Enemies, Allies, and Opportunities: The Politics of Noblewomen’s Lawsuits in Early Modern Piedmont

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Enemies, Allies, and Opportunities: The Politics of Noblewomen’s Lawsuits in Early Modern Piedmont

Catherine Ferrari

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to the Eberly College of Arts and Sciences
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ABSTRACT

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Catherine Ferrari

This dissertation considers early modern law courts as political venues in which noble families not only asserted claims to wealth, property, and inheritance but also sought to enhance their reputation and influence. By studying the archives of elite families in Piedmont from the mid-sixteenth to the mid-seventeenth centuries, I argue that noblewomen used the law to gain a political voice, defending their legal claims against other family members in highly visible conflicts in which not only their property but their standing at the court of the duke of Savoy was at stake. These women exploited legal procedures and drew on family and patronage networks to assert their legal claims while also advancing their political positions at a princely court. This project enhances our understanding of early modern political culture by exploring the complex ways that elite men and women combined a use of law with political strategies, with varying degrees of success. It encourages historians to view lawsuits as dynamic, showing that, as the years passed, the objectives that led an individual or a family to pursue a legal claim could change over time as the family’s political situation and goals shifted. This dissertation tracks the ebb and flow of these lawsuits over decades, making it possible to trace the shift of political/legal dynamics as the litigants adjusted them to suit their needs. Elite women had extensive access to the law, but their success in obtaining a favorable ruling depended on their capacity to draw on kinship ties as well as their own political standing. Indeed, strong claims and legal acumen were often not enough to enable them to achieve their legal goals. Women were most successful in their legal endeavors when they bolstered them with political strategies pursued outside the courtroom. By focusing on the central but often overlooked role of elite female litigants in a culture of widespread intra-family legal disputes, this project reveals the complexity of early modern politics in Piedmont, an understudied part of Italy.
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For Evelina and Matilda
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List of Abbreviations

ALM Archivio Luserna Manfredi d’Angrogna
ASTC Archivio di Stato di Torino, sezione corte (Court Section)
ASTR Archivio di Stato di Torino, sezioni riuniti (Cameral Section)
BRT Biblioteca Reale di Torino
Cigna Santi Vittorio Amedeo Cigna Santi, *Serie Cronologica de’ Cavalieri dell’Ordine Supremo di Savoia*
DBI Dizionario biografico degli italiani
Fasc. Fascicolo
Lettere Part. Lettere di particolari
Lettere PN Lettere di principi naturali di Savoia
Lettere SR Lettere di principi di Savoia di Racconigi
MdR Morozzo della Rocca, primo versamento
Patenti Patenti camerali (art. 687, par. 1)
SdM Solaro di Moretta, Fondo “Solaro. Ordinamento 1793”
Sottofasc. Sottofascicolo
Introduction: Immortal Justice

We no longer wish to hear the complaints of Count Filippo Manfredi of Luserna concerning the fact that over the span of many years his house has been in litigation against the late Monsignor of Racconigi, then against Madama the Monsignor’s wife and heir, and now he, the Count, against the Baroness of Entrague, as heiress of Monsignor and Madama, [a suit] which is currently pending undecided and which has become immortal before us with no end in sight, as is justice. We hereby state and order...that you are to meet promptly and hasten this suit by proffering your judgment in it...we do not wish for the above-mentioned Count to have any more occasions to have recourse to us in this matter.

Prince Tommaso of Savoy, Regent of His Royal Highness, the duke of Savoy, to the Senate of Piedmont, April 29, 1640

The above quote reflects the trans-generational nature of litigation among the early modern elite and the frustration that such lengthy (“immortal”) lawsuits could produce. Disputes like the Luserna/Entrague suit were crucial venues in the nobility’s perpetual struggle to preserve and defend not only their rights and wealth but also their honor and influence at a princely court.

It was not unusual for a suit to continue for decades and to span multiple generations, which meant that nobles were involved in almost constant litigation, often juggling several cases simultaneously. The most common and most hotly disputed suits stemmed from high stakes claims to inheritances, lands, and dowries. The fact that so much litigation arose around inheritance and succession meant that lawsuits between family members were common, as siblings, cousins, and in-laws battled to hold on to or obtain control over family property. Indeed, a nobleman could expect to sue or be sued by a number of his relatives throughout his life, a dimension of noble experience that remains largely unexplored. This dissertation focuses on the

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1 ALM, Mazzo 9, Fasc. 8. “Non vogliamo piu sentire le doglienze che si fa il conte D. Filippo Manfredi di Luserna, concernenti che nel spacio di tanti anni ne quali vertisse la lite che ha la casa sua contro il fu Monsignor di racconigi, poi contro Madama sua moglie et herede, et indi lui Conte contro la Barona d’Entrague, herede dell’uno et dell’atra, et quale oggi pende indicisa, avanti di noi si renda immortale, senza che ne possa veder un fine, come porta la giustitia. Che pero vi diciamo et ordiniamo...che habbiate a congregari prontamente, et sbrigar essa causa, con proferire la vostra sentenza...non volendo che il sudetto Conte habbi piu occasione di raccorer da noi per questo fatto, così dunque esseguite e N. Sig.re vi conservi Torino li venti nove di Aprile 1640.”

2 For recent work on legal conflict among early modern noble family members see Caroline Castiglione, *Accounting for Affection: Mothers, Families, and Politics in Early Modern Rome* (London and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Antonio Terrasa-Lozano, “Legal Enemies, Beloved Brothers: High Nobility, Family Conflict and the
legal role of early modern noblewomen in family disputes in order to enhance our understanding of this vital aspect of elite family life.

In the spring of 1640, Prince Tommaso of Savoy (1596-1656) and his brother Cardinal Maurizio of Savoy (1593-1657) were fighting a civil war against their sister-in-law, Marie Christine (1606-63), widow of Duke Vittorio Amedeo I of Savoy, over control of the regency of the duchess’s son, Carlo Emanuele II, duke of Savoy (r. 1637-72). The previous July, Prince Tommaso’s combined army of Piedmontese forces and Spanish allies had succeeded in wresting control of the duke’s capital of Turin from Marie Christine, who had been forced to flee Piedmont. As the dowager duchess negotiated with her brother, King Louis XIII and his powerful minister, Cardinal Richelieu, for aid in retaking Piedmont, Prince Tommaso sought to consolidate his control over the capital and the surrounding countryside. It was within this tense situation of civil war that Filippo Emanuele, count of Luserna, approached the newly instated prince-regent about his ongoing lawsuit against Perrona de Grillet, baroness of Entrague. Since taking control of Turin less than a year before, the prince had received several petitions from the count regarding the suit, and the prince’s vexation with the count and his “immortal” lawsuit was clear. The dispute in question dated back ninety years and had involved multiple generations of litigants. The current litigants in the suit had inherited the dispute from their forbears just as they had inherited their wealth, titles, property, and debts. In his memoirs, Filippo Emanuele’s father, Carlo Francesco Manfredi, referred to the family’s lawsuits as part of his inheritance from his

Aristocrats’ Two Bodies in Early-Modern Castile,” *European Review of History – Revue européenne d’histoire* 17, no. 5 (October 2010): 719-734.

own father: “my father died, leaving me with four sisters, all unmarried, 28,000 scudi in debt and with twenty-two lawsuits.” As their ancestors had done before them, the current count of Luserna and the baroness of Entrague took up their places in this ongoing lawsuit with a sense of duty and honor to their lineages, if perhaps also accompanied by an awareness of the burdensome nature of such an inheritance.

**Thesis**

This dissertation presents six case studies of noblewomen’s lawsuits in Piedmont from 1550 to 1650 to make two main arguments. First, it suggests that historians should expand their understanding of the early modern political sphere to include the law courts. As these case studies will demonstrate, elite men and women used tribunals as political venues to preserve and defend their status at the princely court of the duke of Savoy, calling on assistance from powerful patrons, making alliances with other members of their extended family, and relying on support from their own client networks. They often combined a use of the law with additional political strategies, with varying degrees of success. I argue that noble lawsuits were dynamic and that, as the years passed, the objectives that led an individual or a family to pursue a legal claim could change over time as the family’s political situation and goals shifted. Tracking the ebb and flow of these lawsuits over the decades makes it possible to trace these political/legal dynamics as the litigants adjusted them to suit their own and their family’s strategies. Examining noble lawsuits over the long term reveals that the central issues of a dispute shifted over the years. A case that might appear initially to revolve around primogeniture, for example, might later focus on a

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different legal problem. Lawsuits mediated relationships between individuals and families and the nature of that mediation changed as circumstances and social configurations changed.

The second argument of this dissertation is that elite women had extensive access to the law and were often involved in lawsuits over property and inheritance, but that their success in obtaining a favorable ruling depended greatly on their capacity to draw on kinship ties as well as their own political standing. Indeed, strong claims and legal acumen were often not enough to enable them to achieve a positive outcome. A number of factors could limit their potential for a positive outcome. First, the competing pressures that they faced as individuals who stood at the crossroads of both vertical and horizontal family structures could force them to act in ways that contradicted their own or their children’s interests. Second, women’s inheritance claims could be undermined by a preference for male primogeniture, and even the support of a powerful political patron might not be enough to overcome this inclination. Finally, a lack of strong political connections could leave a woman vulnerable against more influential legal adversaries. This dissertation will demonstrate that women were most successful in their legal endeavors when they bolstered them with political strategies pursued outside the courtroom. A combination of legal savvy, political expertise, and a network of loyal clients could enable a women to overcome even the most powerful legal adversaries.

Most intra-familial lawsuits focused on inheritance, particularly in cases involving primogeniture and entails, which curtailed the rights of younger children (e.g. the Castilian majorazgo and the Italian fideicommissum). Some scholars have identified a shift towards primogeniture in the early modern period. Indeed, David Sabean and Simon Teuscher argued that this shift was part of a major transition in kinship structures from the late Middle Ages to the early modern period, when kinship relations became characterized by strong vertical
relationships and hierarchical structures within lineages, developing alongside local variations of state formation and reconfigurations in property holding and inheritance.\(^5\) This transition, which (they contend) gained momentum during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, featured an increased emphasis on family lineage, unity and prestige, with changes in inheritance practices taking place in many areas in Europe at around the same time. This greater focus on descent and family coherence resulted in a trend towards primogeniture and patrilineal inheritance. In his study on the city of Bern, for example, Teuscher found a greater emphasis on patrilineal inheritance from the end of the fifteenth century, accompanied by stress on consistent, long-term family strategies and the preservation of patrimony.\(^6\)

The early modern shift towards primogeniture asserted by Sabean and Teuscher, however, is not at all clear. Scholars working in other time periods have tended to locate the rise of primogeniture during their own period of study. For example, Georges Duby found that primogeniture became widespread during the central Middle Ages\(^7\) and Marc Bloch stated that primogeniture was well established almost everywhere in Europe by the twelfth century.\(^8\) David Herlihy also identified the change earlier, arguing that families began to emphasize descent and inheritance through the male line and to adopt primogeniture in the twelfth century, and that this pattern solidified by the fourteenth century.\(^9\) On the other hand, Gérard Dellile argued that

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\(^6\) Simon Teuscher, “Politics of Kinship in the City of Bern at the End of the Middle Ages,” in *Kinship in Europe*, 76-90.

\(^7\) Georges Duby, *Rural Economy and Country Life in the Medieval West* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1968), 118.

\(^8\) Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society*. Translated by L.A. Manyon, foreward by M.M. Postan (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), 204.

devices such as the *fideicommisnum* were problematic for rulers because they created large estates ruled by powerful families.10

Evidence from early modern Piedmont shows that the situation with regard to primogeniture was more complex than a simple upward trend. As the cases analyzed in this dissertation will show, a push towards primogeniture was accompanied by consistent resistance to it. In addition, evidence from the capital of Turin shows that, far from preferring primogeniture, many fathers resisted the idea that their daughters should be passed over in favor of preserving the male lineage. In 1621, Turin’s city councilors complained to the duke of Savoy that its inheritance statute, which dated back to 1360, was too vague, resulting in excessive litigation between family members.11 In particular, the city councilors were motivated to preserve their daughters’ inheritance against distant male relatives: “everyone desires his things to remain with his own daughters, rather than going to transversal agnate males.”12 A late fifteenth-century attempt by the city to clarify its laws and protect women’s inheritance rights had gone largely ignored by ambitious male relatives as well as the city’s magistrates. Gian Savino Pene Vidari has shown that Piedmontese jurists were also concerned with women’s inheritance. Specifically, he noted the debate between jurists with regard to the exclusion of the “sposa congruamente dotata” (adequately dowried bride) from her father’s inheritance.13

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11 The law in question was the “De servando jure in successionibus” statute of June 6, 1360. Felice Amato Duboin, ed., *Raccolta per ordine di materia delle leggi...sino all’8 Dicembre 1798*, Tome 7, Volume 9, Book 6, Title XIV, (Turin: Davico e Picco, 1818-69), 222, n. 1. The city councilors stated that this statute “haver apportato et appportar molte liti per le diverse opinione et interpretatione della forza di esso statuto.” They cite the example of one Clara Lucia, only child of Alessandro Paoli of Turin, who, in a case decided by the Senate, was excluded from inheriting her father’s estate in favor of her uncle and cousins.
12 Ibid., n. 1, 223-224, “Ogn’uno havrà disiderio che le sue cose restino più presto alle proprie figlie, che alli maschj transversali agnati.”
In a series of influential articles, Sarah Hanley developed the concept of the “family-state compact,” in which the French monarchy and the rising robe nobility (judicial and administrative officeholders) promoted the authority of husbands and fathers alongside the authority of kings.\(^\text{14}\) She argued that robe nobles cooperated with the growth of the absolutist state and, in doing so, obtained more absolute control over their wives and children. The case studies in this dissertation suggest a different model for thinking about how women related to princes and their judicial institutions. This study differs from Hanley’s in two key ways. First, Hanley’s idea was based on the role of women within the families of the legal aristocracy, the “robe” nobility. The women involved in this study, although they range from the highest echelons of the ducal court (Isabelle de Grillet, Matilda of Savoy) to the lower ranks of the nobility (Maria Solaro and Caterina Bobba), were nevertheless of a higher social standing than the women considered by Hanley. In addition, rather than finding a “compact,” these case studies reveal moments of conflict between the duke of Savoy and his legal officers due to the duke’s desire to advance his female clients.

The legal experiences of elite noblewomen like Isabelle de Grillet and Matilda of Savoy (chapters 2 and 5) suggest the existence of a model of “dynastic – agnatic friction” in Piedmont. As magistrates moved increasingly towards greater protection of agnatic claims, they sometimes found themselves at odds with the ruler’s dynastic logic. When such conflicts occurred between the ruler and his legal officers, the magistrates seem to have had the upper hand, prevailing over the ruler’s will.

Early modern historians have studied the relationship between judicial institutions and the crown to gauge the extent to which the authority of early modern monarchies relied on the

collaboration of their institutions. Many such studies have focused on the relationship between the French crown and the parlements, whose magistrates often resisted royal authority. Historians once accepted the argument that the political power of the parlementaires was broken after the Fronde, the failed attempt by the princes, the nobility, and the law courts to oppose the growing power of the royal government (1648-1653). Albert N. Hamscher, however, argued convincingly that the Parlement of Paris continued to exert real political influence after the Fronde. He pointed to the ongoing frustration of both Cardinal Mazarin (1602-61) and Louis XIV (r. 1643-1715) with the parlementaires to conclude that any victories that the crown won against them were both superficial and temporary, as Louis XIV’s government continued to rely on consultation and compromise with the Parlement. Patron-client studies, such as those pioneered by Sharon Kettering, stressed the personal nature of seventeenth-century politics and the importance of continued cooperation and compromise to the functioning of the state. In contrast with the Parlement of Paris, the Senate of Piedmont had a history of compliance and collaboration with the duke of Savoy, so that the instances in which the senators resisted his decisions stand out. The Senate resisted the duke’s authority in very few cases, but did so in instances in which the duke was asking the senators to favor a noblewoman’s claims over the claims of her male kin.

Noblewomen and the Law

If nobles were constantly engaged in lawsuits against members of their own family, women were often central figures in these intrafamilial conflicts. Emblematic of the multiple kinship structures that existed, women were placed at the intersection of both vertical (patrilineal

or agnatic) and horizontal (bilateral or cognatic) family structures. In his analysis of these two axes in kinship, David Warren Sabean argued that blood was seen not only as transmitting essential qualities from parent to child but also as tying people of different lineages together, such as a man and his son-in-law. In this context, women played a key role in families as conduits for blood between generations as well as between allies by marriage. In her study of aristocratic Englishwomen, Barbara Harris noted that women were crucial actors in both their natal and marital families, sharing and promoting the interests of their male relatives and acting as crucial links between natal and marital kin. “The natal connections they brought with them when they married and those they cultivated with their marital relatives and neighbors linked them to the wider world in which their families exercised and pursued wealth and power.”

Noblewomen could benefit from their membership in more than one family. Maneuvering among their extended kin, they “received support and retained resources from each of their families as they moved from one to another.”

As links between two families, women were pivotal in implementing broader kinship strategies. Grace Coolidge states that “women participated actively in the family strategies with which nobles sought to gain property, and, through property, power. They arranged marriages, raised children to carry on the family line, and managed family property.” Recent studies on women’s roles as marriage negotiators, as mothers exerting control over the next generation, as

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19 Ibid., 205.
20 Ibid., English Aristocratic Women, 10.
property managers for absent husbands, as networkers and as political actors has underscored the importance of women’s political roles within both immediate and extended families. In addition to these crucial aspects of the noblewomen’s experience, this dissertation argues that women also struggled for and exercised power by defending family property in lawsuits. Although significant work has been done on female litigants in a wide range of contexts across Europe, there is not much scholarship on the central role of noblewomen litigating in a culture of pervasive intra-familial legal disputes. Widows with small children were tasked with defending and asserting claims for their children in order to preserve the honor and wealth of their husband’s lineage. Sometimes they fought to maintain custody over their children, who might be claimed by their deceased husbands’ relatives as property of the male lineage. Women also engaged in lawsuits against their natal families, asserting and defending claims to their fathers’ property against both close family members and distant kin.

As the case studies of this dissertation will demonstrate, women exploited legal procedures and drew on family and patronage networks to assert and defend their inheritance and property claims while simultaneously working to consolidate and advance their political positions. Scholars have analyzed noblewomen’s participation in early modern politics through a variety of different avenues, expanding our notion of the political to include informal channels of power. Magdalena Sánchez demonstrated that noblewomen exploited court networks, close

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22 See the work of Barbara Harris, Grace Coolidge, Sara Chapman, and Megan Moran.
23 For scholarship on women’s roles as litigants in a range of jurisdictions and contexts, often focusing on their work and economic status, their property claims or their criminal prosecution, see the work of: Barbara Hanawalt, Judith Bennett, Tim Stretton, Cordelia Beattie, Garthine Walker, and Sara Butler (for England); Sara McDougall and Julie Hardwick (for France); Mia Kørpiola (Sweden); Marie Kelleher (Spain); Trevor Dean and Thomas Kuehn (Italy). See also this study on women in the Mediterranean: Jutta Gisela Sperling and Shona Kelly Wray, eds., Across the Religious Divide: Women, Property, and Law in the Wider Mediterranean (ca. 1300-1800) (London: Routledge, 2010). The most recent work on women litigants across European contexts is collected in: Teresa Phipps and Deborah Youngs, eds., Litigating Women: Gender and Justice in Europe, c. 1300-c.1800 (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).
24 Castiglione, Accounting for Affection.
family ties with the monarch and traditional women’s roles to act as unofficial agents of their natal family at other courts. As Sánchez noted, early modern diplomacy relied heavily on informal diplomatic networks involving mostly female relatives. More recently, scholars have questioned the extent to which noblewomen wielded actual political power, and have worked to reach a better understanding of how they acted politically, demonstrating convincingly that many noblewomen could access and exert political power, and that such exercise of political authority was in no way exceptional or unusual. This dissertation encourages scholars to expand their view of the political sphere even further to include the law courts and see them as political sites where prince and subjects negotiated their relationship and where nobles jockeyed for reputation and influence. Law courts provided nobles with an arena for adjudicating honor and status and a focus on women’s use of the courts for this purpose enhances our understanding of early modern political culture and the interplay between gender, kinship and law. The central but often overlooked role of female litigants in a culture of widespread intra-family legal disputes reveals the complexity of the relationship between law and politics in Piedmont, an understudied part of Italy.

While contributing to important discussions on the role of women in early modern politics, a subject that continues to be studied in other Italian and European archives, this project also fills a gap in scholarship on elite women and kinship networks in early modern Turin and

26 Ibid., 9.
Piedmont. In the past, much of the historiography of the city of Turin focused on the political problems that arose when the local city government was faced with the constant and often burdensome presence of its duke and his developing institutions.\textsuperscript{28} Scholars have also studied the ducal court itself, focusing on the structure of the court, its numbers, and its culture.\textsuperscript{29} Very little has been said, however, about the individuals and families who populated the court. The few studies done on the Piedmontese nobility have hinted at the great potential of the extensive family archives in Turin. Stuart Woolf studied two centuries in the history of three noble families to argue that the Piedmontese elite maintained its power and influence throughout the early modern period against the growing authority of the absolutist state.\textsuperscript{30} Woolf’s study was published in 1963, and there has not been much work done on Piedmontese noble families since then.

In addition, although there have been some studies on legal history and on law and society under the dukes of Savoy, there has not been much focus on the relationship between the people and the judicial system. Recent Francophone scholars have produced interesting work on the operation of tribunals in the French-speaking lands of the dukes of Savoy,\textsuperscript{31} while very little has been done on the Italian-speaking courts in Piedmont. The only in-depth study on the legal system in Turin is Simona Cerutti’s work on summary procedure in Turin’s Commercial

\textsuperscript{28} See, for example, the work of Giuseppe Ricuperati, and specifically: Le avventure di uno stato “ben amministrato”: Rappresentazione e realtà nello spazio sabaudo tra ancien regime e rivoluzione (Turin: Tirrenia stampatori, 1994).
\textsuperscript{30} Stuart J. Woolf, Studi sulla nobiltà Piemontese dell’epoca dell’assolutismo (Turin: Accademia delle Scienze, 1963).
\textsuperscript{31} See Françoise Briegel and Hervé Laly on the Senate of Chambéry, and Marc Ortolani on the Senate of Nice.
Tribunal (*Consolato di commercio*) in the eighteenth century.\(^{32}\) This is surprising considering the availability of the sources and the prominence of the city of Turin among seventeenth-century Italian cities. Likewise, the relationship between law and society has been almost completely overlooked, although Agnese Maria Cuccia’s recent work on spousal dynamics and dowry management as seen in petitions to Turin’s high court, the Senate, shows that there may be some interest among recent scholars in this direction.\(^ {33}\) By exploring a small portion of the wealth of the family archives in Turin, I hope to spark the interest of other scholars to explore these archives further.

*Methodology and Archival Sources*

The six protagonists of this study are all noblewomen but are nevertheless quite different from each other, representing the wide range of possible experiences of elite women: Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi (1530–1602), a wife and mother who grew up as an orphan at the French court; Isabelle de Grillet (1552–1625), a childless widow with close ties to the duke of Savoy; Maria Solaro (d. 1617), a twice-married widow with children to provide for and few political connections; Beatrice Langosco (d. 1612), a mother of illegitimate children by the duke of Savoy and legitimate children from her subsequent marriage; Matilda of Savoy (1577–1639), Beatrice’s illegitimate daughter and the beloved half-sister of the duke of Savoy; and Caterina Bobba (d. 1647), a widow and close friend of the duchess of Savoy dealing with a profligate nephew during the turbulent years of the Piedmontese Civil War.

Although different from each other in station and personality, these women all had one thing in common: they engaged in legal disputes with other members of their families, the


records of which have been well-preserved. The family archives found in the State Archives of Turin and the Royal Library of Turin were the main sources for each case study. The judicial records of the Senate, found in the cameral section of the State Archives, contain daily records of Senate decisions but only the briefest description of the decisions that the senators made in each case. The family archives, on the other hand, contain hundreds of pages of legal briefs, witness testimony, petitions, court orders, and final judgments for each suit studied in this dissertation. In some cases, as in the example of the dispute between the Luserna and Savoy-Racconigi families (chapters 1 and 2), the papers found in one family archive were used to supplement the other, resulting in a comprehensive picture of a full century of litigation between the two families.

Although a clearly-indicated and well-indexed family archive is present for some of these families (i.e. the Luserna and the Solaro di Moretta archives, which are housed in the Royal Library and State Archives respectively), others were found within the archives of other families, placed there due to marriage or seized during litigation. The records of the Bobba family, for example, are found inside the vast Morozzo della Rocca family archive. The Savoy-Racconigi archive is not immediately apparent as such. Indeed, there is no actual Savoy-Racconigi archive. Instead, much of the family’s papers are found within the “Feudo della Chiusa” subsection of the Solaro di Moretta archive, a set of fourteen bundles whose title does not hint at the family archive within. Because the Solaro di Moretta archive was only given to the State Archives in 2001, previous studies of the Savoy-Racconigi, a cadet branch of the House of Savoy, did not take account of the rich archival resources of the “Feudo della Chiusa” bundles. This project therefore provided an opportunity to explore archives that have not been studied by other scholars.
The legal records found in these family archives are dense. One to three years of legal activity might amount to several hundred pages of handwritten scrawl of varying degrees of legibility. Sometimes difficult to decipher, the records have at times also been subject to damage from water or smoke over the centuries. In one case, a rat living in the Castle of Moretta chewed a hole right through the center of one of the Solaro di Moretta bundles! Despite the often challenging nature of these documents, their completeness provided a valuable opportunity to follow these lawsuits up close and, at times, day by day, which is at the heart of this project.

