

## RENÉ DE CHALLANT AND RENAISSANCE LORDSHIP

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An understudied aspect of Renaissance lordship is its transregional dimension. Some sixteenth-century lords, such as René, count of Challant, held lands that were geographically dispersed and situated within multiple jurisdictional contexts. His status as lord of Valangin injected personal and familial elements into René's diplomatic and military role in Sabaudian-Swiss politics. Litigation over his landed claims in different parts of Europe drew him into relationships with a host of political actors. Likewise, the territorial configuration of his fiefs affected revenue collection and accounting in ways that impacted his interactions with other princes. Consideration of transregional lordship further complicates our understanding of the development of sovereign authority and its relationship to dynastic interests.

*Keywords:* Renaissance, Savoy, Challant, Lordship, Transregional.

*Parole chiave:* Rinascimento, Savoia, Challant, Signoria, Transregionale.

1. *Transregional politics in the Western Alps.* In 1529-30, René de Challant, as *maréchal de Savoie* (the leading authority of Duke Charles III of Savoy in his lands west and northwest of the Alps), was engaged in a series of financial and political negotiations with the patrician leaders of the Swiss cantons of Berne and Fribourg. René was about twenty-five years old at the time, himself a transregional lord whose lands were concentrated in the Valle d'Aosta, a largely autonomous region subject to the house of Savoy. His Valdostano fiefs, which included the county of Challant, were rural and Alpine, but he had also inherited from his first wife an urban palace in Casale Monferrato and other properties in the surrounding countryside. From his parents he had also acquired lands in Savoie and Bugey, the barony

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This essay proposes testimonies and considerations that could not be developed in M. Vester, *Transregional Lordship and the Italian Renaissance: René de Challant, 1504-1565*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2020.

of Beaufremont in Lorraine, and the lordship of Valangin, which included the towns of Le Locle and La Chaux-de-Fonds, and about half of today's canton of Neuchâtel. As lord of Valangin he owed fidelity to the count of Neuchâtel, but simultaneously enjoyed the status of *bourgeois* of Berne. This territorially diverse assemblage of authorities and obligations extended from northwestern Italy over the Alps, through the Swiss cantons, and into the borderlands between France and the Empire. The relationships that were created were urban and rural, and linked René to a variety of subjects and rulers. These created wide opportunities for political maneuvering but also numerous constraints.

Over the course of his career René de Challant served the duke of Savoy in a variety of offices. But he was also a transregional lord with claims of his own to assert. This makes it difficult to identify when René acted as a ducal agent with respect to other states, and when he was operating on his own behalf. Another way to think about this is by considering how porous the boundaries of the early modern «state» were, and how blurry its definition was. Would it be too far a stretch to posit the existence of a «Challant state»? Transregional lords like René present a conundrum in part because their lordships could be spatially dispersed and juridically differentiated, representing the multiplicity of relationships between nobles and other rulers. When René engaged with the lords of Berne, was it as a Sabaudian official, as lord of Valangin, as military commander of the Valle d'Aosta, as a baron subject to the duke of Lorraine, as a pensioner of the king of France, or as the ruler in his own right of a composite a set of lands?

This problem should be considered in light of the rapidly changing strategic and institutional context during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries in the part of Europe stretching from northwestern Italy across the Alps, the Jura, and the Vosges into the Moselle and Rhine valleys. This instability was created by the Burgundian wars (and the division of the Burgundian lands according to the treaty of Senlis in 1493), the Swabian War, the Italian wars, the expansion of the Swiss cantons between 1481 and 1536 (and of the allied territories of Valais and Grisons), and the Reformation. In Italy the outcomes included the evolution of the lordship of Masserano, the marquisate of Saluzzo, the territorial impact of the Reformation on the Waldensian valleys within the Escartons of the Briançonnais), the shifting alliances of the Republic of Genoa, the changing status of the county of Asti, and uncertainty surrounding the future status of the marquisate of Monferrato. The Sabaudian lands west of

the Alps saw the creation of the apanage of the Genevois in 1519, efforts by Geneva to cut its ties with the house of Savoy, and tenuous relations with the French provinces of Dauphiné and Provence (and between those places and the crown, as developments during the wars of religion would clarify). It was not clear whether the trend was toward state consolidation or toward fragmentation. This was in some ways a continuation of a constantly shifting medieval political environment, but perhaps the long-term impact of such maneuvers was amplified by the resources and institutional apparatus brought to bear by the early 1500s, especially due to the French and Spanish-Imperial occupation of much of the western Alps and northwestern Italy). The provisional character of boundaries and autonomies could provide opportunities for political actors to expand, consolidate, break away, or otherwise alter their environments.

Early sixteenth-century nobles who inhabited the regions stretching from northwestern Italy to the Vosges thus found themselves in a political context marked by instability. In this context, numerous actors (princes and nobles, but also city-states, bankers, soldiers, clerics, and even villagers) could influence events. To the degree that state formations were able to create proto-bureaucracies, these institutions were apt to fragment due to infighting amongst officials. Actors frequently held obligations that crossed political boundaries and involved in them in transregional conflict. Nobles like René de Challant operated in both rural and urban settings and simultaneously served dynastic states and engaged in autonomy-seeking activity.

*2. Lordship and dominion during the Renaissance: an historiographic overview.* Recent scholarship on late medieval and early modern political culture has begun to explore these themes. Work on small states has helped us to rethink our assumptions about the institutional setting of Europe during this period. Simultaneously, studies by historians of the nobility have unsettled some old commonplaces about nobles in Renaissance Italy (especially in the northwestern part of the peninsula) and elsewhere.

As we have noted, the political environment of the Alpine arc was marked by shifting boundaries, social disruptions, and warfare during the Renaissance. It seemed to be tending in the direction of political consolidation, beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries<sup>1</sup>, a development hastened by sixty-

<sup>1</sup> This is when the house of Savoy acquired the county of Nice, reunited to the main line of the

five years of warfare between Valois and Habsburg rulers beginning in 1494. However, scholars of political culture have turned their attention to smaller political units: To what degree could they be considered «sovereign»? How were their boundaries defined and rendered significant? How did political networks function within and amongst them? This research raises questions about how to define «state», examining for example the Imperial lords of northwestern Italy who claimed to be sovereigns and sometimes made marriage alliances with princely families. Matthias Schnettger has proposed the study of such polities by considering their relations to larger states and the origins of their political leadership, among other things, in what he calls a «microhistoire totale»<sup>2</sup>. The duchies of Lorraine and Bar offer examples of polities whose liminal status, overlapping jurisdictions, and territorial discontinuity contributed to a kind of historiographic blind spot in terms of their role in early modern politics and even their political morphology<sup>3</sup>.

dynasty the principality of Piedmont-Acaia, and successfully defended the *pays de Vaud*. The French crown acquired the Dauphiné in 1343, simultaneously recognizing the Republic of the Escartons in the Queyras. Between the late thirteenth and the late fifteenth centuries, the Swiss cantons and their associate members Valais and Grisons established their independence from the Empire and nearby powers. The Ossola valley, the Ticino, and the Valtellina fell under the domination of the Visconti, the Swiss, and the Grisons, respectively. In the central and eastern Alps the key date was 1363, when Rudolf of Habsburg acquired the county of Tyrol. The prince-bishops of Trent maneuvered within the Habsburg orbit to consolidate their power. North of the Brenner, the prince-archbishopric of Salzburg was effectively independent from 1328, though not until 1505 were the Wittelsbach able to unite Bavaria under the control of a single branch of the family. Finally, in the eastern Alps, the Habsburg lands were divided by the 1379 Treaty of Neuberg, permitting a cadet line to extend control over the Tyrol and the duchies of Carinthia, Styria, and Carniola. Within a few decades, the Venetian Republic was extending its reach into Friuli and the Julian Alps, conquering the Patriarchate of Aquileia in 1420.

<sup>2</sup> M. Schnettger, *Kleinstaaten in der Frühen Neuzeit: Konturen eines Forschungsfeldes*, in «Historische Zeitschrift», 2008, 286, 3, pp. 605-640: 639; on small states see also B.A. Raviola, *L'Europa dei piccoli stati. Dalla prima età moderna al declino dell'Antico Regime*, Roma, Carocci, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> W. Monter, *A Bewitched Duchy: Lorraine and Its Dukes, 1477-1736*, Genève, Droz, 2007, p. 17. Monter himself was snagged by some of these difficulties: in discussing the marriages of Duke Antoine's second son Nicolas de Vaudémont he fails to identify his second wife as Jeanne de Savoie-Nemours, and refers to her as «a French wife» (ivi, pp. 56-57). He also writes that in the 1560s Duke Charles III of Lorraine displayed a «fondness for French-style absolutism» which «caused friction with his subjects, because (like the newly-restored Duke of Savoy in 1560) he refused to take the customary oath confirming the privileges of the Estates» (ivi, pp. 59-60). It is not clear why the author would wish to qualify the effort to rule as an absolute prince as «French-style» while acknowledging the model provided by another, non-French prince.

This trend in the scholarship is helping to build an understanding of political culture that is less restricted by the distortions of anachronistic categories and focused instead on units of analysis that follow more closely the messier transregional and transcultural contexts of premodern Europe<sup>4</sup>. This work on small states and the ambiguity of political boundaries has been complemented by studies of the Renaissance nobility (in Italy and elsewhere) that has challenged the traditional views of the nobility as a coherent social group and of their relationship to the state. Massimo della Misericordia rejects the thesis of a northern Italian late medieval nobility that died out and was replaced by an urban, court-based elite, stressing instead cultural continuity as nobles in cities employed knightly ideas to differentiate themselves from other groups<sup>5</sup>. Angelantonio Spagnoletti has expanded this discussion in two useful ways, first by pointing to the existence of different kinds of feudal systems in Italy<sup>6</sup>, and second by discussing the emergence of a dynastic system encompassing the entire peninsula after Cateau-Cambrésis<sup>7</sup>. For his part, Claudio Donati drew attention to

<sup>4</sup> See K. Pomeranz, *Histories for a Less National Age*, in «American Historical Review», CXIX, 2014, 1, pp. 1-22; 2-3. This new approach emerged simultaneously in the 1990s in the US, the UK, Germany, and France, stressing connections and phenomena that crossed national boundaries, and eschewing «normative macro-models» and monocausal explanations. It had been anticipated in many ways by the *Annales* school, however; see B. Struck, K. Ferris, J. Revel, *Introduction: Space and Scale in Transnational History*, in *Size Matters: Scales and Spaces in Transnational and Comparative History*, special issue of «International History Review», XXXIII, 2011, 4, pp. 573-584; 573-575.

