Transregional Lordship
and the Italian Renaissance

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Transregional Lordship and the Italian Renaissance

René de Challant, 1504-1565

Matthew Vester

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: René de Challant, detail from altarpiece dated 1547-1548, by an artist close to Jakob Seisenegger. Source: Archivi dell'Assessorato Turismo, Sport, Commercio, Agricoltura e Beni culturali della Regione autonoma Valle d'Aosta – fondo Catalogo beni culturali. Photograph by Cesare Diego; used with permission of the Regione Autonoma Valle d'Aosta.

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Table of Contents

Maps and Tables

Figures

Abbreviations

ADA	Archives départementales de l'Ain (Bourg-en-Bresse, France)
ADS	Archives départementales de la Savoie (Chambéry, France)
AEN	Archives d'État de Neuchâtel (Neuchâtel, Switzerland)
AHR	Archives historiques régionales (Aosta, Italy)
AHSS	*Annales. Histoire, sciences sociales*
ANA, CT	Archivio notarile d'Aosta, Tappa di Châtillon (Aosta, Italy)
APSV	Archivio parrocchiale di St. Vincent (St. Vincent, Italy)
art.	Articolo
ASMn	Archivio di Stato di Mantova (Mantua, Italy)
AST1	Archivio di Stato di Torino, prima sezione (Turin, Italy)
ASTR	Archivio di Stato di Torino, sezioni riunite (Turin, Italy)
BCT	Biblioteca civica di Trento (Trent, Italy)
Beatrice	Beatrice of Portugal
BHR	*Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance*
BNF, Mss. Fr.	Bibliothèque nationale de France, manuscrits français (Paris)
Boyvin	*Mémoires de Boyvin du Villars* in *Choix de chroniques et mémoires sur l'histoire de France*, ed. J.A.C. Buchon (Paris: Librairie Charles Delagrave, 1884)
BSBS	*Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino*
cat.	catégorie / categoria
Ch III	Charles III of Savoy
DBI	*Dizionario biografico degli italiani*
DHS	*Dictionnaire historique de la Suisse*
'Diverse lettere al Duca Carlo 3°'	AST1, NS, mz. 1 bis, no. 31, 'Diverse lettere al Duca Carlo 3°, ed al Maresciallo di Savoja sulli movimenti delle Truppe de Bernesi,'
EF	Emanuel Filibert of Savoy
EHR	*English Historical Review*
FC	Fonds Challant
FCC	Fonds du Conseil des Commis
FHS	*French Historical Studies*

Fornaseri	Giovanni Fornaseri, *Le lettere di Renato di Challant, governatore della Valle d'Aosta a Carlo II ed a Emanuele Filiberto* (Turin: Deputazione Subalpina di Storia Patria, 1957)
'Histoire généalogique'	AST1, Duché d'Aoste, mz. 3, Challant, no. 18, 'Histoire généalogique de la maison de Challant par l'Archevêque Madruz de Trente comte de Challant' (1638)
HJ	*The Historical Journal*
IGTDS	Inventaire générale des titres du duché de Savoie
Jeanne	Jeanne de Hochberg, Duchess of Longueville and Countess of Neuchâtel
JFH	*Journal of Family History*
JIH	*The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*
JMH	*The Journal of Modern History*
LP	Lettere di particolari
MSI	*Miscellanea di storia italiana*
mz.	Mazzo
NS	Negoziazioni cogli Svizzeri
PD	Protocolli ducali
PP	*Past and Present*
Recueil	AST1, Cité et Duché d'Aoste, mz. 1 d'addizione, no. 8, '1522 en 1657. Recueil des Matieres plus essentielles de tems en tems traittées dans le Conseil des Commis du Duché d'Aoste sous les respectifs secretariats; avec insertion de plusieurs patentes, ordres, et provisions des Ducs de Savoye en faveur du dit Duché.'
René	René de Challant
RHMC	*Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*
RLC	Registri di lettere della corte
RQ	*Renaissance Quarterly*
RSI	*Rivista storica italiana*
SCJ	*The Sixteenth Century Journal*
SKB	Staatsarchiv des Kantons Bern (consulted online)
Villarsel	Charles de Challant-Fénis, Lord of Villarsel
ZHF	*Zeitschrift für Historische Forschung*

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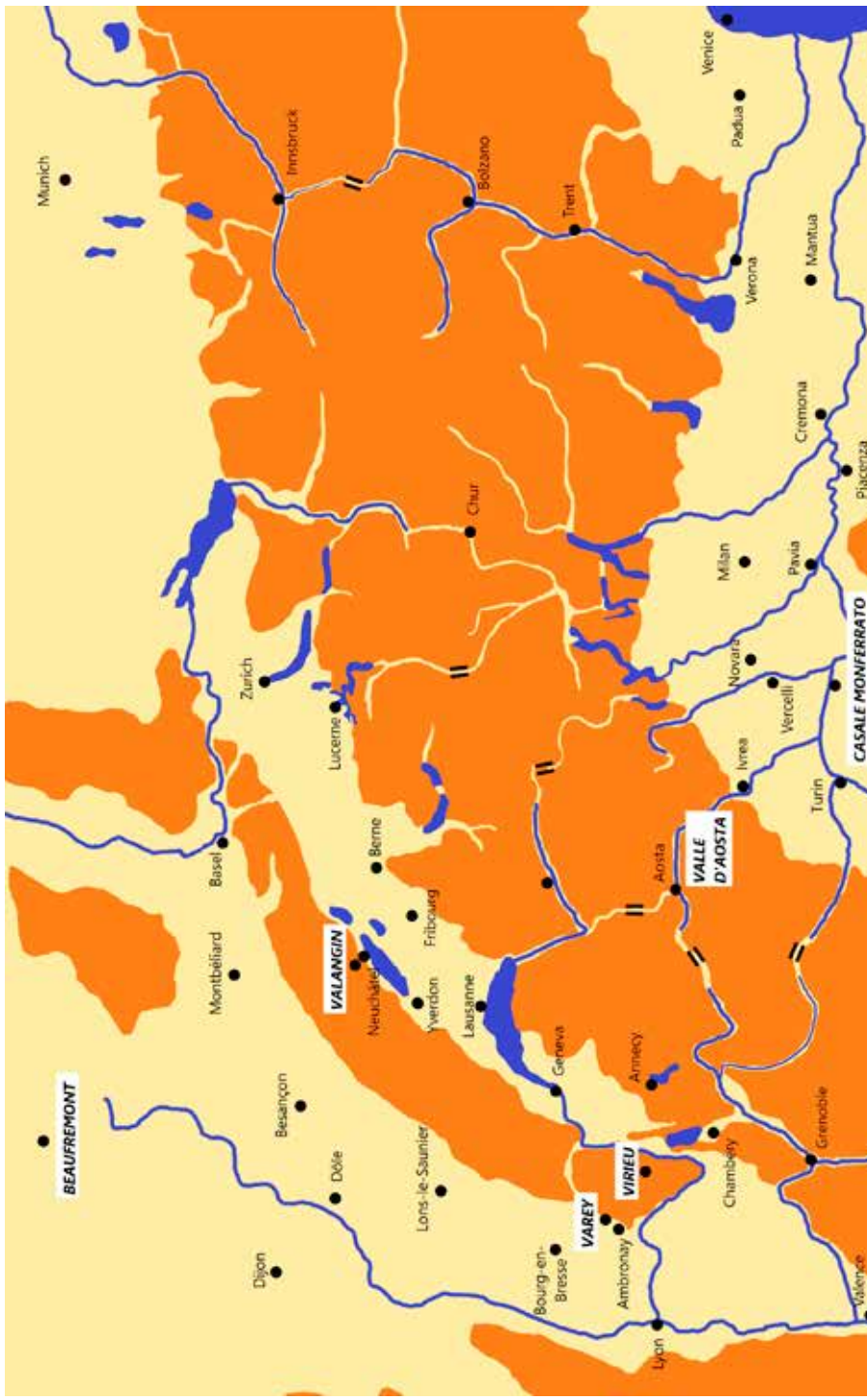

Map 1: René's transregional lands (mountainous areas shaded). Map by author.