In addition to drawing on the records of their legal disputes, every effort was made to trace the individuals involved in this study in other sources found in the archives. The State Archives (divided into court and cameral sections) in Turin contain a wealth of notarial and judicial records and records of the House of Savoy that are complete and well-indexed. With the exception of the records of the House of Savoy, which have been the focus of significant ongoing study by historians of the dynasty, these archives are underexploited by scholars. Ironically, the development of the early modern Sabaudian states, of which Turin was the capital, resulted in a level of documentary and archival production that is exceptional among early modern Italian states, and these archives are particularly rich for the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Indeed, the great benefit of working on elite women and family legal disputes in Turin is the variety and completeness of the available records. The
family archives that form the central sources for this study included not only records of legal disputes, but records of dowry agreements, wills, marriage contracts, settlement agreements, family accounts, gifts, investitures of feudal lands, and beautifully drafted family trees. In addition to the family archives, it was possible to trace individuals on the payroll of the duke or duchess of Savoy in their household accounts in the cameral section of the State Archives. The cameral section also contains the records of the Senate and wills received and registered by the Senate. Gifts and investitures made by the duke or duchess to an individual, including investitures of feudal lands, grants of pensions, property, or the right to collect taxes are found in the ducal patents of the cameral section. If an individual wrote to the duke or duchess of Savoy, such correspondence is available in the court section of the State Archives under “Lettere di particolari” (Letters from individuals), organized alphabetically. Because Isabelle de Grillet and Matilda of Savoy were members of the duke’s extended family, their correspondence is found in the court section of the State Archives under “Lettere diverse Real Casa” (Various letters of the Royal House) under the subsections “Lettere Principi Savoia di Racconigi” (Letters of the Princes of Savoy of Racconigi) and “Lettere di principi naturali di Savoia” (Letters of natural princes of Savoy). Unfortunately, because the other women involved in this study were not members of the House of Savoy, there is very little to no surviving correspondence written to or from them.

The absence of correspondence for some of the women involved in this study meant that it was challenging to uncover the motivations behind their actions. Both Isabelle de Grillet and Matilda of Savoy discussed their legal troubles at length in their correspondence. For the other women, it was necessary to interpret their reasoning, their goals, and their frustrations through the legal actions they took in response to their adversaries and by tracing their legal strategies
step by step. In each case study, I have worked to provide plausible explanations for the women’s actions while remaining transparent about the limitations of my sources.

As in any project in which a case-study approach is used, the salient question is whether it is possible to generalize about larger topics such as women’s legal agency or women’s use of the law as a political tool. Critics of this methodology will claim that the particularities of each individual case make it impossible, or at least very difficult, to draw larger conclusions. Indeed, scholars of early modern women and law have often taken a quantitative approach, drawing conclusions about these topics based on tallies of the outcomes of lawsuits in a given tribunal over a certain time period. This approach can be useful in providing a general picture of women’s legal activities in a given time and place. Furthermore, the limits of the surviving archival records sometimes render this the only choice for historians. There are, however, significant drawbacks to a quantitative analysis of lawsuits, which can lead to skewed conclusions. For example, if one looks only at the outcomes of a given set of cases (i.e. did women win or lose their suits), the many decisions made by the litigants along the course of the lawsuit are lost.

Such an analysis also raises the question: what did it mean to “win” or “lose” a case? In noble litigation, the Senate often issued a number of sentences over the years in various attempts to bring about a final resolution to the dispute. As in the quote at the beginning of this introduction, suits could become “immortal,” passed down from generation to generation despite the Senate’s periodic attempts at rendering a final judgment. This type of situation is so common

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34 For example, see Sara McDougall, *Bigamy and Christian Identity in Late Medieval Champagne* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), which analyzes a small body of convictions (about twenty) from the episcopal court of Troyes, as well as the personnel of the court itself, to make a convincing argument that, rather than an institution in crisis, the cases in question show how highly people valued Christian marriage and the framework established for it by the Church.
in litigation among the nobility that making the sentence the focal point of analysis yields very little to the historian. At various moments in the suit, a litigant could be said to have “won” or “lost,” only for the case to be resumed a few months or years later. I am convinced that a comprehensive overview of the litigants’ decisions, reactions, and strategies over the long-term life of a case tell us much more about early modern women’s legal agency and experiences than is possible in a sentence-focused approach.

The wide-ranging nature of the legal records I found during my archival research enabled me to pursue a different method. I could have combed through the Senate’s records of its daily decisions and made note of the appearances of noblewomen, tallying up the types of actions in which they were involved and the ultimate outcomes of their suits. Instead, I applied a microhistorical approach to a small handful of cases to discover the day-to-day workings of a noble lawsuit, analyzing the many decisions that the parties made over these decades-long disputes, and sought to interpret the litigants’ motivations and objectives over the years. As I read through the hundreds of pages of briefs, petitions, and Senate orders, I became aware that the ultimate sentence in each case was less significant to the litigants than were the years of litigation that preceded it, with all of their struggles and victories. Sometimes, the lack of action was also significant, as when a litigant decided to give up on their claim temporarily until their adversary died, at which point they could try again with their adversary’s successor. As stated above, early modern litigation between nobles was a dynamic process. The litigants’ objectives and motivations shifted over time as their circumstances changed. For example, a suit filed in order to claim payment of a dowry or an inheritance could, over time, become a tool for defending family honor. In such cases, obtaining a favorable final ruling became secondary to the continuation of a protracted legal battle against a worthy adversary. In each chapter, I have
sought to extract the motivations and objectives of the parties insofar as is possible by making use of the variety of available documentation.

My approach was inspired by Caroline Castiglione’s innovative work, *Accounting for Affection: Mothering and Politics in Early Modern Rome*, which introduced the concept of the *mater litigans*, a term that Castiglione coined to describe “the legal acumen and tenacity shared among Roman noblewomen.”35 In this work, Castiglione placed five aristocratic Roman mothers from the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries within “a larger pattern of female advocacy on the Italian peninsula” to conclude that “as law courts became more central to state power, women became stronger advocates for themselves and their families and learned how to navigate expanding judicial and bureaucratic systems.”36 Castiglione noted that scholars have typically “focused their efforts in either judicial or epistolary sources,” but that her work “grapples with conflicts that were neither exclusively in the domestic sphere nor entirely in the theater of Rome, but which unfolded in the overlapping territory between these spaces of aristocratic life.”37 Indeed, she noted that “a study based exclusively on legal records would highlight the adversarial aspect of family life” which, although present, would not provide the full family dynamics.38 Castiglione exploited a range of both formal (“public”) sources and informal (“hidden”) sources to provide a nuanced analysis of early modern Roman mothers, family disputes, and politics.

Although my approach to this project was inspired by Castiglione’s work, the records found during my archival research led me to pursue a different methodology and focus. The

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36 Ibid., 18-19.
37 Ibid., 20-21.
38 Ibid., 21.
family archives in Turin, while comprehensive in their records of lawsuits, did not yield the extensive correspondence that Castiglione found in her family archives in Rome. When letters were present, they were mostly written between male family members with very few to no letters written to or from the women of the family. Thus, as noted above, I sought other avenues to track down the words of the women involved in this study, such as their correspondence with the dukes and duchesses of Savoy. For some women, like Maria Solaro, I found no correspondence at all. However, an entire subsection of the Solaro family archives is devoted to Maria’s legal papers, from which I was able to detect something of her personality. The impressive extent of her legal archive speaks to Maria’s tenacity and legal acumen even if I could find no trace of her own words. Caterina Bobba was even harder to trace outside of her lawsuits, as her presence in the archives was limited to the few years between her husband’s death and her own. I was, however, able to supplement my information about the Bobba family by tracing Caterina’s daughter, Angela, in the household records of Duchess Marie Christine and by using later correspondence between members of the family and the duke of Savoy to shed light on the character of Caterina’s legal nemesis, her nephew Mario Vittorio Bobba.

The Senate of Piedmont in Turin

Before launching into the case studies, it is necessary to say a few words about the Senate of Piedmont, the law court that served as the venue for the legal disputes among the Piedmontese nobility. While term senate tends to evoke the political institution of ancient Rome or today’s legislative assemblies, in medieval Italy senate encompassed a wide range of meanings and forms, referring to institutions that performed a variety of both political and judicial functions.39

In the fifteenth century, the term *senate* was often used to describe the duke of Savoy’s councils in Turin and Chambéry which had the authority to issue judgments in the last instance. The senates in their early modern form were first officially designated as such by Duke Emanuele Filiberto (r. 1553-80), who reorganized his government when his domains were restored to him by the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559, after decades of French occupation. The duke’s *Ordini nuovi* clarified the functions and procedures of the new legal system, establishing the senates in Turin and Chambéry at the top. This legislation was confirmed and supplemented by Emanuele Filiberto’s son Carlo Emanuele I (r. 1580-1630) in the *Nuove Costituzioni ducali*, issued in 1582.

Both the *Ordini nuovi* and the *Nuove Costituzioni ducali* described the senates as central to the developing hierarchy of the duke’s states. As the highest courts of appeal in the ducal lands, their decisions served as precedents and guidance for lower courts. In addition to acting as the ultimate appellate courts, the senates had immediate jurisdiction over complex and high-stakes disputes such as those involving fiefs, the nobility, high clergy and disputes between communes. The duke could also send specific cases to a senate at his discretion. Senate decisions could only be challenged by appealing directly to the duke, who could either resolve the case himself or send it to his Council of State for a decision.

In addition to their judicial functions, the Senates performed administrative activities, including the *interinazione*, or registration, of ducal edicts and patents. The duke issued laws and sent them to the senates to be registered, which served the dual purposes of informing the public of the new legislation and making it enforceable within the senates’ jurisdictions. But this simple

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40 Ibid., 75.
41 A third Senate was established in Nice in 1614 under Carlo Emanuele I.
procedure implied something more. Before registering the laws, the senators studied them to make sure they were in line with the general principles of reason and justice and did not conflict with any other ducal edicts or precedents. If, during their examination of a law, the senators found anything contrary to the principle of justice, anything contradictory, or anything prejudicial to the public interest, they informed the duke, who either made the proposed changes or ordered the Senate to proceed with registration.43

As was the case in the French parlements, this procedure could take on political implications and lead to tension between the magistrates and the ruler. Michael Breen noted that friction between early modern political institutions “was characteristic, and even fundamental to the operations of the ancient régime state,” with a constant negotiation of boundaries of authority between the ruler, high courts, and the myriad lower courts and other administrative institutions.44 In 1519, the Savoyard jurist Claude de Seysse (1458-1520) proposed that a monarch’s power was “bridled” by the ideal of justice, with the parlements established “chiefly to bridle the absolute power that the kings might want to use.”45

The dichotomy between robe and sword nobility that has so informed French historiography is less applicable to early modern Piedmont, where the sons of great feudal families often studied the law and made careers as leading jurists.46 For this reason, the tension

46 “Sword nobles” were the traditional French aristocracy with a history of military service while “robe nobles” were the rising early modern class of judicial or administrative officeholders who were ennobled as a reward for their service. Scholars have analyzed the extent to which the two groups were in conflict with one another. Stuart Carroll, for example, argues that scholars have greatly overestimated the rivalry between sword and robe nobility: Blood and Violence in Early Modern France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). Examples of Piedmontese nobles who sat on the Senate include the Cacherano family who had numerous senators in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, including Ottaviano Cacherano, count of Osasco, mentioned in chapter 3 as Maria Solaro’s father-in-law.
between robe and sword was much less marked in Piedmont and sons of noble families did occasionally sit as magistrates. According to Geoffrey Symcox, the Senate of Piedmont also had less of a tradition of resistance to its prince. Indeed, unlike their French counterparts in the parlements, the Senate tended to avoid offering serious resistance to the dukes of Savoy. Symcox characterized the senators as “studious, indefatigable, characterized by an austere rectitude that might verge on intellectual narrowness, and by a tradition of devoted service to the state that on occasion could take precedence over independence of judgment.” With the development of absolutism under Vittorio Amedeo II (r. 1675-1730), the senates became even less independent, living “in satisfactory symbiosis with the government,” and rarely protesting the duke’s interference in court matters. Indeed, the senators “loyally supported government policy” and were “rewarded by the grant of powers stripped from other courts.” During Vittorio Amedeo’s reign the Senate “had been transformed from independent checks on the ruler’s power into judicial cogs in a larger government machine; instead of standing apart from the central power, they had been absorbed by it.” In the rare instances when they opposed him, Vittorio Amedeo took swift measures to bring the senators to heel. For example, in 1723 when the second president of the Senate issued a decision that ran counter to the duke’s instructions, he found himself banished to his country estate for two years. Since there have been no comprehensive studies of the Senate of Piedmont during the reign of Vittorio Amedeo II, it is possible that

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The Mandredi di Lusera family, discussed in chapters 1 and 2, also had a tradition of sending their sons to study the law, although they did not sit on the Senate.


48 Vittorio Amadeo II became king of Sicily in 1713, exchanging Sicily for the kingdom of Sardinia in 1720.

49 Symcox, Absolutism, 56.

50 Ibid., 56. For example, when the smaller senates of Pinerolo and Casale were shut down in 1730, the Senate of Piedmont took on their functions.

51 Ibid., 58.

52 Ibid., 56.
Symcox overestimated the sovereign’s ability to control and manipulate the senates. More work on the relationship between the two parties throughout the early modern period would be useful in clarifying this point.

A century before the rise of absolutism under Vittorio Amedeo II, when our case studies begin, the senates may have been more independent but nevertheless tended to acquiesce to the duke’s instructions in most matters. As stated above, this dissertation will show that the Senate did offer resistance to the duke in specific matters, most notably when the duke was promoting one of his female relatives or clients over the claims of her male kin. In these cases, the Senate resisted the duke in order to promote the authority of the woman’s male relatives. The case studies within this dissertation demonstrate less cooperation between the ruler and the courts than would later follow with the growth of absolutism in the latter half of the seventeenth century. They reveal that conflict tended to occur between the senators and the duke when the senators’ preference for agnatic claims conflicted with the ruler’s own dynastic logic.

**The Context: a Brief Introduction to the Principality of Piedmont and the House of Savoy**

When the people of Italy voted to abolish their monarchy and form the modern Italian Republic in 1946, the house of Savoy had been ruling its lands for almost a thousand years, first as counts, then as dukes, and finally as kings. During the early modern period, their lands stretched from Duchy of Savoy in southeastern France across the Alps into the Principality of Piedmont in northwestern Italy and included the Alpine state of Aosta and the city of Nice on the Mediterranean. From its capital in Turin, the house of Savoy ruled over a highly diverse population both linguistically and culturally, and played a key role in early modern politics. The Sabaudian lands were strategically located between Habsburg Milan and southern France, with
the dukes controlling key Alpine passages. The house of Savoy was sought after as an important ally in the ongoing struggle between France and the Habsburgs, and the dukes used this to their advantage. The fortunes of the house of Savoy rose during the early modern period as those of other Italian states declined and, in 1861, Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy became king of a united Italy (r. 1861-1878). As a result, from the nineteenth century, the history of the house of Savoy was seen as part of the narrative of the Italian Risorgimento. And, because the house of Savoy ceded the Duchy of Savoy and the County of Nice to France in 1860, historians have tended to overlook the integral role of those lands in the Sabaudian state. Indeed, the delineation of the modern-day national boundaries of France and Italy in the nineteenth century have left the Sabaudian lands without a united historiography, as Italian and French historians have taken national approaches to their work. As stated by Matthew Vester, “French scholars tended to treat the history of the western Sabaudian lands as provincial history, without regard to their role as the late medieval seat of a sovereign ruler. Italian historians collapsed all of the cisalpine lands under the rubric of “Piedmont,” and discussed the role of this region as the inevitable leader of Italian unification.”

From 1494 to 1559, the Valois fought the Habsburgs for control of the Italian peninsula. In 1536, François I, wanting full control of the Sabaudian territories as a strategic gateway into Italy, invaded the lands of his uncle, duke Carlo II of Savoy, forcing the duke into exile and beginning a long period of French occupation of the Sabaudian lands. Carlo’s son, Emanuele Filiberto, served the Habsburgs in Philip II’s army and as governor of the Netherlands from 1555

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53 The term “Sabaudian” is used here to more accurately indicate the lands ruled by the House of Savoy during the early modern period. The principle elements of this composite monarchy (the Principality of Piedmont, the Duchy of Savoy, the Duchy of Aosta, and the County of Nice) were divided by the modern boundaries between France and Italy in the nineteenth century, resulting in a largely anachronistic division in historiography.

to 1559. He led the Spanish invasion of northern France and, in 1557, won the decisive victory of
the Italian Wars against the French at St. Quentin. This victory led to the Peace of Cateau-
Cambrésis, ending the 65-year struggle over control of Italy. Under the terms of the treaty,
Emanuele Filiberto’s lands were restored to him and he was married to the sister of Henry II of
France, Marguerite of Valois, duchess of Berry. In 1563, the duke moved his capital east from
Chambéry on the western side of the Alps to Turin in Piedmont. Emanuele Filiberto and
Marguerite had only one child, Carlo Emanuele, who succeeded his father in 1580. Carlo
Emanuele I (1580-1630) married Philip II’s daughter Catalina Micaela. With ambitious plans to
expand the duchy, in 1588 Carlo Emanuele I seized the marquisate of Saluzzo from the French
and attempted unsuccessfully to take control of the neighboring duchy of Montferrat, an imperial
fief held by the Gonzaga family. Carlo Emanuele died in 1630 while on the Montferrat
campaign. In 1619, his son Vittorio Amedeo I (1630-37) had married Marie Christine of France,
a daughter of Henry IV and Marie de’ Medici. When Vittorio Amedeo died suddenly, Marie
Christine (referred to as “Madama Royale”) became regent for her five-year-old son Francesco
Giacinto and, after his death the following year, for the four-year-old Carlo Emanuele II (1638-
75). Her husband’s brothers, Cardinal Maurizio and Prince Tommaso opposed the regency of
their sister-in-law and her French supporters, resulting in the Piedmontese Civil War (1639-42).
The supporters of Madama Marie Christine, the “madamisti,” were backed by France while the
“principisti” were supported by Spain. Peace was finally concluded between the factions in 1642
and was sealed by the marriage of Marie Christine’s daughter to her uncle Maurizio, who
abandoned the religious life. Marie Christine maintained control of the duchy and, although her
regency ended officially in 1648, her son, Carlo Emanuele II, permitted her to remain in charge until her death in 1663.

**Figure 1. The Early Modern Dukes of Savoy and their Consorts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duke</th>
<th>Reign</th>
<th>Consort</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlo II</td>
<td>1504-1553</td>
<td>Beatrice of Portugal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuele Filiberto</td>
<td>1553-1580</td>
<td>Marguerite of France</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlo Emanuele I</td>
<td>1580-1630</td>
<td>Catalina Micaela of Spain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vittorio Amedeo I</td>
<td>1630-1637</td>
<td>Marie Christine of France</td>
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<tr>
<td>Francesco Giacinto</td>
<td>1637-1638</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlo Emanuele II</td>
<td>1638-1675</td>
<td>(1) Françoise Madeline d’Orleans</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Marie Jeanne Baptist of Savoy-Nemours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vittorio Amedeo II</td>
<td>1675-1730</td>
<td>king of Sicily (1713-1720)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>king of Sardinia (1720-1730)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>m. (1) Anne Marie d’Orléans</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(2) Anna Canalis di Cumiana</td>
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**Dissertation Outline**

Chapter One focuses on the litigation between Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi and her Savoy-Racconigi cousins over her “insufficient” dowry. A Piedmontese noblewoman, Beatrice was orphaned when she was a small child and was sent to be raised at the French court. In 1549, she married Piedmontese noble Carlo Manfredi, count of Luserna, and returned to Piedmont. Twelve years later, she sued her cousins on her father’s side, the only remaining members of her natal family, claiming that she had not be “competentemente dotata” (sufficiently dowried) when she married. Although originally launched for financial reasons, the Luserna lawsuit came to be identified with various slights to the honor of the family. Gradually, the lawsuit became a tool that the Luserna used to defend their family prestige and enhance their standing at the court of the duke of Savoy. Indeed, for the Luserna, winning was not everything. The legal battle itself was crucial.

Chapter Two continues the saga of Beatrice’s dowry, but from the very different perspective of the Luserna’s adversary, Isabelle de Grillet, who inherited the suit from her
deceased husband, the last of the Savoy-Racconigi lineage. A noblewoman of high status whose family was very close to the duke of Savoy, Isabelle nevertheless entered the lawsuit from a position of financial and political weakness. She drew on the legal and extralegal resources at her disposal as well as her kinship with the duke to recover her place among the Piedmontese elite. Although the duke was inclined to help her defend herself against the Luserna, his intervention was largely ineffective. Isabelle fought vigorously and successfully on her own, causing the Luserna to abandon the lawsuit until after her death. This lawsuit demonstrates that although the duke might pressure the Senate to reach a certain outcome, the senators could resist. It also shows that a persistent and resourceful noblewoman could be successful in court against powerful men even without the aid of her patron.

Chapter Three focuses on Maria Solaro, a noblewoman of lesser status than Isabelle de Grillet but no less resourceful. Maria Solaro’s cousins Carlo and Ludovico Solaro were able to overcome her claims to her father’s inheritance because the Senate held that Maria’s father had intended his property to go to his male heirs, even though the word “male” was not expressly stated in his will. The Senate also concluded that a woman was ineligible to inherit feudal property. Realizing that she could not resist her cousins on her own, Maria sought an alliance with the head of the main branch of the Solaro family. Ultimately, although Maria was unsuccessful in her inheritance suit, her alliance pushed Carlo and Ludovico out of Moretta. Maria’s example shows that a woman of lesser noble status and without political connections was at a major disadvantage when asserting inheritance rights against politically powerful male relatives, even when the legal arguments would seem to support her claims. Maria’s lawsuit is also an example of the trend towards supporting agnatic kinship claims over female claims.
Chapter Four analyzes the conflict over the inheritance of the fief of Pianezza from the perspective of Beatrice Langosco. Duke Emanuele Filiberto granted the fief to Beatrice after she gave birth to their illegitimate daughter, Matilda. When the duke died, Beatrice married Francesco Martinengo and had legitimate sons with him. Beatrice then began repeatedly petitioning the new duke, Carlo Emanuele I, to bar Matilda (his own half-sister) from inheriting Pianezza in favor of her legitimate Martinengo sons. The series of requests she made shed light on the pressures Beatrice faced in her new marriage with regard to her ownership of the fief. Carlo Emanuele placed Matilda under his protection even as he complied with Beatrice’s numerous requests to disinherit her. Beatrice’s petitions raise questions about her sense of loyalty and family identity. Although it was not unusual for a woman to have two sets of children from different fathers, Matilda’s high status complicated the situation, creating problems that would not have existed in the more typical situation with two sets of children of similar status. In addition, evidence from her petitions suggests that Beatrice continued to identify with her natal family, the Langosco, suggesting that the tension she experienced was not limited to the competing claims of her two sets of children, but was further complicated by her ongoing allegiance to the Langosco lineage.

Chapter Five continues the study of the conflict over Pianezza from the perspective of Matilda of Savoy (Lady Matilda) after her mother’s death. Matilda’s correspondence and the records of her lawsuits shed light on the difficult relationship between an illegitimate woman and her legitimate half-siblings. Although illegitimate, Matilda had much in her favor as the beloved half-sister of the duke of Savoy. As in the case of Isabelle de Grillet, however, the duke was unable to pressure the Senate to reach the outcome he and Matilda desired. While the Senate generally acquiesced to the duke’s instructions, the senators pushed back against the duke when
he tried to promote Matilda over the claims of her legitimate half-brothers. Ultimately, Carlo Emanuele was unable to fully bring Matilda in as a client for the dynasty due to the Senate’s preference for the claims of male primogeniture.

Chapter Six shifts from a focus on the litigants to a focus on witnesses and how they could be used by litigants. When her husband died, Caterina Bobba fought over his property with her step-nephew. Both sides called witnesses, most of whom were servants and neighbors of the Bobba family. At their own volition and without prompting by the court, Mario’s witnesses presented a narrative of the facts that was detrimental to him and favorable to Caterina. The unusual behavior of these witnesses demonstrates that common people could and did exercise their own agency as they gave depositions. These witnesses aligned themselves with Caterina rather than with the party who had summoned them. In Caterina, the witnesses saw a potential patron who was close to Dowager Duchess Marie Christine, the recent victor of a tumultuous civil war. They therefore distanced themselves from Mario, a man held in disdain by the new regime. Caterina benefitted from their actions and won her case.