<sup>5</sup> Massimo Della Misericordia examines family chronicles in late medieval Alpine Lombardy that show the continued influence of noble ideals (service to princes and monarchs, hunting, jousting, and militarized residences) and an ideological investment by Italian elites who used castles and decorations to display their power in ways that corresponded to a changing political environment. See his *Gusti cavallereschi, stili residenziali e temi figurativi. Aspetti della cultura aristocratica nella Lombardia alpina alla fine del medioevo*, in «Quaderni storici», LI, 2016, 3, pp. 794-796; also Id., *Medioevo cavalleresco nelle memorie familiari dell'aristocrazia alpina lombarda*, in «Bollettino della Società Storica Valtellinese», LXVIII, 2015, pp. 7-17; 7-9.

<sup>6</sup> These included Imperial, Papal, and Spanish feudal arrangements, leading to confusion in terms of who was sovereign where, especially where other lords (the Fieschi, the counts of Gavi etc.) had state-like jurisdictions and claimed to be «signori separati». This situation was not unusual in the triangle between Florence, Genoa, and Milan, where there were feudal states belonging to the Sinibaldo, the Cybo, the Malaspina, and others. Spagnoletti thinks it useful to relate these small states to larger ones and to the Habsburgs, who could use the small states as leverage against regional states; see A. Spagnoletti, *Le dinastie italiane nella prima età moderna*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2003, pp. 14-16, 19-21.

<sup>7</sup> Spagnoletti traces the origins of this dynastic system to the death of Francesco II Sforza

how many different kinds of nobilities existed in Italy, in terms of their economic activities, how they interacted with Spain, and the rules defining nobility in various parts of the peninsula (which rendered «supranational institutions» that could confer nobility, like the Knights of Malta, more popular). For Donati, the Italian nobility was not homogenous, and should be studied in regional contexts<sup>8</sup>. He was interested in the fact that the heads

in 1535 and Habsburg acquisition of the duchy of Milan, which amplified the need to distinguish between state interests and the interests of one's house (ivi, pp. 28-29). Naples was part of this system and also, as a capital city without a royal court, a place where «noble courts proliferated» (J. Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan: Citizen Culture in Baroque Naples*, Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011, p. 172), and the same could be said of Rome and its cardinals' courts. The key turning point with respect to the structure of politics was 1559, according to Spagnoletti – a perspective that accords with early twentieth-century scholarship that stressed «Spanish preponderance». After that date, «si sarebbero chiusi tutti gli spazi per fuorusciti e signori desiderosi di costituirsi in stato: più che alla ricerca di territori su cui esercitare la propria autonoma sovranità, i signori senza stato avrebbero mirato all'acquisto di feudi nel regno di Napoli» (Spagnoletti, *Le dinastie*, cit., p. 36). The settlement of 1559 enabled Italian rulers to construct institutional support within their states by co-opting elites into this effort, according to Spagnoletti. But he also notes that, until the early eighteenth century, dynastic politics in Italy included noble families that may have enjoyed ties with other princely houses but did not rule over states of their own (ivi, pp. 37, 87).

<sup>8</sup> C. Donati, *The Profession of Arms and the Nobility in Spanish Italy: Some Considerations*, in *Spain in Italy: Politics, Society, and Religion 1500-1700*, ed. T.J. Dandele, J. Marino, Leiden, Brill, 2006, pp. 299-332: 300. For example, he wrote that political structure of the Sabaudian state resembled that of other European monarchies, and its great nobles were prestigious but lacked real political power which, according to him, was in the hands of the *bourgeois* jurists who held high office. See also C. Donati, *The Italian Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, in *The European Nobilities in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, vol. 1, *Western and Southern Europe*, ed. by H. Scott, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London-New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 286-321: 286, 290, 306-307. Sabaudian rulers supposedly «owed their titles and the subsequent consolidation of their authority to Charles V and Philip II», while Sabaudian nobles «derived from Spain the hierarchical system on which the noble class was built» (ivi, p. 288). John Marino would have agreed with Donati's point about regional differences, pointing to the peculiar situation in Naples where, if one was a citizen, the noble-commoner distinction was not made, «nobility» generally being tied to neighborhood. Gradually, though, within the kingdom, differences emerged between an older nobility of «traditional military virtues, birth, and blood», and new, self-made nobles who represented «office, worth, intelligence, and learning» (Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan*, cit., pp. 172, 236). Donati remarked on the divergent interpretations of northern/central and southern nobles, lamenting the fact that this historiographic division has reinforced «il dualismo tra un Centro-Nord terra d'elezione dei patriziati e un Sud mare feudale»: C. Donati, *Nobiltà e Stati nell'Italia della prima età moderna (con particolare attenzione a fonti archivistiche milanesi)*, in *Nobiltà e Stato in Piemonte. I Ferrero d'Ormea. Atti del convegno*

of several noble dynasties between 1530 and 1559 succeeded in creating «an acknowledged, autonomous space within the Italian dynastic system», while lamenting the paucity of attention given to feudal lords in Italy after 1559. He saw this as a byproduct of the exclusive attention given to the ways in which Italian nobles were subsumed into oligarchic territorial states during the later period. How did prominent northern Italian noble families lose their positions or shift their traditional identities during this period?<sup>9</sup> Spagnoletti has argued that Italian nobles had a different sensibility from their transalpine counterparts<sup>10</sup>. This position follows logically from the thesis of significant variation amongst the Italian nobility itself. But comparative scholarship on late medieval and early modern cities and their elites (including nobles) has not yet clearly identified the similarities and differences between these features in different European urban regions<sup>11</sup>. What is important to note is that in Italy and elsewhere nobles were flexible in terms of their relations with other elites and in their ability to engage

*Torino-Mondovì 3-5 ottobre 2001*, a cura di A. Merlotti, Torino, Zamorani, 2003, pp. 70-71. Scholars of southern Italy have studied relations between the nobility and the Spanish monarchy, and for northern Italy historians have begun to stress the importance of how princely courts created ties of dependence between the prince and urban nobles through the distribution of fiefs.

<sup>9</sup> Donati, *The Profession of Arms*, cit., pp. 307-308. Donati posits that this identity shift amongst the feudal nobility was linked to the presence of the Spanish and Imperial military apparatus, citing Pierino Belli's *De re militari et bello* as indicative of a new deference to sovereign rulers (pp. 308-309). His work on the Este di San Martino examined these questions in detail: *Una famiglia lombarda tra XVI e XVIII secolo: gli Este di San Martino e i loro feudi*, in *Archivi territori poteri in area estense (sec. XVI-XVIII)*, a cura di E. Fregni, Roma, Bulzoni, 1999. He showcased the role of Giustina Trivulzio, spouse of Sigismondo II, calling her death «il vertice massimo consentito a una famiglia privata, che non aveva avuto l'opportunità di crearsi, quanto ancora era possibile, uno "stato proprio"» (ivi, pp. 441-442 for quotation; also pp. 446-447).

<sup>10</sup> Spagnoletti, *Le dinastie italiane*, cit., p. 246. Spagnoletti argues that Italian nobles' willingness to give important positions and roles to princely bastards «era ritenuto un'anomalia al di là delle Alpi».

<sup>11</sup> B.A. Raviola suggested that the concept of «border» was different in Italy than elsewhere in early modern Europe, since state boundaries and «national» borders in Italy were different. But the same could be said of other parts of Europe, especially in the regions between France and the Empire. The other kinds of borders described by Raviola for Italy (geographic features like mountains, confessional boundaries, strategic passages etc.) could be found in other places, as could commercial routes that transected and extended out from the peninsula, creating an «immagine policentrica del concetto di frontiera». See B.A. Raviola, *Frontiere regionali, nazionali e storiografiche: bilancio di un progetto di ricerca e ipotesi di un suo sviluppo*, in «Rivista storica italiana», CXXI, 2009, 1, pp. 193-202: 193-194, 196-197.

simultaneously in princely service and in the promotion of their own dynasties. Jan Dumolyn has explained how the physical movement of noble and non-noble elites in the Low Countries contributed to the formation of new aristocratic networks in which the boundary demarcating nobility was blurred<sup>12</sup>. This Flemish view of nobles who moved easily between urban and rural contexts, serving the state while consolidating their ties with other powerful families (noble and non-noble), corresponds to the variegated picture of the Italian nobility who benefited from the continued prestige of their feudal status but could adapt as circumstances demanded. Scholarship on how nobles interacted with their suzerains has also emphasized complicating factors such as service to multiple rulers and other ways in which nobles successfully preserved their room for political maneuver. This obviously differed from place to place. In Lorraine, noble families such as the Mahuet dominated positions in the state bureaucracy for generations. Early modern Europe counted many more small states like Lorraine than large kingdoms, with nobilities that held to traditional practices but also exhibited a cosmopolitan awareness of European politics and the advantages offered by state service<sup>13</sup>. But local distinctiveness was not limited to small states; Jeroen Duindam has shown differences between court cultures, for example, in France and in the Empire<sup>14</sup>. Eric Hassler notes that the «environnement socio-politique de la monarchie des Habsbourg» was a fractured one, populated by nobles of hybrid juridical status for whom court position and marriage alliances were key factors, but whose relation to the crown could vary significantly according to

<sup>12</sup> J. Dumolyn agrees with W. Blockmans that the great nobility in Flanders were distinct from lesser nobles, who merged with urban elites. Dumolyn noted that non-noble proprietors of large farms who served as officers for local nobles could eventually rise into the nobility (J. Dumolyn, *Nobles, Patricians and Officers: The Making of a Regional Political Elite in Late Medieval Flanders*, in «Journal of Social History», XL, 2006, 2, pp. 431-452: 433, 437). Prior to the sixteenth century, «living nobly» was «widely accessible to commoners with a modicum of wealth and landed property», whereas «seigniorial lordship» was the real mark of distinction. Lifestyle differences as markers of noble status grew out of by the princely state's effort to control access to the nobility, according to F. Buylaert, W. De Clercq, J. Dumolyn, *Sumptuary Legislation, Material Culture and the Semiotics of 'vivre noblement' in the County of Flanders (14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries)*, in «Social History», XXXVI, 2011, 4, pp. 393-417: 395-396.

<sup>13</sup> C. Lipp, *Noble Strategies in an Early Modern Small State: The Mahuet of Lorraine*, Rochester (NY), University of Rochester Press, 2011, pp. 1-3.

<sup>14</sup> J. Duindam, *Vienna and Versailles: The Courts of Europe's Dynastic Rivals, 1550-1780*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

circumstances<sup>15</sup>. Across Europe, relations between nobles, rulers, and other social groups varied widely<sup>16</sup>.