1. On the edge of the Italian Renaissance

Abstract
This chapter situates René de Challant on the edge of Renaissance historiography in several ways. The geographic reach of his fiefs and political activities spanned from northwestern Italy across the Alps into the borderlands between France and the Empire. His service to the House of Savoy raises questions about the boundaries of scholarly work on the Italian Renaissance. His activities as a feudal lord with pretensions of sovereign status help us to reevaluate the relationship between the historiography on the European nobility and studies of Italian Renaissance elites. Biography as a genre of history is perched between contextual narrative description and comparative analysis. Recent work on the spatial dimensions of early modern history draw our attention to this material dimension of René's experiences.

Key words: Italian Renaissance, historiography, nobility, spatial history

In 1559, René de Challant seemed to be at the height of his powers. The unquestioned leader of the most powerful magnate family in the Valle d'Aosta, he held fiefs not only throughout the valley, but also in the transalpine Sabaudian lands (in what is, today, western Switzerland), in the duchy of Lorraine, and in the marquisate of Monferrato. As Marshal of Savoie, he was the chief military commander for the House of Savoy and swore allegiance to that Duke for most of his lands. The Challant family had appeared in the Valle d'Aosta by the twelfth century (when the valley accepted Sabaudian overlordship) and began acquiring fiefs and offices. François de Challant received the comital title in the fifteenth century but had no direct male heirs, so the head of another branch of the family, Jacques de Challant-Aymavilles, acquired his titles. Jacques's great-grandson René reaped the benefits, also inheriting from his mother the lordship of Valangin and the barony of Beaufremont north of the Alps. He was a transregional noble with strong service ties to a dynasty whose states themselves spanned the

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Alps, embodying in his person and lands an Italian Renaissance that was itself spatially dispersed.

The force of René's influence might be one reason why the Duke of Savoy assigned him to a command that was naturally exercised from Savoie, across the Alps from his power center in the valley. Indeed, the anonymous author of a *Memoriale* presented to the Duke of Savoy in 1560 pointed out the number of strategic castles held by the Count of Challant throughout the valley, and the potential danger that these represented to the Duke's dominion there. Andrea Boldù, Venetian envoy to the court of Savoy, reported in 1561 that René had 'twenty-four castles with capital jurisdiction, and some that are fortresses; and he enjoys 30,000 *scudi* in revenues'.[1] René's influence was thus rooted in his transregional landed position, in the valley and elsewhere. His lordship over these places was directly linked to other sources of authority: his kinship relations and marriage alliances, his political networks, his roles in governance and military affairs, and his financial activities. René de Challant was a powerful Renaissance noble whose authority was tied to the spatial distribution of the places that he ruled – indeed, the fact that his patrimonial lands were located in modern-day Italy requires us to reconsider transregional lordship as a neglected element of the history of the Italian Renaissance.

The Renaissance has enjoyed a long historiographic relationship with urban life, commercial culture, and forms of artistic production associated with both, especially in the cities of northern and central Italy, whether ruled by *signori* or by republican oligarchies. Partly in response to pressures created by the academic job market (in the Anglophone world), scholars over the past couple of decades have discussed the 'Mediterranean Renaissance' or even 'global Renaissances'. Among those working on the Italian Renaissance specifically, recent historiography has begun to extend the history of the Italian Renaissance beyond well-trodden parameters – studies have examined the Venetian Empire and cultural interactions with the Ottomans, Italy's relationship with transalpine kingdoms such as Hungary, and parts of Italy that have often been left in the shadow of Renaissance studies.[2] But rural lordship has remained neglected by most historians of the Renaissance, despite the fact that chivalric culture has been seen as an inspiration for families like the Este or Gonzaga, who sought to legitimize their recently usurped authority. Feudal lords were thought to have belonged to an older

1 Boldù, 439.

2 See, for example, Dursteler, *Venetians in Constantinople*; O'Connell; Howard; *Italy and Hungary*; Dauverd; and Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan*.

medieval order that had been displaced by the Renaissance, especially when their lands stretched across multiple regions from northern Italy. For example, the Sabaudian lands and the areas just beyond the Western Alps, despite their location in northwestern Italy and their continual military, financial, and commercial links to the rest of the peninsula, are routinely excluded from Renaissance history and seen as extraneous to 'Italian' culture.

I argue that René de Challant, whose holdings ranged from the Monferrato northwest and over the mountains, was an Italian and transregional dynast. The spatially dispersed kind of lordship that he practiced and his lifetime of service to the House of Savoy, especially in the context of the Italian Wars, show how the Sabaudian lands, neighboring Alpine states, and even regions further afield were tied to the history of the Italian Renaissance. Even merely to situate René de Challant, his network of relations, and his experiences on the edge of the Italian Renaissance helps us to analyze several key historiographic themes with more precision. A study of René's life also draws attention to other themes connected to the spatial dimensions of transregional lordship that have been obscured due to the traditional tendencies of Renaissance studies. It uncovers an 'Italy' whose boundaries extend not just into the Mediterranean, but into regions beyond the Alps.

This book straddles traditional biography – in this case, one in which the empirical evidence has never been comprehensively compiled – and a comparative approach that situates René with respect to other Italian and European nobles. Nobles' conceptions of themselves and their place in society have been studied through analysis of the language that they used to describe these things, especially in correspondence, with an eye to the relationship between norms and practices.[3] Even in the absence of family archives and extensive sources, Edoardo Grendi has managed to write a deeply contextualized history of the Balbi family of Genoa,[4] and Joseph Morsel studied the social space of a family belonging to the lesser nobility.[5]

Historians are divided in their assessment of the utility of the biographical approach,[6] which can be conceptualized within the framework of a microanalytical global history that illuminates historical forces by focusing

3 Broomhall and Van Gent.

4 Grendi, xxiv (for quotation), xiv, xxiii; see Donati, 'Nobiltà e Stati,' for an appreciation of Grendi's study.

5 Morsel, discussed in Demade, 'Parenté, noblesse.'

6 Robert Rotberg viewed biography as crucial for history-writing; see Rotberg, 305. G.R. Elton was dismissive of biography (see Prestwich, 326). Prestwich argued that biographies can in fact advance new historiographic interpretations.

on the lives of 'certain unusually cosmopolitan individuals' and combining macro- and micro-analyses.[7] Whether one is writing biography or another form of history, one faces the same interpretive challenges. These might relate to the problem of understanding 'strategies',[8] the possibility that there were historically specific ways of understanding the political implications of historical evidence,[9] or assumptions about motives based on concrete actions described in the sources.[10] In biographies and other histories, sequence matters, temporality points to multiple causality, and cultural context works as a dialectic between systems of meaning and practices that constantly transform each other.[11] But both biographical and historical research are based on surviving sources and must respect the interpretive limit constituted by those sources, which creates challenges for writing broad cultural histories of groups like 'the Renaissance nobility'.