These case studies support the two main arguments of this dissertation, namely that elite men and women used the law courts as political venues and that success in the law courts was intertwined with women’s capacity to exploit kinship and patronage ties and was therefore impacted by their own political standing. In each of these cases, the private mixed with the political as women combined a knowledgeable use of the law with the making of alliances and reliance on their patrons and clients. By applying a microhistorical approach to these lawsuits, it is possible to track the legal and political dynamics at play in each case. Tracing these women’s decisions and reactions at each step of their legal disputes and placing them within their political
context reveals that strategies implemented outside the courtroom were just as crucial as
presenting a convincing legal argument.

**A Note on Language**

The legal briefs, petitions, ducal pronouncements, and Senate sentences cited in this
dissertation were written in Italian. Testaments and legal opinions by Piedmontese jurists were
written in Latin. Older judicial records (before the restoration of Duke Emanuele Filiberto in
1559) were also written in Latin. Because the Sabaudian nobility was bilingual, correspondence
between nobles was written in French or Italian. Very occasionally, a noble might pen a letter in
Spanish. The chosen language often depended on the origins of the addressee. For example,
when writing to Marie Christine, duchess of Savoy and a French princess, nobles most often
addressed her in her own native language of French. Isabelle de Grillet, a Frenchwoman, tended
to use French in her correspondence, except when dealing with the local population in her
Piedmontese lands, when she naturally used the language they would best understand: Italian.
Matilda of Savoy, living at court as a young woman under the influence of Infanta Catalina
Micaela, Duke Carlo Emanuele I’s Spanish wife, occasionally wrote to her ducal half-brother in
Spanish or interspersed Italian and Spanish terms in the same letter. In short, the Sabaudian
nobility was at ease in at least two languages, if not three, as demonstrated in their
 correspondence.

All translations of archival documents and non-English secondary sources were carried out by
me and I assume responsibility for any mistakes therein.
Chapter 1
The “Insufficient” Dowry of Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi, 1549-1577

My father had me study Rhetoric, Logic, Mathematics, Philosophy, and Music, as well as weaponry, riding and other knightly exercises, and when I had begun to study the Law, my father died, leaving me with four sisters, all unmarried, 28,000 scudi in debt and with twenty-two lawsuits that everyone was demanding of me... Our greatest enemies were the Lord of Pancalieri, along with the Lord of Racconigi his brother, with whom my father was engaged in a lawsuit over the dowry of my mother, and they were supported by the Countess of Pancalieri. The Memoirs of Carlo Francesco Manfredi, count of Luserna (1551-1618)¹

Introduction

On July 24, 1549, Emperor Charles V (r. 1519-1556) hosted a magnificent multiple-day event at his court in Brussels in which two of the great houses of the Piedmontese nobility were joined together through the marriage of Carlo Manfredi, count of Luserna (c. 1508-1577), and Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi (1530-1602), the only child of Gianfrancesco of Savoy-Racconigi, count of Cavour. Wedding guests included the emperor’s two sisters Eleanor, the queen of France; Mary, the queen of Hungary; the emperor’s son Philip, future king of Spain; Emanuele Filiberto, the prince of Piedmont; and a host of other noblemen and women of the imperial court. Throughout the ceremonies, banquets, and dancing that celebrated their wedding, Carlo and Beatrice were honored with personal attention from Charles V and his family, demonstrating their high status among the European nobility. Although the marriage was a great success, however, Beatrice would later claim that she had not been “competentemente dotata” [sufficiently dowried] when she married Carlo. Orphaned in childhood, she sued her cousins on

¹ Carlo Francesco Manfredi di Luserna, “Memorie,” 398. “Il mio Padre mi fa attendere alli studi di Rethorica, Logica, Matematica, Filosofia et Musia, come al tirar d’arme, cavalcare et altri esorcizi cavagliereschi, et havendo cominciati gli studi di Legi, morse il S.e mio Padre, lasciandomi quattro sorelle nubili tutte, vintioto milia scudi di debito et vintidue liti che tutti domandavano a me...II Conte di Pancalieri con Monsù di Racconigi suo fratello con quali litigava mio Padre le doti di mia madre erano inimici capitali, agiutati dalla Contessa di Pancalieri.” Carlo Francesco Manfredi’s parents were Carlo Manfredi di Luserna and Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi. The individuals referred to by him are Claudio of Savoy-Racconigi, count of Pancalieri, his brother Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi, count of Racconigi, and Claudio’s wife Marie de’ Gondi, prima dama d’onore of Duchess Marguerite de France and mother of Isabelle de’ Gondi (see chapter 2).
her father’s side, the only remaining members of her natal family, to force them to pay her a dowry that she considered appropriate to her status and that of her husband. This unusual retroactive claim resulted in a series of lawsuits that continued for a century, as Beatrice and her cousins (and, later, their heirs) argued over the meaning of “sufficient” dowry, dowry traditions among the Sabaudian nobility, and whether Beatrice was entitled to a greater dowry than had been established in her father’s will. Even when the Senate of Piedmont issued sentences in Beatrice’s favor and her Savoy-Racconigi cousins were ordered to pay, Beatrice and her husband continued to appeal these decisions and to push for larger sums.

This chapter argues that the lawsuits that noble families engaged in were dynamic; that is, the motivations behind them could change over the years as family circumstances changed. Lawsuits among nobles could continue for decades, spanning generations and, over time, families could find that, although they had originally launched a lawsuit for one reason, they had additional and different reasons to continue it. In the Luserna case, a dispute that was originally financial came to be identified with various slights to the honor of the Luserna family. Over the years, the lawsuit became a tool for defending the family prestige. Indeed, engaging in a lawsuit against another great noble family was a strategy that nobles could use to enhance their own standing at a princely court. While the stakes could be very high, involving claims to lucrative properties and large sums of money, achieving a favorable final ruling in such lawsuits was not necessarily the primary objective for these families. Instead, this chapter will demonstrate that the legal battle itself could be the objective. A noble family could draw prestige from the fact that they were locked in protracted combat in the law courts against a highly esteemed adversary.

Use of the law courts as sites for adjudicating status and honor coincided with a decline in private violence among European nobles. Jonathan Dewald has identified a link between the
growing power of the state apparatus, litigation among elite families, and a decline in dueling, as early modern rulers outlawed the practice. The proliferation of new law courts and the creation of growing numbers of jurists and lawyers to work in them during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries impacted the European nobility, as nobles with significant property were forced to engage in “incessant litigation and constant interchanges with the legal system.” Slowly, the European nobility came to favor the law courts as the venue for settling disputes rather than resorting to private violence like the duel. By the 1660s, dueling had “lost much of its luster” and “had ceased to be a social norm.” As this gradual shift took place, litigation came not only to be seen as the proper place for resolving conflict, but also became a source of reputation and honor.

In noble litigation, both sides poured significant sums into legal battles year after year and, in cases like the suit analyzed in this chapter, the parties might even purposefully prolong the suit to keep the conflict going. Over time, as the Luserna family suffered a series of political setbacks and insults to their honor, the lawsuit became a vehicle for the family to defend themselves. As the political standing of this great house was undermined, their commitment to continuing this lawsuit solidified. For the Luserna, the financial interests involved in the dispute over Beatrice’s dowry operated alongside an increasing interest in defending their social prestige, demonstrating that the various interests driving a family to continue to litigate a suit over many years could change. The Luserna case demonstrates that lawsuits were means that families used to expressing the nature of their relationship to another family, their relationship to the ruler, and the relationship between particular family members.

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3 Ibid., 116.
4 Ibid., 117.
The seeds of the dispute between the Savoy-Racconigi and the Luserna were sown a decade before the wedding took place. Beatrice’s dowry was established on February 10, 1538 in the will of her father, Gianfrancesco of Savoy-Racconigi. His will provided for a dowry of 2,000 gold scudi,\textsuperscript{5} which was to be handed over to Beatrice’s groom upon their marriage. The purpose of the dowry was to defray the couple’s household expenses during marriage (“sustinere onera matrimonii”). The husband took possession of the dowry for that purpose, although the wife retained her rights to it. During her marriage, the wife held her dowry in “nuda proprietas,” meaning that she owned it but had neither the right of usufruct over it nor the right to alienate it. If the husband died before his wife, the husband’s heirs were required to return the dowry to his widow. This was the dowry’s second function: to maintain the widow after her husband’s death. If the wife died before her husband, the dowry would pass to their surviving children. The size of a woman’s dowry reflected the honor of both her natal and marital families. As this chapter will demonstrate, dowry amounts were a frequent topic of conversation among the nobility, who kept track of them as an indicator of a family’s standing in society.

After their marriage, Carlo and Beatrice decided that the 2,000 gold scudi established for Beatrice’s dowry were not commensurate with the status of the Luserna and Savoy-Racconigi families and they filed a legal complaint to that effect, triggering a lawsuit that continued for generations. The couple’s claim that a higher dowry be provided for Beatrice than that established years previously in her father’s will was highly unusual. Dowries were negotiated

\textsuperscript{5} FdC, Mazzo 16, sottofasc. no. 3, p. 2. The text of the will reads: “Item sibi haeredem particularem instituit, et ore proprio nominuit ide Dominus testator Dominam Beatricem eius filiam legitimam, et naturalem ex quon. Ill. Domina Iayma eius seconda uxor in scutis duobus milibus auri voluendis per eius infra scriptum haeredem cum dicta Domina Beatrix sit nubilis aetatis, quibus mediantibus, salvistamen bonis dotalibus dictae Dominae Iaymae eius quondam matris ad ea spectantibus, voluit, et vultidem Dominus Testator eam fore, et esse tacitam, et contentam ab omni et toto eo, quod petere possit in suis bonis, et haereditate, et interim, et donec uxorata fuerit, voluit, et volt idem Dominus Testator eam habere victum, et vestitum honorifice secondum eius facultatem, et statum in ipsius Domini Testatoris Domno.”
between two families well before the marriage took place, and contracts were drafted and signed
that specified the amount of the dowry and how it was to be paid. Dowries consisted of sums of
money but also of land, jewelry, clothing, or other property. All of this would be spelled out in
great detail in the contract. The extensive records of this lawsuit, which are located
predominantly in the “Luserna Manfredi di Angrogna” family archive in the Royal Library of
Turin and in the “Feudo della Chiusa” archive in the State Archives of Turin, do not provide any
indication of the reasoning behind Beatrice and Carlo’s decision to make such an unusual
retroactive claim, which seems to have been unprecedented.⁶ Their insistence on pushing the
Savoy-Racconigi for greater sums over the years of the suit and appealing decisions that were
favorable to them indicates that their ultimate objective in this lawsuit was not solely financial.
This chapter argues that, as the Luserna family suffered politically, they sought to rehabilitate
their standing via their ongoing lawsuit with the Savoy-Racconigi. A great Piedmontese house on
their own merit, there were not many families in Piedmont that could boast the high status,
wealth, or proximity to the duke of Savoy that the Luserna could. As a cadet branch of the House
of Savoy, the Savoy-Racconigi were one of the few Piedmontese families that were on par with
the Luserna. Through marriage with Beatrice, Carlo Manfredi established a family tie to the
Savoy-Racconigi. Witness testimony taken in this case shows that people in Piedmont discussed
the lawsuit between the two great families quite a lot. Although the Luserna originally filed this

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⁶ The papers concerning the lawsuit between the Savoy-Racconigi and the Luserna families are found in two
archives in Turin: the Manfredi di Luserna family papers in the Biblioteca Reale and in the “Feudo della Chiusa”
[Fief of La Chiusa] subsection of the Solaro di Moretta family papers in the State Archives. The “Feudo della
Chiusa” papers are essentially the family archive of the Savoy-Racconigi family. It is unclear how these papers
arrived in the Solaro di Moretta family archive, but according to the archival inventory they were already there in
1792 when professional archivist Costanzo Tamietti was hired by the last count of Moretta to put the family papers
in order. Consisting of 14 bundles, the “Feudo della Chiusa” papers were in all likelihood from the personal archive
of Isabelle de Grillet’s niece, Perona Grillet, baroness of Entraque. Additional documents for the Savoy-Racconigi
are found in the “Lettere principi diversi” [Letters of various princes] and the “Principi del sangue” [Princes of the
blood] sections of the State Archives.
suit for financial purposes, as they suffered various slights to their honor over the years, the suit came to be used as a political venue in which they could express their honor through their legal battle against an equally high-status opponent whom they saw as the origin of much of their dishonor.

**A Successful Marriage**

Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi and Carlo Manfredi, count of Luserna were indeed evenly matched in terms of their social standing among the Piedmontese elite. Lady Beatrice’s family, the Savoy-Racconigi, was an illegitimate cadet branch of the House of Savoy, founded when Ludovico, the last prince of Savoy-Acaia (1364-1418), died without legitimate heirs. His only surviving child was Ludovico, “the bastard of Acaia,” (1390-1459) born of the prince’s extramarital relationship with an unknown Neapolitan noblewoman. Before he died, Ludovico the elder granted his illegitimate son the fiefs of Racconigi and Migliabruna, marking the beginning of the ascent of the Savoy-Racconigi, who began playing key roles in Sabaudian politics as cousins and advisors of the dukes of Savoy. In 1412, Ludovico the younger married a woman from an illustrious family, Alisia Montbel d’Entremont, with whom he had four daughters and two sons. Beatrice was the last descendent of their second son, Ludovico.

The groom, Carlo Manfredi, count of Luserna, was from a prominent family of feudal lords with medieval roots in Piedmont. His father had been a preeminent legal scholar and Carlo followed in his father’s footsteps. In striking contrast to France, where there was a marked dichotomy between robe and sword nobles, heads of great feudal families in Piedmont like the

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7 Information about the origins and history of the Savoy-Racconigi line, particularly the line of Ludovico the bastard’s son and heir, Francesco, and on their service to the House of Savoy is found in Anna Maria Berio, “Per la storia dei Savoia-Racconigi,” *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino*, no. 42 (1940): 60-107. Additional information on the family, focusing particularly on the relationship between the Savoy-Racconigi and the community of Racconigi is found in Aldo Mainardi, “La famiglia dei Savoia-Racconigi,” *Bollettino della Società per gli studi storici, archeologici ed artistici nella provincia di Cuneo*, no. 92, 1985: 171-189.
Luserna were often leading jurists in the Sabaudian lands and engaged in service to the House of Savoy. Carlo Manfredi received a law degree from Padua in 1534 and became a law professor. His academic career, however, was interrupted by the French invasion of Piedmont in 1536. Steadfastly loyal to the House of Savoy, Carlo left his teaching position to serve his duke and was sent on a series of diplomatic missions to Milan, Rome, and Brussels, where he met his bride. Beatrice’s parents had both died when she was a small child and she had been raised at the court of Eleanor, queen of France. When the queen’s husband, Francis I, died in 1547, Beatrice accompanied Eleanor to her new home at her brother’s imperial court in Brussels. Beatrice’s legal petitions continuously stressed the extraordinary nature of her upbringing among European royalty, often noting that she was “born of the House of Entremont on her mother’s side and of the House of Savoy on her father’s side, and had always been nurtured and raised at the courts of kings and emperors.”

An anonymous report of the Luserna/Savoy-Racconigi wedding is found in the Luserna family archive in the Royal Library of Turin. The sumptuous nature of the wedding and the high status of the attendees underscores the elevated positions of both the Luserna and Savoy-Racconigi families, providing legitimacy for the claims of exalted noble status at the European-wide level that they would constantly seek to emphasize at home in Piedmont. Likely written by a member of the Piedmontese ambassadorial delegation to Brussels, the report describes lavish

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8 The doge of Venice, Andrea Griti, granted Count Carlo Manfredi Luserna the title of doctor in law of the University of Padua on July 28, 1534. ALM, mazzo 4, fasc. 13.
9 A brief history of Carlo’s short-lived career in Venice and his early service to the House of Savoy is given in FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 7, atto no. 89, pp. 15-16.
10 An account of Beatrice’s childhood, including her parents’ death, her appointment as a lady-in-waiting to Queen Eleanor and their later move to the emperor’s court at Brussels is described in a brief submitted in the lawsuit between the Savoy-Racconigi and the counts of Luserna. ALM, mazzo 112, fasc. 15, p. 81.
11 ALM, mazzo 112, fasc. 65. “Essa signora Beatrice e nasciuta della cassa di antramonte da parte di madre et per parte del padre da quella di savoya essendo stata sempre notrita et allevata in corte di re et imperator.”
festivities. After attending Mass with Charles V at the Church of Saint James, Carlo Manfredi, accompanied by the emperor, the emperor’s son Philip, the duke of Alva, and “all the rest of the court,” proceeded to the royal palace.\textsuperscript{13} They made their way to the palace chapel, where they were joined by the bride, whom the queens of France and Hungary had accompanied “by the hand.”\textsuperscript{14} The wedding mass was celebrated by the bishop of Arras, Antoine Perrenot,\textsuperscript{15} and when the ceremony was over they were “conducted by hand by the above-mentioned princes, to the endless sounding of trumpets...to great hall.”\textsuperscript{16} There, a banquet was held followed by music and dancing.

Carlo and Beatrice were treated with the utmost courtesy during the festivities. The author of the report noted that the emperor’s son Philip danced with Beatrice and that at the end of the night the emperor’s sister personally put the couple to bed: “Everyone retired except for the Most Serene and Virtuous Mary Queen of Hungary...who accompanied the bride to her chamber” where she personally undressed Beatrice “and put her to bed with her own hands.”\textsuperscript{17} The Queen then led the groom into the bedroom dressed only in his shirt, “took him by the hand to the bride’s bed, commanded him to do his duty, and left.”\textsuperscript{18} Such personal attention from the emperor and his family brought great honor to both the bride and groom and reflected their high

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\textsuperscript{13} Ibid. “La sudetta M.ta hebbe sentita la gran messa nella gran Chiesa di S.to Jacomo e...ritornette con...il resto della corte al palazzo.”
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. “Soa sorella la sereniss.a Leonora regina di franza qual insieme con la regina maria di hungaria soa sorella gia si era incaminata alla capella del palazzo conducendoli la sposa per la mano.”
\textsuperscript{15} Antoine Perrenot de Granvelle (1517-1586), influential statesman and minister of Philip II, became bishop of Arras in 1540 at the age of 23, archbishop of Mechelen in 1560 and cardinal in 1561. A loyal servant of the Habsburgs, he was appointed chief councilor to Margaret of Parma during her regency over the Spanish Netherlands and played a key role in the early years of the Dutch Revolt against Spanish rule, clashing with Dutch leaders and eventually being recalled to Spain by Philip II.
\textsuperscript{16} “Relazione delle Nozze.” ALM, mazzo 4, fasc. 14. “Fatta la Ceremonia della benedictione...furono condotti per mano da sudetti principi, con infiniti rumor di Trombe, et soni, in una gran salla preparata a tal effetto.”
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. “Tutto il mondo si ritirette eccetto la sereniss.a et virtuosiss.a Maria regina di hungaria sorella di soa M.ta qual accompagnando la sposa nella Camera la volse spoglarla come la spoglette tutta et metterla in letto di soa mano propria.”
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid. “Facendolo tutto spoglar salvo la camisa lo condusse per mano preso al letto della sposa et comandandoli che facesse il suo dover sene partite.”
\end{flushright}
standing among the European nobility. Shortly after the wedding, Carlo wrote to his mother, Bianca Vagnone, who anxiously awaited news of the wedding from the family’s home in Piedmont. He informed her of “the success of my marriage and of the great favor and honor done to me and to my consort.”\(^{19}\) He stressed that Beatrice was much admired at the imperial court, such that when the couple were taking their leave of Charles V in order to return to Italy “it was said that it had been many years since a lady’s departure from the court had caused such displeasure for everyone.”\(^{20}\) He closed his letter by assuring his mother that Beatrice would be like a daughter to her and that his bride was looking forward to meeting her mother-in-law.

After the wedding, the couple settled in Piedmont and Carlo continued to serve the House of Savoy in diplomatic and military roles. Duke Carlo II (r. 1504-1553) appointed him ambassador to Venice and then governor of Vercelli.\(^{21}\) The couple’s first son, Carlo Gianfrancesco, was born in Vercelli on February 8, 1551. The child was named Carlo after the duke, who served as his godfather, and Gianfrancesco in honor of Beatrice’s deceased father. When Duke Carlo II died and was succeeded by his son, Emanuele Filiberto (r. 1553-1580), Carlo Manfredi stayed on as governor of Vercelli, where their four daughters were born: Bianca (1552), Philiberta (1553), Carlotta (1554), and Francesca (1556).\(^{22}\) In 1556, Emanuele Filiberto reconfirmed his trust in Carlo Manfredi by appointing him governor of the fortress of Cuneo. In early 1557, the couple’s second son, Emanuele Filiberto, was born there.

\(^{19}\) Carlo Francesco Manfredi di Luserna to his mother Bianca Vagnone di Troffarello, September 3, 1549. ALM, mazzo 4. “Stara molto in suspeso he desiosa de intendere...di tutto il successo del mio matrimonio he del gran favor et honor fatto a me et a mia consorte.”

\(^{20}\) Ibid. “Si diceva esser molti ani che non era partita damisella dalla corte di cui soa partita fosse in magior dispiacere de tutti comunemente picolli he grandi come fu quella di essa mia consorte.”


\(^{22}\) Ibid. Bianca was betrothed to Count Cesare di Scalenghe but died before the marriage could take place. Philiberta became the second wife of Amedeo Ponte di Lombriasco, president of the Senate. Carlotta became a member of duchess Marguerite’s court and married Gaspare Porporato, giving birth to 11 children. Francesca married Adalberto Bertodano, count of Tolegno.
In the spring of 1557 Carlo defended Cuneo during a seven-week siege by the French. To reward him for his conduct as governor and defender of Cuneo, Emanuele Filiberto granted Carlo an annual pension of 30 gold scudi deriving from the salt gabelle of Nice and the right to include the cross of Savoy in his family arms.23 Shortly thereafter, on August 10, 1557, Emanuele Filiberto led Spanish troops to victory over the French at the battle of St. Quentin, which led to the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis and the restoration of Piedmont to the House of Savoy. Carlo Manfredi’s loyal service during the two decades of French occupation of Piedmont had resulted in a close relationship with Emanuele Filiberto and he was richly rewarded for his fidelity. On July 7, the duke appointed him general superintendent of all of the mines in Savoie,24 Emanuele Filiberto’s duchy on the western side of the Alps. On October 3 he granted him an annual pension of 600 scudi with the right to transmit it to his heirs.25 Shortly thereafter, Carlo was appointed governor of Mondovi.26 Ties of friendship between the House of Savoy and the Manfredi di Luserna were further solidified in 1562, when Duke Emanuele Filiberto and Duchess Marguerite de Valois attended the baptism of Carlo and Beatrice’s second son, Emanuele Filiberto. Just as the duke’s father Carlo II had been the godfather of their first son, Carlo Gianfrancesco, so Emanuele Filiberto stood as godfather to their second son.

The Savoy-Racconigi/Luserna Lawsuit

It was during this period of close relations between the Manfredi di Luserna family and Duke Emanuele Filiberto that Carlo and Beatrice brought what eventually developed into a series of lawsuits against Beatrice’s cousin Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi, count of Racconigi, over the amount and payment of Beatrice’s dowry. Like his cousin Beatrice, Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi

23 June 20, 1558. ALM, mazzo 4, fasc. 8 and fasc. 9.
24 Paris, July 7, 1559. ALM, mazzo 4, fasc. 3.
25 October 3, 1559. ALM, mazzo 4, fasc. 4.
26 Nice, November 26, 1559. ALM, mazzo 4, fasc. 5 and 6.
was a descendant of Ludovico “the bastard” of Acaia, the founder of the Savoy-Racconigi line. Whereas Beatrice was descended from his second son, Ludovico, and was the last of that line, Filippo was descended from Ludovico’s oldest son and heir, Francesco. Since Beatrice’s father and grandfather were deceased, Filippo and his brother Claudio, count of Pancalieri, were Beatrice’s closest male relatives as well as the leaders of the Savoy-Racconigi lineage. Like Beatrice’s husband, the Savoy-Racconigi played a key role in Sabaudian politics as part of Duke Emanuele Filiberto’s inner circle. Both Carlo Manfredi and the Savoy-Racconigi brothers were among the party that the duke assembled to accompany him Paris for his wedding to Marguerite de Valois in 1559.\(^{27}\) When legal conflict erupted between Beatrice and her Savoy-Racconigi cousins in the 1561, therefore, both sides in the lawsuit were among the elite group of nobles who were closest to the duke and were at the center of political power in the Sabaudian lands.

An earlier lawsuit, brought by Lady Beatrice in 1550 when she and Carlo returned to French-occupied Piedmont after their marriage, had been filed before the royal *parlement* in Turin against the Savoy-Racconigi as “the holders of the property of the late Signor Gio Francesco of Savoy, father of said Lady [Beatrice].”\(^{28}\) In her complaint, Beatrice made three demands: that she receive back pay of *alimenti* [maintenance allowance] for the time period that she had lived as a young woman at the French court with no financial support from her father’s house, that she be paid her mother’s dowry with interest from the time of her father’s death, and that she be granted a dowry of her own that was “consistent with the quality and dignity of her House” based on the “value and income of the feudal properties left by her said late father...also

\(^{27}\) Merlotti, “Carlo Manfredi Luserna.”

