

PREFACE

VASSALAGE – THE ART OF SUSTAINING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND HIGHER EDUCATION

Science is just like any other craftsmanship; it is profoundly influenced by the participants involved in its activities. There are scholars who render services to the public, and there is the society which highly depends on the output of their contribution. The higher the quality of the scientific community in a country the higher quality of life is there. There is only one problem within this structure. A scientist is not a craftsman and the society is not a consumer. The two sides of this model needs to be implemented by a third party – the Maecenas. Why?



Cover page of the 1550 edition of Machiavelli's *Il Principe* and *La Vita di Castruccio Castracani da Lucca*. Source: <http://www.storiain.net/arret/num60/artic6.htm>.

Simply put, because of the nature of the output of science. If I need a pair of shoes, I go to a shoemaker and he will produce that in accordance with my wishes. However, if I want to solve a scientific problem, like inventing the perpetual mobile, I cannot simply appoint a scientist to accomplish the problem. Why not? There are two reasons for that; firstly while a scientist may make an honest attempt at achieving your goal, one can never be assured of success. The other reason is that the magnitude of expenses don't always align with the request.

A few hundred years ago count Montecuccoli (1609-1680), a military leader of the Hapsburg Empire formulated his evergreen thesis. War is an activity based on three necessary pillars: money, money and money. And it is true for science as well.

There are various means and ways financing science: support, subsidy, donation, fund, scholarship, grant, gift, present, etc. All these are provided by the Maecenas. The word Maecenas is a widely used byword for the rich generous supporters of arts, science, sports and other activities. Gaius Cilnius Maecenas (cca70-8 BC) was a wealthy Roman nobleman, a friend and advisor of Emperor Augustus. During his life he acted as a sort of quasi-minister of culture and supported such talented persons like Virgil and Horace. His name became an eponym for a patron of arts.

Funding is the act of providing financial resources usually in the form of money, or other values such as effort or time, to finance a need, program, and project by the Maecenas – normally by an organisation or government. Types of funding such as donations, subsidies, and grants that have no direct requirement for return of investment are named as soft funding or crowdfunding.

Up to this point financing of science seems to be a fairy tale. The good, the poor, the clever, the diligent, the honest will be rewarded by the powers that be for their services, so they may act in favour of the society. However, the scheme is much more sophisticated.

Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527) an Italian diplomat, scholar and philosopher of the Renaissance period of Tuscany has written his immortal pamphlet book “The prince” dealing with various problems of governing society. This book is sometimes claimed to be one of the first works of modern philosophy, especially for its modern political assessment, in which the effective truth is taken to be more important than any abstract ideal. It was also in direct conflict with the dominant religious and scholastic doctrines of that period concerning politics and ethics.

Macchiavelli postulated that actors of the society in all fields of life are arranged into an autocratic structure, the vassalage that is directed and operated by the decision of the powers that be. The vassal or feudatory, the subject is a person who has entered into a mutual obligation to a lord or monarch in the context of the feudal system in medieval Europe. The obligations often included military support and mutual protection, in exchange for certain privileges, usually including the grant of land held as a fiefdom. However distinctions have to be made within this mutual structure between obligations and challenges. Whenever a state has no power to finance public duties, it turns to be a Maecenas raising funds for the few rather than fulfilling its general obligations.

The life of Columella - the scientific paper - is also highly determined by its financial resources. It would be beneficial to be run on a regular budget rather than on occasional donations depending on the goodwill of the Maecenas.

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