Biographers and other historians face questions about which categories of analysis to employ, especially with respect to political units. A recent move by scholars of early modern politics is to analyze small states, and the problems that they pose for uncritical assumptions about sovereignty, boundaries, and political networks.[12] By taking into account political units that were readily dismissed by nineteenth-century historians, such scholars have reacted against 'methodological nationalism', investigating instead new analytical units 'that cross borders without claiming to encompass the polities and cultural areas they slice through'.[13] Narratives situated on large spatial scales 'also tend to use large temporal scales', which can result in a disconnect 'from the time scales of human lives' and from understandings of personal experience and historic causation.[14] However, what might be called 'transnational biography'[15] permits one to recover 'actors and agency' and to

7 Aslanian et al., 1445.

8 Historians of kinship often fail to offer precise definitions of 'family strategy'; see Dolan, 292, 301. Michel Nassiet makes a similar argument in *Parenté, noblesse et États dynastiques*, 18.

9 Millstone, 84-85, 89-90.

10 Pollock, 157.

11 Sewell, 169-71. Angelo Torre has explored this relationship between cultural representations and practices, warning about a kind of history that 'sussuma le pratiche all'interno delle rappresentazioni e che rinunci all'incrocio delle fonti documentarie'. This could lead to a new kind of idealism by viewing the sources *only* according to the logic of their production (and not as signifiers of any other reality) (see Visceglia, 308-9, discussing Torre, 'Percorsi della pratica').

12 Schnettger, 639; Raviola, *L'Europa dei piccoli stati*.

13 Pomeranz, 2-3. This 'transnational' approach had been pioneered much earlier by *Annaliste* historians such as Lucien Febvre, Marc Bloch, and Fernand Braudel (see Struck et al., 573-75).

14 Pomeranz, 5.

15 This term seems to be of recent vintage; see Meneghello.

analyze 'the spatial multiplicity of individual actors' lives and experiences ranging from the local micro-scale to macro-levels including national or global scales'.[16]

This study of René de Challant takes up the challenge of showing how biography can facilitate an integration of different scales of analysis. If looked at from the perspective of only one regional history, the transregional dimension of a life such as René's is invisible. Only by reconstructing a dense context of the person's activities and relationships does the spatial significance of René's biography come to light. Close observation is what makes it possible to see the ways in which lordship, finances, diplomacy, kinship, and political networks were intertwined and spatially articulated. As we will see in the conclusion, this spatial dimension also comes to the fore in language, but only when that language can be contextualized in social and material ways. Further, as the weight of specific fields of activity is clarified, it becomes possible for the narrative to dial back the scale of analysis to a more comparative setting, and to relate René's experiences to those of other Renaissance nobles. Each of this book's two parts (Part One chronicles events while Part Two examines themes) alternates between close-up views of René's actions and relationships and wider-angle views of more macro-level events and thematic comparisons. Each part informs the other: the significance of René's experiences over time is lost if no categories for comparison are available, while comparison is meaningless if totally abstracted from a diachronic context. Close reading of all available sources relating to René's biography brings to the fore not only the importance of the transregional dimension, but also enables the identification of relevant fields of comparison.[17]

This book thus positions itself on the edge between biography and comparative history, but centrally engaged with the methodological, and particularly transregional, concerns of each. Very little has been written in English on the Sabaudian lands, not to mention the Valle d'Aosta, during the period between the late Middle Ages and early modern times, and there is no book-length biography of René de Challant in any language. A singular case like that of René is important both for its own sake and for what it shows us

16 Struck et al., 577; Pomeranz, 22. Historians must clarify what kind of meta-narrative is framing their research when the nation-state no longer serves as a useful category of analysis (Struck et al., 579). A biographical mode of history-writing guards against the creation of transhistorical conceptual entities that exist only as the historical products of their specific times, or were simply constituted as such by historians, untethered to any historical documentation (see Green, 552 n. 1 for the critique by Simona Cerutti and Robert Descimon of transnational studies).

17 On microanalysis and biography, see Renders.

about the limits of our broad categories of historical understanding. The fact that René's political involvement, and political imagination, does not fall within categories that are immediately recognizable in Italian Renaissance scholarship, underscores Dipesh Chakrabarty's call for a 'nontotalizing conception of the political' and a heterogeneous historical imagination.[18] In other words, the specific case that seems unimportant due to its detachment from conventional narratives is crucial precisely because it reminds us of the heterogeneity of 'the political' in past times.[19] But René's experiences can also contribute to our understanding of a number of thematic issues relating to Renaissance and early modern nobility, lordship, and politics. A close reading of an individual life can raise unexpected issues in ways that prompt one to rethink historiographic categories. In the case of René de Challant, the geographically dispersed nature of his noble tenures, his near-constant movement back and forth across the Alps throughout his life, and the peripheral location of his Italian lands with respect to the rest of Italy draw attention to the spatial dimension of Renaissance lordship and politics. Being aware of the material and spatial elements of noble power in turn sheds a different light on historiographic topics such as family relations, noble networks, information management, financial brokerage, and dynastic prestige. This book thus combines attention to a singular Renaissance life with a variety of themes in the historiography of the European nobility between 1400 and 1700. The two-part structure of the work reflects this approach, the first half focusing on the events of René's life, and the second part examining those aspects of his relationships – family connections, political networking, financial ties, and the practice of lordship – that have been studied by other historians of the European nobility. In each part, I will argue that the spatial dimension, both material and imagined, of René's experiences as a Renaissance lord was an integral part of his self-understanding and of how others perceived him. Each part will also demonstrate the degree to which, through transregional nobles like René, 'Italy' spilled over into other parts of Europe.

The remainder of this introduction will examine some of the themes in recent scholarship relating to the Italian Renaissance and the European nobility, and issues of space and mobility with respect to both topics. Just as the history of northwestern areas of the peninsula has been at the edge of Italian Renaissance studies, so has the history of lordship. René embodied both, as a 'quasi-sovereign' lord on the brink of complete political

18 Chakrabarty, 149, 178-79.

19 For a similar approach in art history, see Kaufmann.

autonomy – but also as a feudal noble who enjoyed extensive contacts with urban merchant-bankers in the Swiss cantons and was a self-declared '*bourgeois de Berne*' thanks to his fief of Valangin. Italian, but not quite; feudal lord, but a Renaissance courtier; sovereign Prince of Valangin, but loyal vassal of the Duke of Savoy (and others); landed dynast, but closely tied to Swiss burghers: in several ways, René was a liminal figure. The next several pages examine what historians have written on the themes of the peripheries of the Italian Renaissance, the place of the nobility in Renaissance historiography (discussing nobles in Italy, relations between European nobles and other social groups, and the political role of semi-sovereign nobles and small states) and the ways in which spatial analysis and mobility sheds light on these topics.

The Italian Renaissance

A transregional understanding of the Italian Renaissance can encompass a figure like René de Challant, who wrote in French and held patrimonial lands in the 'intra-mountain state' of the Valle d'Aosta. There are a number of thematic and geographic realities that have been far from the center of a traditionally urban-centered Renaissance historiography – rural areas where feudal ties remained strong, Alpine Italy, the Sabaudian states, and even transalpine zones (such as the Swiss lands) with strong links to Italy – and the question of their relation to the Renaissance remains open. Historians of France have discussed '*la France italienne*', detailing the remarkable influence of Italian Renaissance culture at French courts and among the French nobility who felt 'the lure of Italy' during the early sixteenth century.[20] This impact created an anti-Italian backlash during the second half of the sixteenth century, and a sense that Italians had taken over French culture.[21] Just as the France of Francis I and Henry II has been included in our geography of the Italian Renaisssance, so should the border areas around northwestern Italy.

The social and cultural history of the lands formerly ruled by the House of Savoy is an in-between topic, residing comfortably neither within early

20 Marjorie Meiss-Even notes that 'all of the key posts in the Lorraine stables were held by Italians'; see Meiss-Even, 52.