But many historians have found evidence of the nobility's ability to carve out spaces of autonomy even while serving princes. Hilla Zmora describes nobles subject to the ruler of Ansbach-Kulmbach, to whom they lent large sums of money in return for appointments to key administrative posts, giving them considerable power over many of the ruler's lands. This authority was augmented by the fact that in such regions «there were multiple princes competing for nobles' allegiance»<sup>17</sup>. The Franconian prince thus «faced an uphill struggle in subjecting nobles to his exclusive authority»<sup>18</sup>. The «treason» of Charles de Bourbon (1523), Benjamin Deruelle argues, was viewed by his supporters as an honorable act by which Bourbon (who had been publicly dishonored by Francis I) reminded the king that their relationship was reciprocal<sup>19</sup>. Similar tendencies marked aristocrats in the Mughal Empire. Corinne Lefèvre found that nobles posed no ideological opposition to the claims of Emperor Jahangir but did not submit in any absolute way to the ruling dynasty. If the nobility ceased their outward fight

<sup>15</sup> E. Hassler, *Les Harrach face à la disgrâce. Les stratégies matrimoniales d'un lignage aristocratique autrichien à la fin du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, in «Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine», LXI, 2014, 2, pp. 176-201: 198.

<sup>16</sup> Spatial proximity helps explain why nobles in Lorraine were less autonomous from their rulers than were French nobles (C. Lipp, *Power and Politics in Early Modern Lorraine: Jean-François de Mahuet and the Grand Prévôté de Saint-Dié*, in «French Historical Studies», XXVI, 2003, 1, pp. 31-53: 43). In Venetian Crete, the patriciate was comprised not only of Venetians, but was more of a hybrid resulting from movement between Venice and Crete, and including landowners, merchants, and extended family members (M. O'Connell, *Men of Empire: Power and Negotiation in Venice's Maritime State*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009). The notion of «nobility» as an exclusive group arrived late (after 1600) to Genoa, where both old and new nobles absorbed members from lower social groups. During the seventeenth century, the nobility there renewed itself «molto debolmente» (E. Grendi, *I Balbi. Una famiglia genovese fra Spagna e Impero*, Torino, Einaudi, 1997, pp. 70, 75). In the English context, social mixing between groups of varied status was driven in part by the necessity for aristocratic families to establish London residences (I. Warren, *The English Landed Elite and the Social Environment of London c. 1580-1700: The Cradle of an Aristocratic Culture?*, in «English Historical Review», CXXVI, 2011, 518, pp. 44-74: 46-47, 61-62, 74).

<sup>17</sup> H. Zmora, *The Princely State and the Noble Family: Conflict and Co-operation in the Margraviates Ansbach-Kulmbach in the Early Sixteenth Century*, in «The Historical Journal», XLIX, 2006, 1, pp. 1-21: 1, 19-20.

<sup>18</sup> *Ivi*, p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> B. Deruelle, *De papier, de fer et de sang. Chevaliers et chevalerie à l'épreuve de la modernité (ca 1460-ca 1620)*, Paris, Publications de la Sorbonne, 2015, p. 333.

against the regime, «elle sut habilement exploiter les faiblesses de l'appareil d'État pour accroître son pouvoir dans les régions»<sup>20</sup>.

Families whose lands were situated in border areas could leverage their territorial position as they served great princes. Nobles whose lands were situated in the interstices of smaller states were often able to preserve their autonomy by reaching agreements with non-contiguous sovereigns against potential depredations from nearby neighbors<sup>21</sup>. The Stainville were a border family that employed strategies of «divided service» in the seventeenth century, with one son serving the French king throughout Europe, and another serving the duke of Lorraine as a courtier and diplomat<sup>22</sup>.

Asking questions about the political strategies of noble families operating in border areas invites consideration of how boundaries and space itself were conceptualized during the Renaissance. James Sheehan sees boundaries as becoming increasingly spatialized in early modern Europe, as the idea of *dominium* shifted from private to public law, which «required thinking about and organizing political space in a radically new way»<sup>23</sup>. By the seventeenth century there were perhaps two different ways of conceptualizing space: as absolute and given (Newton's view) and as relational and interpreted (Leibniz's view). While one way to think about space is as a cultural construction, one must remain cognizant of «the physicality of space [...] [its] materiality and the concrete experiences which take place in [it]»<sup>24</sup>. This is particularly true with respect to the political actions of great nobles

<sup>20</sup> C. Lefèvre, *Pouvoir et noblesse dans l'empire Moghol: perspectives du règne de Jahāngīr (1605-1627)*, in «Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales», LXII, 2007, 6, pp. 1287-1312: 1311.

<sup>21</sup> F. Cengarle, *Lordships, Fiefs and «Small States»*, in *The Italian Renaissance State*, ed. by A. Gamberini, I. Lazzarini, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012, pp. 284-303: 287; see also Raviola, *L'Europa dei piccoli stati*, cit. A similar dynamic operated even at the heart of the Empire, as Hassler has documented for members of the Viennese nobility who were direct vassals of the emperor and thus holders of an ambiguous position with respect to other European nobles and territorial princes (Hassler, *Les Harrach*, cit., pp. 176-177, 192-193). By the eighteenth century, this international outlook amongst many European nobles might even have grown stronger, not weaker (H. Scott, C. Storrs, *The Consolidation of Noble Power in Europe, c. 1600-1800*, in *The European Nobilities*, cit., pp. 1-60: 51).

<sup>22</sup> J. Spangler, *Points of Transferral: Mademoiselle de Guise's Will and the Transferability of Dynastic Identity*, in *Dynastic Identity in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by L. Geever, M. Marini, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, pp. 131-150: 141.

<sup>23</sup> J. Sheehan, *The Problem of Sovereignty in European History*, in «American Historical Review», CXI, 2006, 1, pp. 1-15: 5.

<sup>24</sup> P. Stock, *History and the Uses of Space*, in *The Uses of Space in Early Modern History*, ed. by P. Stock, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 1-18: 7.

who inhabited border regions. Analysis of these actions can contribute to understanding of whether early modern people, and especially nobles, understood and practiced space in historically specific ways<sup>25</sup>.

This article examines a few ways in which René de Challant interacted with a variety of rulers, nobles, and officials in the spaces of his transregional lands on either side of the Alps during the 1530s and 1540s. Its approach is biographical, which can make comparison difficult due to the need to respect the interpretive limit constituted by the sources on which it is based. But if we are to understand the political interactions of Renaissance nobles with suzerains and other actors in specific territorial contexts, then close contextualization is necessary. Kenneth Pomeranz has observed a parallel relationship between scales spatial and temporal analysis in the sense that studies of large areas tend to be situated over long periods of time, which can obscure the human element in historical understanding<sup>26</sup>. A new interest in «transnational biography»<sup>27</sup> promises to refocus attention on the role of the person as an historical actor while locating such persons in the multitude of spatial settings and interactional fields that characterized their lives, rather than privileging either local, national, or global scales of activity<sup>28</sup>.

The remainder of this essay examines a few specific episodes from René de Challant's biography: his engagement in Sabaudian-Swiss politics in the years around 1530, his litigation before tribunals in the marquisate of Monferrato and in Chambéry during roughly the same period, and his reflection in late 1545 on the financial administration of his various fiefs. It draws attention to the multiplicity of political actors engaged in these episodes, the frequently ambiguous role of state institutions therein, and the transregional nature of René's activities. The count of Challant seems

<sup>25</sup> Historians of early modern Europe have tended to focus on space in representational terms rather than as a site of practice. For example, Valerie Traub sees «spatialization» as both a cognitive process and a geopolitical phenomenon in her examination of how geographic places were depicted as female bodies by early modern cartographers and engravers (*History in the Present Tense: Feminist Theories, Spatialized Epistemologies, and Early Modern Embodiment*, in *Mapping Gendered Routes and Spaces in the Early Modern World*, ed. by M. Wiesner-Hanks, Farnham, Ashgate, 2015, pp. 15-54: 17-19).

<sup>26</sup> Pomeranz, *Histories*, cit., p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> L. Meneghello, *Jacob Moleschott – A Transnational Biography: Science, Politics, and Popularization in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Bielefeld, Transcript-Verlage, 2018; see also the academic conference on «Transnational Biography in Europe» sponsored by the European Society for the Study of English held in Brno (29 August-2 September 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Struck, Ferris, Revel, *Introduction*, cit., p. 577.

to have been guided by a double rule of service to suzerains and dedication to his own dynasty's autonomy – a rule taken from a rulebook that he and other nobles wrote themselves as they confronted the uncertainties of their times.

3. *René's role in Sabaudian-Swiss diplomacy, 1528-31.* As marshal of Savoie, one of René's key missions was overseeing relations with the Swiss cantons, with respect both to the political and religious status of Geneva, and to the myriad financial obligations owed by the duke of Savoy to Berne and Fribourg in particular. While Berne officially declared for the Reform in February 1528, Fribourg remained Catholic. Both, however, sought to curb Sabaudian influence over Geneva and fought tenaciously to ensure the repayment of loans that they had extended to the duke. By the late 1520s, public opinion in Geneva had shifted in favor of the Reformed religion and against the city's bishop, who was traditionally an appointee and strong ally of the duke of Savoy. The environment that René was tasked with managing was simultaneously urban and rural, and involved rapidly shifting dynamics amongst nobles, non-nobles, and sovereigns. René engaged in these exchanges both as the area's highest-ranking Sabaudian official and as a regional grandee with interests of his own to defend.

At about the time that René took up his charge in Chambéry, in spring 1528, a group of nobles who supported the dynasty's claims over Geneva formed an association, the order of *La Cuiller*, dedicated to re-establishing effective ducal control over the city and preserving its allegiance to traditional religion. A year later they unsuccessfully attempted to seize control of the city. Meanwhile, a council member named Michel Guillet, who rejected the Reform, had emerged as the leader of the «bons catholiques» on of the council. He began to play an increasingly prominent role in Genevan religious and financial politics. Guillet was also part of a consortium that offered, on behalf of the city, to farm episcopal revenues, and he served on municipal commissions appointed to interact with ecclesiastical institutions<sup>29</sup>. In summer 1529, the pope announced new taxes on ecclesiastical revenues, to be assessed by the cathedral chapter, for the purpose of fighting heresy in the Sabaudian lands and nearby regions,

<sup>29</sup> H. Naef, *Les origines de la réforme à Genève*, 2 vols., Genève, Droz, 1968 (1936), vol. 2, pp. 201, n. 2, 202, n. 2.

and named Pietro Gazino, bishop of Aosta, as collector<sup>30</sup>. Guillet himself also held revenues which included the tithes at Petit-Sacsonex, just outside of Geneva. These were among those affected, but the chapter saw fit to give him a rebate of three measures of wheat on the sums that he owed<sup>31</sup>.

