

The Leonardo-Machiavelli Plan To Divert the Arno

In the first decade of the 16th Century, two extraordinary Florentines collaborated on a great infrastructure project: to alter the course of the Arno River. The Renaissance genius Leonardo da Vinci, and the founder of modern statecraft Niccolò Machiavelli, working in the court of the famous *condottiere* Cesare Borgia, devised a plan that would redirect the flow of the river, using canals and locks, to change its course, as it travelled from Florence out to the Tyrrhenian Sea. Diverting the river would not only provide Florence with an outlet to the sea, bypassing the city's military rival Pisa, it would help to limit damage to the surrounding farmlands from the flood-prone Arno.

Like today's NAWAPA project, the plan, if carried out, would have altered

the economic and political realities of the time, and reshaped and upshifted the Biosphere to the benefit of mankind.

This aerial map of the Arno Valley was drawn by a young Leonardo in about 1473, and shows his early interest in hydrodynamics; it is a harbinger of his later Arno and Romarantin projects.

—Bonnie James