\(^{28}\) FdC, mazzo 16, sottofasc. no. 3 “Sommario della causa dell’Illustissima Signora Baron d’Entraygues contra L’Illustissimo Signor Conte di Luserna,” p. 1. “Fanno evocar avanti il Parlamento Reggio sedente in Torino gli’heredi,o sia possessori de beni di detto Sig. di Cavor, cioè il Sig. Antonio Ludovico di Savoia Conte di Pancaglieri, il Sig. Fillipo di Savoia Sig. di Racconiggi.”
considering that she is an only child.”29 That case met a dead end, probably given the volatile political situation in Piedmont at the time and the fact that the men involved in both sides of the dispute were away at war. After the duke of Savoy’s restoration, Beatrice and her husband filed suit again, this time before the recently created Senate in Turin, the highest court in Piedmont.

On January 4, 1561, Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi, as the current head of the House of Savoy-Racconigi and, allegedly, the heir of Beatrice’s father, was summoned before the Senate to answer Beatrice’s claim that, at the time of her marriage, twelve years before, she had not been “competentamente dotata” (sufficiently dowried), particularly given “her quality and the greatness of her father’s house and patrimony.”30 It is worth mentioning that when this suit was filed, both Carlo Manfredi di Luserna and Filippo di Savoy-Racconigi were mediating between the duke of Savoy and the Waldensian sect in the Piedmontese mountain valleys southwest of Turin.31 Carlo Manfredi’s lands, the Luserna Valley, were soon to become the site of a violent conflict between the Waldensian population and Sabaudian forces, despite both Filippo and Carlo Manfredi’s attempts at mediation.32 Filippo, who advocated moderation throughout the six-month conflict, was entrusted with negotiating with the Waldensians and eventually signed

29 Ibid. “Che gli sia stabilita, et pagata dalla possessori di detti beni etiandio feudali dotte congrua secondo la qualità, e dignità della Casa, valore, e redditi de beni feudali lasciati dal detto fu suo Padre...et considerato anche ch’ella è Figliuola unica.”
30 ALM, mazzo 112, p. 16. “erano...obligati per le dotte materne et per le competenti dotte et alimenti della sig.ra principale quale attesa la qualita sua et grandezza della casa et patrimonio paterno et delli suoi debbe esser almeno competentemente dotata.”
31 The Waldensian (“Vaudois”) movement started in 12th-century Lyon when Peter Waldo (1140-1217), a wealthy merchant, gave up his possessions and dedicated his life to preaching the Gospel. Waldo and his followers were declared heretics and excommunicated by the Church. Persecuted, large communities of Waldensians had settled in the mountain valleys of Piedmont. The Waldensian presence in his land was a political problem for Duke Emanuele Filiberto upon his restoration in 1559. In April 1560, the duke of Savoy sent a military expedition against the Waldensian valleys, which included Carlo Manfredi’s lands, the Luserna Valley. Both Carlo Manfredi and Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi urged moderation. When the duke entrusted Giorgio Costa della Trinità with command of the military operation in October 1560, Filippo advised him, in his dealings with the Waldensians, to use “more clemency and compassion than violence and severity, since the souls and hearts of the people become much more softened with those means than with iron, fire, and blood.” Quoted in Pierpaolo Merlin, Emanuele Filiberto: Un principe tra il Piemonte e l’Europa (Turin: Società Editrice Internazionale, 1995), 243.
the Peace of Cavour with four Waldensian delegates. There is no evidence in the Savoy-Racconigi or Luserna correspondence of the dealings these two men might have had with each other during the Waldensian conflict. Unfortunately, the two most extensive contemporary sources on this subject do not provide much evidence. The anonymous Histoire memorable de la guerre faite par le Duc de Savoye Emanuel Philebert contre ses subjectz des Vallées describes Filippo di Savoy-Racconigi’s negotiations in detail but does not mention Carlo Manfredi. The other contemporary source, Scipione Lentolo’s Historia delle grandi e crudeli persecutioni merely mentions a couple of attempts by the local population to request that Carlo Manfredi, who was governor of Mondovì at the time, to intercede with them for the duke.

During those turbulent early days of 1561, Beatrice made three demands of Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi. As in her original complaint before the French parlement Beatrice asked that, as per her parents’ wills, she receive the dowry of her mother, Jacqueline Montbel d’Entremont, consisting of 2,800 gold scudi. Second, she claimed that her dowry of 2,000 gold scudi, provided for in her father’s will, should be increased to reflect her status and that of her husband. Given her prestigious marriage and her father’s own extensive wealth and property, Beatrice believed that her dowry was insufficient when compared with the dowries of other Piedmontese ladies. Finally, she demanded back payment of alimenti for the years she had lived at the court of Queen Eleanor with no support from her natal family. She complained that after she was sent to the

33 Ibid., 165. The Peace of Cavour granted the Waldensians the right of public worship as long as they remained in their remote mountain villages.
34 Scipione Lentolo, Historia della grandi e crudeli persecutioni fatte ai tempi nostri in Provenza, Calabria e Piemonte, contro il popolo che chiamano valdese e delle gran cose operate dal Signore in loro aiuto e favore; raccolta fedelmente da Scipione Lentolo in tempo ch’egli era ministro della Parola di Dio nelle valli d’Angrogna, Lucerna, Bobio, Peroscia e San Martino, in Piemonte, 1559-1566, ed. Teofilo Gay (Torre Pellice: Tipografia Alpina, 1906). “Il povero popolo havea già mandato al Signor Carlo dei conti di Luserna...alcune suppliche...per presentarle al Duca, ma...non sapeano se l’havea fatto o no,” 125.
36 Ibid., p. 4.
royal court of France as one of the Queen’s ladies “she never received anything from her Agnates and Cognates” in the form of *alimenti* and that, since her marriage, her husband Carlo Manfredi had borne the burden of their “matrimonial expenses with costs of 500 scudi per year.”

Beatrice summoned her cousin Filippo as the defendant in this case based on her claim that he was her father’s heir as his nearest male kin, had inherited most of his property, and was responsible for meeting her father’s financial obligations towards her. Her parents had married in 1524 and she was their only child. When her mother died, Gianfrancesco married his second wife, Leonetta de Torreris, and they had one son, Giuseppe. It is worth noting that when Gianfrancesco made his will in 1538, Piedmont had been under French occupation for two years and Beatrice’s dowry arrangements were made in the middle of a war that had likely depleted his resources considerably. Both father and son died in 1539 and Beatrice was sent to France.

Because Gianfrancesco did not have any living sons when he died, his property had been transmitted to Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi as his nearest male relative. Beatrice was particularly interested in proving that Filippo had inherited her father’s lucrative half of the fief of Cavour. When questioned by the Senate, Filippo denied that he was the heir of Beatrice’s father. While it was true that he held Cavour, he argued that he had not received it via inheritance. The castle and properties attached to the fief had been seized by the French when Beatrice’s father died. The French continued to occupy the fief until August 2, 1552, when Filippo paid the French crown 3,000 scudi to recover it for the Savoy-Racconigi. Thus, he argued, if he currently held Cavour

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37 Ibid., p. 11. “Che detta Sig. Beatrice fù condotta alla corte del Re di Francia in servitio della Regina Elleonora. Che dopo non ha havuto cosa alcuna da suoi Agnati, et Cognati. Che il Sig. Carlo ha sostentato i carrichi matrimoniali con spesa di scu. 500 ogn’anno.”
38 Ibid., p. 1.
39 FdC, mazzo 16, sottofasc. 3, p. 5.
it was only because he had obtained it from the king of France at great personal cost during the French occupation. Filippo was therefore able to sidestep this part of Beatrice’s claims by proving that he had not obtained her father’s portion of the fief of Cavour by inheritance, but by purchase from the king of France, a rather surprising argument to make before a Sabaudian court, given that Filippo had been fighting for the enemy at the time and had benefitted from his collaboration.

Beatrice pressed on, focusing her claims around three main arguments: (1) her dowry was insufficient when compared with the quality of both the Savoy-Racconigi and Luserna families; (2) there was an established precedent for much higher dowries among the great houses of the Piedmontese nobility; and (3) that Filippo’s brother Claudio had repeatedly stated in front of witnesses that, if the suit were his to manage, he would satisfy her claims. The Savoy-Racconigi responded that (1) Beatrice had made an excellent marriage to an esteemed and wealthy man and was well provided for and that (2) there was no precedent for such a high dowry among the Piedmontese nobility and that dowry amounts varied greatly depending on the specific circumstances of the individuals involved in the marriage negotiations.

**Beatrice’s Arguments: the Quality of the her Natal and Marital Families**

In her legal briefs, Beatrice argued that the amount of her dowry was inconsistent with the value of her father’s assets as well as with the dignity of both her family and her husband’s family, since both came from principal noble houses of Piedmont. In particular, she turned the Senate’s attention to the fact that Carlo Manfredi di Luserna was an individual of the greatest quality and highest status. In order to prove that his position among Sabaudian nobles demanded a more significant dowry for his daughter, Beatrice’s legal team stressed that, prior to their marriage, Carlo had been offered the hand of another noblewoman who had a much greater and
more appropriate dowry. Indeed, Carlo had come very close to marrying Margherita, a daughter of the Saluzzo di Cardè family.\(^{40}\) Witnesses recalled that the lady in question had a dowry of anywhere from 8,000 to 12,000 scudi, much greater than the 2,000 scudi assigned to Beatrice.

Witnesses were summoned to speak about Carlo’s lost opportunity with the Saluzzo di Cardè. Francesco Cerruto, a notary from Villafranca, recalled that “at the time when said signor Carlo was thinking of marriage, he was asked and implored to marry into one of the primary houses of Piedmont, into the house of Saluzzo,” a match which would have granted Carlo an “honest dowry” of eight thousand scudi “or more.”\(^{41}\) Tommaso Rebuffo, also from Villafranca, testified that his wife Joanna, a servant, “was living in the castle of Cardè at the time that the said daughter of the deceased lord of Cardè was ready to marry...and conversed with said daughter.”\(^{42}\) Rebuffo had heard from his wife “that said daughter...loved said signor Carlo and that she had said she did not want any other husband but him.”\(^{43}\) When Margherita’s father died, her mother Madama di Cardè, had continued the marriage negotiations, sending her agent, signor Rapayre, to Luserna numerous times for that purpose. Unfortunately for Carlo, because the girl had not yet reached the age of majority, a guardian (tutore) had been appointed to safeguard her interests after her father died. Her guardian, Franceschino Solaro of Monasterolo, decided on a different match for her with French general Paul de La Barthe, seigneur de Thermes.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{40}\) The marquisate of Saluzzo, located in southwestern Piedmont, was ruled by the Saluzzo family until 1548, when the family died out. It was occupied by the French and then, in 1588, by Duke Carlo Emanuele I, whose rule over Saluzzo was acknowledged by Henry IV in the Peace of Lyon in 1601. The Saluzzo di Cardè were a cadet branch of the Saluzzo family.

\(^{41}\) ALM, mazzo 112, p. 144. “Nel tempo che esso s.r Carolo era a maritar era richiesto et pregato di maritarsi nelle prime case di Piemonte et massime nella casa di Saluzze ad una figliola del fu Illu. mons.r di Carde la quale li haverebbe datto honesta dotta...alla somma da ottomillia scudi è piu.”

\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 139. “Agionge alla predetta soa depositione che la nobile Ioanna consorte di lui teste del tempo che la sudetta figliola del fu sig. di Carde era da marita stava nel castello di Carde...et ivi conversava con la detta figliola.”

\(^{43}\) Ibid., p. 139. “Cossi haver inteso dalla predetta soa consorte che la detta figliola la qual da poi è stata moglie di mons.r di Termes amava detto s.r Carolo et che havea detto che non voleva altro marito che lui.”

\(^{44}\) Paul de La Barthe (1482-1562) had been commanding the French troops in Piedmont during the 1540s and 1550s, so this was a very useful match for the Saluzzo. He led the French forces at the Battle of Gravelines (1558), where they were defeated by the Spanish. This defeat, together with the defeat at the Battle of St. Quentin in the year before,
Cerutto reported that, when Solaro was asked why he had married the girl to La Barthe instead of to Carlo, as her own father had intended, Solaro responded: “What would you have had me do? He [Termes] is a general and my patron. I could not do anything.” This exchange highlights the unusual political dynamics in Piedmont generated by the war and the French occupation. It is also additional evidence of Carlo Manfredi’s grievances against those who collaborated with the French.

In the following years, the Luserna family presented this incident as a great injustice to their house. Gaspardo Capris, bishop of Asti, recalled that he had been present in Vercelli when Carlo had complained to the old duke, Carlo II of Savoy, that General Termes “had caused him harm” by taking a young woman from him and marrying her when, “according to what he [Carlo] said, [she] had promised to be his wife” and would have brought him 10,000 scudi for her dowry. Witness Antonio Bigliore, a resident of Luserna, had been in Carlo’s service for years. He recalled that Madama di Cardè intended to give her daughter to Carlo in marriage. The witness knew this because “he had visited said madama many times on behalf of said signor Carlo, bringing her gifts, namely fresh fruits and other foods depending on the season.”

In addition to having had a more lucrative matrimonial prospect prior to his marriage to Beatrice, which was an indicator of Carlo’s own value as a partner, Beatrice’s legal team also argued that of all of the many branches of the House of Luserna, Carlo’s lineage was the most

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45 ALM, mazzo 112, p. 147. “Sig.r Franceschino dice alhora ad esso teste consimile parole che cosa volete che io faci lui è generale mi è patrone non ho potuto far di mancho.”
46 Ibid., p. 128. “Detto sig.r Carolo si doleva appresso la felice memoria duca Carolo detto che mons.r di Termes gli haveva fatto torto a sustraher et havergli tolto una sorella del modern mons.r di Carde la qual secondo diceva gli haveva promesso d’esser soa moglie...et haveva per dotta scudi diec millia.”
47 Ibid., p. 167. “esso teste è stato piu volte per parte del predetto s.r Carolo a visitar detta madama di Carde portandogli delli presenti cioe delle frutte fresche et altre cose mangiattive secondo erano li tempi.”
affluent and most highly esteemed. Witness Tommaso Rebuffo stated that the other member of the extended Luserna family were “not equal in status and rank” with Carlo Manfredi di Luserna “because he is a doctor of law and councilor of state to His Highness” and because the others “were not so rich nor did they have the income” that Carlo had. It was well known among the people of Luserna, he continued, that Carlo and his family “were more affluent than the others in goods and income” and that none of the others “were greater in honor, faculty, wealth or rank than said signor Carlo.”

Another witness, merchant Ioanne De Ursio of Luserna, stated that he understood the Luserna to be “the first house in Piedmont after the House of Savoy.” He added that none of the other Luserna lineages “has such a high position with His Highness as has said signor Carlo as governor of the city of Mondovì and as one of the councilors of state of His Highness.”

Antonio Bigliore understood that “the house of said signor Carlo is one of the greatest of His Highness’s state.”

Although the majority of her legal team’s focus was on Carlo Manfredi’s status, they also reiterated that Beatrice herself was of the House of Savoy, had been raised by Queen Eleanor of France, where she “conversed regularly with kings, princes, dukes, marquises and other illustrious persons as one does at the courts of kings and emperors.” At Charles V’s court, Beatrice “was not merely loved but quite well-beloved.” She was married in the presence of
Emperor Charles V and other European royalty, including the duke of Savoy, Emanuele Filiberto. In her legal briefs, Beatrice’s lawyers also stressed that Carlo had spared no expense to ensure that their marriage festivities in Brussels were commensurate with his bride’s high status:

“Said signor Carlo...spent more than 400 [scudi] for a single banquet, plus clothing of cloth of gold and silver and other items of velvet and silk, necklaces, rings and other precious stones for Beatrice’s use...including the clothing for her ladies, servants in livery and other various expenses.”

In addition, Carlo had travelled “from Vercelli to Flanders with ten or twelve horses, spending more than a half scudo per day for each man and horse.”

Witness Antonio Bigliore accompanied Carlo to Brussels for the wedding. He noted that when the couple returned to Piedmont, they travelled with a host of ladies, servants and staff “appropriate to the status of the house of Savoy, from which the lady [Beatrice] was descended.”

In addition, Beatrice’s legal briefs stressed that “Carlo her husband had always sustained large expenses for the marriage and had always honorably and nobly kept his consort in both clothing and with three ladies...” as well as providing her with “horses and other things that are required of her rank and quality.”

The Savoy-Racconigi brothers responded to this argument by pointing out that Beatrice was currently living quite comfortably and that Carlo provided well for both her and their children. In short, how could she complain about her dowry when she had nevertheless made the

54 Ibid., p. 81. “Esso s.r Carlo...spese piu di quattro cento in un solo banchetto quanto nelle veste di panno d’oro et argento con altre di veluto e sete, collane, annelli et altre pietre pretiose per l’uso di lei s.ra Beatrice sua consorte computandovi il vestir donzella servitori alla livrea et altre diverse.”

55 Ibid., p. 81. “Oltre la spesa gia fatta nell’andar da Vercelli in Fiandra con diece o dodeci cavalli dove spendeva piu di mezzo scudo d’oro in giorno per huomo a cavallo.”

56 Ibid., p. 166. “Ha condotto nella presente patria in Vercelli ben accompagnata e servita di damiselle et altri servitori et stafieri come conveneva e conviene al stato della casata di Savoia dalla quale è dicesa detta sig.ra soa consorta.”

57 Ibid., p. 82. “Ill. s.r conte Carlo suo marito sempre ha suportato grandi carighi matrimoniali et sempre egli ha honorevolmente et nobilmente tenuta essa sua consorta tanto nelle vestimente che nella servitu di tre damigelle...et cavalli et altre cose che si richiedono al grado et qualita soa.”
best marriage she could possibly have made? In 1562, Filippo called witnesses to testify to that
effect. A resident of Cavour, Theodoro Morma gave his opinion that Beatrice had been married
very well (“benissimamente maridata”) and that “she could not have been married more
suitably...than to said signor Carlo,” whom he described as “an honored, wise gentleman and one
of the first gentlemen of Piedmont.”\textsuperscript{58} Iacobo Perroto of Cavour testified that Beatrice “can only
consider herself well married” given “the rank, quality and faculty of said signor Carlo,” whom
he described as “the wisest, most educated and honored and, what is more, the richest of said
lords [in the areas of Luserna and Cavour].”\textsuperscript{59} He knew this, he said, not because he had
“particularly scrutinized” Carlo’s accounts or had personal knowledge of Carlo’s income, but
“only because it was common and public knowledge.”\textsuperscript{60} Witness Claudio Andrioni actually cited
Carlo Manfredi’s failed match with Margherita Saluzzo di Cardè as a reason why Beatrice
should be satisfied with her marriage: “the Illustrious signora Beatrice, wife of said signor
Carlo...is very well married given that prior to that marriage the Illustrious madama di Termes
[Margherita] was to marry...and there was talk of joining her in marriage with said signor Carlo,
and such negotiations were almost successful.”\textsuperscript{61} In other words, Beatrice should consider herself
grateful to have made such a match, considering that he had been a serious consideration of the
daughter of another great family, the Saluzzo di Cardè.

\textit{Beatrice’s Arguments: The Precedent for Higher Dowries}

\textsuperscript{58} FdC, mazzo 9, fasc. 8, no. 95, pp. 17-18. “...esso s.r Carlo esser gentilhuomo honorato savio et de li primii
gentilhuomini del piemonte...in modo ch’essendo la s.ra Beatrice sudetta convenuta in matrimonio al detto s.r
Carlo... benissimamente maridata et non puotea esser stata maritata piu degnamente.”
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., pp. 26-27. “...hè tenuto et reputato il principal gentilhuomo di esso contato il piu savio dotto et honorato si
anchora el piu richo d’essi signori...ha sentito et olduto referirsi del grado qualita et faculta di esso s.r Carlo, d’il qual
essendo moglie la Illu. s.ra Beatrice di Savoya concapitulata non puo dirsi per verita ch’ ben maritata.”
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., pp. 26-27. “Non c’habi scrutinato luy teste particularmente le faculta et redditi d’esso ma solamente per la
comune et pub.ca voce quale ha sentito et olduto...”
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., p. 36. “Reputa luy teste che la Illu. s.ra Beatrice mogle di esso s.r Carlo concapitulata sia benissimamente
maritata ateso ch’avanti tal matrimonio essendo la Illu.ma madama di Termes da maritar quale hé de la Illu. casata
di Salucio si trato di congiungerla in matrimonio a esso s.r Carlo essendo venuto il tratato quasi a perfectione.”
Beatrice’s second main argument was that her dowry was not commensurate with the dowries of other Piedmontese noblewomen. Beatrice’s legal team argued that “there are and have been not just many other counts and lords of similar nobility as her husband, but also simple gentlemen of lesser wealth and lesser degree of honor and quality than her husband who, in taking wives, had much greater dowries than two thousand scudi.” Indeed, “many had dowries of five or six or 10,000 scudi more or less,” including fathers “who had many other daughters to marry off.” This seems to have been an argument that the Senate took quite seriously, as both Beatrice and the Savoy-Racconigi marshalled numerous witnesses to discuss dowry amounts in Piedmont in general and among the Savoy-Racconigi family specifically.

On June 19, 1564, the Senate ordered that witness testimony be taken in the case and, in February 1565, witnesses were questioned in the towns of Asti, Villafranca, Luserna, Cavour, Mondovi, and Cherasco. The witnesses swore “touching the Scriptures” to tell the truth as far as they knew it. Beatrice’s witnesses provided evidence that most Piedmontese noblewomen had dowries that exceeded 2,000 scudi. Battista Borghino of Asti noted that a nobleman from Asti, Ludovico Malabayla, count of La Manta, married a daughter of the Spinola family who brought “8,000 scudi including 500 for clothing.” Borghino knew of this because he worked for signor Ludovico and had seen the dowry document. In addition, Malabayla had told him that two of his wife’s sisters were married with dowries of 10,000 scudi each. Borghino made sure to specify that Malabayla, unlike Carlo Manfredi, did not hold high offices close to the duke. When asked how he knew about the dowries of Malabayla’s wife’s sisters, Borghino described that he “heard...”

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62 LMA, mazzo 112, p. 34. “Vi sono et son stati alter volte no’ sollamente molti altri conti et sig.ri similli di nobilita a suo marito ma anche de gentillhomini simplici et di menor richezze et menor grado onor et qualitta che no’è detto suo marito i quali togliendo molgie li hanno havuto molto maggior dotti di doe millia scudi...”
63 Ibid., p. 34. “...ne sono parechii qualli hanno havuto dotte de cinqe e sei et diece millia scudi...anchor che havesero molte altre figlie da maritare.”
64 Ibid., p. 132. “...ha habbiuto per dotta di detta s.ra suoa consorte scudi otto millia includo scudi cinque cento per le veste...”
said signor Ludovico, his said consort and other gentlemen discussing said dowries as people do." Ludovico Malabayla was himself called as the next witness and he confirmed the amounts of the dowries of both his wife and her sisters.

Other witnesses were called to testify that dowry amounts had been steadily increasing in Piedmont in recent decades. Although the claim was not made explicitly in Beatrice’s legal briefs, this testimony was likely intended to support the argument that a dowry that might have been considered sufficient in 1538 when Beatrice’s father wrote his will, was no longer suitable when Beatrice and Carlo married in 1549, and certainly not by 1565 when the witnesses were questioned. Beatrice’s team argued that dowries had increased so much over the years “that it is now customary to give much larger dowries than in the past...the dowries that in the past were given to a great count or lord are given today to a merchant or borghese of mediocre quality and condition.” Francesco Cerruto of Villafranca testified that “it is true that the dowries of forty years ago or so...have been increasing every day.” Notary Bartolomeo Riveria, as someone who had been drawing up dowry agreements for families for many years, confirmed that “dowries have been increasing in the last twenty years or so...this is public knowledge in Piedmont.” As an example, Riveria stated that people who used to “establish dowries of 100 or so or 200 scudi for their daughters, at the present time similar persons are forced to give 300 or 400 scudi.”