During the same summer of 1529, Duke Charles III was heavily indebted to Swiss lenders, especially in Fribourg. He missed his August minimum payment deadline, only managing to deliver some money in November. In his efforts to see these debts paid, René depended on the brokerage of Jehan Guillet (brother of Michel)<sup>32</sup>. As payment was being effected, René learned from his officer Bellegarde and from the ducal governor of Vaud (Aymon de Genève-Lullin), that Michel Guillet was involved in some kind of dispute, and it soon became clear that he was under investigation by prosecutors in Vaud for reasons that the sources do not clearly establish. They seemed to involve the defenses of the town of Lausanne. René sent his cousin Charles de Challant-Fénis (lord of Villarsel), and other nobles to attend to the matter (since there were no legal officials available to send)<sup>33</sup>. By early December Guillet was on his way to Chambéry for a trial, and Lullin warned René about the problems that would arise if other officials were found guilty in this case, which could have strategic implications for the duke of Savoy. One concern was that the condemned officers would be forced to reveal certain orders that the duke of Savoy had given them. Another worry was what would happen if the cathedral canons of Lausanne joined forces with the Fribourgeois in the case, and possibly also with the Cistercian abbot of Hauterive (near Fribourg) – the case seemed to involve an accusation of corruption against Guillet, who had allegedly defrauded these ecclesiastical leaders. If Guillet were found guilty and his property were seized by the Fribourgeois clerics, it would (according to a treaty agreement) give them jurisdiction over the property that they acquired in ducal territory<sup>34</sup>. As

<sup>30</sup> Ivi, pp. 234-235, 235, n. 2.

<sup>31</sup> Ivi, pp. 235-236.

<sup>32</sup> G. Fornaseri, *Le lettere di Renato di Challant, governatore della Valle d'Aosta a Carlo II ed a Emanuele Filiberto*, Torino, Deputazione subalpina di storia patria, 1957, pp. 9-11, René to Charles III [hereafter, Ch III], Chambéry 9-XI-29.

<sup>33</sup> See ivi, pp. 14-15, René to Ch III, Chambéry 18-XI-29; ivi, pp. 16-17, René to Ch III, Chambéry 27-XI-29; ivi, pp. 18-21, René to Ch III, Chambéry 4-XII-29. Herminjard suggested that this had to do with a dispute between Michel Guillet and the cathedral chapter of Lausanne; see A.L. Herminjard, *Correspondance des réformateurs dans les pays de langue française*, 9 vols., Paris, M. Levy and G. Fischbacher, 1866-1897, vol. 8, p. 483.

<sup>34</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 18-21, René to Ch III, Chambéry 4-XII-29.

marshal of Savoie, René depended on the political influence and financial brokerage of the Guillet brothers to help maintain control over Geneva and to meet the duke's financial obligations to the Swiss. But Michel Guillet was an imperfect interlocutor whose indiscretions created a dilemma for René: see justice done at the expense of territorial and political advantage, or pardon Guillet while provoking the ire of key players on whom the duke (and René for his personal account) was financially and strategically dependent.

The oblique nature of René's correspondence makes it difficult to decipher these matters precisely, but the developments clearly worried him<sup>35</sup>. In the midst of these events, René was attending to a border dispute at the Pont de Beauvoisin (situated in the royal province of Dauphiné, just west of Chambéry), where armed nobles were trespassing on Sabaudian territory, and trying to organize exiles who had fled Geneva<sup>36</sup>. This border conflict continued at least until the following July, when Dauphiné officials prohibited the sale of food to the duke's subjects. At that point René and the rest of the council launched a retaliatory boycott «en tous voz pays de par deçà», informing Charles III that were he to visit Chambéry soon, he should be prepared for an absence of ripe melons or other fruit, except «ceux des haultes montaignes»<sup>37</sup>.

By December 1529 René was deep in discussions with Jean Guillet and key Fribourgeois officials (one of whom was Christophe Pavillard, to whom Charles III's ambassador to France, Pierre de la Forest lord of La Barre, owed over 3,000 *écus*)<sup>38</sup> to try to resolve the Guillet problem. René had determined that the main danger for the duke was that the property dimensions of the conflict could weaken his jurisdictional position, so he urged Charles III to take steps, even if expensive, to defend «votre bien et auctorité». Specifically, René advised the duke to acquire the property that the bishops of Lausanne (Sébastien de Montfalcon) and Geneva (Pierre de La Baume) held in Sabaudian territory<sup>39</sup>. René agreed to go to Lausanne to address these issues and suggesting forgiving a large fine that had been imposed on Guillet since otherwise «l'on ne pourroyt appointer le different entre votre dict chastellain de Nyon et luy» [we would be unable to settle the dispute between your castellan of Nyon and him]<sup>40</sup>.

<sup>35</sup> Ivi, pp. 9-11, René to Ch III, Chambéry 9-XI-29.

<sup>36</sup> Ivi, pp. 14-15, René to Ch III, Chambéry 18-XI-29.

<sup>37</sup> Ivi, pp. 69-71, René to Ch III, Chambéry 1-VII-30.

<sup>38</sup> Ivi, p. 38, René to Ch III, Chambéry 28-I-30.

<sup>39</sup> Ivi, pp. 23-24, René to Ch III, Chambéry 8-XII-29.

<sup>40</sup> Ivi, pp. 26-28, René to Ch III, Chambéry 27-XII-29.

The gist of the Guillet affair was that his problems (which may have resulted from his financial service to the duke) led to convictions which, if carried out, would have undermined the duke's interests in Geneva and the *pays de Vaud* at a critical moment. These were issues that neither Charles III nor René as his marshal of Savoie could resolve through military or judicial means. They were dependent on other local actors – non-nobles, nobles, ecclesiastical, municipal etc. – with differing consequences for the duke and for René. Additional local developments further complicated matters. In early January, René was faced with a crisis involving Count Jean II of Gruyère (René's first cousin once removed and the father-in-law of Villarsel). Gruyère had rendered a ruling as an independent arbiter in a dispute between Charles III (on one side) and Berne and Fribourg (on the other) about whether it was permissible for the Swiss cantons to form an alliance with Geneva. Gruyère had decided in favor of the duke, and the Fribourgeois responded by filing a suit before the bailiff of Vaud. Villarsel helped René attend to this dispute, reporting also on a recent assembly of pro-Sabaudian Vaudois nobles held in Lausanne<sup>41</sup>. Kinship, finance, property, jurisdiction and diplomacy intersected in multiple directions as René simultaneously promoted the duke's interests and took care not to damage his own.

In early 1530, René set out on a diplomatic mission to repair relations between the Bernese and the duke. He brought Lullin with him, although the governor of Vaud had not wanted to go to Berne, «à cause des estrapades de corde qu'il avoit faict donner à ceulx qui parloyent de la secte lutherienne» [because of the torture that he had applied to those who spoke about the Lutheran sect]<sup>42</sup>. In the city on the Aar they stressed Charles III's desire «de bien vivre et voisiner avec eulx». Johann von Erlach, Kaspar von Mülinen, Graffenried, and Naegli brought a message from the city's small and large councils to René and Lullin, in their lodgings. The Bernese claimed to reciprocate the duke's sentiments<sup>43</sup>. But they were playing a double game, and less than a week earlier had sent three articles to Charles III which demonstrated their «maulvais voulloir» toward him<sup>44</sup>. The Bernese demanded that they be «gectés et hors mys de fiances, qu'ilz ont faictes pour vous au pays des ligues» [released from their

<sup>41</sup> J.J. Hisely, *Histoire du comté de Gruyère*, Lausanne, Georges Bridel, 1857, vol. 2, pp. 280-283; Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 29-30, René to Ch III, Chambéry 5-I-30.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>44</sup> Ivi, pp. 48-49, René to Ch III, Berne 28-IV-30.

loan guarantees made on your behalf in the Swiss cantons]. The duke's failure to honor his repayment commitment happened «journallement», upon which «l'on vous y faict despance mettant ostaiges sur vous, que vous retourne à honte et à eulx aussi» [payments are made on your behalf for hostages taken as security, which redounds to your shame and theirs as well]. They threatened to take possession of all the property that the duke had pledged as security for the loans (which included the county of Romont and the town of Yverdon), if he failed to pay. They also suggested that the duke leave a resident in Berne for the task of paying the *censes* to those to whom they were due, which would be more efficient and less expensive for the duke. The Bernese condemned Charles III's recent decision to give the lash to anyone who spoke about «la secte lutherienne» and rejected his characterization of them as «hérétiques». The Bernese clarified that if the duke did not grant «liberté» to those in his lands who wish to follow «leur dicte secte, appelée évangélique», then «ilz ne traicteront point avec vous». Other friends of René told him that before entering into any agreement with the duke, the Bernese «vueillent que Lausanne et Genève soyent en liberté d'ensuyvre la loy qu'ilz voudront» [want Lausanne and Geneva to be free to follow the law of their choice]. René qualified this demand as «desordonnée» and advised the duke to ignore it. René knew Charles III's intention «de perséverer en la vraye foy que messeigneur voz prédécesseurs ont tenus et icelle maintenir, comme bon prince catholique» [continue in and maintain the true faith that my lords your predecessors had embraced, as a good Catholic prince]. Finally, the Bernese announced that they were breaking all their alliances with the duke and would soon notify him by official messenger<sup>45</sup>.

René then left Berne for Romont, where the Fribourgeois sent about twenty ambassadors (very expensive to support, noted René). First, the Fribourgeois seemed tractable with respect to the count of Gruyère<sup>46</sup>. The meetings went well, and René asked the duke to send money to distribute to the envoys from Fribourg, and to the lord of Châtel St Denis (Villarsel), who «a prins beaucoup de poyne en ce affere» [exerted himself significantly in this matter]<sup>47</sup>. Villarsel and Antoine Piochet, a ducal official from Chambéry, were there also and discussed a dispute between Charles III

<sup>45</sup> Ivi, pp. 49-53, René to Ch III, Romont, 4-V-30.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>47</sup> Ivi, pp. 53-54, René to Ch III, Romont, 4 to 7-V-30; also ivi, p. 55 (first of two letters), René to Ch III, Romont 7-V-30.

and Michel Mangerod, baron de La Sarraz, a matter which could be settled if the duke would send «ung homme de robbe longue avec vos droictz» [a learned attorney along with proofs of your rights]<sup>48</sup>. The baron de La Sarraz had inherited this fief from his uncle, but this was then contested by his uncle's cousin Jacques de Gingins. The Vaud estates supported Mangerod's claim, with the proviso that if he had no male descendants the barony would revert to the cousin's family. In 1542 the barony was acquired by François de Gingins when he married Mangerod's widow and heiress, Claude de Gilliers<sup>49</sup>. One might be tempted to characterize René's missions to Berne and Romont as examples of feudal nobles negotiating with urban patricians, but in fact the lords of Berne and Fribourg enjoyed landed interests and kinship ties across the western Swiss plateau. René's correspondence reveals how religious differences created obstacles, but also how such disagreements were closely tied to politics and not seen as intractable. René's activity as the agent of Charles III was also facilitated by his ties of family and friendship to other lords in the area, in ways that would have long-term implications for his own political position there. Following the meeting with the Fribourg envoys, «veu que je ne faisais rien à Romont», René went to his own lordship of Valangin, where he met Kaspar von Mülinen<sup>50</sup> and the lord of Collombier. Here again the personal and the official overlapped, as René accompanied them to some lands on which the duke had constituted a rent for which Mülinen and Collombier had stood as security. Although they held official positions in Berne, they had acted privately in this respect. They warned that failure by the duke to service his debt would result in the taking of hostages whose daily maintenance would cost the duke an extra thirty-six gold florins per day, followed by the seizure of his property at the end of six weeks. René urged Charles III to consider that if this happened, a chain reaction would follow and creditors would seize the duke's mortgaged lands everywhere. To

<sup>48</sup> Ivi, pp. 49-53, René to Ch III, Romont, 4-V-30.