21 Joanna Milstein cautions that historians 'tend to treat the Italian community in France as an undifferentiated whole,' rather than as representatives of specific places (Milstein, 1, 2, 5). See also H. Heller.

modern French history nor with that of the Italian Renaissance. Recent efforts to avoid the tendency to fit this history into a particular national historiography, by configuring the subject as 'Sabaudian Studies', might be usefully extended by situating the Sabaudian case within the broader Alpine arc, many parts of which face similar historiographic challenges. The question then becomes whether there was an 'Alpine Renaissance'.[22] The term 'Renaissance' seems to limit itself to a certain kind of cultural history – and a kind that we rarely associate with the Alps.[23] In part, this is because 'Renaissance' is often also linked to urban society,[24] which might seem natural: one will search in vain for scholarly works that examine the 'rural Renaissance' or the 'peasant Renaissance' – such terms sound absurd.[25] Since 1949, at least, scholars have used the term 'northern Renaissance' to describe to developments in the heavily urbanized Low Countries, juxtaposing them to the Italian (southern?) Renaissance.[26] Thereafter, more 'Renaissances' appeared, most of them national in scope – although these (including the 'Spanish Renaissance') were typically incorporated into the non-Italian catch-all category of 'northern Renaissance'.[27] The Alps seem to have played a visible role in the creation of these north-south abstractions by functioning as a boundary between Italy and the 'north' (wherever that may have been).[28] Yet, despite the heuristic visibility of the Alps in discussions of the Renaissance, they are practically invisible in concrete terms. So idealized is the function of the Alpine boundary in scholarly discourse that one finds a reference to 'one of the great Old Masters of the early Northern Renaissance, the Austrian artist Michael Pacher, [who] spent the bulk of his life as a sculptor and painter in the south Tyrol'.[29] If an artist active *south* of the Alpine watershed is a master

22 See *Sabaudian Studies*.

23 The hostile reaction of 'the U.S. Renaissance studies establishment' to Braudel's *Mediterranean* (at least until the early 1970s) was partly due to Braudel's total history approach; see Marino, 'The Exile and His Kingdom,' 636.

24 Guido Ruggiero's recent study of the 'Rinascimento' examines 'two [...] urban civilizations' on the peninsula before and after 1450 (Ruggiero, 286).

25 J.R. Hale recalled someone having asked him whether ice hockey was 'a part of civilization'; one could ask the same question of the Alps (Hale, xx).

26 Phillips; Telle; Préaux.

27 See Baskerville; Tilley; 'Spanish Renaissance;' Byne and Stapley; Bell; *Flemish Renaissance*; H. Cole; Whitcomb; Angyal; Miller. In 1973, a reviewer included Spain in the 'northern Renaissance' (Yost).

28 Ruggiero's history of the Renaissance invites the reader into this world along with an imaginary German pilgrim crossing the Brenner Pass on his way to Rome (Ruggiero, 23). For Hale, 'the Alps were felt to divide a northern, transalpine world from a southern, temperamentally and culturally conditioned Mediterranean one' (Hale, 62).

29 See http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/old-masters/michael-pacher.htm, 12 November 2019.

of the *northern* Renaissance, then our geographic terms need to be revised in order to attend more concretely to lived human experiences, including within that swatch of Europe that we can define as Alpine.[30]

This attention to geography has caught on in the recent past, as scholars have tried to 'globalize' the Renaissance and reexamine geographic and temporal categories that had become embedded in scholarly fields.[31] Thomas DaCosta Kaufmann discusses research fields in which 'the borders of the unified territories do not correspond to those of an atlas of political history' but can be conceptualized as 'optical zones' that shared 'stylistic peculiarities' due to 'the terrain and qualities of light'.[32] There is something to be gained from taking these cues and reshuffling the categories of Renaissance history by including the Sabaudian lands and other Alpine regions.

In terms of periodization, one can point to economic developments that began to change Alpine society beginning in the thirteenth or fourteenth centuries, followed by increasing differentiation between Alpine areas and the lowlands in the eighteenth century, both demographically and in terms of agricultural intensification.[33] One could also periodize an 'Alpine Renaissance' with reference to European political and military developments and their impact on the region. In a general sense, the Avignon papacy, the conciliar movement, and the anti-pontificate of Felix V (Amadeus VIII of Savoy), all increased ecclesiastical activity within the Alpine space and intensified through traffic toward Rome. Across the Alpine arc, a process of political consolidation was also apparent, beginning in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries,[34] and then intensifying with the invasions of Italy in 1494 and the subsequent Franco-Imperial wars (corresponding to Guido Ruggiero's 'second Rinascimento').[35] The constant transit of armies, diplomats, and

30 It must be acknowledged that people of the time also understood the Alps as a cultural divide, referring to drunkenness as 'that "plague from beyond the Alps"' and artists who 'had no peer this side of the Alps'; see Hale, 61-62.

31 There has been at least one exhibition on the Mediterranean Renaissance (one of which included several works 'from Alpine Savoy') and the term 'maritime Renaissance' has been made to refer to artistic relations between southern Italy and Iberia; see Dombrowski.

32 Kaufmann, 9-10. *Raumstil* referred to this kind of regional style (73-77, 97).

33 Alpine resources, including cheese, began to be exported, commercializing certain aspects of agrarian production (see Mathieu; also Pounds, 204-5). For mining and manufacturing in the Alps, see Hale, 386 and Mathieu. For other references to the Alpine economy during the Renaissance, see Appuhn and, of course, Braudel. For Alpine commerce during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Fontaine; Imboden; and Mathieu.

34 This took place in the Sabaudian lands; in Dauphiné; the Swiss cantons; Alpine Lombardy; the Tyrol and the Trentino; the archbishopric of Salzburg; Bavaria; the duchies of Carinthia, Styria, and Carniola; and the mountainous areas of Friuli and the Julian Alps.

35 Ruggiero.

political leaders across the Alpine realms undoubtedly permitted a transfer of politico-administrative ideas and practices. This ongoing structure of transit and exchange, together with the remarkable variety of political formations that characterized the Alpine space – ranging from dynastic territorial states to rural and urban republics to ecclesiastical polities to imperial fiefs, produced a distinctive political environment in this area that lasted from 1300 until 1700 or so. In some areas of the Alps, the later seventeenth century was a golden age of sorts, with the emergence of prominent court cultures in Turin, Munich, and the Austrian lands.[36]

In terms of distinguishing artistic characteristics of an Alpine Renaissance, scholars have certainly pointed to the importance of Burgundian traditions, especially in the Western Alps, and the influence of the International Gothic in mural and easel paintings.[37] The court of Savoy, midway between Burgundy and Milan, was also a musical center during the fifteenth century, while the wood sculptors of southern Germany and Austria and the stonemasons of the Ticino and northern Lombardy earned European fame. In a way, the Alps – and the very regions where René's lands were located – were where Burgundian and Italian artistic innovations collided.[38] Kaufmann's suggestion that the Swiss area occupied a 'liminal position in European geography, one that is situated between a number of worlds or regions' could be applied to the Alpine arc as a whole, and to René's transregional holdings in particular.[39]

Whether something like a shared 'Alpine identity' existed among inhabitants of this region is doubtful, even if visitors to the Alps did leave records of their impressions of the mountains.[40] We do know, however, that, by the seventeenth century, some Alpine dynasties incorporated the mountains into their representational schemes, suggesting that rulers assumed that the image of the Alps was a positive one.[41] Thinking about the Alps as a coherent historical space also requires recognition of the social and cultural diversity of the region, beginning with the variety of family structures in

36 For interactions between these courtly centers, see *Lo stato sabaudo e il sacro impero romano*.

37 See Plesch; Castelnuovo.

38 Examples to consider are the frescoes of the castles of La Manta (marquisate of Saluzzo) and Buonconsiglio (Trento), and the *Sacro Monte* of Varallo (for the latter, see Symcox).