65 Ibid., p. 133. “...piu volte ragionando et oldendo ragionar d’esse dotte dal predetto s.r Ludovico la predetta s.ra soa consorte et d’altri gentilhomini come occorreva....”
66 Ibid., p. 35. “...adesso sono sollite darsi molto piu grande...che si solleano dar per il passato...le dotte quelle antiquamente si sarebbero datte a un gran conte et signore..hanno ogni di darsi a un mercante et borghesse et che mediocre quallita et conditione.”
67 Ibid., p. 144. “Depone anchora che e’ vero che le dotte di quaranta anni in qua o circa che lui teste si cognosce et è di bona memoria vano ogni giorno augumentando.”
68 Ibid., p. 185. “Piu oltre dice che le dotte da vinti anni in qua passati sono cresciute...e questo è publico nel paese di Piemonte.”
69 Ibid., p. 186. “Persone constituenu dotte alle luoro figiolie di cento o in quanto o ducento scudi e piu al presente consimile persone sono constrette dar li tricento e quatrocento scudi.”
The Savoy-Racconigi countered that in the history of their lineage, dowries “did not usually exceed two thousand scudi” and, “if some daughter did have a dowry greater than two thousand scudi, it was where there was greater income and money in the House of Racconigi, which could be paid without diminishing the fiefs and so as to correspond to the quality and wealth of the groom.”\textsuperscript{70} They pointed out that the income of both Beatrice’s father and her husband Carlo had previously been more modest than the Luserna claimed: “signora Beatrice’s lord father was full of debts at the time of his death” and “at the time of the wedding signor Carlo, Beatrice’s husband, did not have more than 400 scudi in income per year.”\textsuperscript{71} They claimed that “many other counts of Luserna” married women with lower dowries, settling for amounts of 1,000 scudi or, at most, 1,500 scudi.\textsuperscript{72} Indeed, in all of Piedmont there were “many honored counts and lords of honorable houses” who paid much lower dowries than 2,000 scudi, and usually they never exceeded that sum.\textsuperscript{73}

What factors did one consider in deciding on a dowry amount? In one legal brief, the Savoy-Racconigi argued that “the truth is that in Piedmont, from time immemorial” in marriages between the nobility “one mainly considers friendship and kinship, and large dowries are not given no matter how wealthy the fathers, brothers, or agnates of the women, or the husbands and even if their income is quite large, the common custom is usually not to give more than 1,000, 

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 25. “...e solito in dottar le figluole no’ ha ecceduto due millia scuti...qualche figluola haver havuto maggior dotti di due millia scudi sarà stato nella casata di Racconiggi dove era maggio reddito e denari quali si puotevano sborsare senza minuire li feudi e aoncora per risponder alla qualità e richezze del marito.”

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 26. “Il fu sig.re Padre della Sig.ra Beatrice...era molto carrico di debiti nel tempo di sua morte.”

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 27. “Molti altri consorti conti di Lucerna che hanno tolte moglie e molti ne sono stati per il passato maritati quali no’ hanno havute maggior dotti, anzi comunemente molto menori come sarebbe di mille scuti o mille cinq cento al piu.”

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., p. 27. “Vi sono molti altri Condati e molti Sig.ri e conti honorati e forse di maggior faccolta e ne sono stati per li passati tempi i quali si hanno tolte moglie nobili e d’honorate casate, co’ molto menor dotti di scuti due millia e comunemente no’ s’è ecceduta ne’ s’eccede tal somma.”
1,200, 1,500 or, at most, 2,000 scudi.”\textsuperscript{74} Such dowries, they concluded, “are considered suitable.”

In response, Beatrice’s legal team denied that there were any set customs among the Piedmontese nobility that kept dowries to 2,000 scudi or below, stating that “there has never been a consistent custom.”\textsuperscript{75} To prove their point, they focused on the dowries of the Savoy-Racconigi: “many lords of Racconigi...past and present have sent their legitimate and natural daughters and sisters to various noble and honored houses and established their dowries without any regard whatsoever for any alleged directives or customs.”\textsuperscript{76} Many “in the past and within living memory” gave dowries much larger than the 1,500 scudi alleged by the other side. Furthermore, if some daughter did receive “even just 3,000 scudi, it was because her father had many other sons and daughters who needed to be married.”\textsuperscript{77} The Luserna claimed that the sisters of Beatrice’s own father had dowries of 12,000 scudi each.\textsuperscript{78} Adriano Tavato of Asti pointed out that “he had heard from numerous persons” that Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi had himself married off his own daughter\textsuperscript{79} “and that he had given said daughter a dowry of 12,000 scudi even though he had other daughters” who would also need dowries.\textsuperscript{80} Notary Bartolomeo

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 27. “La verita e tale in Piemonte e sempre s’è osservato da tempo immemorabile in qua che facendo matrimoni tra signori e nobili principalmente si considera l’amicizia e parentella, e no’ si danno gran dotti per ricchi che siano padri, fratelli, o agnati delle femine, o vero, di mariti e ancora ch’il reddito fosse grande, la comune usanza e solito no’ e di dar piu di scuti 1000 – 1200 – 1500 et al piu 2000 e quelle sempre si sono stimate e stimano dotti congrue e competenti.”

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., p. 34. “In Piemonte da memoria di homo in qua nel far matrimoni da signori nobilli et altri del paese no’ vi e mai stato oservanza una uniforme usanza.”

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., p. 31-32. “Molti delli signori passati et presenti si de Racconigi o come Panchalieri et Cavor hanno havuto et mandate loro figiole et sorelle legittime et naturale in diverse case nobili et honorate dandoli et constituendo li dotti senza haver risguardo ad alcuno ordine o stabilimento asserito.”

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p. 32. “...potendo constar qualche figiola delle suddette haver havuto solamente di osia anche tre millia scudi e stato per che il padre haveva molti altri figli maschi et altre figiole da maritare.”


\textsuperscript{79} Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi’s daughter Violante married Nicolas Henry de Cremieux.

\textsuperscript{80} ALM, mazzo 112, p. 122. “Dice saper per haver inteso da piu persone l’Ill.re s.r de Racconigi fratello...haver maridato una sua figiola ad uno gentilhomo detto mons.r di Cremiu et haverli datto per dotta di detta suoa figiola scudi dodeci millia anchora che habbi altre figiole.”
Riveria remembered that Barbara of Savoy-Racconigi, a sister of Filippo and Claudio, had been married to Ludovico Isnardi, count of Sanfré with a dowry of 4,000 scudi. The Luserna produced copies of the 1561 dowry instrument for Filippo’s daughter, the 1544 dowry instrument of Margherita Saluzzo di Cardè (Carlo Manfredi’s lost marriage prospect), and the dowry instrument of Barbara of Savoy-Racconigi to prove that noblewomen in Piedmont, including other women of the Savoy-Racconigi lineage, were married with significantly greater dowries than that of Beatrice.

Indeed, the high dowry of Filippo’s daughter Violante (12,000 scudi) seems to have been a point of focus for the Luserna family’s anger. Although it is not explicitly stated in their complaints, it is not difficult to understand why. While Carlo Manfredi di Luserna had left his comfortable teaching position at the University of Padua to serve the duke when the French invaded Piedmont in 1536, Filippo, the man who had inherited from Beatrice’s father Gianfrancesco, had collaborated with the French during the occupation and had even gained the castle and fief of Racconigi by purchase from the French crown. His daughter was marrying a Frenchman, Nicolas Henry di Cremieux. From Carlo Manfredi di Luserna’s point of view, the person who had profited from collaborating with the enemy and inherited his father-in-law’s property was marrying his daughter to a Frenchman and dowering her six times the amount of Beatrice’s dowry. In this sense, the Luserna lawsuit can be seen as the response to an insult and an attempt to repair the family honor.

As to the Savoy-Racconigi’s argument that dowries were given based on “friendship and kinship,” that large dowries were not generally given and that, in any case, neither Beatrice’s father nor her husband had the greatest wealth at the time that the dowry was established and the

81 Ibid., p. 181.
82 Submitted on February 23, 1565. Ibid., p. 91.
marriage contracted, the Luserna insisted that, in establishing dowries, “the virtues and values of men should be more esteemed than their wealth and worldly goods.”

Dowries should reflect “the quality of the persons of the husband and wife, also considering the amount of the patrimony of both the father and relatives of the bride and the husband, and according to their degrees of virtue and honor.”

In any event, the Luserna argued that Beatrice’s own qualities were “perhaps not so unrefined ("volgare"), since she came from the House of Savoy and was nourished and raised by Queen Eleanor of France for 11 years, and was married at the court of Charles V.” Indeed, the Luserna concluded that “their [Beatrice and Carlo’s] qualities, conditions and virtues...merit greater dowries than those of others.” In contrast with the Savoy-Racconigi’s claims that her husband’s income was a mere 400 scudi per year, Beatrice’s legal team stated that her husband’s “worth and income...to be over two thousand scudi per year not including stipends from His Highness [the duke].”

**Beatrice’s Arguments: Her Cousin Promised that he would Satisfy her Claims**

In addition to their arguments focusing on Beatrice’s dowry, Carlo and Beatrice called witnesses to testify that Filippo’s younger brother, Claudio of Savoy-Racconigi, count of Pancalieri, had expressed numerous times in public that, if it were up to him and not his older brother, he would do what he could to resolve the dispute between the two families and would satisfy Beatrice’s claims. It is interesting that what appears to be a division between Filippo and

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83 Ibid., p. 33. “Le virtu et valor delli homini sono molto piu da estimare che le richezze et beni del mondo.”
84 Ibid., p. 36. “...le dotte se danno dalli signori gentilhomini et altri piu e meno secondo la quallita delle persone del marito et la moglie havendo ancho risguardo alla quantita del patrimonio tanto del padre et parenti della sposa come del marito, et secondo li gradi virtu et honor.”
85 Ibid., p. 33. “...ancho le quallita d’essa ponente no’ suono forse delle volgare, atteso che e pur uscita della casa di Savoya nutritta et allevata ondecì anni dalla Regna Leonora de Franza et in corte ancho di Carlo Quinto Imperatore maritata et sposata al suo marito.”
86 Ibid., p. 33. “...sono statte et suono tale che non ceddano ad altri pari suoi et che meritano maggior dotti che no’ fanno molti altri.”
87 Ibid., p. 33. “...il Patrimonio et intratta di detto suo marito passa doi millia scudi di reddito ogni anno senza li stipendi quali li da Sua Altezza.”
Claudio with regard to Beatrice’s dowry is paralleled by the brothers’ diverse military and political commitments during the wars. Many of the witnesses called by the Luserna were members of Carlo Manfredi’s household and had served him both during the wars leading up to the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis and afterwards. Both Carlo Manfredi and Claudio of Savoy-Racconigi served in the Spanish Habsburg forces commanded by Duke Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy and had many occasions to encounter each other before and after battles. Adriano Tavato recalled witnessing a meeting between Carlo and Claudio at the royal palace in Brussels in 1558 after the Battle of St. Quentin and just before the Battle of Gravelines. The witness recounted that, upon encountering Carlo, Claudio greeted him and said that he had heard about the litigation between his brother, Filippo, and the Luserna family. He said that “if the matter were to affect him, he would settle it out of court” (“se tal cosa a lui tocasse che non lo farebbe lìttigar”). Indeed, he said that, if it were up to him, he would conclude the suit quickly by “submitting the suit to the summary judgment.”

After the war was over, the two men encountered each other on several occasions when witnesses were again present. Tavato recalled that, in 1560, when the duke of Savoy had returned to Piedmont, Carlo and Beatrice met Claudio in the town of Mondovì. When Beatrice saw her cousin “they embraced each other with kisses and many other caresses as is usual between cousins” after which they discussed her dowry. Once again, the witness heard Claudio saying “as far as touches me for my part, I would not make you litigate but would satisfy your claims.” The witness explained that he was able to overhear such conversations because he was in Carlo’s

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88 Ibid., p. 119.
89 Ibid., p. 120. “...se tal cosa a lui tocašse che non lo farebbe lìttigar...et che remetterebbe tal causa a giudicio sumario.”
90 Ibid., p. 120. “…riscontrandosi cosi la sudetta sig.ra Beatrice con cap.lante suoa cogina si ambrazareno con basi e molte altre carezze come conviene tra cogini…”
91 Ibid., p. 120. “Il detto s.r conte Claudio gli rispose o ben s.ra cogina non dubitate ... che quello e guanto mi toccava per mia parte non vi faro lìttigar ma satisfaro le ragion...”
service and “he accompanied said signor Carlo wherever he went.”

Ludovico Comazzuolo, one of Carlo’s household gentlemen, testified that in September 1560 he witnessed an encounter between Carlo and Claudio in which Carlo informed Claudio that he had decided to pursue a lawsuit against the Savoy-Racconigi for Beatrice’ dowry claims. According to Comazzuolo, Claudio responded to Carlo that “he did well to do so and that if he [Claudio] had had anything to do with it that he would not have made him litigate but that he would have given him that which was his.”

Another time, Claudio met with Beatrice and told his cousin that, if it was up to him, “he would have given her that which was reasonable.” Gaspardo Capris, bishop of Asti and a trusted friend of the duke, was present when Carlo and Claudio met in Vercelli: “Signor Carlo was complaining to said signor Count Claudio saying...your father the count of Pancalieri and your brother the lord of Racconigi are making me litigate the dowry and claims of my consort, your cousin.” Claudio answered that “said lords his father and brother were very wrong [“havevano gran torto”] and that he hoped one day that he [Carlo] would have what he was entitled to.” Sebastiano de Catellanis of Gattinara was with the bishop during this meeting and confirmed that he heard similar words between the two men.

One morning in Fossano, Pietro Qualia of Mondovi accompanied Carlo to see Claudio, where Qualia heard Claudio saying

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92 Ibid., p. 121. “In quelli tempi stava in servitio...d’esso s.r Carolo gover.r predetto et per questo si ritrovava alle sudette case...perche accompagnava detto s.r Carolo dove andava.”
93 Ibid., p. 174-175. “…che esso s.r conte di Pancalier alhora gli disse tale o sia consimile parolle che faceva molto ben et che se havesse habbiuto a far con sua s.ria che non l’haverebbe fatto lìttigar ma che gl’haverebbe datto quello era suo.”
94 Ibid., p. 175. “…se fossi tocato a sua s.ria che non la faria lìttigar ma che gl’haverebbe datto quel tanto che saria stato ragionevole.”
95 Ibid., p. 126. “S.r Carolo si lamentava con il detto s.r conte Claudio dicendogli simile parolle vostro barba conte di Pancalier e vostro fratello il s.r de Racconigi me fano lìttigar le dotti e ragion di mia consorte vostra cogina.”
96 Ibid., p. 131. “…alhora gli rispuose il detto s.r conte Claudio altre consimile parolle che detti ss.ri suo barba e fratello havevano gran torto et che sperava uno giorno di haver quello gl’aspettava.”
“it is not my intention to litigate; indeed, I want to do what I am required to do without litigating.”

Although Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi generally had control over the lawsuit, there were several instances in the 1560s when Claudio submitted briefs in the suit, perhaps because his brother was away from Piedmont. Indeed, the brothers worked closely together on this case. Neither Filippo nor Claudio appear to have responded to the Luserna’s allegation that Claudio had criticized his brother’s actions in the suit. They likely considered this claim to be immaterial to the conflict and knew that the Senate would never presume to enter into a potential conflict between two such powerful brothers when the relationship between Filippo and Claudio was not at issue in the case. Indeed, it would have been considered a failure of decorum and even disrespectful for the Senate to engage with this argument. Indeed, despite the fact that a number of depositions were taken on the subject of Claudio’s conversations with Carlo, the Senate does not seem to have considered them.

The Sentence of 1566

After all of the case records had been submitted to the Senate and the witness dispositions taken, the Senate issued a sentence on April 6, 1566, ordering the Savoy-Racconigi, as the holders of Beatrice’s father’s assets, to pay her the 2,800 scudi of her mother’s dowry and the 2,000 scudi for her own dowry as established by her father’s will. In addition, the Senate ordered the Savoy-Racconigi to pay 6% interest on the full sum of 4,800 scudi from the day of Beatrice’s wedding up to the present day. The Senate dismissed Beatrice’s claim for a higher dowry. Although they might have been content to have received an order for 4,800 scudi plus

97 Ibid., p. 172. “...oldette dir da detto mons.r di Panchalier tale o sia con simil parolle non e’ mia mente di littigare anci ho voglio far quello che sono tenuto senza littigio.”
seventeen years’ interest at a rate of 6%, the Luserna protested against the dismissal of Beatrice’s claim for a higher dowry. The Senate had decided that her father’s will made it clear that, when he established the amount of Beatrice’s dowry, he had taken account of the fact that Beatrice would receive her mother’s dowry as well and, because of that, he had “left the plaintiff a smaller dowry.”

Thus, the Senate considered Beatrice’s full dowry to amount to 4,800 scudi. On April 10, the Luserna’s attorney accepted the provisions of the sentence that ordered the Savoy-Racconigi to pay Beatrice her mother’s dowry, but refused to accept the provisions regarding her own dowry. Shortly thereafter, the Luserna submitted an appeal against the sentence.

Why would the Luserna appeal a decision that was favorable to them? After all, it was highly unlikely that the Senate was going to grant their unusual retroactive claim for a higher dowry, and the amount that the Savoy-Racconigi were ordered to pay was substantial. An answer to this question lies in the respective political positions of Carlo Manfredi and the Savoy-Racconigi brothers in 1566. This sentence, and its so-called “unfavorable” outcome for Beatrice and Carlo, was issued at a time when Carlo was falling out of favor with the duke. In 1566, Emanuele Filiberto appointed Sebastiano Grazioli (nicknamed “Castrocaro” after the town of his birth) governor of the Chisone and Pellice valleys, to which he soon added the Luserna valley, the center of the fiefs of the Luserna family. Castrocaro had been appointed to help the duke deal more severely with Waldensians in the area who were causing trouble as bandits. He clashed immediately with the authority of the local lords, most notably the Luserna family, and “soon relations between the governor and the feudal lords broke down into open conflict.”

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99 Ibid., p. 13. “...che le sudette doti materne, le quali si vedono havute in consideratione del Testatore, et perciò verisimilmente, ha lasciato minoti le proprie doti dell’attrice.”
100 Merlotti, “Carlo Manfredi Luserna.”
101 Ibid.
his memoirs, Carlo Giovan Francesco characterized the arrival of Castrocaro in these words:

“Worst of all was that His Higness appointed as Governor of the Valleys of Luserna...Bastiano Castrocaro,” whom he described as making alliances with the local enemies of the Luserna, resulting in violence between the servants of both sides.\footnote{102 Carlo Francesco Manfredi, “Memorie,” 398-399. “Ma il peggio di tutto era che S.A. haveva dato il Governo delle Valli di Lucerna...Bastiano Castrocaro.”}

In his correspondence with the duke, Castrocaro accused Carlo of aiding the Waldensian bandits: “I must inform Your Highness that I have heard...that every night, Martino Bonetto and Pietro Fraschia captains of the bandits, with their followers, are summoned to Luserna by Lord Carlo to his house, and often even during the day, where they speak against me and thus, against the service of Your Highness.”\footnote{Sebastiano Grazioli to Duke Emanuele Filiberto, November 13, 1575. Text provided in “Le lettere del Governatore delle Valli, Sebastiano Grazioli di Castrocaro,” Bollettino della società di studi valdesi no. 26, ed. Arturo Pascal (Torre Pellice: Imprimerie Alpine, 1905), 27. “Non posso tacer d’avisar V.A....che ogni notte, martino bonetto et pietro fraschia cappitani de bandidi, con altri loro seguaci sono mandati a chiamare dal S.r Carlo e luserna in casa sua, et ben spesso di giorno, dove non si tratta salvo contra di me però e cio, contra il servitio di V.A.”}

Castrocaro asked the duke to “order Lord Carlo of Luserna as you believe to be appropriate regarding the favor he shows to bandits, otherwise others will be encouraged to be disobedient.”\footnote{Sebastiano Grazioli to Duke Emanuele Filiberto, November 13, 1575. Text provided in “Le lettere del Governatore della Valli,” p. 28. “...le piacia ordinarmi quanto le parera necessario che io facia supplicando finalmente si degni ordinare quel tanto che gli parera expediente al sig.r Carlo di luserna sovra questo suo favorire, li banditti che altramente si da animo a glaltri di esser inobedienti.”}

Castrocaro’s correspondence is full of similar complaints about Carlo. Carlo, for his part, demanded Castrocaro’s removal repeatedly.\footnote{Merlotti, “Carlo Manfredi Luserna.”} Nevertheless, the duke continued to support his agent, leading to increasing tension between them.

One sign of the duke’s displeasure with Carlo can be seen in 1568, when Emanuele Filiberto revived the esteemed chivalric Order of SS. Annunziata, named the greatest Sabaudian nobles to be its knights, and passed Carlo over for this honor.\footnote{The Order of the Santissima Annunziata (Annunciation) was founded in the fourteenth century as the duke of Savoy’s highest chivalric order. “Limited to forty members, by the time of Emanuele Filiberto’s restoration its numbers had dwindled to five...even the duke himself had not been created a knight of the order.” Oresko, “The Duchy of Savoy and the Kingdom of Sardinia,” 235.}
had created new knights of the Order had been in 1527. The list of new members was practically a directory of the most elite men in the Sabaudian lands: the six-year-old Carlo Emanuele, prince of Piedmont, followed immediately by the Savoy-Racconigi brothers, Filippo and Claudio and five other leaders of great houses.\textsuperscript{107} Carlo Manfredi was not among them. The next creation of knights occurred the following year, on March 25, 1569. Another member of the Savoy-Racconigi was made a member, Filippo’s son Bernardino, along with three other great noblemen. Again, Carlo Manfredi was excluded from this most prestigious group.\textsuperscript{108}

Watching all of the men of the Savoy-Racconigi lineage achieve this coveted status would certainly have rankled Carlo Manfredi. Just a few months later, on July 8, 1569, he resigned from his position of governor of Mondovi, claiming poor health.\textsuperscript{109} He returned to his home in Luserna together with Beatrice and his children, “where he continued his battle against Castrocaro.”\textsuperscript{110} He also continued his battle against the Savoy-Racconigi. The two sides of the suit wrangled back and forth over execution of the 1566 sentence until Carlo died in 1577, at which point Beatrice preferred to let the case go rather than continue to pursue an appeal.

\textit{Conclusion}

The duke’s manifest displeasure with Carlo Manfredi due to his ongoing conflict with Castrocaro and, perhaps, Carlo’s refusal to accept the 1566 sentence, and the duke’s clear preference for the Savoy-Racconigi spurred Carlo and Beatrice on in their lawsuit. As the Luserna family’s relationship with the duke deteriorated, Carlo and Beatrice’s conflict with the Savoy-Racconigi was a highly visible way that they could use to reassert their place among the

\textsuperscript{107} Cigna Santi, 65-78.
\textsuperscript{108} The Manfredi di Luserna family would finally achieve this great honor over thirty years later when Carlo’s son, Carlo Francesco, was promoted by Duke Carlo Emanuele I on February 2, 1602. Cigna Santi, 100.
\textsuperscript{109} Merlotti, “Carlo Manfredi Luserna.”
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
great families of the Sabaudian nobility. Their experience with the lawsuit so far had shown them that the law courts were one venue where they could assert their quality and status. During the initial years of the suit, great focus and effort was placed on the couple’s upbringing, kinship connections, and wealth. Beatrice’s illustrious connections with the House of Savoy, the Queen of France, and Charles V was stressed repeatedly, while Carlo’s preeminent status as the leader of the Luserna lineage was also a matter of great interest. Although their claim for a higher dowry may have been far-fetched, the Senate was willing to entertain it and, as it did so, the Luserna had an opportunity to highlight the quality of their house.

In addition, they were pitting themselves against the most worthy of adversaries. Through their kinship connection with the Savoy-Racconigi, Carlo Manfredi saw an opening to engage the duke of Savoy’s cousins in a dispute that would be witnessed by the Sabaudian nobility. This served the dual purpose of stressing the new kinship between Carlo Manfredi and the House of Savoy, and highlighting the rivalry between the Luserna and another great dynasty, the Savoy-Racconigi. The couple’s son, Carlo Gianfrancesco described the competition between the two families in his memoirs, referring to Filippo, Claudio, and Claudio’s wife, Marie de Gondi as “our greatest enemies.” By embracing the idea that the Savoy-Racconigi were their “greatest enemies,” the Luserna were reasserting their own status as being commensurate with that of the Savoy-Racconigi, who were in the ascendant at Emanuele Filiberto’s court in Turin.

Although Carlo Manfredi died before he could reestablish his former position of favor, his son, Carlo Gianfrancesco, became well-established at the court of Duke Emanuele Filiberto after his death. In 1573, the duke named Carlo Gianfrancesco a knight of the Order of SS.

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112 Ibid., 399.
Maurizio e Lazzaro, the second most prestigious knightly order in the Sabaudian lands after the Order of SS. Annunziata.\textsuperscript{113} In his memoirs, Carlo Gianfrancesco recalled that in 1574 he was sent on his first diplomatic missions to Duke Alfonso of Ferrara and “started to serve the Most Serene Carlo Emanuele in his chamber.”\textsuperscript{114} When Carlo Emanuele succeeded his father, Carlo Gianfrancesco continued to serve him, travelling to Prague as the duke’s ambassador to the Holy Roman Emperor in 1604.\textsuperscript{115} On February 2, 1602, the duke finally invited Carlo Gianfrancesco to join the most elite noblemen of Piedmont and made him a knight of the Order of SS. Annunziata.\textsuperscript{116} After their mother’s death, Carlo Gianfrancesco and his brother Emanuele Filiberto revived the lawsuit against the Savoy-Racconigi. Their conflict with Bernardino of Savoy-Racconigi, and later, his widow Isabelle de Grillet, will be discussed in Chapter 2.