<sup>49</sup> See P.-R. Monbaron, *La baronnie de La Sarraz et la Maison de Gingins sous l'Ancien Régime bernois (1536-1798)*, in «Château de La Sarraz», 1983, pp. 7-17 and M.L. de Charrière, *Les dynastes de La-Sarra, maison de Grandson*, in «Mémoires et documents publiés par la société d'histoire de la Suisse romande», XXVIII, 1873, pp. 342-522: 489.

<sup>50</sup> A Bernese Catholic who carried out a number of diplomatic missions for Berne and underwrote some of the duke's loans; see A. Hüsey, *Kaspar von Mülinen*, in «Dictionnaire Historique de la Suisse», 2009, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/016685/2009-01-15/>; A. Segre, *Documenti di storia sabauda dal 1510 al 1536*, in «Miscellanea di Storia Italiana», XXXIX, 1903, Series III, Vol. VIII, pp. 3-296: 289.

forestall this, René sent his secretary Perret to meet with the holders of the rents in Lucerne. He hoped to buy two weeks' time and urged the duke in the meantime to send money. By the end of that time frame René's officer Bellegarde had obtained 1,800 *écus* from the Lucernois and transferred them to Perret. René exhorted the duke to thank the secretary of Lucerne and to «donner ordre» in the matter, «vheu la cryeryé que journallement ses gens en font avec la coustange de dompmaige qu'il vous porte» [given the daily complaints of these people and the cost and damage that it causes for you]<sup>51</sup>. René understood how the duke's debts were tied to Sabaudian territorial interests through the potential loss of specific mortgaged lands. He did what he could to make Charles III understand what he was facing, but the duke seemed unable to find new sources of revenue with which to repay his debts.

Soon thereafter René asked Charles III to relieve him from future diplomatic trips to «Allemaigne» [the Germanophone cantons]. Such missions required René to spend great sums of money to maintain his prestige as a ducal ambassador (and as a powerful lord in his own right). Despite such expenses, nothing ever seemed to get settled – Lullin seemed better attuned to such tasks anyway, he wrote. Being freed of such duties would enable him to attend to his other obligations outside of the Swiss area, such as maintaining the provisioning and good repair of the duke's forts in the Valle d'Aosta, such as Bard<sup>52</sup>. As if to illustrate these frustrations, word arrived that the Fribourgeois were suddenly outraged at some small change in the agreement that had been reached a month earlier («incontinent se mutinarent» [they immediately mutinied]). René insisted that it was not their intention to «deffaire nulle alliance», but on the contrary to strengthen it. Nonetheless the Fribourgeois refused to seal the agreement, and one of them later told René secretly that this was a contrivance to avoid taking any action that might prejudice their claims against the count of Gruyère. Ultimately, all that could be attained was the scheduling of a new meeting in Fribourg, once the plague outbreak there ended («journallement s'y meurent 25 ou 26 personnes de peste»). René decided to send Lullin, who had «beaucoup de secrectz qu'il vous vouldroyt desclairer» [many secrets that he wanted to tell you], about the Gruyère case and other things, to

<sup>51</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., p. 56, René to Ch III, Valangin 12-V-30; *ivi*, p. 60, René to Ch III, Chambéry 1-VI-30.

<sup>52</sup> *Ivi*, p. 60, René to Ch III, Moudon 28-V-30.

see the duke. Before leaving Moudon René also met with the baron de La Sarraz who requested arbitration in a dispute with the duke over the locality of Constantine [?]<sup>53</sup>.

Sensing the futility of continuing to invest his own political and financial capital on the duke's behalf in the face of ever-increasing Swiss demands and Charles III's lack of responsiveness, René declared in June 1530 that he would be unable to continue to borrow money on behalf of the duke. «Je ne supporte plus telz intérestz que j'ay faict pour le passé» [I can no longer afford the interest payments that I have paid in the past], he wrote, and when the duke offered to grant René the additional office of lieutenant, René expressed skepticism that the duke would be able to pay the stipend. He wanted to know the source of his wages for this office: already there was little revenue deriving from fines in Chambéry since «l'argant s'employt aillieurs pour voz afferez» [the money is being used elsewhere for your affairs]. If he were to be given this appointment, René requested «très humblement m'assigner mon dict estat sur la ferme des services du conseil de ceste ville, affin que j'en puisse ester contanté et que par ce moyen je puisse payer mes créditeurs et provisionnaires d'icy» [very humbly that you assign my wages to the revenues of the town council of Chambéry, so that I can receive payment and thus be able to pay my creditors and furnishers here]<sup>54</sup>. In the interim, René did offer to continue to help broker loans for Charles III, without taking on the loans himself. To this end he sent the son of the secretary of the city of Lucerne to court, to «vous faire trouver argent à cense, si besoiing en avez» [to find creditors willing to purchase rents from you, if you need some]. For his part, though, the duke would need to maintain good relations with contacts like the family of the deceased *Burgermeister* of Basel, Heinrich Meltinger, for whom payment was needed from the duke to keep their creditors at bay<sup>55</sup>. René had reached the limit of what he was willing to do as the duke's officer, cognizant of the need to protect his own credit amongst potential Swiss lenders and allies.

Charles III heeded René's request, and appointed Lullin and others as his envoys to the Swiss; René suggested that he include among them Bellegarde,

<sup>53</sup> Ivi, René to Ch III, Chambéry 1-VI-30; see also ivi, pp. 69-71, René to Ch III, Chambéry 1-VII-30.

<sup>54</sup> Ivi, pp. 63-64, René to Ch III, Chambéry 3-VI-30.

<sup>55</sup> Ivi, p. 66, René to Ch III, Chambéry 11-VI-30; see also A. Burckhardt, *Die Basler Bürgermeister von 1252 bis zur Reformation*, in «Basler Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Altertums-kunde», XXIII, 1925, 12, pp. 1-29.

«pour ce qu'il est aultant instruict des afferez que homme du monde» [since he is as well informed about these matters as anyone could be]. His other advice was that the duke keep his promises to the «particulliers de Fribourg», so that «une aultrefois, si vous avies affere d'eulx, qu'ils s'employassent de bon cueur à vous fere service» [in the future, if you might need them, they will engage themselves willingly in your service]<sup>56</sup>. The envoys reported that they had extended the talks for another month, at which point the duke's presence would be required in order to conclude the matter<sup>57</sup>. The duke also seemed to agree with René about continuing to support the Meltinger family in Basel and encouraged him to write to the heirs asking them to be patient «et se contenter du payement des censes jusques à ce que vous poysiez satisfere au principal» [and to be happy with the rent payments until you are able to reimburse them for the principal]<sup>58</sup>.

Just as René seemed to be successfully extricating himself from some of the thornier issues in Sabaudian-Swiss relations, Michel Guillet reappeared on the scene in June 1530 to cause more headaches. He and a Fribourgeois captain named Cheseaux captured a certain Jean Pouz, a.k.a. Le Merloz, due to damages caused by Pouz on Guillet's property. Pouz was placed in the episcopal prison in Geneva, judged, and decapitated. The cathedral chapter of Lausanne considered this abusive (presumably on jurisdictional grounds), as did many Vaudois nobles, while Fribourg supported Guillet<sup>59</sup>. The uproar caused by this event continued that fall when, between 26 September and 3 October, Sabaudian soldiers began to crisscross the countryside near Geneva. It was unclear whether this deployment had been officially ordered, and if so by whom. The Genevan councils sounded the alarm and sent messengers to Berne and Fribourg. The soldiers were burning farms and preparing to attack when suddenly they were instructed to retreat, and it was later learned that the bishop had been behind the maneuver, undertaken by the nobles of *La Cuiller* and led by Baron Michel de La Sarraz. In the meantime, not only Berne and Fribourg, but also Soleure and Neuchâtel had sent troops to defend the city. The Genevans sent their own militia to engage with those of *La Cuiller* and defeated them at Meyrin (8 October), killing about sixty people, before sacking the

<sup>56</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 67-68, René to Ch III, Chambéry 17-VI-30.

<sup>57</sup> Ivi, pp. 71-72, René to Ch III, Chambéry 4-VII-30.

<sup>58</sup> Ivi, pp. 69-71, René to Ch III, Chambéry 1-VII-30.

<sup>59</sup> Naef, *Les origines*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 247-248, n. 2.

Cistercian convent of Bellerive<sup>60</sup>. On 10 October, the Swiss forces entered Geneva: 14,000 men under the command of Hans d'Erlach of Berne, many of whose troops established their camp on ducal territory<sup>61</sup>. Once more, a coterie of actors had taken initiatives that created a strategic crisis for the duke and for René, demonstrating the wide room for maneuver enjoyed by nobles, patricians, cities, clerics, and other associations in this unstable political environment.

In Geneva and nearby, ecclesiastical buildings were pillaged. René wrote from Cruseilles (about twenty kilometers from Geneva) about the «enormes maux et pileries que les gens de ceulx de Berne et Fribourg ont faict à voz subjectz en vos pays» [the enormous harm and pillaging carried out by those of Berne and Fribourg against your subjects in your country], and about the continued burning of houses, despite the fact that the duke «n'estes nullement consentant de l'emprinse faicte contre la cite de Genève» [had in no way consented to the action taken against the city of Geneva]. René urged Charles III to demand reparations for these damages. Envoys from Basel and Valais gave René a list of what the Bernese and Fribourgeois required before they would withdraw, but their talks were inconclusive, and René condemned «la mauvaïse volonté qu'ilz [the Swiss] ont de gaster votre pays» [the evil desire that the Swiss have to ruin your country]<sup>62</sup>. Perhaps the Swiss reasoned that by damaging ducal lands in Savoie they would make it more difficult for the duke to make payments on his Swiss debts and easier for them to seize his property in Vaud.

On 19 October the Swiss and ducal envoys signed a peace agreement at St Julien, with terms that mortgaged the pays de Vaud to Berne and Fribourg, possession of which would be taken by them should the duke again threaten Geneva's safety<sup>63</sup>. René did not participate in these talks and seems to have gone to Valangin about a week before, apparently to make sure that his lands there were safe<sup>64</sup>. He seemed to be removing himself even more from Sabaudian policy, although he assured Charles III of his continued desire to serve, writing that «vous n'aves subject, ny serviteur qui de meilleur cuer vous vouldist obéir» [you have neither subject nor servant more willing to

<sup>60</sup> Ivi, pp. 253-256.

<sup>61</sup> Ivi, pp. 257-258.

<sup>62</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 76-77, René to Ch III, Cruseilles 11-X-30.

<sup>63</sup> Naef, *Les origines*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 259-61.