39 Kaufmann, 98. Similar arguments could be made for a kind of religious distinctiveness of the Alpine lands, where the Theban martyrs and others provided a unique saintly tradition, and where key Reformation and Counter-Reformation events occurred. On the Alpine arc as a distinctive economic region, see *Communities and Conflicts*, which sees the region as an open zone of 'intersection between different political and institutional models' (7).

40 See Korenjak on the history of 'mountain enthusiasm'.

41 Merlotti; Pennini; Celi.

different parts of the arc.[42] Here, we return to Braudel's classic problem of 'possibilism' – that idea that geography offered constraints to human actions but did not predetermine outcomes, leaving humans free to influence their own environments.[43]

The general history of Renaissance historiography has been explored by many.[44] Over the last hundred years, Anglophone scholars linked the Renaissance and the theme of the birth of the modern world, republicanism, and capitalism – all of which have been tied to Italian city-states (especially Florence and Venice) – before abandoning the idea that the Renaissance was a crucial stage on a linear path of Western civilizational development. This was followed by studies of how the Italian cities were subsumed into territorial dynastic states.[45] More recent attention has been given to the reciprocal influences between Italy and other parts of Europe,[46] but a more traditional view that 'the culture of the Italian Renaissance' was permeated by humanism, and 'the energies driving that culture' were 'effectively bilingual [Italian and Latin]' has persisted.[47] This is coupled with an acknowledgment that the 'peripheral' areas of Italy (such as southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia) have been overlooked in Anglo-American historiography.[48] Calls for more study of the landed nobility, who have been portrayed as disrupters of Renaissance urban life, are well placed, given more recent work showing that nobles played key roles in city affairs, asserted influence through clients, and even contributed to urban expansion by facilitating agrarian growth.[49]

It has been claimed that 'Renaissance political theorists spoke about politics in ways that differed from transalpine settings because the Italian context

42 Mathieu.

43 On Braudel's concept of 'possibilism', see Viazzo, 2-5.

44 Despite important studies by Goldthwaite and others, the term 'Renaissance' seems to pair more easily with 'culture' than with 'economics'. Although the history of objects and of consumption is changing this divergence between 'cultural' and 'material' history, 'Renaissance' as a general term of periodization most typically refers to a period of *Italian* history. For Hale, 'the word Renaissance loses much of its appropriateness when transplanted from peninsular soil' (Hale, 322).

45 From the perspective of the history of the nobility and of rural lordship, the movement away from an urban-centered Renaissance opens the door to the study of problems and regions that have been neglected in Anglophone scholarship (Muir, 1118). A recent survey found a tendency to identify the seventeenth century as the period that gave birth to capitalism (with Italy playing a peripheral or semi-peripheral role); see Visceglia, 299-300.

46 Caferro, *Contesting*, 8-9, 16.

47 *Cambridge Companion*, 1.

48 Ibid., 10-12.

49 C. Shaw, 1, 51-53, 58. Since the 1970s, Philip Jones had been revising the view that feudal institutions declined in medieval Italy and stressed instead 'the conspicuous influence of rural aristocracy on city-states' (Cengarle, 284-85).

itself was different', due to the unprecedented 'emergence of autonomous communes in medieval Italy'.[50] A transregional approach enables us to test this assertion, along with the argument that, by the early sixteenth century, 'the waning of Renaissance political thought' was underway, being replaced by 'the ideology of sacred monarchy that would dominate the political culture of early modern Europe'.[51] René's case and others show that, in many parts of Italy, small feudal principalities in fact remained vibrant for some time to come and even 'undermined the process of state formation'.[52] Renaissance Italy was a place where noble values and republican sensibilities coexisted, though perhaps not always in the same persons, and sometimes crossed regional frontiers.[53]

An older historiographic interpretation portrayed feudal institutions as having declined over the course of the Middle Ages in response to the growing power of Italian cities. More recent work has reassessed relations between cities, feudal lords, and peasants;[54] questioned distinctions between 'city', 'city-state', and 'territorial state' as political forms;[55] examined pacts and reciprocities between cities and noble families;[56] stressed cultural continuity between rural nobles and urban courtly elites;[57] and explored

50 Jurdjevic, 299.

51 Boone, 1027-28. Linda Darling, relying on Wayne te Brake, seems to agree with this assessment (Darling, 508).

52 Raviola, 'The Imperial System,' 217. While these small polities testified to the continued importance of the Holy Roman Empire in Italy, many scholars continue to identify a linear model of sixteenth-century European state development from Italian city-states to 'northern monarchies' (Caferro, *Contesting*, 157).

53 John Marino found that, in the kingdom of Naples, a 'bourgeois public sphere of civil society' emerged under viceregal rule (*Becoming Neapolitan*, 172). Angelantonio Spagnoletti argued, conversely, that 'l'amicizia, la cavalleria, il rapporto personale che lega il principe ai suoi cavalieri [...] sono qualità (virtù, si potrebbe dire) non ravvisabili nelle istituzioni repubblicane e nei loro uomini' (Spagnoletti, 100).

54 Regional princes sought to use the institution of the fief to delegate public functions, but 'a purely seigneurial logic' remained locally operative; see Cengarle, 286-87.

55 Michael Martoccio reviews the work of Gamberini and Lazzarini, who identify two historiographic views of the Italian Renaissance state. One focused on the role of cities in state development and the other ('[Federico] Chabod's model') saw the state as a creation of officials and institutions (Martoccio). In the 1970s, Giorgio Chittolini and Elena Fasano Guarini, influenced by German historiography, stressed the role of reciprocal agreements in state development, seeing the state as a mediator among constituent groups. Gamberini and Lazzarini refer to this view as 'pactist' and 'reciprocal', and find it more convincing than 'the long-lasting idea' according to which 'the trademark and cornerstone of the political history of Italy' was 'the crucial role of cities' (*The Italian Renaissance State*, 2, 4).

56 C. Shaw, 59, 60-62, 168.

57 Massimo della Misericordia shows the continued influence of noble ideals in late medieval Alpine Lombardy, where elites used castles and decorations to represent their authority, while adapting their representations to political contexts, transforming, for example, fortified castles

the variety of feudal systems in Italy,[58] which resulted in an Italian dynastic system after 1559 with important transregional elements.[59] This emerging body of work is helpful for relating René's experiences to those of other Italian nobles, even if the transregional dimension is missing from most scholarship on the Italian nobility. Feudal lordship has been depicted either as having died out with the Middle Ages or as a tool of a new absolutist dynasticism – either way, as something foreign to the Italian Renaissance. Newer scholarship is beginning to challenge some of these commonplaces, and the career of René de Challant helps to illustrate this shift.

Reciprocally, René's transregionality demands that we rethink our understanding of the Italian Renaissance and who was part of it. An unhelpful boundary between subalpine areas of Italy and the 'northern Renaissance' persists. A transregional conception of Renaissance studies can bring new problems to the fore. Already, an emerging body of scholarship on topics of transregional valence (borderlands, pilgrimage, pirates, renegades and conversion, migration, smuggling, missionary orders, political envoys and go-betweens, etc.) is beginning to destabilize traditional historiographic-geographic boundaries.[60] This transregional approach also offers ways for us to understand the nobility of the Italian Renaissance from a fresh perspective.

The Renaissance nobility

The feudal nobility has been at the edge of the concerns of most historians working on Renaissance Italy, but this is changing: few scholars would accept a thesis of noble decline beginning in the Renaissance. Rather, they would

into 'palazzi rinascimentali'. See Della Misericordia, 'Gusti cavallereschi,' 794-96; also id., 'Medioevo cavalleresco,' 7-9.