\textsuperscript{113} February 22, 1573. ALM, mazzo 7, fasc. 14.
\textsuperscript{114} Carlo Francesco Manfredi, “Memorie,” 399. “...cominciai servire il Ser.o Carlo Emanuel alla camera.”
\textsuperscript{115} Vincenzo Promis, \textit{Ambasciata di Carlo Francesco Manfredi di Luserna a Praga nel 1604} (Turin: Stamperia Reale di G. B. Paravia e Comp.), 1877.
\textsuperscript{116} Cigna Santi, 100.
Figure 2. The Savoy-Racconigi Family Tree with the Luserna Family

Ludovico “the bastard of Acaia” (ca. 1385-1460/61) m. (1412) Alisia Montbel d’Entremond

- Francesco (d. before 1505) m. Caterina di Seyssel
  - Claudio I (d. 1522) m. Ippolita Borromeo (d. 1527)
    - Bernardino I (d. 1526) m. Violante Adorno (d. 1521)
  - Maria (d. 1471) m. (1449) Amato di Seyssel (d. 1466)
    - Antonia Ludovica (ca. 1485-1551) m. (1) Giovanna di Pontevez
  - Alice (d. ca. 1464) m. (1460) Innocenzo Fieschi di Masserano
    - Barbara (d. ca. 1464) m. Galeazzo di Tenda
  - Ludovico (d. ca. 1503) m. (1493) Francesca Saluzzo
    - Giovanna Francesco (d. 1538) m. (1) Violante Valperga
    - (2) Jacqueline de Montbel (d. ca. 1543)

- Ludovico II (d. 1536) m. Violante Valperga (d. 1527)
  - Filippo (ca. 1510-1581) m. (1537) Paola Costa della Trinità
  - Claudio II (d. 1582) m. Marie de Gondi (1534-1580)
    - Francesco (d. 1544) m. Margherita Bolleris (d. 1589)
      - Filippo Emanuele (1592-1676) m. (1) Caterina Grimaldi (d. 1620)
        - (2) Angela Vacca (d. 1649)
  - Carlo (d. 1551-1618) m. Beatrice Ferrero Fieschi (ca. 1557-1601)
    - Filippo Emanuele (1592-1676) m. (1) Caterina Grimaldi (d. 1620)
      - (2) Angela Vacca (d. 1649)

- Bernardino II (ca. 1540-1605) m. (1577)
  - Isabelle de Grillet (1552-1625)
    - Giovanna Battista (1548-1585) m. (1584)
      - Benedetta Spinola
    - Filiberto (d. 1585) m. Ottavia di Moretta
      - Bona m. Claude de Challant
        - Paola de Challant m. Ludovico Solaro 1st marquise of Dogliani
      - Claudia (d. 1617) m. Besso Ferrero Fieschi, marchese di Masserano
        - Violante m. Henry Nicolas de Cremieux
        - Paola Henry m. Carlo Provana di Druent
      - Ludovico Solaro m. (1) Besso Ferrero Fieschi, marchese di Masserano
      - Luisa m. Luigi Isnardi Roero di Sanfre
      - Francesco m. Margherita Bolleris (d. 1589)
        - Ottavia m. (1563)
      - Gian Francesco (d. 1605) m. Francesca Provana
Chapter 2. “A Long and Laborious Suit”:
Isabelle de Grillet v. the Counts of Luserna, 1605-1609

Petition to the duke of Savoy by Isabelle de Grillet, lady of Racconigi, in her case against the
counts of Luserna: ¹

*Most Serene Lord...There are rumors that I was barred from an Audience because I appealed to
the Council of State against a sentence issued by Your Highness, but since it is quite untrue that I
fell into such error, even if I am but a woman and troubled, I am beside myself, and I hope that
Your Highness... will have pity and consent to hear this disconsolate widow who, after the
goodness of God, has no one to trust in besides Your Highness, and that you will thus
condescend, as I kneel at your feet and implore you, now that you are better informed of my
claims through the full [legal] opinions, to command as you deem just...*

Petition to the duke of Savoy by the counts of Luserna in their case against Isabelle de Grillet: ²

*Most Serene Lord, it is now necessary to put an end to this and impose perpetual silence on the
complaints of Madama di Racconigi [Isabelle]... We humbly implore Your Highness to
condescend, in your wisdom, to impose an end to such a long and laborious suit once and for all
and order the Most Excellent Senate to carry out justice.*

Introduction

The above petitions were submitted to Duke Carlo Emanuele I of Savoy (r. 1580-1630)
during the years 1607-09 as part of a lawsuit pending before the Senate of Piedmont between the
representatives of two great families of the Piedmontese nobility: Isabelle de Grillet (1552-
1625), widow of the last member of the Savoy-Racconigi family, and brothers Carlo
Gianfrancesco Manfredi (1551-1618) and Emanuele Filiberto Manfredi (1557-1616), the counts
of Luserna.³ At the time, the suit had been dragging on between the Savoy-Racconigi and the

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¹ Isabelle de Grillet to Carlo Emanuele I, March 15, 1607. Lettere SR, Mazzo 76. “Ser.mo Sig.re...Corri voce che mi
sia stata serrata l’Audienza perche io habbia richiamato al Consiglio di Stato contro una sentenza di V.A. Ser.ma ma
sicome è falsissimo ch’io sia corsa in tanto errore, se ben donna e travagliata mi trovi fuori di me stess
a così anco spero che V.A....si pregarà à pietà e vorrà sentire questa sconsolata vedova che non ha dopo la bontà di Iddio
confidato di persona che di V.A. e perci si degnerà ch’à suoi piedi inchinata habbia da lei racorso, e la suppliche
che meglio informata delle mie ragioni da integri pareri comandi poi quello che le ne parrà giusto...”
² The counts of Luserna to Carlo Emanuele I. Undated but likely February or March 1609. FdC, mazzo 8, no. 89.
“Ser.mo Sig hormai dovria pur mettersi fine et imporsi perpetua silentio alle querelle di Madama di Racconis...
Suplicando Humilmente VA Ser.a si si degni...imponendoli una volta un fine si longa e travagliosa litte et mandar
al Senato Ecc.mo di far giustitia...”
³ The family relationship between the Savoy-Racconigi and the Luserna is shown in the family tree at the end of this
chapter.
Luserna for decades. It concerned the nonpayment of the dowry of Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi, who had married the counts’ father, Carlo Manfredi, the previous count of Luserna, in 1549. The original litigants having died, Isabelle had inherited the case from her husband, Bernardino of Savoy-Racconigi, who had in turn inherited it from his father and uncle, while the counts of Luserna had inherited it from their parents.

By 1600, the once numerous and influential Savoy-Racconigi family had dwindled down to one man, Bernardino of Savoy-Racconigi, Isabelle’s husband. Bernardino’s brothers had all predeceased him and he and Isabelle had no children. Thus, when Bernardino died in 1605, the line of the Savoy-Racconigi, a cadet branch of the House of Savoy, came to an end. Although Isabelle had no children, which would have given her some control over and a stake in the future of her husband’s house, Isabelle continued to identify with and act on behalf of the Savoy-Racconigi. Her actions after her husband’s death demonstrate both the potential and the limitations of the political influence and power that a noble widow could wield. Initially well placed through her natal and marital ties to be a strong player in Piedmontese politics, the death of her husband’s house and her own lack of children limited her potential for political power in comparison to other noble widows, who held the future of their marital houses in their hands. Despite her limited political capital as the widow of a defunct house, Isabelle exploited the judicial system as a venue for her political ambitions, mounting a successful defense of the Savoy-Racconigi line, with which she fully identified, presenting herself as the last representative of that cadet branch and aggressively asserting her right to be heard by the duke of Savoy. This, combined with her capable governance of the Piedmontese fiefs of Racconigi and La Chiusa on the duke’s behalf, enabled her to reclaim a place for herself among the great

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4 The initial years of this suit are analyzed in chapter 1.
families of the Sabaudian nobility. In order to do so, Isabelle had to overcome forceful legal attacks by the mighty Luserna family and constant attempts to undermine her government by the people of Racconigi, who initially resisted her rule.

After her husband’s death, Isabelle had to contend with her diminished role as the widow of a man who had fallen out of court favor in the latter years of his life and whose lineage had ended. She energetically defended her place at the ducal court as the duke’s “cousin” (albeit distant and by marriage). Bernardino left Isabelle to cope with a number of debts and pending lawsuits, most notably the longstanding suit against the counts of Luserna over Beatrice of Savoy-Raconigi’s dowry. An analysis of Isabelle’s vigorous and ultimately successful defense against the claims of the counts of Luserna sheds light on a widow’s political potential. Although scholars have shown great interest in the political power wielded by early modern noblewomen and by noble widows, Isabelle was in a unique position as a childless widow whose marital house ended with her husband’s death. As such, she faced a distinctive set of obstacles: she had few close relatives on whom to rely and she could not be said to be the custodian of the future of her marital house, a common and acceptable role for noble widows, which could place them in a position of significant power. The strategies she adopted to cope with challenges to her status and reputation, characterized by her steadfast dedication to defending against the Luserna’s claims and her struggle to govern the fief of Racconigi provide us with a greater understanding of the political limitations and opportunities afforded to early modern noblewomen.

Judicial records, family archives, and correspondence reveal the interplay between Isabelle’s legal strategies and her political ambitions. As she confronted powerful Piedmontese noblemen in court, Isabelle drew on her kinship and patronage ties, calling repeatedly on her “cousin” Duke Carlo Emanuele I to intervene in her favor. The duke had an interest in helping
Isabelle since she was fighting for the reputation of a cadet branch of the House of Savoy. He was also inclined to help Isabelle as the daughter of the woman who had been his mother’s close friend and *prima dama d’honore* as well as his own *governatrice* when he was a child. This chapter will show, however, that the duke’s intervention on Isabelle’s behalf did not always bring about the desired outcome. Although Isabelle had hoped to prevail in her lawsuit by drawing on her kinship ties with the duke, ultimately it was her own dogged perseverance and intelligence that led to her success in the suit, while the duke’s intervention was largely ineffective. Isabelle’s experiences after her husband’s death shows an early modern noblewoman exploiting the law courts as political venues to preserve and defend her honor and enhance her status at a princely court.

**Isabelle de Grillet and Her Family**

Isabelle de Grillet was the daughter of Nicolas de Grillet, *seigneur* de Pomiers, and Marie de Gondi (1534-80). The Gondi, originally Florentine merchants, were one of the most powerful and wealthy families in sixteenth-century France. Marie de Gondi’s parents were Antoine de Gondi, the first of the family to move to France from Italy, and Marie-Catherine de Pierrevive, art patroness, *salonnière*, and a close friend of Catherine de’ Medici. During the 1550s, Marie-Catherine served at the French court as lady-in-waiting to the queen’s daughter-in-law, Mary Stuart, and as governess of the royal children, a prestigious position generally granted to women of the highest status. Antoine and Marie-Catherine’s children continued the family’s ascent at court by making strategic marriages with the French nobility. On July 19, 1551, their daughter Marie married her first husband, Nicolas de Grillet, *écuyer* of the household of the dauphin Francis. Both Francis and his wife Mary Stuart attended the couple’s wedding at the Château de

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In addition to her marriage, which brought her closer to Catherine de’ Medici, the dauphin and dauphine, Marie obtained a prominent position at court as *dame d’honneur* of Francis I’s daughter, Marguerite, duchess of Berry.  

In the summer of 1557, two events took place that changed the course of Marie’s life. In June, her husband Nicolas died. Two months later, on August 10, Emanuele Filiberto, duke of Savoy, led Philip II’s forces to victory over the French at the Battle of St. Quentin, which led to the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis in 1559. As described in the Introduction, this treaty marked the end of sixty-five years of warfare between France and Spain and restored the Sabaudian lands to Duke Emanuele Filiberto. The treaty was sealed with two marriages: Phillip II married Henry II’s daughter Elisabeth, and Emanuele Filiberto married Henry’s sister Marguerite, duchess of Berry. As her *premiere dame d’honneur*, the widowed Marie de Gondi followed Marguerite from the French court to her new home in Piedmont in 1562.  

A few months after she arrived at the ducal court, Marie married her second husband, Piedmontese nobleman Claudio of Savoy-Racconigi, count of Pancalieri. This marriage solidified Marie’s place among the elite of her new home in Piedmont. As described in chapter 1, the Savoy-Racconigi were an illegitimate cadet branch of the House of Savoy descending from Ludovico, “the bastard of Acaia.” The descendents of Ludovico’s sons became the founders of the two main branches of the Savoy-Racconigi, the descendents of whom would clash over the dowry of Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi a century later. Wherease Beatrice was the last

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7 Samuel Guichenon, *Histoire de Bresse et de Bugey* (Lyon: Chez Jean Antoine Huguetan, 1650), 207.  
8 Francis I invaded the Sabaudian lands in 1536. From that time until 1559, when Emanuele Filiberto regained possession of his lands, the French occupied much of Piedmont.  
10 The date of Ludovico the younger’s death is unknown. Berio notes that he died before March 25, 1461, because that is when the duke of Savoy granted his fiefs to his oldest son heirs, Francesco. Berio, “Per la storia dei Savoia-Racconigi,” 62 and Mainardi, “La famiglia dei Savoia-Racconigi,” 176.  

71
descendent of Ludovico’s second son, Marie de Gondi’s new husband, Claudio, was the direct descendent of Ludovico’s oldest son, Francesco.

When she arrived in the Sabaudian lands, the recently restored Duke Emanuele Filiberto was establishing Turin as his new capital and was rebuilding his court after a long exile. Robert Oresko identified this period in the history of the Sabaudian court as one of the earliest examples of a “restoration” court. Emanuele Filiberto had to “re-create” a court after twenty years of foreign invasions, during which many nobles “had collaborated with the occupying military forces, either Valois or Habsburg.” Indeed, “the re-knitting of loyalties between the restored duke... and a nobility whose devotion to the dynasty had loosened during the quarter-century of troubles and exile, occupied a prime position on Emanuele Filiberto’s political agenda.”

Marie’s husband Claudio and Claudio’s older brother Filippo had supported different sides during the Italian wars. When the French occupied Turin in 1536, Filippo supported the French occupiers. He solidified his loyalties by marrying Paola Costa, daughter of Antonio Ludovico Costa della Trinità, a Piedmontese nobleman who was one of Francis I’s officials. His decision to side with the French crown enabled him to recover his family’s hold over the fief of Racconigi, which had been seized by the French. Claudio, on the other hand, remained loyal to the House of Savoy and followed the duke’s son, Emanuele Filiberto, into the service of the emperor and Philip II. This strategic division of loyalty ensured that whatever the outcome of

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11 Oresko, “The duchy of Savoy and the Kingdom of Sardinia,” 233.
12 Ibid., 236.
13 Ibid., 236.
14 Andrea Merlotti, “Filippo di Savoia-Racconigi,” DBI, vol. 91 (2018). The marriage took place on January 10, 1537, just a few months after the beginning of the French occupation. Filippo received the fiefs of Tegerone and Motturone as Paola’s dowry.
15 On May 16, 1538, the king of France vested Filippo with the fief of Racconigi and on May 23, the Community of Racconigi swore loyalty to the king of France and recognized Filippo as their lord. Mainardi, “La famiglia dei Savoia-Racconigi,” 183.
16 Merlotti, “Filippo di Savoia-Racconigi.”
the Italian wars, one member of the Savoy-Racconigi family would be on the winning side, a stratagem followed not just by members of the Sabaudian aristocracy but by the House of Savoy itself.\textsuperscript{17}

After the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis, Emanuele Filiberto, acknowledging Filippo’s influence in Piedmont and in the interest of reconciling with those nobles who had supported the French occupation, offered Filippo a place at his court. Both Filippo and Claudio were granted key positions. Claudio was appointed \textit{sommelier du corps}, which gave him command over the duke’s bedchamber, and Filippo was named one of the gentlemen of the duke’s chamber.\textsuperscript{18} Both were appointed to the Emanuele Filiberto’s Council of State.\textsuperscript{19} By marrying Claudio, Marie was therefore aligning herself not only with a cadet branch of the House of Savoy but with one of the most dominant families at the Sabaudian court. Upon her arrival in Turin she resumed her position as Duchess Marguerite’s \textit{prima dama d’honore} and became the \textit{governatrice} of Emanuele Filiberto and Marguerite’s only child, the future Duke Carlo Emanuele I.\textsuperscript{20}

Marie and Claudio were constantly present at the ducal court, where they exerted substantial influence. Joanna Milstein notes that in May 1574, the first person to be listed in a compilation of “persone conviventi ordinariamente a corte” (people regularly living at court) was Claudio, the count of Pancalieri, an indication of his significance in the ducal household.\textsuperscript{21} Marie was always with Duchess Marguerite and the young Carlo Emanuele and the Savoy-Racconigi were often mentioned in the Duchess’s correspondence. In a letter to her nephew, the king of

\textsuperscript{17} Duke Emanuele Filiberto, the head of the dynasty of Savoy, fought for the emperor, while his cousin, Jacques de Savoie-Nemours, head of the legitimate cadet branch and next in the line of succession, fought for the French, a strategy that ensured the best possible outcome for the dynasty as a whole, regardless of the outcome of the wars. See Matthew Vester, \textit{Renaissance Dynasticism and Apanage Politics: Jacques de Savoie-Nemours 1531-1585} (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press), 2012.

\textsuperscript{18} Merlotti, “Filippo di Savoia-Racconigi.”

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} Samuel Guichenon, \textit{Histoire de Bresse et de Bugey}, 207.

\textsuperscript{21} Milstein, \textit{The Gondi}, 195.
France, Marguerite recommended one of Filippo’s sons and expressed her affection for the Savoy-Racconigi family: “My lord, we will remain very obliged to you, Monsieur de Savoye and I, for the honor and favor that he [Filippo’s son] will receive because he is of the house of Racconigi, which makes me recommend him to you with the greatest affection.”

Marie continued to play an active role at court even after the duchess’ death in 1574. In 1575, the duke sold Marie, “nostre tres-chere, et bien Amée Cousine” (our dearest and most well beloved Cousin), the lands of Saint-Trivier-de-Courtes (near Bourg-en-Bresse) and made them into a county. Marie therefore became countess of Saint-Trivier. Her will, drafted in the bedroom of the duke’s young son, Carlo Emanuele and witnessed by the duke himself, demonstrates both her prominent place at court and her close relationship with her oldest child, Isabelle. Her provisions for her children include generous bequests to Isabelle, to whom “she left money for a dowry of 2,000 écus, a yearly allowance of 500 livres and a furnished house in Turin.” Isabelle’s brother, who would inherit the county of Saint-Trivier, was to pay Isabelle 400 écus per year in revenue from those lands.

Marie had four children from her first marriage to Nicolas de Grillet: Isabelle, Philippe, Marie and Charles-Maximilien. Isabelle, born on October 1, 1552, was about ten years old when Marie followed Duchess Marguerite to Turin. At an unknown date, she married Philibert, lord of Montjouant and La Pérouse, governor of the citadel of Bourg-en-Bresse. Little is known about her first husband. Writing about eighty years later, historian Samuel Guichenon stated that

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22 Marguerite de France to the king of France. Undated. “Lettres inédites de Marguerite de France,” Revue Historique 17, 1, eds. J. Loutchitsky and T. de Larroque (Paris: Librairie Germer Bailliére, September-December 1881), 98. “Monseigneur, nous vous demeurerons très obligés, monsieur de Savoye et moy, de l’honneur et faveur qu’il receptra pour estre de la mayson de Raconis, qui faict que je le vous recommande de plus grande affection.”
24 The circumstances and provisions of Marie’s will are described by Milstein, The Gondi, 199.
26 There is little evidence of the identity of Isabelle’s first husband in the Archivio di Stato di Torino. A ducal protocol of January 27, 1571 contains a brief submitted to Duke Emanuele Filiberto by the “Sig. di Montjovant”
Isabelle’s first marriage was annulled due to a “malefice,” an evil spell that rendered her barren.27 Guichenon appears to be the earliest source to mention the reasons for the dissolution of the marriage and, as a result, later historians have generally accepted that her marriage ended because Isabelle could not have children. Despite the failure of her first marriage, in 1577 Isabelle made a second and more prestigious marriage with her stepfather Claudio’s nephew, Bernardino of Savoy-Racconigi.28 Bernardino was the oldest of Filippo and Paola Costa’s ten children, and thus the heir of the Savoy-Racconigi lineage. The fortunes of the Savoy-Racconigi had continued to rise after Emanuele Filiberto’s restoration, such that on January 29, 1581, the new duke, Emanuele Filiberto’s son, Carlo Emanuele I, issued letters patent legitimating the line of the Savoy-Racconigi and granting Filippo (and Bernardino after him) a place in the succession if the head of the next cadet branch, Jacques de Savoie-Nemours, had no legitimate sons.29

Isabelle Inherits the Case: 1605-1609

Chapter 1 analyzed the origin and early years of the lawsuit between the Savoy-Racconigi and the Luserna, in which the Luserna sought to force the Savoy-Racconigi to pay a larger dowry for Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi, who had married Carlo Manfredi di Luserna in 1549. The Senate issued a sentence in 1566 ordering the Savoy-Racconigi to pay the Luserna 4,800 scudi. The Luserna family appealed, as they had hoped to obtain a much larger sum and still felt that Beatrice’s dowry was “insufficient.” Carlo Manfredi di Luserna died in 1572, at

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27 Guichenon, Histoire de Bresse et de Bugey, 207.
28 Given that Isabelle’s first marriage was annulled because she could not have children, it is possible that Emanuele Filiberto engineered this marriage between her and the heir of the Savoy-Racconigi precisely to bring an end to Bernardino’s branch. This type of strategy was not unheard of. Some scholars have speculated that Emanuele Filiberto’s own marriage to Marguerite de France, who was thirty-six at the time of their marriage, was intended to end his own lineage in favor of the Savoie-Nemours cadet branch of his house.
29 Registered by the Senate of Piedmont on January 31, 1581 and by the Senate of Savoie on September 22, 1581. ASTC, Materie politiche per rapporto all’interno, Principi del sangue diversi, Mazzo 10.
which point his wife, Beatrice of Savoy-Racconigi, preferred to let the case go rather than continue pursuing an appeal. Almost thirty years later, Carlo and Beatrice’s sons, Carlo Gianfrancesco and Emanuele Filiberto, renewed this dispute against their Savoy-Racconigi cousins.\(^\text{30}\) Both of their parents were now deceased, which freed the brothers to act as they wished. Filippo and Claudio of Savoy-Racconigi had also died (in 1581 and 1582 respectively). The Luserna brothers filed suit before the Senate, summoning Filippo’s son Bernardino to court as the current head of the Racconigi lineage. The counts of Luserna were determined to pursue their mother’s claim to a “sufficient” dowry and force Bernardino to pay it. In his response to their reopening of the appeal 36 years after the 1566 sentence, Bernardino alleged that the counts of Luserna were acting against their deceased mother’s wishes. He claimed that they had not pursued an appeal “while Madama Beatrice, their mother, was living because she never gave them her consent to do so, as she did not wish to flout her father’s will or the Senate’s sentence.”\(^\text{31}\) Nevertheless, the Senate agreed to hear the appeal and by the fall of 1605, after several delays in the case, the senators seemed close to reaching a decision.

On October 9, 1605, however, Isabelle wrote to Duke Carlo Emanuele I to let him know that her husband Bernardino was “so grievously ill that it is impossible to discuss anything with him; nevertheless he is being pestered by certain suits that he has pending undecided before the Most Excellent Senate.”\(^\text{32}\) She requested a suspension of Bernardino’s lawsuits, hoping that he would soon recover, and was granted a month of reprieve. Bernardino died on November 4. In a letter informing the duke of his cousin’s passing, Isabelle described Bernardino’s last

\(^{30}\) FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 7, no. 89.

\(^{31}\) FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 89, p. 22-23. “...vivente Madama Beatrice luoro madre perchè lei non gli’ha mai prestato il consenso non volendo contrarvenir alla volonta paterna et alla sentenza senatoria.”

\(^{32}\) FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 89. “è talmente gravato dalla sua malattia che non si può’ seco negotiar cosa alcuna cio non ostante è molestà d’alcune litti che ha avanti l’ecc.mo Senato indecise.”
moments: “having received the Holy Sacraments of the Church, and having commanded me to be well faithful to God and to Your Highness, as I am and as I will be all the time of my life,” Bernardino died, leaving Isabelle “the most desolate creature under Heaven.”

Bernardino may have been gone, but his lawsuits lived on and Isabelle, as his sole heir, had to contend with them. Isabelle entered the lawsuit from a position of political weakness. Twenty years before, she and her husband had been highly influential figures at the courts of Dukes Emanuele Filiberto and his son Carlo Emanuele I. By the early 1580s, they were a formidable political team and “their opinion was the one most listened to.” In 1581, the Consiglio of the city of Turin offered 1500 scudi to the new duke, Carlo Emanuele I, and gave 200 scudi to Bernardino as well, as he was considered the duke’s favorite. A turning point seems to have occurred in 1582, when Bernardino undertook an important military mission for the duke, whose desire to take the city of Geneva “was a true obsession.” When promised French support failed to materialize, Bernardino botched two attempts to seize the city, resulting in the duke’s displeasure and triggering a crisis among Bernardino’s court faction. When Bernardino’s uncle Claudio died in August 1582, Bernardino had hoped to be appointed to the prestigious position of sommelier du corps in the duke’s household. In what he must have understood as a clear sign of the duke’s irritation with him, however, Bernardino was passed over for that position in favor of Giovanni Battista, his younger brother. Giovanni Battista had originally pursued a career in the church but had performed so well in the duke’s service that Carlo Emanuele had allowed him to put aside the religious life and to marry.