<sup>64</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 78-81, René to Ch III, Chambéry 20-X-30 (mentions returning from Valangin and meeting a Bernese messenger at St Julien).

obey you]. But he also explained that «pour l'office qu'il vous a pleu me donner qu'il ne fault représantant votre personne de deçà que je les voyse n'acquecter» [regarding the office that it pleased you to give me, I must not, as the representative of your person on this side of the mountains, see them agree to the accord]<sup>65</sup>. He viewed the agreement as unfair and therefore dishonorable, leaving the negotiation to lower-level officials. He was convinced that other political disputes had created snags and prevented an equitable settlement. For example, he pointed out that «l'affere de Vingard [...] c'est celluy qui donne plus d'empesche à voz afferez» [the Wingarten affair [...] is the one that is causing the most problems for your affairs]<sup>66</sup>. This was apparently a reference to Wolfgang von Wingarten, whose father Hans, a leading Bernese official and military commander, had died of the plague two months earlier and who was himself a Bernese councillor and serial adulterer<sup>67</sup>. René also identified a dispute between Baron Marin de Montchenu and Antoine de Cusinens, lord of Challes, who had «desià faict gros amatz de gens d'ung coste et aultre pour fere oeuvre de faict» [raised large numbers of troops on one side and the other in order to settle matters by force]. Perhaps these two had been responsible for initiating hostilities to begin with; whatever the case, René made haste to summon them to Chambéry where he hoped, with the assistance of other lords, to «vuyder ceste matière» [resolve this matter]<sup>68</sup>.

René's main concern about the St Julien accord was that «votre pays de Vaud est ypotéqué pour le dict fiancement» [your country of Vaud is mortgaged as security]. This forced the duke to accede to the Swiss demands; otherwise «ilz pourroyent invahir et si saisir de votre dict pays, qui seroit mal aisé à recouvrer, considéré la grosse envye, qu'ilz ont heu de bons temps y mettre le pied» [they could invade and seize your said country, which would be difficult to reconquer, given their long-held great desire to gain a foothold there]<sup>69</sup>. René urged Charles III to send an embassy to Berne to try to re-establish friendship ties. Only this would permit them to resolve the problem of finding other individuals or groups to underwrite Sabaudian loans: neither «les villes lutheriennes» allied with

<sup>65</sup> Ivi, pp. 77-78, René to Ch III, Chambéry 19-X-30.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>67</sup> A. Hüsey, *Wolfgang von Wingarten*, in «Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse», 2013, <https://hls-dhs-dss.ch/fr/articles/017315/2012-04-19/>.

<sup>68</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 77-78, René to Ch III, Chambéry 19-X-30.

<sup>69</sup> Ivi, pp. 78-81, René to Ch III, Chambéry 20-X-30.

Berne would be willing, nor would Basel agree to anyone not approved by Berne, «actendu qu'ilz tirent une mesme corde» [since both rely on the same backers]. For this reason, it was crucial to work with the Small Council in Berne to address the matter of the «banderet Vingarte», which had had and would continue to have a negative knock-on effect if the duke did not engage with it (Wingarten seems to have been a creditor whose support was crucial but dependent on being paid)<sup>70</sup>. René's local knowledge gave him an understanding of how specific sets of relationships and circumstances affected the duke's larger political and financial position. It also made him familiar with an environment in which he would continue to operate as lord of Valangin. Unfortunately for the house of Savoy, it seemed as though the duke and his advisers in Turin were unable or unwilling to engage with the variety of actors whose cooperation was crucial if they were to secure their strategic objectives.

René continued to advise the duke that the financial issue was the key to making progress with Berne. He recommended sending «homme scavant et d'importance» [a knowledgeable and important person] to negotiate with them about this, someone who would «avoir le mot en guet tel que vous scaves qu'il fault à ces gens, car il y a bien affere à se scavoir guyder avec eulx, vheu le peu de raison qu'ilz usent» [know what kinds of language to use with these people, since knowing how to manage them is not easy, given their lack of reason]. Some Genevan exiles were asking the duke to appeal to Rome, but René counseled against this, «vheu le mauvais vouloir qu'ilz ont contre les gens d'église, que leur donroit occassion d'ensuyvre leur malvaie entreprise» [given their bad will toward clerics, which would give them an opportunity to pursue their evil project]. He also, again, explained his disinclination to get involved in the Swiss negotiations himself, explaining that «s'ilz [the Swiss] sont une foyz faschés de moy, ilz vouldroyent puy apprés que vous mesmes prinsies le peinne de souvant les aller veoir» [if the Swiss become angry at me, they will then want that you yourself make the effort to come see them, frequently]. However, if René were relieved from the office that he currently held, representing the duke's person, he would then be willing to go («non representant votre personne de deçà, je seray

<sup>70</sup> The agreement required the duke to pay 368 *écus* by the end of October. René's lieutenant Bellegarde would be held hostage if the duke failed to pay, «que ne vous seroit gros honneur». Other Bernese military leaders threatened «grosse mutination» if the rents owed to them by the duke were not paid (*ibidem*).

prest dy faire des voyages» [if I were not representing your person on this side of the mountains, I would be ready to travel as necessary]]<sup>71</sup>.

But René was still marshal of Savoie, and as such continued to confront a host of other problems in the territories under his jurisdiction. As had been the case a year earlier<sup>72</sup>, in fall 1530 the duke renewed prohibitions against exporting any grain from Sabaudian territory. This provisioning crisis stemmed both to poor harvests and to the presence of so many Swiss troops on the duke's lands. Unsurprisingly, various institutions claimed exemptions from this prohibition. For example, the Celestine monastery in Lyon claimed privileges from the duke to import grain from its holdings in Bresse, despite the prohibitions. René and the ducal council in Chambéry advised that Charles III override this privilege for now, since otherwise «ceulx de Mascon et plusieurs aultres gens d'église, qui ont des rantes en votre pays de Bresse, voudroyent fere le semblable» [those of Mâcon and many other clerics who collect rents in your country of Bresse would want to do the same], and this would drain an enormous amount of grain from the duke's lands, driving prices even higher, such that «voz puvres subgettz seroyent foullés» [your poor subjects would ravaged]<sup>73</sup>.

In late October a Bernese messenger reminded René that if the duke did not pay the amounts established at St Julien, «ilz s'en prandront sur le pays de Vaud, qui leur est à ceste occasion ypothéqué» [they will collect from Vaud, which has been mortgaged to them for this reason]<sup>74</sup>. René again urged Charles III to «donner ordre» who «Vingard», since he was the one «qui mest en ruyne tous les aultres» [who causes problems for everyone else]. Nothing less was to be expected of this person, «attendu la nature et credit de l'homme». The duke's treasurer Louis de la Ravoire promised to pay the amounts demanded by the Bernese. René also identified a specific creditor in Lyon whose demands had to be satisfied to ensure that the payment could be made in time; otherwise «tout le reste de vous affaire porront tunber en ruygne» [all of your other affairs could be ruined]<sup>75</sup>. Perhaps sensing that a ducal bankruptcy and a Swiss invasion was inevitable, René also reported on the state of the castle and defenses at Yverdon, where he

<sup>71</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>72</sup> Ivi, pp. 9-11, René to Ch III, Chambéry 9-XI-29.

<sup>73</sup> Ivi, p. 82, René to Ch III, Chambéry 26-X-30.

<sup>74</sup> Ivi, pp. 83-84, René to Ch III, Chambéry 30-X-30.

<sup>75</sup> Fornaseri refers to a Lyonnais financier named «Levin Lorydian», but this appears to be a paleographic error (*ibidem*.)

had recently traveled. The town walls near the lake were in good shape, but the other side was weak and vulnerable to attack and would cost 4,000 écus to repair. The inhabitants were already complaining of being over-taxed, and while the duke had given some money for reparations, it was tied up in a conflict between the duke's commissioner and the local military commander<sup>76</sup>.

In November, Charles III instructed René and other officials regarding an upcoming conference at Payerne, where the St Julien accord was to be confirmed<sup>77</sup>. René seems to have been in Valangin (not far from Payerne) in mid-November<sup>78</sup>. His correspondence shows his strong opposition to the whole set of arrangements with the Swiss. The deal required Charles III to pay a war indemnity of 21,000 écus, a third of which the Swiss would return to Geneva<sup>79</sup>. In the meantime, René warned the duke about continued Bernese actions to strengthen the Reform in Lausanne by sending preachers there illicitly, laying the groundwork to turn the city into a canton. In René's view, the duke had to respond, «comme seluyt a qui appartient l'aulte seigneurie et souveraynite de Lausanne» [as he who holds the high lordship and sovereignty over Lausanne], and also over «des villages resortant a Lausanne» [the villages dependent on it]. René recommended appointing some of the «principaulx de son hostel et pays agreable a monseigneur de Lausanne» [some of the key Vaudois members of your household who are friendly with the bishop] to go see the bishop

<sup>76</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>77</sup> Archives Historiques Régionales d'Aoste [hereafter, AHR], *Fonds Challant* [hereafter, FC] 26, n. 28, instructions dated 20-XI-30; see *ivi*, FC 247, n. 15 for another copy, also F.-G. Frutaz, *Notes sur René de Challant et sur le passage de Calvin dans la Vallée d'Aoste*, in «Musée neuchâtelois», XLI, 1904, pp. 242-267: 246.

<sup>78</sup> He held his «audiences generalles», or judicial sessions and invited various local dignitaries to attend; see Archives d'État de Neuchâtel (hereafter, AEN), *Archives seigneuriales*, fasc. R5.10, uuu, René to castellan of Landeron, 9-XI-30; *ivi*, ttt, René to castellan of Boudry, 9-XI-30; *ivi*, sss, René to Canon Jehan de Cortonay, curé of St Blaise, 10-XI-30. Note, however, that in each of these three documents, the year (1530) was written in pencil by a later hand on the back of the letters.

<sup>79</sup> Naef, *Les origines*, cit., vol. 2, p. 264. According to Pierre Lambert de La Croix, president of the *Chambre des comptes* and author of a set of memoirs about the 1530s, the Sabaudian envoys «approuvarent» these acts, «dont [le duc] fust fort irrité sur eulx, disant ne leur avoir donné tel pouvoir de consentir a ce acte qui luy estoit si preiudiciable, d'autant qu'ilz hypothequoient le pays de Vaud» (*Mémoires de Pierre Lambert*, in *Monumenta Historiae Patriae edita iussu Regis Caroli Alberti Scriptorum*, vol. 1, Torino, Regio Tipographeo, 1840, pp. 502-503).

and persuade him that the threat to both his temporal and spiritual power was real unless he and the Lausannois accepted ducal authority<sup>80</sup>. In early 1531 the Genevan council sold the episcopal property that it had seized in October, definitively rejected the duke's jurisdiction over the city's criminal affairs and seized fiscal authority<sup>81</sup>. «Cest affere [qui] mérite bon advys» [This matter deserves attention and advice], wrote René to the duke, «vheu qu'il concerne votre bien et estat» [since it relates to your patrimony and state]<sup>82</sup>. He met Charles III in Piedmont in April<sup>83</sup> but we have no record of the conversation between the two.