58 Spagnoletti, 14-16, 19-21.

59 This dynastic system, according to Spagnoletti, grew out of the Habsburg annexation of the state of Milan, and requires a distinction between the concepts of 'ragion di stato' and 'ragione della casa' (ibid., 28-29). For Spagnoletti, after 1559, Emanuel Filibert and other Italian rulers, 'ormai legittimati nei loro titoli e nel possesso dei loro stati,' began a state-building process by building support among elite groups in their states (ibid., 37). As has been noted, though, more recent work has complicated this state-building narrative. Spagnoletti himself seems to acknowledge this point by observing that, until the Sabaudian acquisition of the royal title in 1713, this Italian dynastic system had continued through marriage alliances between non-sovereign aristocratic families linked to the Empire and Italian territorial princes (ibid., 87).

60 *Your Humble Servant*; Rothman; Hysell; Stopani; Dursteler, *Renegade Women*; Davis; *Gated communities?*; Kwass; Armstrong; *Transregional and Transnational Families*.

focus on how nobles adjusted to changing political and economic conditions in order to maintain positions of authority, often through bureaucratic or courtly service.[61] Historians such as Franco Angiolini, Cesare Mozzarelli, and Walter Barberis have outlined these shifts and pioneered work on regional nobilities, and on how nobles interacted with princely courts.[62] Claudio Donati wrote prolifically about the Renaissance-era Italian nobility, rejecting the view that a new noble climate was created in Italy when the idea of a Renaissance Republican patriciate lost ground and a 'noble awareness' emerged.[63] Donati also emphasized the regional variation among Italian nobilities, and their relation to Spanish power.[64] He lamented the historiographic focus on how nobles were subsumed into Italian territorial states because it rendered invisible the continuation of feudal lordship after 1559, with just a few exceptions. He wondered about the houses that disappeared or were redefined (such as the Fieschi, the Pallavicino, and others – one might add the Challant –, especially 'between the Alps and the Po'), and how their 'military and knightly identity' changed so quickly.[65] He studied this question from the perspective of the Este di San Martino – a good example of a family whose transregionalism extended from northwestern to northeastern Italy.[66] The Genoese nobles studied by Céline Dauverd were

61 Romaniello and Lipp, 2-4; Duindam; Scott and Storrs; H. Scott, 'The Early Modern European Nobility,' 27-28.

62 This posited a new growth in noble power linked to the rise of territorial states and the investment in noble titles by wealthy financiers, contributing to economic and political decadence; Angiolini, 66-88.

63 Donati, 'Nobiltà e coscienza nobiliare,' 60, 66. Donati stressed the continued importance of an urban, communal culture, not the radical assertion of a noble-feudal one and elimination of the other; see Donati, 'Nobiltà e Stati.'

64 Donati, 'The Profession of Arms,' 300; id., 'The Italian Nobilities,' 286, 290, 306-7. John Marino would have agreed with Donati's point about regional differences, pointing to the peculiar situation in Naples (Marino, *Becoming Neapolitan*, 172, 236). Like Angiolini, Donati remarked on the divergent interpretations of northern/central and southern nobles, lamenting the fact that this historiographic division has reinforced 'the dualism between a patrician-dominated center-north and a feudal south'. See 'Nobiltà e Stati,' 70-71.

65 Id., 'The Profession of Arms,' 307-8.

66 Donati studied this cadet branch of a great family and how its members 'si vedono nel "gran Teatro del Mondo"' ('Una famiglia lombarda,' 438). Like other Italian families, the Este di San Martino constantly maneuvered between dependence on the Empire and fidelity to the main Este line and to the King of Spain. He asked how families like this exercised dominion over their own subjects in their feudal lands, which were spread across different northern Italian states. Carlo Emanuele exemplified this challenge, holding fiefs as he did from the Duke of Savoy and the King of Spain, as his overlords went from being allies to being enemies during the Monferrato wars.

tied to Liguria, the kingdom of Naples, and Spain.[67] Christine Shaw's work on the 'military nobles' of Renaissance Italy highlights their independent power,[68] while other studies have surveyed their self-fashioning of noble masculine identities.[69]

While Alessandro Barbero has depicted late medieval Piedmont as a composite entity based on contractual agreements between rulers and communities, following Chittolini's model for Lombardy,[70] most historians have emphasized differences between the Sabaudian nobility and those elsewhere.[71] The dukes of Savoy were prominent in late-Renaissance Italy due to the antiquity of their princely status and their ties to European dynasties.[72] For Walter Barberis, the uniqueness and boldness of Emanuel Filibert's political activity, his military and governing experience in the Netherlands, and his ability to mediate between nobles and power groups 'was not properly part of Italian culture and experience'.[73] This Duke was thus 'not an Italian prince' and even the physical aspect of his states 'distanced him from contemporary Italian models', given his 'Franco-Imperial state experience on the borders of Italy' that differed 'from other Italian situations'.[74] But as we have seen, situations were different all across Italy and often exhibited transregional characteristics. Furthermore, scholarship on nobilities in other parts of Europe has identified some similarities with the Italian

67 Identifying a symbiosis between Genoese mercantile and financial activity and Spanish dynastic imperialism, Dauverd shows how Genoese nobles combined government service, trade and finance, and feudal rule (Dauverd).

68 C. Shaw, 9, 10, 21, 65, 84, 100, 116, 124-25, 130-33, 148, 250, 253-54.

69 Dialeti, 14.

70 Barbero, 'The Feudal Principalities.'

71 For Claudio Donati, on the Italian side of the Alps as far as the Tiber, '"non esistono delle vere capitali [of territorial states]; e solo Torino, rimasta ai margini della grande fioritura italiana, ne presenta il carattere"' (Donati, 'Nobiltà e Stati,' 69, citing one of his earlier works). Walter Barberis likewise stressed the considerable distance between Turin and Rome in the early sixteenth century, arguing that the Sabaudian court did not have 'alcuna somiglianza con quelle che a cavaliere fra Quattro e Cinquecento avevano illuminato il tardo rinascimento padano'; see Barberis, 'Emanuele Filiberto,' 290.

72 Thalia Brero described the court of Duke Charles III as transitioning from 'une cour médiévale vers une cour d'Ancien Régime' [bypassing the Renaissance!] and reorganizing itself more opulently 'sur le modèle franco-bourguignon' (Brero, 28). Toby Osborne has analyzed the status conflict between the houses of Savoy and Medici and drawn attention to their wide-ranging dynastic ties; see Osborne, 6-7.

73 Barberis, 'Emanuele Filiberto,' 291.

74 Ibid., 295-96. Barberis's account of the Duke's various state-building actions recalls the nationalist writers who celebrated the 500th anniversary of his birth in 1928. He considers the Sabaudian case to be 'sostanzialmente eccentrica rispetto alla storia italiana' (ibid., 296-97).

context. In the Low Countries, late medieval nobles also allied themselves with cities rather than with states, even if the relationship between the city and the state was collapsed in Italian city-states.[75] But, in Genoa, links with Spain after 1528 'helped to spread [...] a European idea of nobility', which was less open.[76] Christine Shaw has noted that, although German, French, and Spanish nobles who came to Italy took on an air of superiority with respect to their Italian counterparts, they shared understandings of noble identity.[77] The literature does not seem to have clearly demonstrated how and why Italian cities, urban elites, and nobles may have been any different from Spanish, French, Swiss, German, or Low Country ones, especially since there were structural similarities in the political contexts between several of these areas.[78] The case of René de Challant permits us to examine this kind of transregional nobility in greater detail, and to assess the spatial characteristics of Renaissance lordship.