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33 Isabelle de Grillet to Carlo Emanuele I, November 4, 1605, from Racconigi. Lettere SR, mazzo 76. "...ayent recevu les sains sacrements de l’eglise, et me comandent d’estre bien fedele a Diue et a V.A. come iey estre et serey tout le temps de ma vie." “Je suis...la plus dessolee creature qui soyt sous de Ciel.”
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid.
By the end of 1583, Bernardino had become so marginalized at court that he retired from
Turin and retreated to his castle of Racconigi, south of the capital. His palazzo in town was
bought by Carlo Emanuele as part of his plans for a “palazzo nuovo grande” and was
transformed into private apartments for the new duchess, the infanta Catalina Micaela of Spain.
Given Bernardino’s leadership of the pro-French faction at court, the infanta’s takeover of his
palace was “a very clear symbol of who had the power at court and, at the same time, of
Racconigi’s disgrace.”  
Bernardino was not included in the entourage that accompanied the
duke to Saragozza for his wedding to the infanta, while his brothers Giovanni Battista and
Filiberto did make the trip (both fell ill and died there). He spent the following years far from
court intrigue, making only occasional appearances at important ceremonies where his presence
was required as a member of the House of Savoy. After Duchess Catalina Micaela died in
November 1597, Bernardino started returning to court more regularly and was assigned several
important tasks, such as accompanying the duke’s children to Mondovi to avoid a plague in the
city. However, he never achieved his former position of influence. With all of his brothers dead
and with no children of his own, Bernardino’s knowledge that his line would end with him must
have laid a melancholy pall over his last years. His finances were also in a poor state, as will be
discussed below.

Despite Isabelle’s protests, one month after Bernardino’s death, on December 10, 1605, a
sentence was issued against him in the suit against the counts of Luserna. In a stunning

38 Ibid.  
39 Ibid.  
40 Sentenza December 10, 1605. FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 89, pp. 163-64. The text of the sentence is as follows (emphasis
added): “Carlo Emanuel per gratia di Dio Duca di Savoia, Prencipe di Piemonte, ad ogni uno siy manifesto c
ella lite vertente avanti il Senato nostro tra li vassalli nostri Conti di Luserna da una parte et il Sig.e di Raconigi
dall’altra, havendo a rell.ne li meriti della causa...pronontiamo concessa la richiesta restituzione
domandata esser luogo alla revisione della Sentenza nostra, et quella revedendo, Diciamo esser dovuto l’interesse
delle dotti materne della fu Dama Beatrice etiandio dal giorno della morte del fu Conte Gio Fran.co di Savoia suo
Padre sino al giorno del matrimonio qual liquidiamo a cinque per cento, et dovuti anche li alimenti d’esa Dama dal
windfall sentence for the Luserna brothers, the Senate ordered that Beatrice’s dowry of 2,000 gold scudi be supplemented by an additional 3,000 gold scudi as requested by the Luserna, plus 5% annual interest from the date of the marriage in 1549. In addition, the Luserna should receive Beatrice’s mother’s dowry of 2,800 scudi plus 5% interest from the date of her father’s death to the date of her marriage. The Senate also ordered the payment of the *alimenti* [maintenance allowance] that Beatrice had demanded in the amount of 150 scudi per year to cover the years after Beatrice left her home to serve Queen Eleanor until the date of her marriage. This was an absolute landslide victory for the counts of Luserna, as the total amount owed to them by the Savoy-Racconigi (including interest) increased from the approximately 5,000 scudi awarded pursuant to the 1566 sentence to approximately 25,000 scudi, a truly astounding sum of money. The increase was mostly due to the 56 years’ worth of interest applied to Beatrice’s augmented dowry. Isabelle would eventually claim that the original dowry of 2,000 (plus interest) and

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41. LMA, mazzo 112, fasc. 15, 81. In a petition submitted to the Senate in 1564, Beatrice gave her father’s death as 1538 and her mother’s death as about five years later: “...nell’anno mille cinquecento trenta otto morse il sudetto fu Ill.r s.r di Cavorre e suo padre e parechi anni Avanti cioe cinque or circa morse la sig.ra Giayma sua madre.”

42. Ibid., p. 33. In a petition submitted to the Senate in 1563, Beatrice alleged that she had lived at the Queen’s court for 11 years: “...uscita della casa di Savoya nutritta et allevata ondeci anni dalla Regina Leonora de Franza et in corte ancho di Carlo Quinto.”

43. Taking 1538 as the date of Beatrice’s father’s death (as estimated by Beatrice above), my calculations are as follows. Beatrice’s mother’s dowry of 2,800 at 5% interest for 11 years (from her father’s death in 1538 to Beatrice’s marriage in 1549) = 1,540 scudi in interest. *Alimenti* for 11 at 150 scudi per year = 1,650 scudi in alimenti. Beatrice’s original dowry (2,000) plus 5% interest for 56 years from 1549 to 1605 = 5,600. Her additional dowry (3000) at 5% interest for 56 years = 8,400. Therefore, her mother’s dowry (2,800) plus interest (1,540) plus alimenti (1,650) plus Beatrice’s dowry (2,000) plus interest (5,600) plus her additional dowry (3,000) plus interest (8,400) comes to a grand total of 24,840 scudi owed to the counts of Luserna.
Beatrice’s mother’s dowry had both been paid, bringing the total sum owed down to 13,050 scudi.\textsuperscript{44} Nevertheless, the Senate’s decision was astonishing.

What could account for the Senate’s actions? Since the Senate rarely alluded to the reasoning behind its decisions, its motivations are unclear. The amount awarded in this sentence is so excessive that it appears to be a deliberate attempt to deplete the resources of the Savoy-Racconigi definitively. Given the recent death of the last member of the lineage, the Luserna may have sensed an opportunity to take hold of the family’s remaining wealth. It was unlikely that the full sum would ever be paid, but the Luserna could look forward to some sizeable payments from Isabelle if they could enforce at least some installments. Isabelle may have seemed an easy target who might not have the resources or the inclination to fight back against one of the greatest families in Piedmont. Perhaps the Luserna expected the widow, now in her fifties and unlikely to remarry, to retire quietly.

Isabelle had no intention of letting the Luserna pillage the patrimony of the Savoy-Racconigi lineage. As soon as she was informed of the sentence issued against her deceased husband, she challenged it before the Senate, claiming it was invalid because: (1) it was made against an individual who was deceased at the time it was issued, a fact which was known to the Senate at the time, (2) the sentence altered the rulings contained in the 1566 sentence, which should be considered fully adjudicated and rendered final, since 34 years had passed, (3) Isabelle was entitled to carry out a legal inventory of her deceased husband’s estate before any further action was taken in the case and (4) Isabelle had recently discovered inventories and receipts from Lady Beatrice proving that she had received full payment from her cousins for her mother’s

\textsuperscript{44} A calculation made in the case record made in April 1606 considered Beatrice’s original dowry of 2,000 plus interest and her mother’s dowry of 2,800 to have been paid, and gave the total as 14,515 scudi. FdS, mazzo 8, fasc. 89, pp. 268-269.
dowry back in 1549.\textsuperscript{45} In fact, Isabelle seems to have exerted more energy toward digging up evidence of payments to Lady Beatrice than her husband, his father, and his uncles had done in previous years. The following months of the case saw a flurry of evidentiary submissions from Isabelle’s attorney, as she scoured the archives of the Savoy-Racconigi to trace any and all records of transactions between her husband’s family and the Luserna from the time of the marriage in 1549.

About a year later, on February 6, 1607, Duke Carlo Emanuele, having consulted with his Council of State and the senators, and having heard arguments from the attorneys for both parties, revised the 1605 sentence. In its place, he issued a \textit{laudo} (award) stating that “all of the claims” that the counts of Luserna might have under the previous sentence issued against Lady Isabelle “must be tempered [moderato], and we hereby temper them to the sum of 10,000 scudi.”\textsuperscript{46} By stating that the 1605 sentence needed to be “moderato,” or “tempered,” the duke was acknowledging that the amount demanded of Isabelle was excessive. He ordered Isabelle “to pay to said brothers one third [of the total] within three months, a third within the following year, and the rest within six months after the end of said year, and we hereby absolve said Lady from any greater claim from said brothers.” Although the new amount was an improvement, it was still greater than the Luserna’s original claims. Isabelle immediately protested the \textit{laudo}, arguing that her claims had not been heard, nor had the duke been fully informed of all of the details of the case, including all of the evidence she had recently gathered.

During her appeal against the \textit{laudo}, Isabelle petitioned the duke directly to have him remove certain senators from the case. She claimed that a number of the senators involved in the

\textsuperscript{45} FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 89, p. 229.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., p. 275. \textit{‘...si debbano moderare, come moderiamo alla somma di scudi diece milla.’} Isabelle was ordered “a pagar alli detti fratelli un terzo fra tre mesi, un terzo fra un anno indi seguente, e il compimento fra sei mesi doppo spirato detto anno, quali mediante assolviamo detta Dama da ogni maggior pretensione di detti fratelli.”
1605 sentence, which was so incredibly favorable to the counts of Luserna, had close friendships with the counts and that, as long as they were on the case, her claims would be ignored. She argued that those senators were simply incapable of judging her suit in an impartial manner, given their bias in favor of the Luserna:

The Lady of Racconigi, in her suit against the Lord Counts of Luserna, mistrusts... the following Lords of the Most Excellent Senate...
First. Senator Cortina, because he was the reporting judge for the initial Sentence and was removed pursuant to the letter of review and nevertheless wishes to interfere [in this suit]...
Second. Senator Goviano, because he is a close friend of said Lord Counts, in the service and at the request of whom he very hotly urged and persuaded said Lady to agree to [pay] a large sum to said Lord adversaries...
Third. Senator Calusio, because he is the close friend of Signor Count Carlo, one of the Lord adversaries, who is the godfather to one of his children
Fourth. Senator Humolio, because he is likewise a close friend of said Lord Count, who is the godfather to one of his children.
Thus she humbly implores Your Most Serene Highness to condescend to order them to abstain from voting [on the appeal] and intervening in this suit...  

This letter is undated, but it was written sometime after the 1605 sentence but before the 1607 laudo. A scribbled note at the bottom of the letter orders “it is hereby granted that the above individuals be removed.”

Who were these senators? The information about them is limited. Carlo Dionisotti’s comprehensive history of the Sabadian senates provides basic biographical information about senators Cortina and Umoglio (or Humolio). Cesare Cortina, “of Agostino, of Cuorgnè, count of Enza, of the lords of Salto, Ponte and Valle,” joined the Senate in 1588 after serving as avvocato

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47 FdC, mazzo 16. No date. “La Dama di Racconiggi nella sua causa con li SS.ri Conti di Luserna ha per sospetto... gl’inframenzionati Sig.ri dell’Ecc.mo Senato, Primo. Il Senator Cortina perché è stato relatore della prima Sentenza et rimosto per le lettere di revisione e cio non ostante volse ingerirsi [interfere].... Secondo. Il Senator Goviano perché è amicissimo di detti SS.ri Conti a servitio e ricchiesta de quali ha sollecitato caldissima.te e persuadeva essa Dama ad accordar gran somma a detti SS.ri avversarii... Terzo. Il Senator Calusio per esser compadre et intrinseco del S. Conte Carlo uno delli SS.ri avversanti. Quarto. Il Senator Humolio per esser similmente compadre et intrinseco del detto S. Conte. Per cio Humilmente supp.la V.A. Ser.ma si degni ordinarli d’astenersi dal voto, ne intervenire in essa Causa...”
48 Ibid. “Si concede che i sudetti restino remosti.”
fiscale generale from 1585.49 Giovanni Battista Umoglio was a law professor who was appointed to the Senate in 1589 and later became its president. Umoglio died at the age of 70 in 1618. More information is available about Manfredo Goveano.50 He was born in France around 1550 and spent his childhood in the various university towns where his father, Antonio, taught as a professor. Duke Emanuele Filiberto must have had great respect for Antonio Goveano, because when Antonio died, the duke took responsibility for his son’s education, authorizing an annual pension of 100 scudi for that purpose. Goveano completed his studies in 1575 and was appointed to the Senate of Piedmont. His status rose considerably in 1582 when he married Eleonora Piosasco di None, the daughter of an elite family. Over the following decades he had an illustrious career in government administration, law, and diplomacy. Goveano was one of the witnesses to Carlo Emanuele I’s will in 1605.51 After 1607, he does not seem to have received any more appointments from the duke, but was still a senator. He died in 1613. Both Senators Umoglio and Goveano were praised for their actions during the plague of 1599: “In this city of Turin during the plague of 1599, these great men and impartial judges who governed the magistrato della sanità [an institution aimed at managing public health] pursued nothing other than pure service to God, the Duke and the public: senators Giovanni Battista Umoglio, Manfredo Goveano, etc.”52 The identity of Senator Calusio is unclear, because, although there were many members of the Calusio family in local government positions in Turin throughout the

49 Dionisotti, Storia della magistratura piemontese vol. 2, 313.
50 The following biographical information about Goveano was found in Andrea Merlotti, “Manfredo Goveano,” DBI vol. 58, 2002.
51 Manfredo Goveano was witness to Carlo Emanuele I’s will on Nov. 26, 1605 as “councilor of state and senator.” ASTC, Materie politiche per rapport all’interno, Testamenti di sovrani e principi di Savoia, mazzo 4.
sixteenth century, there is no Calusio listed in Dionisotti’s study of the Senate of Piedmont.\textsuperscript{53} The limited information available about these men makes it difficult to know to what extent Isabelle’s accusations of partiality were founded.

Despite Isabelle’s petition and the duke’s order that the named senators be removed from her suit, it seems that at least Senators Cortina and Goveano remained on the case and continued to be involved in Isabelle’s appeal. In fact, having protested against these senators after the 1605 sentence was handed down, Isabelle was incensed to discover that Senator Cortina was still on the case when the laudo was handed down two years later. She argued that, because Cortina was the reporting judge for the 1605 sentence, “it is no wonder that he [Cortina] caused His Highness to issue said laudo” rather than giving Isabelle’s claims full consideration.\textsuperscript{54} Isabelle was convinced that her appeal would not be given a fair hearing if Cortina, the author of the 1605 sentence, was in charge of hearing her appeal against his own decision. In an undated document addressed to the duke, Isabelle complained again that Cortina and Goveano were still hearing her appeal. Cortina, she argued, “has already been removed as ‘suspetto’ [of questionable partiality] and should not be interfering” while Goveano was, as far as she was concerned, “sospetissimo.”\textsuperscript{55} Furthermore, even if the two Senators were deemed capable of rendering an impartial decision, neither was in full possession of the facts of the case. “Even if it had wished to, [the Senate] could not refer to all the facts ..... because it had not seen the legal inventories and other records which were produced after the Senate sentence.”\textsuperscript{56} The phrase “even if it had


\textsuperscript{54} FdC, mazzo 16, part 3, p. 2. “Non e’ meraviglia che’insinuasse a S.A. di dar il sudetto laudo.”

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid..

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid. “Anco havesse voluto, [the Senate] non poteva riferire tutto il fatto, perch’ non haveva veduto li inventari legali et altre scritture ritrovate e doppo la sentenza Senatoria prodotte.”
wished to” [anco havesse voluto] indicates that Isabelle felt as though the Senate was squarely set against her and was obstinately refusing to consider the evidence that she had gathered.

Why might the Senate have worked with the Lusena family and against Isabelle? Her husband’s fall from favor had made the last twenty years difficult for her. Her position at court had been undermined by her husband’s political disgrace and marginalization from court. When she appealed against the 1605 sentence, she recognized that her actions were being discussed and criticized at court. As she wrote to the duke: “There are rumors that I was barred from an Audience because I appealed to the Council of State against a sentence issued by Your Highness.”\(^{57}\) Isabelle knew that she was being criticized for questioning the duke’s wise judgment. After all, senators were appointed by the duke and he delegated the administration of justice to them as his trusted representatives. Any sentence that they issued was signed off on by the duke. She countered this criticism by arguing that she was not criticizing the duke, who was the “fonte di giustitia” (fount of justice) but merely pointing out that he had, through no fault of his own, given his approval for an erroneous decision based on the advice provided to him by his senators and Council of State, who were both uninformed and sospetti: “Those who say that it should be impermissible to review a Prince’s laudo do not mean a laudo given based on imperfect information from a questionable person who has not seen all of the records.”\(^{58}\) In issuing a judgment, one assumes, she argued, “that the Prince has been duly informed of the facts.”\(^{59}\) Although her language was unfailingly deferential, her insistence was bold, particularly coming from a widow whose political capital was in decline. Nevertheless, she continued to assert her right to present all of her evidence.

\(^{57}\) Isabelle to Carlo Emanuele I, March 15, 1607. Lettere SR, mazzo 76. See full quote above.

\(^{58}\) FdC, mazzo 16. “Quelli quali dicono non doversi ammeter revision di laudo del Prencipe non intendono di laudo dato a relatione imperfetta di persona sospetta qual non ha veduto tutte le scritture.”

\(^{59}\) Ibid. “...che il Prencipe sia stato compitamente informato del fatto.”
In addition to arguing that the senators were partial to the counts of Luserna and had issued both biased and uninformed advice to the duke, Isabelle addressed the facts of the case. Although Isabelle was acting from a vulnerable position when compared with her Luserna adversaries, she could use the dispute to restore her status among the Piedmontese nobility if she could successfully convince the duke of the merits of her case. As shown in her correspondence with the duke, she knew that other nobles were discussing her case and judging her actions (“There are rumors that I was barred from an Audience...”). Isabelle therefore decided on a forceful defense, raising arguments that had not yet been made by the Savoy-Racconigi. Whereas the counts of Luserna complained of Lady Beatrice’s inadequate dowry of 2,000 scudi as provided for in her father’s will, Isabelle argued that Lady Beatrice had actually received a very adequate dowry of 6,300 scudi. She pointed out that while the lady’s father had only provided 2,000 scudi for her dowry, Beatrice had also received her mother’s dowry of 2,800 scudi. In addition, at the time of her marriage to the count of Luserna, Queen Eleanor of France had added 1,000 scudi to Beatrice’s dowry, while Beatrice’s aunt Beatrice Pachequa had contributed 500 scudi. Altogether, 6,300 scudi “were a very respectable dowry in those days.” The Senate, she argued, should consider those additional contributions as part of Beatrice’s dowry “so as not to diminish the fiefs [held by the Savoy-Racconigi].” Isabelle’s fear was that the Senate would cut Isabelle’s income by ordering that the revenue from her fiefs be diverted to the Luserna to pay for the dowry. Isabelle pointed out that Lady Beatrice’s mother, who had been of the main lineage of the counts of Entremont, and had married in the presence of Carlo II, duke of Savoy, had only received 2,800 scudi for her dowry, 800 scudi of which “were gifted to her by the Most

60 Ibid., part 3, p. 3. “...in quelli tempi era una dote egreggia.”
61 Ibid. “...per non aggravar li feudi.”
Serene Philiberta and Beatrice of Savoy.”\textsuperscript{62} Thus, Lady Beatrice’s dowry was the same as her mother’s and had been deemed sufficient at the time. Neither of these arguments appears to have been raised prior to Isabelle taking over the suit in 1605.

Isabelle also stressed that, when the original sentence was issued in 1566, Lady Beatrice did not protest it or express any reservations regarding it. In fact, Isabelle had found a document in which Beatrice released her cousins from further debt, asserting that she had no further claims regarding her dowry. She also discovered a receipt issued by Lady Beatrice in 1549, in which she stated that she had received full payment of her mother’s dowry.\textsuperscript{63} One of the principal issues Isabelle faced, however, was that many of the original documents from sixty years before appeared to be missing or misplaced. As she stated in her initial response to the 1605 sentence, certain documents were missing, “her husband’s ancestors having lost all of the records of said suit, along with the Inventory with legal solemnities regarding the inheritance of the deceased Count Antonio Ludovico of Savoy” from which the succession of Beatrice and her sons derived.\textsuperscript{64} Isabelle directed her energy towards finding the documents in question, many of which are currently located in her records of the case.

In addition to the arguments set out above, Isabelle had, from the time of her husband’s death, argued that the suit could not proceed until she had time to have a proper inventory of his assets performed. It was important to establish what assets he had inherited from his father, Filippo, who had died in 1581, what assets Isabelle herself had brought to the marriage, and what the couple had purchased and added to their property after marriage. In short, Isabelle argued

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid. These women were Duke Carlo’s sister Philiberta (1498-1524) and his wife Beatrice of Portugal (1504-1538).
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{64} FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 89, Isabelle’s petition to the duke, received on January 28, 1606. p. 185. “...havendo li ss.ri antecessori di detto suo marito perso tutti gli atti di detta litte, et l’Inventaro con le sullenità legali dell’heredità del fu Conte Anto. Ludovico di Savoia.”
that Bernardino and his father, Filippo, had been in a poor financial situation when she married him, that the castle of Racconigi was in a deplorable state after the French occupation, and that all of the furniture and other goods contained in the inventory made after Bernardino’s death had been purchased after their marriage or been brought to the marriage by Isabelle, rather than inherited from the Savoy-Racconigi lineage.

Isabelle called a number of witnesses from the town of Racconigi to establish these claims. One witness, a servant named Giò Antonio Grosso, questioned on October 23, 1606 in Racconigi recalled that “the Castle and place of Racconigi were sacked by the French and most and almost all of the furnishings were taken away from that Castle and place.” He added that “the deceased Most Illustrious Filippo of Savoy, lord of this place” did not furnish the castle after regaining it from the French, “except as required by necessity.” And because Filippo had many sons and daughters to pay for, “he did not have furnishings, upholstery or silverware like a lord of his greatness and status.” When Bernardino married Isabelle, he said, Bernardino was still living under his father’s authority and “did not possess any stable assets except for a very few house furnishings…and that he never acquired or possessed any stable assets except after the death of his father.” Another servant recalled that Filippo was so burdened by the dowries he paid out for his daughters that “he was not furnished in accordance with his dignity, rank and status.”

65 Ibid., p. 54-55/347-348. “...fu saccheggiato da francesi il Castello et luoco di Raconiggi et che furono esportati via da esso Castello e luoco la maggior parte e quasi tutti li mobili... il fu Ill.mo Filippo di Savoia s.re di questo luoco il quale non si curò per...esso Castello di mobili...salvo come chiedeva il bisogno...perche haveva...figlioli come ancora che apresso esso Ill.mo s.r Filippo la colloc. a matrim.o tre...dele sue figliole a quali ha bisognato darli le doti et...mantenevano come ha mantenuto sei figlioli...detto fu Ill.mo Filippo non haveva mobilia, tapezzaria et argentaria come signore alla grandezza e stato suo.”
66 Ibid., p. 55/348. “...non possedeva alcuni beni stabili salvo ben pochi mobili di Casa...et che mai ha acquistato ne posseduto alcuni beni stabili ecetto doppo la morte del padre.”
67 Ibid., p. 57/350. “...non era mobiliato conforme alla dignita, grado e stato suo.”
Bernardino’s financial situation does seem to have been poor, judging from several letters he wrote to Duke Carlo Emanuele I in his later years. In 1599, the duke asked Bernardino to accompany him to France. Bernardino, while expressing his desire to serve the duke, “as I will never have any other thought than obeying you in everything” was concerned that he could not afford the journey, “as I do not have any other [money], except that which is allocated to pay debts, that I would need in order to buy a horse, mules and food for myself...as I lack all of this.” A week later, he wrote again, reminding the duke of his situation, and stating that “I could easily be prevented [from travelling], no longer having a cent and needing to purchase at least twenty-five horses and four or five mules.” In her appeal against the laudo, Isabelle relied heavily on the argument that Bernardino had received a ruined inheritance from his father after Racconigi was sacked and that Filippo had spent all of his income on getting his numerous children settled.

*Isabelle’s Rule over the Fief of Racconigi*

Isabelle was indeed in a precarious situation after Bernardino died. In addition to having to cope with expensive litigation like the Luserna case, she also immediately lost the fief and castle of Racconigi, which were to be reincorporated into the duke’s properties when the last Savoy-Racconigi died without heirs. Indeed, just four days after Bernardino’s death, Carlo Emanuele sent a representative to take official possession of the fief. On November 10, 1605, Isabelle handed over the castle of Racconigi. A report made for the duke described Isabelle’s official surrender of the keys: “with the greatest humility and kneeling on the ground, with her

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68 Bernardino of Savoy-Racconigi to Carlo Emanuele I, February 19, 1599. Lettere SR, mazzo 76. “...che non havrò mai altro pensier che d’obbedirla in ogni cosa...non ne havendo altri [dinari] se ben erano destinati per pagar debiti, per poter con essi accomprar cavalla, muli et vitti per me...essendo di tutto cio sprovisto.”

