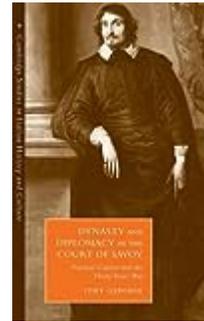


**Toby Osborne.** *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years' War.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. 304 S. \$65.00 (gebunden), ISBN 978-0-521-65268-1.



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The exhilaration on entering a well-stocked academic bookstore often gives way to panic in the face of so much new scholarship that must be read and absorbed. Since life is short and list-prices increasingly towering, only the most ruthless discipline can possibly save the hard-pressed academic from insolvency and back problems. According to this relentless logic, faithful readers of H-Albion may only glance at the latest offering in the Cambridge Studies in Italian History and Culture series, and sad to say, most will not be immediately transfixed by the title of Toby Osborne's work, *Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy*. Nevertheless, before setting the book aside, the early modernists will certainly be intrigued by the dust-jacket with its fine Van Dyck portrait, now in the National Gallery in London, of Alessandro Cesare Scaglia, a close friend of Charles I and the Duke of Buckingham. Their interest will redouble with the recollection of the prominence that Bulstrode Whitelocke accorded Abbe Scaglia in his explanation of the Anglo-French war of 1627-29: "the jarring with France brake out to an open war, which was fomented by an abbot here, in disfavour with cardinal Richlieu [sic]."[1] Any remaining indifference to this book will vanish once the fact registers that Osborne deploys a mass of hitherto unknown material from archives in Turin to examine precisely this period. At this point, the response of many English historians will verge on the Pavlovian as they clutch the book and

make for the till in a state of excitement.

Osborne will not disappoint the curious English historian. In his expert hands, readers are confidently introduced to the intricacies of another composite state, divided by geography, religion, and legal traditions. These formidable difficulties notwithstanding, the Dukes of Savoy managed to fashion a tightly run state, which was able to punch well above its weight in the international arena, fielding one of the larger armies in the Thirty Years' War. A striking contrast between Savoy and Britain can be found in the ambitions of its rulers; while Charles I simply wanted to maintain his inheritance, Carlo Emanuele I nursed a mind-boggling array of dynastical claims reaching from Portugal and Jerusalem to the Spanish Netherlands, Geneva, and Mantua. Amid this welter of somewhat fantastic claims, Osborne hammers home the point that family connections and aspirations mattered at least as much as the state did in early modern Europe. Then after following Scaglia's wanderings through several continental capitals, *Dynasty and Diplomacy* takes a somewhat surprising turn as the abate ends up in Whitehall. Ever anxious to establish new dynastic connections, Carlo Emanuele repeatedly approached James I with plans to wed one of his children, first with Princess Elizabeth, then with Prince Henry, and finally with Prince Charles. Although all failed, these projected

alliances nonetheless established a firm basis for Anglo-Savoyard relations, which only became warmer with the arrival of Henriette Marie in London. After all, since Vittorio Amedeo, Carlo Emanuele's son, had married Louis XIII's other sister, he could greet Charles and his French queen as brother and sister-in-law. These ties help explain the novel presence of a Savoyard envoy at Whitehall in 1626-27.

In recent years, with a few honorable exceptions, analyses of early modern international relations have not been in scholarly vogue. Osborne makes us pointedly aware of the steep price that the profession has paid for fashion. To be sure, the dust cover takes pains to announce that the book will not examine "Savoy purely in terms of its military or geo-strategic role"; instead it uses Scaglia to study "a diplomatic culture" of "princes, diplomats, courtiers and artists." Nevertheless the fact remains that the central chapters of the book charter the intricate diplomatic maneuvers of Scaglia and his ducal master. Although contemporary rulers prided themselves on a certain diplomatic agility, they were alternately amused and appalled to find that the Savoyards' skill in this area verged on the gymnastic. These uncharitable assessments, Osborne argued, failed to appreciate Savoy's delicate position sandwiched between the Bourbons and the Habsburgs. Survival therefore required the Savoyards to follow the dictates of "diplomatic pragmatism," which Abate Scaglia raised to an art form.

He was at the peak of his form during his long London embassy. Early in 1626, Carlo Emanuele was part of a loose confederation of princes including Louis XIII, Christian IV, and Charles I, all attempting to check the Habsburg "universal monarchy" which seemed inevitable after their triumphant early innings in the Thirty Years' War. Hence in his first visit to London, early in 1626, Scaglia was a fervent advocate of the "common cause" against the House of Austria. Yet all diplomatic compasses went awry a few months later with the news of the Treaty of Monzon, a secret arrangement in which Louis XIII and Philip IV settled their differences, leaving Carlo Emanuele and Charles I in an exceedingly awkward position engaged in a war with Spain and without any further French assistance. With ample warrant, Scaglia denounced this treaty as the "greatest monstrosity" (p. 103). Such fiery rhetoric, while lost on Cardinal Richelieu, found a warm reception in Whitehall, echoing as it did Buckingham's sentiments. What followed was nearly two years of what S. R. Gardiner famously dubbed "unreal diplomacy" (p. 123), in which Scaglia presided over a bewildering set of mutually exclusive negotiations.

While France and Spain were "the most powerful states in Europe," Osborne emphasizes that "they were not the only ones, and given that their affairs were so vulnerable to change in a period of great uncertainty, the influence of the secondary states of England and Savoy were magnified" (p. 140). Scaglia made the most of this fact, simultaneously discussing an entente with the Habsburgs and with the Bourbons, while plotting Richelieu's overthrow and offering to negotiate with him. For his diplomatic dexterity in "combining threats with offers" (p. 113), a growing number of contemporaries came to loathe him; indeed in 1627 Philip IV abruptly ordered him out of his dominions. Nevertheless, as Osborne calmly explained, "as circumstances and pragmatism required, the abate oscillated from one side to the other" (p. 140).

Much of his leverage stemmed from his close relationship with Charles and Buckingham. Unfortunately John Felton brought that to an abrupt end in 1628, and Charles shortly afterwards made peace, abandoning his earlier commitments to Savoy just as Louis had three years earlier. With the end of his London interlude, Scaglia's career rapidly declined. First he backed the wrong Spanish horse in the War of the Mantuan Succession, and then he fell out with Carlo Emanuele's heir. What follows then is a fascinating set of chapters about the old diplomat's increasingly close involvement in art and literature as he exercised a watching brief over Savoyard politics from his exile in Brussels.

English readers may be somewhat disappointed with Osborne's decision not to sketch out more fully Scaglia's involvement with the Caroline court and its leading figures. But in all fairness, such a decision would have disrupted the book's focus on international relations and Savoyard political culture. Since Osborne, in an earlier essay, has discussed Scaglia's relationship with Buckingham, we can only pray that in subsequent articles, he will return to this theme and provide more details about Scaglia's Whitehall.[2] In the meantime, we can only applaud his striking new book. It makes us aware of both what we have missed in recent scholarship and what we can expect in the future from the pen of this talented historian.

#### Notes

[1]. Bulstrode Whitelocke, *Memorials* (Oxford, 1853), p. 21.

[2]. Toby Osborne, "Abbot Scaglia, the Duke of Buckingham and Anglo-Savoyard Relations During the 1620s," *European History Quarterly* 30 (2000): pp. 5-32.

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