15–39.

73 Netanyahu, *Don Isaac Abravanel*, 158–66, 189–94.