Scholars have studied the European nobility in a variety of ways, looking at individual families over time, biographies of individual nobles, regional elites, and literary evidence of the concept of 'nobility' and how it has changed.[79] Court studies have moved beyond institutional studies of power centers and ceremonial practice to consider themes such as the limits to princely power posed by religion, the role of non-court nobles, the diversity of courts, and women's activities at court.[80] Liesbeth Geevers and Mirella Marini highlight the heterogeneity of the European nobility, while stressing the utility of the dynasty or 'clusters of families' as a unit of analysis. They argue that dynasties had collective identities of their own,[81] and were 'hard to capture within a national framework'. Even when linked to a particular ruler, 'the self-fashioning of such aristocrats often occurred in a transnational context',[82] such that dynastic identity developed alongside national, confes-

75 Buylaert, 'Lordship, Urbanization and Social Change,' 66, 72-73.

76 Grendi, 70, 73.

77 In Shaw's telling, Italian nobles internalized this status difference, as the Italian wars 'accustomed the military nobility of Italy [...] to look to the rulers of Spain, France and the Empire' (C. Shaw, 198, 248 [for quotation]). Spagnoletti, however, believed that Italian nobles had a different sensibility from their transalpine counterparts (246).

78 For a comparative analysis of borders between and within states, see Raviola, 'Frontiere regionali,' 193-94, 196-97.

79 Scott and Storrs.

80 Smith.

81 These identities were developed through religious and political practices, negotiations between family branches, relations to rulers, and in other ways.

82 Geevers and Marini, 3-4, 5.

sional, or gendered forms of self-perception.[83] This kind of dynastic identity was perhaps stronger among transregional nobles like René de Challant who operated in multiple courts in Italy and elsewhere. Other approaches to studying the European nobility have focused on nobles' relation to the state, and the persistence of a 'chivalric ideal' among the aristocracy.[84] Here also, René's case permits examination of the way in which a transregional, spatially dispersed dimension of noble power impinged upon these issues, particularly insofar as the early sixteenth century – and especially the experience of the Italian Wars – was seen as a turning point.

Historical scholarship on nobles and other dominant social groups has catalogued their efforts to block the paths of other upwardly mobile social groups.[85] Noble families sought to identify legendary family origins, link

83 Ibid., 13-18. Brian Sandberg's work on French nobles during the wars of religion understandably focuses on the 'social and cultural practices of violence' required for military, political, and religious purposes during this period, describing such violent practices as a 'way of life' for these aristocrats (Sandberg, xvi, xxiv-xxv). Gregory Hanlon discusses Italian scholarship that has viewed 1630 as a turning point when 'warrior nobles began to return home [from military service abroad] and seek their fortunes by serving their princes' – a timeframe that seems roughly to fit Sandberg's chronology of the high tide of 'warrior pursuits' (Hanlon, 'The Decline of a Provincial Military Aristocracy,' 66 [citing Spagnoletti]).

84 Some scholars have employed the 'social collaboration' model of absolutism developed by William Beik to study how the nobility and other elites worked together with absolutist rulers to achieve various political ends in seenteenth-century France (Dee). Others have examined the relationship between nobles and territorial rulers in polities of different dimensions: Charles Lipp investigates 'small-state nobles' like the Mahuet family, who established an 'administrative dynasty' in Lorraine (Lipp, *Noble Strategies*, 1-3). But, as Eric Hassler points out, even large polities (like the Holy Roman Empire) had distinctive court cultures (Hassler, 198). According to Martin Wrede, while French historiography has traditionally depicted the Crown as the key point of reference for the nobility (although this has been changing), German scholars, who have fairly recently rediscovered the nobility, have tended to analyze them from their own (and not the ruler's) point of view (Wrede, 441, 458). Benjamin Deruelle disagrees with the consensus among scholars that chivalry died out as the early modern state grew more powerful and 'asphyxiated' noble values of equality and power-sharing. These scholars identify a decline in the value of military courage, viewing stoic self-control as its successor in response to the crisis of religious war; see Deruelle, 15-16. For Deruelle, knightly ideals remained culturally important into the early seventeenth century, forming a cultural construct that mediated the relationship between nobles and rulers; ibid., 25; see also 19-24, 27-28. Deruelle acknowledges that his distinction between what is 'knightly' and what is simply 'noble' is not always clear (354). He sees the reigns of Francis I and Henry II in particular as 'the chivalric heart' of the sixteenth century, and the French invasions of 1536 as a resurgence of dynastic conflict that spurred the publication of 21 new editions of chivalric romances between 1535 and 1540 (ibid., 62). The end of the Franco-Habsburg wars and the start of religious conflict (during the period between 1547 and 1578) saw the beginning of a shift in notions of knightly honor, though for Deruelle, different cultural forms continued to coexist (374-75).

85 Martines.

themselves to saintly figures, and (often with the ruler's help) to create 'a closed social group based on blood ties'.[86] Despite such efforts, as the meaning of nobility changed over time, so did the qualities that gave one access to it; by the late sixteenth century, 'intellectual skills and cultural dispositions' became as important as lands and titles to secure noble status.[87] This indicates a gradual shift whose impact on a transregional noble like René de Challant was unclear. Over the past couple of decades, there has been discussion about the role of the '*noblesse seconde*' within the French nobility. These were lower-level nobles who have been seen as 'key to the development of royal clientage as a network of power associated with the building of the early modern French state'.[88] Others have shown that great nobles were also able to pull lesser nobles from their areas into their own patronage systems, and that many 'second nobles' broke with the Crown during the religious wars.[89] Not only did the relationship of nobles to the ruler and to other social groups differ across Europe,[90] such relationships were further complicated for nobles like René whose geographic ties of vassalage linked them to multiple rulers in several different regions.

There has been a lively discussion among scholars of the early modern Low Countries about relationships between nobles and urban elites, helping us to think about René's relationship to patricians in Berne, Casale, Milan, and elsewhere. Jan Dumolyn claims that the elite in late medieval Flanders included both nobles and non-nobles, due to 'increased regional mobility' for princely officers, intermarriage, and new social networks.[91] Buylaert, Dumolyn, and Wim de Clercq further developed the idea of an overlap between wealthy bourgeois families and local nobles in the southern Low Countries, challenging the view that a noble lifestyle and appearance was 'an effective barrier between nobles and commoners'.[92] In Flanders,

86 Le Gall, 8-9 (paraphrasing André Burguière). See also Nassiet, *Parenté, noblesse et États dynastiques*, 40.

87 The nobility's 'sociocultural space' was thus transformed during the sixteenth century; see Wintroub, 389-90, 405-6.

88 Salmon, 575; see also Wintroub, 389.

89 This was the critique of Robert Descimon, who coined the term 'noblesse seconde' (Salmon, 576).

90 In Lorraine, the nobility 'never became as removed from state control as their French counterparts' (Lipp, 'Power and Politics,' 43). See O'Connell for Venetian Crete and Grendi for Genoa. In seventeenth-century England, residence in London became increasingly important for landed families, but 'the country estate and its associated ties and symbols remained the chief basis of elite identity' (Warren, 46-47, 61-62, 74).

91 Dumolyn, 433, 437.

92 Buylaert et al., 'Sumptuary Legislation,' 395-96.

nobles often resided in cities (at least seasonally) and invested in the urban economy, partly in response to urban authorities extending jurisdiction into the countryside.[93] Arie van Steensel finds confirmation of many of these findings in the evidence from Zeeland, emphasizing the tight patronage (but not marriage) connections between 'the feudal-aristocratic and urban bourgeois worlds',[94] and remarking that 'noble and civic values were not mutually exclusive', especially given the heterogeneity of the nobility.[95] These findings raise questions about interactions between urban patricians and landed nobles not only in Italy, but among transregional nobles whose lordship was exercised in different customary settings.