4. *René's engagement with princely judicial institutions.* In the midst of his efforts to promote Sabaudian interests (and his own) in his interactions with Berne, Fribourg, and a variety of Vaudois nobles and clerics, René's enemies were formulating criminal proceedings against him in Chambéry, the seat of his office as marshal of Savoie. The events surrounding this episode help demonstrate the institutional fragmentation of the Renaissance «state», the way in which nobles were forced to engage with contemporary legal cultures, and the variety of supporters and detractors with which great lords had to contend.

Soon after he left Savoie, René was accused (June 1531) of having carried out an «invasion violente» of a house belonging to Aubert Veillet, a ducal secretary. Veillet testified that, «sachant que j'en estoyt vray possesseur» [knowing that I held lawful possession], René subsequently expelled Veillet's household servants<sup>84</sup>. Trouble between René and Veillet had been simmering for a while. In May 1530 the count of Challant wrote to the duke of Savoy to thank him for a favorable sentence rendered against Veillet, who had decided to «me turber et donner empesche en mes biens des Moulins» [bother me and prevent me from enjoying my property in Moulins], where, following the duke's decision, René had «fait culture et semer les terres et possessions, prétendant comme la rayson veult, les recueillir sans aulcun contredit, ny turbation quelconque» [planted and cultivated the lands and possessions, intending to harvest without any opposition, as was his right].

<sup>80</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 28-29, René to Ch III, Chambéry (?)–XII-30.

<sup>81</sup> Naef, *Les origines*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 265-266.

<sup>82</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 85-86, René to Ch III, Chambéry 29-I-31.

<sup>83</sup> Archivio di Stato di Mantova, *Archivio Gonzaga*, b. 747, c. 15, René to Federico II Gonzaga, Casale 16-IV-31.

<sup>84</sup> AEN, AS, fasc. K6, n. 28, ducal response to petition dated 26-VI-31.

He wanted to let the duke know about Veillet's continued troublemaking<sup>85</sup>. Seven or eight months later, Veillet was implicated in another legal battle with Claude Collier and Bonne Pigniere. The former would eventually work for René and play a key role in his assertion of sovereignty over Valangin. In 1525 Collier had been implicated in some kind of poisoning plot at St Pierre d'Albigny, in Savoie. He fled and, under René's protection, gave the count all his property. René thus ended up with a copy of the trial record<sup>86</sup>. Then in 1529 René mentioned Collier in a letter to the duke of Savoy; in November of that year the bishop of Grenoble had decided to give Collier's property (here he was identified as a priest) to Charles III<sup>87</sup>. Perhaps Collier had been convicted in the earlier case and benefited from a light sentence thanks to the intervention of René. By 1534 or so, he was with René in Valangin and by 1537 was named provost of the collegial church there. Collier and Pigniere lost their case against Veillet, but René persisted in supporting them, perhaps because he had some claims over their property<sup>88</sup>. In spring 1531 he petitioned the duke for protection of these claims and received a favorable response<sup>89</sup>.

According to Veillet's accusation, days after receiving this confirmation from Charles III, men working for René burst into his house and «expulsa par aulcuns temps mes serviteurs et ouvriers», who only returned following action taken by the duke's council. Veillet appealed to the council to confirm his earlier victory against Collier and Pigniere and to prohibit René from «me troubler ou donner aulcun destourbe et enpeschement esd' biens» [troubling me or creating any disturbance or obstacle to the enjoyment of my said property]. He claimed that he was «vray possesseur», according to the earlier decision, and that the documents that René had employed in the case were drawn up by a certain Guy Treppier who was not a legitimate notary anyway. René returned to Chambéry in mid-July

<sup>85</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., p. 59, René to Ch III, Aymavilles 26-V-30.

<sup>86</sup> See AEN, *AS*, fasc. C1.8, for 1525 register; also G.-A. Matile, *Histoire de la seigneurie de Valangin jusqu'à sa réunion à la directe en 1592*, Neuchâtel, James Attinger, 1852, pp. 249-250.

<sup>87</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., p. 14, René to Ch III, Chambéry (?) -XI-29.

<sup>88</sup> AEN, *AS*, fasc. K16, n. 26, register of Veillet litigation dated 30-VI-31. Perhaps René had sold his property in Moulins to Collier and Pigniere, and Veillet was continuing to challenge their rights to it despite the 1530 verdict.

<sup>89</sup> Ivi, n. 28, ducal response to René petition dated 26-VI-31. This response was co-signed by Piossasco, Pierre Gorreti, Jo' Ger'o Malopera, Pyo'o de Collo [Pierre du Coux?] Francesco Resiardi, Francesco Bovet, and Panperimi Arbvio [?].

and submitted testimony. He simply desired to «tenir paisiblement ce que a luy appertient» [hold peacefully that which belongs to him], requesting a ducal declaration naming him «vray seigneur util propriétaire et legitime possesseur des biens» [true lord, holder of use rights, and legitimate possessor of the proeprty]. At first it appeared that the case was to have been heard before the duke himself. However, when it became clear that the president of the council would hear it, René's attorney protested (4 August) that had the count known this, he would have not remained in person in Chambéry, but would have sent others to represent him. The distinction between appearing before the duke and appearing before the president was crucial from the perspective of René's honor. The next day Veillet accused René's procurator Bernard Boulet of failing to appear before the *Chambre des comptes*<sup>90</sup>.

In response to circumstances that surely seemed humiliating, René again appealed directly to the duke, pointing out that he was not able to relinquish his claims to the property, for three main reasons. First, he had learned that Veillet was spreading the rumor that «leur est esté fait forsse, violence, laressin et aultres prepos» [force, violence, larceny, and other things had been inflicted upon him], whereas everyone knew that René had done nothing unlawful; for this reason, René sought a judicial resolution. Second, the case should be resolved «par cognoycence» [according to expert opinion], legally, and not by other means, «devant jens docte, non suspect, elleu par la parttye averse avecques les myens [...] devant le conseyl de set ville» [before learned, unbiased men, elected by the two sides [...] before the town council]. René pledged to resist those who «me veulle faire reculler de mon droit sens cognoyssance judiciaire» [want me to back down from my rights without judicial examination of the case]. Third, René claimed that «le status dominical n'ordongne poin que en tel cas l'on doige faire reduitte» [lordly status in no way requires that such cases should be set aside]. He struggled to understand «pour quoy Monseigneur ne me laisse en justice comme dessus» [why my lord the duke will not permit justice to run its course for me as above], and asked the duke to «me faire de que ferryes aulx moindre de vous sugetz, me laysser en cognoysance de justice au lieu là où nous aistre, affin que justice en face son cours et deveoir»

<sup>90</sup> Ivi, n. 26, register of Veillet litigation dated 30-VI-31. The president of the *Chambre des comptes* was Dominique de La Croix and whose other members included Pierre Lambert, Sybuet Alardet, Francois P'vesseti [?], Donato Foyssia, and Antoine Rubeat.

[treat me as you would the least of your subjects by permitting the judicial process to unfold where we are now, so that justice may take its dutiful course]. Without this, «le tout me retournerroijt à gros deshonneur et petite reputation» [the whole episode will cause me great dishonor and ill repute]. He urged the Charles III not to make him «reculler en rien de mon droibt» [back down from my rights in any way], and hoped that the duke would ensure «que mon hgneur et reputation n'en soyent follé» [that my honor and reputation are not ravaged]<sup>91</sup>.

While some of the language in René's correspondence is difficult to decipher, it appears that he claimed to have held lordship rights over the property in question, and was outraged that the duke permitted Veillet to shift the venue for settling the dispute to the ducal council in Chambéry and the *Chambre des comptes*. René claimed to have had jurisdictional rights himself and demanded that at the very least the case should have been heard before arbiters elected by the sides. This was a practice that René often employed in disputes concerning his lordship of Valangin, and one that was crafted to protect the honor of those involved. At the same time, René had no qualms about his retainers taking forceful possession of the property in question, and it seems likely that he had even instructed them to do so, again in response to the assault on his honor represented by Veillet's effort to outflank the count jurisdictionally. René proved himself able to draw upon multiple cultural resources from the judicial field – from brute force to customary feudal claims to institutional maneuver – in order to repel this attack from a lower-ranking ducal official. He worked both within and without bureaucratic channels in order to counter Veillet's threat. Just as his enmity with Veillet would prove long-lasting, so would his alliance with Collier<sup>92</sup>.

René was involved in many other court battles over the course of his career. Some of the most significant ones brought him before tribunals outside of the Sabaudian lands (in Berne, Lorraine, and elsewhere). For example, following the death of his first wife, Bianca Maria Gaspardone, René moved to secure his claims on his deceased wife's inheritance, according to the customs of the Monferrato that privileged the widower as heir. This custom neither

<sup>91</sup> Fornaseri, *Le lettere*, cit., pp. 57-59, René to Ch III, s.d. [1530?].

<sup>92</sup> In 1553 René, as lieutenant-general for Emanuel Filibert in Vercelli, would accuse Veillet of corruption. For his part, Collier would provide crucial assistance to René in his efforts to acquire sovereign claims over Valangin; see Vester, *Transregional Lordship*, cit., chap. 4.

prevented Bianca Maria's Gaspardoni kin from suing, nor from appealing the case to the Senate of Monferrato in 1541 after having suffered rulings against them<sup>93</sup>. René hired powerful legal consultants to make his case, instructing Hieronimo da Fagnano, who worked for him regularly, to send someone «con lij nostri consigli et ragione» to Pavia. He wanted his legal strategy to be presented to Andrea Alciato<sup>94</sup>, whose advice was to be sought before moving forward with his attorneys' proposed course of action. René had also sought counsel from Giovanni Francesco Porporato and Niccolò Balbo, who were both highly regarded legal scholars who served as judicial advisers for the duke of Savoy<sup>95</sup>. Fagnano, however, suspected that in this particular case their suggestions were not «molto bonj ma anzy mezy suspettij»<sup>96</sup>. This process itself engendered more litigation, however: at one point in the late 1550s, another legal adviser named Jacques Cachot assisted with litigation against one of the Gaspardoni who was demanding «cent journees de possession», presumably to repay a debt owed to him. René was ultimately successful in protecting his claims, though, and the Monferrato property served him well during the war years as he and his kin mortgaged it to meet various financial obligations in subsequent years<sup>97</sup>. The Monferrato example also demonstrates the ability of a transregional lord like René to navigate different legal cultures in multiple jurisdictions without a loss of honor. His ability to hire legal experts like Alciato, Porporato, and Balbo might even have elevated his stature as an independent grandee in the eyes of the urban elites of Casale Monferrato and elsewhere in northwestern Italy.

