

Florian Chamorel, Un destin méditerranéen. Les princes de la Maison de Savoie en Méditerranée orientale (XIV^e–XV^e siècle), Paris (Honoré Champion) 2023, 699 p. (Études d'histoire médiévale, 18), ISBN 978-2-7453-6004-5, EUR 98,00.

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A comprehensive history of Savoy and the Eastern Mediterranean for the late medieval period has been long overdue. Thus far, the study of Savoyard efforts in the East has remained either a byproduct, as in the works of Joseph Delaville Le Roulx (1886), Aziz Suryal Atiya (1938), and Kenneth Setton (1976–1984), or a partial endeavour, as in Roberto Cessi's article on Achaia (1919) as well as in Eugene L. Cox's (1967) and Pietro Datta's monographs on Amadeus VI (1826). Even Antoine Cartier's aptly titled, but teleologically loaded *La Savoie et l'Orient* (1934) contains only two chapters on the Middle Ages. Thus, Florian Chamorel sets out to expand upon a »less developed aspect of the history of the States of Savoy and its princes [and] to contribute to a better understanding of the various forms of Latin expansion in the Orient [through the Savoyard example]« (44). For the period from 1301 to roughly 1466, he aims to describe the forms and tools of Savoyard presence in the East, as well as cultural aspects of said presence.

In part one (45–171) Chamorel manages to convincingly string together seemingly disparate forms of Savoyard presence in the East, like marital alliances, military expeditions, and diplomatic missions. By connecting each form not only to the regional political context of Savoy but also to the broader context of the Eastern Mediterranean, he convincingly argues that, although »the actions of the House of Savoy display a certain regularity« (169), these forms of presence should not be seen as parts of an intentional policy, but instead as motivated by a certain opportunism and similar goals, namely influence and prestige.

To grasp the worth the princes of Savoy attached to these goals, Chamorel proceeds in the second part of his study (173–433) to evaluate the human, material, and financial resources spent on Savoyard overseas ventures »from both socio-economic and institutional perspectives« (35). Serious contributions to the study of medieval military organisation in their own right, chapters one and two track military and naval resources from recruitment to deployment, providing detailed tables on individual leaders, troop typology and fleet composition. Furthermore, the author details the various factors of fleet assembly with a keen eye for the critical role of experts. He goes on to show that, despite the effort that went into sourcing »homegrown« expertise, the nature of Savoyard engagement in the East prevented the costly buildup



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of indigenous shipyards. Instead, the alternative of chartering ships – more expensive in the long run, but cheaper on short notice – was better suited for the sporadic character of Savoyard interest. A detailed comparison underlines that the resources invested actually rivalled those of contemporary powers for similar expeditions, and convincingly demonstrates significant interest in Eastern endeavours, albeit occasional.

Thus, in part three (435–568) Chamorel looks for evidence of such interest outside of the infrequent expedition. His findings paint a paradoxical picture. Neither short-lived periods of occupation in Achaia, Bulgaria, and Tenedos, the analysis of which would have fit part two as well, nor the trickle of noble Savoyard pilgrims, nor the lack of thematically relevant literature in the Savoyard library betray a strong interest in the East on part of the nobility. Even Duchess Anne of Cyprus, her entourage, and the centuries-long ducal pursuit of the Crown of Cyprus only swayed the nobility's sentiment so much. Instead, the occasional but persistent »cultural« attraction to the East seems to have been most prominent among certain princes of Savoy, who were gradually seeking less the influence it brought them and more the prestige. Though Chamorel acknowledges that the same prestige could be gained through marital alliances, a less resource intensive path for a less maritime power like Savoy, he stops short of elaborating on other potential reasons for these costly ambitions. Italian commitments inciting Mediterranean interventions, overseas expeditions as stop-gap solutions for stalled local expansionism, crusading mentalities and economic interest are all touched upon (cf. 422–426), but further exploration might have been constricted by the nature and plethora of the sources at hand.

Compiling the sources is already quite an achievement, given their dispersal across several series and their diversity in nature: reports for *Materie politiche per rapporto all'interno*, diplomatic acts for *Estratti di Savoia*, letters for *Lettere duchi e sovrani*, *Lettere principi forestieri* and *Negoziazioni con Genova*, and notarial acts for *Protocolli dei notai*. Considering that previous source collections are limited to the appendices of articles or monographs (cf. Cessi [1919] or Cox [1967]), Bollati's edition of the documents pertaining to the crusade of Amadeus VI (1900) and Haberstumpf's regesta of the major diplomatic and dynastic collections in the Turin Archives (1989, 1997–1998), Chamorel's work in condensing wills, donations, safe-conducts, correspondence, instructions, charter contracts, payment orders, etc. into comprehensible cultural, political, and financial information is impressive indeed.

Throughout the study, the author delivers abundant documentary evidence. While Chamorel provides the occasional in-text quotation in translation, likely only to improve its flow, most of the time he gives the full Latin quotation, with the relevant editions and regesta in the footnotes and an acute sense for differences between all of them. This degree of clarity would have been welcome in the uncritical use of terms like »thalassocracies« or »colonial«, which leave certain parts of his argument open



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to interpretation. Nonetheless, Chamorel succeeds overall in writing an impressive, even if not definitive, history of Savoy and the late medieval East, setting an example for the larger field of Mediterranean history.



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