Increasingly, early modern nobles have been viewed not anachronistically as subjects who would inevitably be domesticated by absolute sovereigns and their new state institutions, but as autonomous political actors who continued to pursue their own agendas of aggrandizement deep into the period. This perspective helps us make sense of the goals and actions of transregional nobles like René. Such nobles were 'selfish' and 'power hungry' actors who sought authority and jealously defended their rights, but these attitudes 'derived from their conditions of existence'.[96] Many great noble families in Europe 'aspired to a semi-autonomous sovereign status', and were neither rulers nor subjects. Rather, they operated within 'a blurry pyramid of multiple forms of dynastic sovereignty', which gave way only very slowly to a definition of sovereignty as undivided.[97] Recent scholarship sees early modern sovereignty 'more in terms of territorial, personal and practical elements rather than purely philosophical notions', as 'bundles of rights which might be held to a greater or lesser extent'. This made it possible for a range of families to possess 'a measure of sovereignty' in ways that were 'fundamental to their self-identification and self-representation'.[98]

Nobles in the Low Countries pursued this autonomy in different ways, sometimes entering state service but never ceasing to press their claims.[99]

93 Buylaert, 'Lordship, Urbanization and Social Change,' 32-34, 48-50.

94 The author concludes that earlier claims made by scholars of Flanders 'that state formation and urbanisation led to the incorporation of the nobility into a new power elite in the Burgundian-Habsburg Netherlands', weakening the nobility with respect to urban groups, do not hold (Van Steensel, 'Noblemen in an Urbanised Society,' 94).

95 Ibid., 96-97.

96 Brunner, 14.

97 Duindam, 59.

98 H. Scott, '"The Line of Descent",' 231; see also Munns et al., 14.

99 In late medieval Zeeland, only a minority of nobles entered state service. Such nobles instead remained attached to their own lordships, whose concurrent rights and status 'exceeded their pure economic value' (Van Steensel, 'Noblemen in an Urbanised Society,' 86). In Holland,

Historians of the Holy Roman Empire have also stressed the continuity of the ideal of noble autonomy and the ambiguous degree to which nobles were drawn into state service.[100] In the princely states of the Empire, rulers sometimes exerted considerable influence over their nobles, but the latter were also more likely to have transregional ties.[101] The House of Nassau was 'a German line with an international scope, albeit on a more modest scale than the Habsburgs'.[102] Renaissance Italian princes like the Visconti took their cues from the feudal nobility, attempting to expand their jurisdiction when possible and occasionally overriding written norms,[103] and French nobles were deeply committed to protecting their prerogatives and sense of propriety against royal pretensions.[104] To reinforce their autonomy, nobles used violence, marriage alliances, and geographic advantages. This was true across Europe.[105] How were these attitudes affected by the transregional dispersion of noble power bases?

Reinoud van Brederode was accused of using the name and arms of the count of Holland (which belonged to Charles V) but was never accused of *lèse-majesté* and merely ordered to cease. Brederode power resulted from a generations-long 'family self-promotion policy' and made it difficult for the emperor to alienate them; see Dragstra, 22-23. Dumolyn's finding that late medieval Flanders did in fact produce 'a new "state nobility" whose political ideology was to defend the commonwealth of the Burgundian state, abandoning the traditional autonomism of the Flemish urban political elites' (431), runs against the grain of most recent scholarship.

100 Regional nobles who were creditors of the ruler of Ansbach-Kulmbach were appointed to high office and effectively controlled large parts of the state. Even the Emperor himself looked to the nobles in order to counterbalance princely power (Zmora, 1, 19-20). Megan Williams argues that '"the political" in early modern Europe' indicated an environment in which elite families and factions were as important as states and sovereigns (Williams, 372). For Charles Lipp, both nobles and princes were 'guided [...] by the autonomy principle' (*Noble Strategies*, 10-11).

101 Lipp, 'Power and Politics,' 40, 42, 44.

102 Geevers, 'Family Matters,' 469-70. William of Orange saw himself as the head of the house and imagined Habsburg power 'within a Burgundo-imperial framework, considering Ferdinand I and Maximilian II, rather than Philip II, to be Charles V's heirs, (478).

103 Black, 1.

104 Jouanna. This tradition had existed at least since the late Middle Ages when French kings sometimes saw themselves as 'one lord among many' according to Justine Firnhaber-Baker (50-51). Benjamin Deruelle has used the term 'isonomie chevaleresque' to describe the perspective that placed rulers and nobles on the same level and denied any differences 'de nature, de fonction et d'origine' (*De papier, de fer et de sang*, 312). For a similar dynamic among nobles in the Mughal Empire, see Lefèvre, 1311.

105 Historians of late medieval Ireland have tied noble factionalism to a weak central government, but feuding was not unique to Ireland (Crooks). Local warfare proliferated in southern France during the same period, as did seigniorial warfare in German-speaking lands, where it was 'a normal, necessary and licit prerogative of lordship' (Firnhaber-Baker, 41). Until the early sixteenth century, powerful noble families challenged the French king's sovereignty claims and continued to control 'vast territories' (Nassiet, *Parenté, noblesse et États dynastiques*, 23-24).

Although 'trans-regional princely families' have long been overlooked in historiographic traditions focused on nation-state development, this has started to change.[106] Henry VIII was concerned about the possibility of resistance being stirred up by Welsh Catholic nobles (in particular James ap Gruffydd) who added to their local power bases support among the English Catholic exiles in Europe.[107] Similarly, sixteenth-century nobles whose lands stretched across the area between the Low Countries and France were frequently accused of treason by rulers on each side, and risked confiscation and litigation. The transregional identities of such families sometimes resulted from placing members in the service of different rulers in order to hedge their bets. For example, Guillaume de Croÿ had lands not only in the Low Countries and France, but also in the kingdom of Naples. This gave him 'a supra-provincial "Burgundian outlook"' and an Imperial one.[108] This state of affairs was especially prevalent in the part of Europe between the Low Countries and northern Italy, along the borders of France and Germany.[109] The small states scattered throughout this region made it possible for some nobles 'to survive on the margins of the new regional configurations and to maintain their own autonomous role', entering into diplomatic relations with larger powers and offering protection to their own subjects with respect to other states.[110] Even when nobles spent most of their time in one state, where the majority of their property and patronage networks were located, 'their interests were always what historians are now calling "trans-national"', in large part due to their kinship connections.[111]

The 'military nobles' of late medieval Italy resisted the idea that they were 'subjects or vassals' and were not compelled by loyalties to princes or republics (C. Shaw, 197). Noble families also established their political independence by marrying into cadet or illegitimate lines of ruling dynasties. This could even catapult them into sovereign rank: 'a number of prominent noble lineages actually became ruling families and established themselves upon European thrones during the early modern period' (such as the Vasas, the Bourbons, the Romanovs, and the Braganzas). Such lineages set up councils, courts, patrimonial administrations, and patronized artists just as other princely rulers did (H. Scott, '"The Line of Descent",' 222-24).

106 Munns et al., 14-15.

107 Marshall.

108 Soen, 89, 91-92 (where she cites Hans Cools on the 'Burgundian outlook'). In the 1550s, Nicolas de Vaudémont (head of a junior branch of the Lorraine family) complained that, in the Netherlands, 'he was considered pro-French while Paris mistrusted him as an Imperialist' (Monter, 57). The Stainville served both the King of France and the Duke of Lorraine; see Spangler, 141.

109 Munns et al., 15.

110 Cengarle, 287; on small states, see Raviola, *L'Europa dei piccoli stati*. For multiple service among the Viennese nobility, see Hassler, 176-77, 192-93. Some argue that this international outlook strengthened among European nobles during the eighteenth century (Scott and Storrs, 51).

111 Munns et al., 14.