5. *The financial dispositions of a transregional lord.* In December 1545, as he was slowly recovering from a life-threatening illness at his castle of Issogne

<sup>93</sup> AHR, FC 79, no. 6, litigation dated 1541-1542.

<sup>94</sup> A jurist of European renown, perhaps best-known for his *Emblemata*, published from 1531. See R. Abbondanza, *Andrea Alciato*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, II, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1960, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-alcia-to\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/andrea-alcia-to_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

<sup>95</sup> On Porporato, see C. Alliaudi, *Notizie biografiche su Gian Francesco Porporato*, Pinerolo, Giuseppe Chiantore, 1866. On Balbo, see Giovanni Busino, *Niccolò Balbo*, in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, V, Roma, Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1963, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-balbo\\_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/niccolo-balbo_(Dizionario-Biografico)).

<sup>96</sup> AHR, FC 263, fasc. 1, Hieronimo da Fagnano to René, Casale 21-X-42 [?]. Alciato, from Alzate Brianza near Como, taught in Pavia from 1533-37, 1541-42, and 1546-January 1550, when he died (Abbondanza, *Andrea Alciato*, cit.).

<sup>97</sup> AHR, FC 263, fasc. 1, a Challant official [at Casale?] to Mencia [?], s.l., s.d. [ca. 1540].

in the Valle d'Aosta, René sent a lengthy memoir to Bellegarde, his governor at Valangin. In it he outlined his intentions to restructure comprehensively his financial affairs. This letter reveals some other elements of René's self-conception as a lord and how it affected his plans for managing his various fiefs scattered across northwestern Italy and Europe.

René described his illness and suffering in terms that would have made Seneca proud, commenting that despite his sickness being «mal a propos pour mes affaires, je la prend[s] a gré puy que plaist a Dieu» [unfortunate for my affairs, I accept it goodheartedly since it thus pleases God]. He lamented to Bellegarde about the fact that his finances were in shambles due to «les grantz debtes charges que j'ay et que par le moyen du service des princes j'en suys si en arriere que je n'ay seulement moyen de m'entretenir sinon d'haugmenter debtes» [the great debts and expenses that I have, due to my service to princes, and to my being so behind in my payments that I have no way to support myself other than by borrowing even more]. Reflecting on this, he decided to «dorenavant y remedier et prendre aultre chemin sans plus moy fier aussusd' princes et donner ordre et moy retirer de toutes choses que me sera possible, en souffrant pour cinq ou six ans» [from this point forward fix this problem and follow another path, no more trusting in said princes but rather giving an order to withdraw from as many obligations as possible, which will cause me to suffer for five or six years]. By doing this, «mon bien a l'ayde de mes subgectz me puisse outre ma petite nourriture mectre hors de debtes, affin que je puisse sur ma vieillesse vivre en tranquillité et repos comme tousiours mes bons amys et serviteurs m'on conseillé et desire que je face» [my property, with the help of my subjects, will provide the small amount needed for my upkeep and will carry me out of debt, so that in my old age I will be able to live peacefully, as my good friends and servants have always advised me and desired that I do]. Starting with himself and then with «toute la reste grantz et petitiz» [all others, both great and small], he would «endurer et souffrir pour le susd' temps estre dhors de fascherie» [endure and suffer for the said period of time in order to escape this miserable situation]. After that time, he and all of those «qui auront heu ceste patience pour mon service» [will have suffered for my service] would «en avoir myeulx» [receive their just due] and he would be relieved of «ces fascheux debtes» [these hateful debts]<sup>98</sup>.

<sup>98</sup> AEN, AS, fasc. G16, n. 14, René to Bellegarde, Issogne 14-XII-45. Subsequent citations are from the same letter.

For all his «places et seigneuries», he issued orders «pour l'entretienement de ceulx qui en auront la charge» [the maintenance of those who will be in charge]. He also developed guidelines for Bellegarde and the receiver of Valangin, instructing Martine to «le vous bien faire entendre». In the future, he wished to understand «myeulx et plus aisement par vous comptes et a moins de peine de ceulx qui en auront la charge, ce que je doibz avoir de ma seigneurie de Vallengin» [better and more easily, by your accounts and in the simplest way possible from those who will be in charge, the amount of revenues that I should receive from Valangin]. The lack of clarity with respect to his revenues that had been the rule in the past was to end, and Bellegarde was to employ the new approach immediately. René was particularly unhappy to have heard that «quelque peyne ny ordonnance qu'on aye donné quant ma femme estoit a Vallengin ne s'est tenu ains tousiours plusgrant despense» [despite the efforts or orders that were made when my wife was in Valangin, these were not honored but, on the contrary, even more was spent]. He ordered Bellegarde to follow «l'ordre qu'elle y avoit donné». In addition, René wrote, he was to obey «ce qu'elle vous laissa en memoire que debviez faire, vous et Troillet, desia longtemps» [that which she instructed you to do in the memorandum that she left for you and Troillet, a long time ago], with respect to submitting past accounts, both for amounts collected and for other things indicated in the document. He expected to see a good accounting, «comme j'ay tousiours heu ceste fiance en vous, et que je crois que demonstrerez par effect» [as I have always trusted in you, and I believe that your actions will show this to have been well-founded].

Despite the confidence that he had in Bellegarde, René had trouble understanding «qu'a ung tel temps qui a esté et est qu'une telle seigneurie m'aye vallue ny vaille et qu'elle debvroit comme font celles de tous mes voysins et autour de moy» [that during such times as we have seen and see, such a fief has only earned (and earns) so much for me, since it should be worth as much as those of all of my neighbors around me]. He had raised this issue with Martine. This year, Bellegarde was to «regarder de toutte ma graine de ceste annee qu'elle soit presté avecqs toutes les remases qu'on pourra recouvrer, affin que trouvant marchand ou en puisse faire une bonne somme d'argent» [see to it that all of my grain from this year be readied with all of the harvest that can be recovered, in order to sell it to a merchant who will offer a good amount of money]. René observed that «sy l'on heust faict ainsi l'annee passee de bien recouvrer qu'ung cent muys de froment et aultant d'avoyne vaillent de sept a viii centz escuz et espargner le vin

pour en vendre a la grant chierete qu'en estoit m'heusst failly emprumter argent pour poyer les censes avecques tout plein d'aultres faultes d'avoir bon regard au maniemment de mes afferes par della» [if we had done this last year and had gathered a hundred *muids* of grain and an equal amount of oats, we would have made 700-800 écus, and could have saved the wine to sell once prices had risen substantially, and so I would not have had to borrow money to pay the rents to my creditors and many other things, all because of a failure to manage properly my affairs over there].

For René, these «ne me sont choses de petite importance et dompmage» [are matters of no small importance and cost]. He resolved not to put up with them, but was willing to wait to see what «les effectz» of these mistakes would be. He reiterated «la grant confiance que j'ay tousiours heu en vous» [the great trust that I have always had in you], and continued to consider him such a «homme de bien que je pense me le dourrez tousiours a cognoistre» [good man that I think that you will always give me reason to be grateful]. He instructed Bellegarde to repay Martine for the money that he had borrowed to make the *cens* payments, «affin qu'il puisse tenir credit pour une aultre foys me faire service» [so that he will have enough credit to be able to serve me on another occasion]. He was to «serchez tout moyen sur le revenu de la seigneurie pour ce faire» [try everything to find other income from the fief to make this happen]. If there were not enough there, «je suys content qu'on prenne sur le don que m'ont accordé mes subjectz. Car ma volenté est qu'on le satifface» [you may take it from the subsidy that my subjects agreed to pay me, since my will is that Martine be reimbursed].

6. *Constructing noble norms during a period of instability.* At this point in his life René had just turned forty years old and overcome a deadly fever. A large majority of the lands belonging to Charles III, his suzerain for the county of Challant, had been occupied for about a decade, with no end in sight. In this letter to Bellegarde, René blamed «princes» (read: the duke of Savoy) for his financial predicament and declared his intention to withdraw from politics and undergo a period of suffering in order to re-establish his financial health. This, he hoped, would enable him to lead a life of tranquility and (implicitly) autonomy. His plan for making this happen could have been drawn up not in a rural *maison forte*, but in an urban palace by one of his Swiss banker friends: it privileged the rationalization of tasks assigned to those overseeing his lands, prioritized informational clarity, and

recognized the importance of frank criticism of trusted associates when warranted. It is almost as if René were laying the groundwork for a new state of his own, a transregional Challant state comprised of a number of lands spread across the old Lotharingian «Middle Kingdom», one that could step into the vacuum that seemed to be emerging due to the eclipse of the house of the Savoy by other rulers.

In order to accomplish this task, René could have benefited from networks and resources (both material and symbolic) patiently constructed over decades of diplomacy, financial negotiations, military activity, legal wrangling, and revenue management. These activities had been carried out in contexts that were geographically and socially diverse. They were *cisalpine*, *intra-alpine*, and *transalpine*, and they involved political actors who were both commoners and noble, rural and urban, Catholic and Protestant. René routinely found himself operating in configurational settings that were complex and dynamic, and developed an ability to link very localized disputes to developments of broad import. Just as he saw that resolving a dispute with a specific member of the Bernese council could be crucial for the strategic position of the house of Savoy, so did he understand that the claims made in a particular court case (if unaddressed) could undercut his status as a noble grandee. While he appears to have served the house of Savoy faithfully, he was also attentive to opportunities to advance his own house, whether in transregional contexts or possibly even in the Valle d'Aosta.

The political environment of the early sixteenth-century Western Alps and surrounding regions was particularly unstable. It was overrun with a panoply of political actors who were able to leverage individual initiatives or those of small groups in order to achieve particular goals. It was characterized by institutional structures that were easily fragmented and by personal and bureaucratic relationships that crossed regional boundaries. The nobles who lived in these areas found themselves enmeshed simultaneously in patterns of service to princely dynasts with sovereign claims but also in efforts to advance their own family interests and autonomous status.

The question of how to assess the actions of nobles like René de Challant in light of Renaissance understandings of what it meant to be noble and what norms should guide noble behavior offers a challenge to historians. It is part of a larger problem of how to decipher the relationship between the «social» (actions that can be documented) and the «cultural» (how nobles conceptualized their status and roles). One way to address the intersection

of social and cultural analysis is to consider the possibility that nobles' actions themselves produced legitimizing norms. René de Challant and other nobles wrote their own rules, in a way, but took their cues from what others had done and were doing. In this sense the noble culture of this part of northwestern Italy and transalpine Europe was regionally (and transregionally) specific and changed over time as a result of the norm-creating actions of the elites themselves<sup>99</sup>.

<sup>99</sup> This reflection is indebted to Simona Cerutti, *Microhistory: Social Relations Versus Cultural Models?*, in *Between Sociology and History: Essays on Microhistory, Collective Action, and Nation-Building*, ed. by A.-M. Castrén, M. Lonkila, M. Peltonen, Helsinki, SKS-Finnish Literature Society, 2004, pp. 17-40.