69 Bernardino of Savoy-Racconigi to Carlo Emanuele I, February 26, 1599. Lettere SR, mazzo 76. “...potrei facilmente restar impedito non havendo più un soldo et havendo a accomprar almeno venticing cavalli e quattro o cinq muli.”

own hands she presented, delivered and returned [the keys] to said Signor Nicolis, who with reverence and likewise kneeling accepted and received them in Your Highness’ name.”

Although the fief had technically reverted back to the duke, Isabelle was permitted to continue living in the castle. In fact, shortly after Bernardino’s death it was clear that the duke had decided to be generous towards her. He may have been politically motivated. Isabelle still had strong French connections and Bernardino’s death came at time when Sabaudian diplomacy was taking a pro-French turn. He was likely also motivated by the long-standing friendship between Isabelle’s natal family, the Gondi, and the House of Savoy. As stated above, Isabelle’s mother Marie de Gondi had been the duke’s governatrice when he was a child, as well as his mother Marguerite’s close friend. In 1606, Carlo Emanuele I granted Isabelle the fief of La Chiusa, in 1608 she was briefly appointed governess of the duke’s two youngest daughters, and in 1609 the duke granted her a yearly pension of 5,000 scudi to be drawn from the income of Racconigi. Thus, even if the duke held ownership of the fief, Isabelle was personally invested in it as her residence and source of income, which also explains her reluctance to see any of its income diverted to the Luserna. Isabelle continued to live at Racconigi and receive this income even after 1620, when the duke transferred the fief of Racconigi to his son Thomas, prince of Carignano.

71 Ibid. 187, note 67. Mainardi doesn’t cite the source. “Detta Dama Isabella s’è offerta pronta d’obbedire a quanto sarà da S. Altezza...a presentarli e rimetterli le chiavi di questo castello...con grandissima humilità et con la ginichia a terra di propria mano li ha presentate, consegnate et rimesse al detto Sig. Nicolis, qual con riversenza e parimenti inginocchiato li ha accettati et ricevute in nome d’esso S. Altezza...”

72 In 1610, the duke would sign the Treaty of Brussol with Henry IV in which the two formed an alliance against Spain.


Isabelle’s correspondence shows that even though her ownership of Racconigi was limited to receiving a portion of its income, she represented the duke’s authority over the fief and ruled it on his behalf. Her relationship with the people of Racconigi, however, was troubled from the outset and she had a great deal of difficulty convincing the local population to respect her authority. As she wrote to the duke on April 4, 1609, she was disappointed in “the disobedience of the people of Racconigi and the lack of respect that they show me.”

She had, that morning, received a letter from her agent, the Cavaglier [knight] di Ruffia, who had been sent by Isabelle to negotiate with the local leaders of the town. He reported that “these impertinent men” under the leadership of a local man, “that liar” Tommaso Ferero, refused to obey the duke’s commands as communicated to them by Isabelle because, as they said, “the duke writes a lot of letters but is not much obeyed.” Indeed, Isabelle’s agent was so unwelcome in Racconigi that, as he reported, unfriendly words threatened to turn into violence: “publically this morning the followers of Tommaso Ferrero said that they would use harquebuses against me, as I was your Your Ladyship’s advocate...and they said this out loud.” Isabelle wrote immediately to the duke: “as soon as possible, by your absolute authority...send, if it please you, a Commissioner here to Racconigi.”

The trouble between Isabelle and Tommaso Ferero and his followers continued for the next few years. In the meantime, Ferero had become syndic of the town of Racconigi and he and

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76 Isabelle de Grillet to Carlo Emanuele I, April 4, 1609. Lettere SR, Mazzo 76. “…la disobeissance de ceux de Raconis et le peu de respet qu’il s’appreste de moy.”
77 Il Cavaglier di Ruffia to Isabelle de Grillet, April 4, 1609. Lettere SR, Mazzo 76. “...il Duca e solito a scrivere molte lettere ma essere poi molto poco obedito, parole che mi asicuro sono inventate da quel bugiardo di Tomaso Ferero.”
78 Ibid. “Ma si e di peggio anchora in parole pero sin adesso solo et e che publicamente questa mattina li seguaci di Tomaso Ferero han detto volermi dar delle archibugiate essendo io il fomentatore di V.S. Ill.ma il che lei sa et cio hanno detto ad alta voce.”
79 Isabelle de Grillet to Carlo Emanuele I, April 4, 1609. Lettere SR, Mazzo 76. “…prouvoyer au plus tost de son autorité absolue commandant…se luy plairà, un Commissayre a Raconis.”

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Isabelle were engaged in a power struggle over local elections. In September 1610, the duke had informed Isabelle that his choice “to put on the list of candidates” was a certain Doctor Gaspar Ferreri of Cavallermaggiore. Isabelle respectfully disagreed with the duke’s choice, informing him that his candidate not only “lacked experience” but was also a relative of the troublemaker Ferero, who sought to govern “this place with his relatives as they do at present, to the detriment of Justice.” A better candidate, she offered, was a certain “Doctor” from Poirino, Bernardin Laure “with good experience at well governing Justice.” Having made her case in favor of her candidate in a matter “of such importance” Isabelle respectfully awaited the duke’s orders.

After this initial period of tension, Isabelle’s correspondence indicates that by 1611 she had managed to assert her authority over the people of Racconigi, who were more willing to obey the commands of both Isabelle and the duke. In March 1611, the community came to her as the duke’s representative to plead with her to intercede with the duke and relieve them of the burden of lodging a regiment in Racconigi: “they have come to me praying that I would represent to you, as I am doing, that they have always been quick to obey your commandments, as they should.” After lodging the regiment for some time, “they hope in your goodness to be relieved soon.” The people of Racconigi were starting to accept Isabelle as the duke’s agent and turn to her to intercede on their behalf. In early 1612, Isabelle again sought aid for the people of Racconigi, informing the duke about a bread shortage, and hinting that the people were ready to

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80 Isabelle de Grillet to Carlo Emanuele I, September 29, 1610. Lettere SR, Mazzo 76. “Quant i’attendois qu’il pleut a V.A….comander a ceux de Raconis de mettre sur la Rose le Docteur de Poirin Bernardin Laure vieus et fort experiamenté a ben governer la Giustice, j’ay recevú la lettre que V.A. ha dignié m’escrire, me comandant de fere election en cest’office du Docteur Gaspar Ferreri de Caivaluer…ie suis informee qu’il ya’ fort peu qu il est Doctoré et a peú d’experiances, et que Tomas Ferrier qui est a present sindic, est son parent, et a recherché la faveur de V.A. pour gouverner avec son geandre l’Ugonin com’ils font a present, ce lieu, en pregiudice de la Giustice… ie la ritiendray attendant les comandements de V.A. sur ce facet de tant d’importance.”

81 Isabelle de Grillet to Carlo Emanuele I, March ?, 1611. Lettere SR, Mazzo 76. “…me sont venù trouver me priant de luy vouloir rapresenter, comme ie fais, qu’ils ont tousjours esté prompts d’obeir, comm’ils doivent, a voz comandements… ils esperent in sa bonte’ d’ostre bien tost reliues com’ils onte dit.”
turn to violence: “we cannot find any bread to help the people of Racconigi who are about to riot.”

*The End of the Lawsuit*

Isabelle’s correspondence shows that she wrote frequently to the duke on behalf of the people of Racconigi and of her fief of La Chiusa. From 1609, however, no further petitions or responses were filed in the lawsuit against the counts of Luserna. After reopening the suit in 1600, the counts of Luserna insistently pressed their claims against Bernardino and then Isabelle, but seem to have given up after a flurry of back and forth activity between them and Isabelle in 1607-1609. One of the last documents in the Savoy-Racconigi records of the suit contains a final attempt by the counts of Luserna to obtain execution of the *laudo*. The Luserna wrote to the duke: “Most Serene Lord, it is now necessary to put an end to this and impose perpetual silence on the complaints of Madama di Racconigi.... We humbly implore Your Highness to condescend, in your wisdom, to impose an end to such a long and laborious suit once and for all and order the Most Excellent Senate to carry out justice.”

The counts’ frustration with the case, and with Isabelle’s persistence, is clear.

After this, the case record went silent for twenty years. It was reopened only after Isabelle’s death in 1635, when the next generation of counts of Luserna decided to try again, hoping to have better luck against a different defendant. In 1629, Count Filippo Emanuele of Luserna (1592-1676), the grandson of the original litigants, resumed the suit against Isabelle’s niece and heir, Perona de Grillet, Baroness of Entraque and a *dame d’honneur* of Duchess Marie Christine of France. Perona was the daughter of Isabelle’s brother Charles-Maximilien and Anne

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82 Isabelle de Grillet to Carlo Emanuele I, February 21, 1612. Lettere SR, Mazzo 76. “…l’on ne pouvoit trouver du pain pour secouri le peuple de Raconis qui quasi vouloit tumultuer.”

83 The counts of Luserna to Carlo Emanuele I. FdC, mazzo 8, fasc. 89. No date but likely February-March 1609. See full quote above.
de la Baume. As Isabelle’s heir, Perona stepped into position as the last defendant in the lawsuit and as the last representative of the Savoy-Racconigi, even though that lineage had been technically defunct for two decades. On December 22, 1629, the Senate issued a new sentence upholding the previous laudo, but litigation continued between Count Filippo Emanuele and Baroness Perona well into the 1640s.\textsuperscript{84} Despite almost a century of litigation, it does not appear that the 10,000 scudi owed to the counts of Luserna pursuant to Carlo Emanuele I’s laudo was ever paid.

For early modern nobles, honor culture required the constant fulfilment of obligations, duties, and responsibilities to their lineage. One of these obligations was to represent the interests of one’s lineage by pursuing inheritance and property suits to their end, doing one’s utmost to press these important claims in court. Much was at stake in these suits, which could preserve and increase the wealth and influence of an individual and family. They were also expensive and risky ventures, however, in which not only one’s claims, but one’s honor, were at stake.

Generation after generation, the Savoy-Racconigi and the counts of Luserna took up their positions as plaintiffs and defendants in a lawsuit that spanned a century. Isabelle de Grillet entered the suit from a position of political and financial weakness after her husband died and after he spent the last years of his life distanced from court. When he was alive, she identified with her husband’s family, working together with him to help further the ambitions of the Savoy-Racconigi. After Bernardino’s death, having inherited his poor financial situation and his many lawsuits, Isabelle used the resources at her disposal to focus on recovering and retaining the duke’s respect and re-building her status at court. She explored both legal and extralegal ways to mend her honor and her place amongst the Piedmontese elite, vigorously defending herself in the

\textsuperscript{84} The 1629 Sentence and records for this part of the case are found in FdC, mazzo 11, fasc. 10, atti di lite no. 104.
suit against the counts of Luserna and asserting her authority over Racconigi as the duke’s representative there. When the duke’s intervention in her lawsuit was not as effective as she hoped, Isabelle dedicated herself to digging through the Savoy-Racconigi archives for evidence that would support her defense and to raising new defenses that had not yet been made by her husband’s family when they had control over the suit. Her forceful defense of the Savoy-Racconigi claims was successful in staving off the attacks of her legal adversaries. The twenty years’ silence in the Luserna/Savoy-Racconigi lawsuit from 1609 until Isabelle’s death indicates that she recovered sufficient support from the duke and standing in society to make herself a poor legal target. Ultimately, the Luserna decided to bide their time and hope for a less capable defendant in the future.
Photos 2-3: Palace of Racconigi today
Chapter 3. Enemies and Allies: Maria Solaro and Her Natal Family, 1585-1617

[Carlo and Ludovico Solaro] suffered at least 40,000 scudi of damages because signora Ottavia [Sorano] did not marry within their house... Her father could not force his daughter’s will in getting married, as marriage should be made freely... [but] he did show her where his inclination and his intent lay...Although he did not state specifically that he meant [that she should marry] one of those brothers...he could not have named them more clearly than by saying that she should marry into [the houses of] Macello or Moretta,¹ as there was no one of the appropriate age in [the house of] Macello except for said brothers, since Count Giulio, the only alternative, was barely nine years old when she [Ottavia] was married and said brothers were seventeen and fifteen years old...from which one can conclude that her father’s intent was that she marry one of those brothers and that all of the property remain within their house...Said brothers and the signora Ottavia were related to the fourth and fifth degree, so there would have been no difficulty in obtaining a [marriage] license.

Legal brief on the damages suffered by brothers Carlo and Ludovico Solaro because of the marriage of their cousin Ottavia Solaro with Filiberto of Savoy-Racconigi, undated²

Introduction

In 1583, Ottavia Solaro, the daughter of Piedmontese nobles Manfredo Solaro and Margherita Cacherano married Filiberto, a younger brother of the Savoy-Racconigi family.³

Manfredo, the head of one of the numerous branches of the Solaro family, had died before the marriage had taken place and, as his only child, Ottavia was a wealthy young woman with a sizable dowry consisting of “the totality of her father’s property.”⁴ The untimely deaths of both Ottavia and Filiberto after their marriage triggered a complicated inheritance dispute that involved numerous claimants among the Solaro family: first, Margherita, Manfredo’s widow and Ottavia’s mother, who had married her second husband, Mercurino Filiberto, count of Gattinara,

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¹ Branches of the Solaro family.
² SdM, mazzo 15, fasc. 16. “Vi è il danno patito per detti ss.ri fratelli per non esser seguito il matrimonio della detta sig.ra Ottavia in casa loro, almeno di scudi quaranto milla...il padre non ha potuto ligare la volunta della figliola nel maritarsi, essendo il matrimonio libero...se bene il padre forse non ha potuto constringerla nel matrimonio che pero ha voluto mostrargli ove era l’inclinazione sua et dove fosse stata la sua volunta... non poteva gia nominarli piu chiaro, che col dir che dovesse maritarsi a Macello p.a et Moretta, puoi nominando Macello p.a ove non era alcuno di età conveniente salvo detti fratelli, atteso che il p. Conte Giulio, che vi restava, haveva a pena nove anni, quando ella fu maritata et d’essi fratelli uno er d’eta d’anni diescesette, et l’altro di quindeci...dal che si puo conchiuder che la volunta del padre era che fusse fatto il matrimonio in persona d’uno di essi fratelli, et che tutti li beni restassero in casa loro...detti ss.ri fratelli, et la sig.ra Ottavia erano di affinita nel quarto o quinto grado, et che non vi era difficolita di licenza.”
⁴ Ibid.. “…la totalità dei beni paterni.”
a few months after her daughter’s wedding;\textsuperscript{5} second, brothers Carlo and Ludovico Solaro, distant cousins of the deceased Manfredo, who, as outlined in the quote above, had hoped that one of them would marry Ottavia and bring her inheritance into their branch of the Solaro family; and, finally, Maria Solaro, Manfredo’s sister, who fought to keep Manfredo’s property within their branch of the Solaro family and, specifically, to pass it down to her daughters Diana and Elisabetta\textsuperscript{6} and to her nephew, Giovanni Maria, her deceased sister Paola’s only child.

This chapter is chiefly based on the papers found in the Solaro di Moretta family archive housed in the State Archives in Turin, which includes the papers of Maria Solaro. The Solaro di Moretta archive is extensive, comprised of 174 bundles with documents dating back to the fourteenth century.\textsuperscript{7} The archive reveals that Maria was a key figure in the Solaro family in the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries and that she was involved in constant legal conflicts over family inheritances. She was at the center of the lawsuit that erupted after the deaths of Ottavia and Filiberto, representing her branch of the Solaro family against her cousins, Carlo and Ludovico Solaro, and refusing to settle long after other litigants in the case had renounced their claims and signed settlement agreements with the two brothers. In addition to


\textsuperscript{6} Maria had two other daughters, Angela Margarita and Luisa, who became nuns. Very little information is available about them. They are mentioned in the dowry instrument of their sister, Elisabetta. SdM, Mazzo 14, fasc. 22.

\textsuperscript{7} The Solaro di Moretta archive was given to the State Archives of Torino by Angelica Ferraris di Celle in 2001. During the nineteenth century, the archive passed through the hands of several related families, growing to contain 265 bundles and to include the papers of four families. The Solaro di Moretta portions are well-organized and quite complete, while the portions relating to the other three families – the Vassallo di Castiglione, Valfrè di Bonzo and the Ferraris di Celle – are much smaller and less organized. Between 1792 and 1793, Gaspare Giacomo Solaro, last of the counts of Moretta, engaged a professional archivist, Costanzo Tamietti, to organize the family papers. The result was the nucleus of the Solaro di Moretta portion of this family archive, consisting of 174 total bundles. In 1819 Ferdinanda Solaro, Gaspare Giacomo’s niece, married Filippo Vassallo di Castiglione, bringing the castle of Moretta into the Vassallo family, along with its archive. The castle was divided among Ferdinanda and Filippo’s four sons. The archive was physically located in the part of the castle assigned to their third son, Clemente, and was then passed on to his descendants. In 2001, Clemente’s granddaughter, Angelica Ferraris, submitted the entire archive to the State Archive of Turin, where it was then reorganized and inventoried. Information about the history of this family archive is found in ASTC, Inventory no. 318.
this prolonged struggle between two branches of her natal family, Maria was also involved in significant litigation against her second husband’s family, the San Martino, over succession to her husband’s fief of Ozegna, which Maria wanted to transmit to her two daughters after her husband died.\(^8\) Maria was an experienced litigant, using the law against both her extended natal family (to try and control her father’s property) and her marital family (to try and divert her husband’s fief into her daughters’ hands). This chapter will focus on the role that litigation played in conflict between Maria and her natal family, as seen in the lawsuit over Ottavia Solaro’s inheritance.

Lawsuits between family members, like the ones in which Maria was involved, were common among the European nobility. Feudal landowners of Piedmont often turned to the device of the *fideicomissum* in their wills, appointing one heir to receive the bulk of the family property, which he should preserve and pass on to an heir in the next generation. While this testamentary device was intended to ensure that property passed from one generation to the next undivided, it was often challenged by younger siblings and extended family members who would have been excluded by the *fideicomissum*. In the lawsuit between Maria Solaro and her cousins Carlo and Ludovico, the main issue was whether Maria’s father Ludovico had established a *fideicomissum* in his will or not. Maria’s long but ultimately unsuccessful struggle against her cousins for her father’s inheritance demonstrates that it was challenging for a noblewoman without strong political connections to assert inheritance rights against distant but politically powerful male relatives. Indeed, Carlo and Ludovico had two strengths on their side: the favor of Duke Carlo Emanuele I and the general trend towards favoring the claims of agnatic kin (often cousins) over the inheritance claims of women. In order to mount a more successful defense

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\(^8\) Maria Solaro’s first husband was Anniable Cacherano and her second husband was Bonifacio San Martino.
against her cousins, Maria sought strong alliances within her extended natal family. She married her daughter to the head of the primary branch of the Solaro family and began working closely with her son-in-law to curb her cousins’ ambitions. Indeed, the lawsuit over the Solaro inheritance was just one of many conflicts between the branches of the Solaro family during the early years of the seventeenth century. Tracing Maria’s disputes and alliances with representatives of the other branches of her natal family shows that relationships within early modern noble families were subject to constant tension and power struggles. Initially unsuccessful against her cousins, in later conflicts Maria learned that looking outside her own branch and working with other branches of the Solaro family was the most effective way to offset her cousins’ political power. This chapter demonstrates that Maria was successful at winning the heads of other family branches to her side and, although her lawsuit against Carlo and Ludovico Solaro was ultimately unsuccessful, she and her Solaro allies were ultimately successful in pushing the brothers out of Moretta, the center of the Solaro family’s power in Piedmont.

**Ottavia Solaro’s Inheritance**

In considering her marital prospects, Ottavia Solaro and her mother, the widowed Margherita, set their sights high. Although Ottavia’s distant cousins, Carlo and Ludovico, had hoped that one of them would marry her, which would have brought Manfredo’s assets into their branch of the Solaro family, Ottavia and her mother received a more tempting offer from the Savoy-Racconigi family. The match with Filiberto of Savoy-Racconigi was a triumph for Ottavia. The Savoy-Racconigi were an illegitimate cadet branch of the Savoy dynasty and, as such, were cousins of the duke of Savoy. As described in chapter 2, during the French occupation of Piedmont (1536-1559), Filiberto’s father, Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi, allied with
the French and Filiberto’s uncle, Claudio of Savoy-Racconging, count of Pancalieri, remained loyal to the duke of Savoy. After the duke of Savoy was restored to his lands, the Savoy-Racconigi solidified their loyalty to him, becoming his close allies and advisors. In 1568, Filippo and Claudio were among the first noblemen to be invited to join the recently revived chivalric Order of SS. Annunziata. On January 29, 1581, Duke Carlo Emanuele I (r. 1580-1630) issued letters patent legitimating their line and granting Filiberto’s father, Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi, a place in the ducal succession. Ottavia’s new husband was thus not only a distant cousin of the duke of Savoy but also in the line of succession should the duke’s line and that of his cousin, Jacques de Savoie-Nemours, die out.

Filiberto of Savoy-Racconigi was one of ten children of Filippo of Savoy-Racconigi and Paola Costa della Trinità. Filippo died in 1581, just a few months after his line was made legitimate, leaving three surviving sons: Bernardino, the oldest, Giovanni Battista, an abbot, and Filiberto, who was unmarried at the time. The prestigious marriages made by Filiberto’s siblings are evidence that the Savoy-Racconigi routinely made marital alliances with the most illustrious families in the Sabaudian states and beyond. Bernardino had recently married French noblewoman Isabelle de Grillet, daughter of the influential Marie de Gondi (see chapter 3). Giovanni Battista, Filippo’s second son, had been appointed abbot of San Benigno di Fruttuaria, just north of Turin, in 1581 and had distinguished himself in the duke’s service as ambassador to Gregory XIII. He decided to leave the religious life in 1582 and in 1584 he married

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9 Cigna Santi, 65-78.
10 Registered by the Senate of Piedmont on January 31, 1581 and by the Senate of Savoie on September 22, 1581. ASTC, Materie politiche per rapporto all’interno, Principi del sangue diversi, Mazzo 10.
Benedetta Spinola, the daughter of Alfonso, marquis of Garessio, and Eleonora della Rovere. The Savoy-Racconigi sisters also made advantageous matches, marrying into some of the most important families in the Sabaudian lands. Indeed, they tended to marry into semi-independent families whose lands were strategically situated along the borders of the Sabaudian states. Bona married Claude de Challant, baron of Fénis, knight of the Order of SS. Annunziata and luogotenente generale of the duchy of Aosta, in 1577. Claudia married Besso Ferrero Fieschi, marquis of Masserano in 1570. Violante married Frenchman Ottavio Henry, count of Cremieux, gentleman of the chamber of the duke of Savoy (Violante’s marriage and dowry were discussed in chapter 2). Luisa married Luigi Isnardi Roero, count of Sanfré, and Ottavia married Gian Francesco Provana, count of Beinette and the duke’s gran cancelliere. Even Filippo’s illegitimate daughter, Veronica, was in a position to marry the president of the Senate of Piedmont, Clemente Vivalda, baron of Mombarchero, in 1580.

Ottavia was not Filiberto’s first choice of wife. Piedmontese chronicler Giulio Cambiano della Ruffia recorded that in November 1581, shortly after his father’s death, Filiberto “went to Scarnafigi to see signora Ludovica, daughter of signor Cesare, where they were negotiating a marriage.” The Scarnafigi negotiations were unsuccessful, and Filiberto soon settled on Ottavia

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14 Andrea Merlotti, “Bernardino.” The Spinola were one of the most powerful families in the Republic of Genoa. The Garessio branch held a fief across the key mountain pass linking the Sabaudian lands to the port of Albenga in Liguria.
15 Claude de Challant was made knight of the Order of SS. Annunziata by Duke Carlo Emanuel I in 1581. Cigna Santi, 87. Claude de Challant was himself involved, along with his brothers, in a dispute with a female cousin, Isabelle de Challant over the inheritance of the main branch of the Challant family.
16 Made a knight of the Order of SS. Annunziata by Duke Emanuel Filiberto in 1576. Cigna Santi, 84.
17 The count was a witness to Duke Carlo Emanuel’s wills dated 1598 and 1605, where he is listed as a gentleman of the chamber of the duke of Savoy. ASTC, Materie politiche per rapport all’interno, Testamenti di sovrani e principi di Savoia, Mazzo 4. Cremieux was in Dauphiné, south of Bugey. The family fought for the French and had acquired lands in Piedmont.
18 Berio, “Per la storia dei Savoia-Racconigi,” 79.
While Ottavia gained prestige and proximity to the duke by marrying into the Savoy-Racconigi family, she was a worthy match for Filiberto as she also came from a distinguished lineage. The Solaro di Moretta family descended from the Solaro di Asti, a powerful Guelf family in fourteenth-century Asti. When the Solaro were ousted from Asti by rival Ghibelline families, part of the family settled in France and part in the area of southern Piedmont between Turin and Cuneo. The counts of Savoy invested them with various fiefs in that area, giving rise to numerous branches of the family and, most notably, the Solaro di Moretta, whose holdings centered around the fief of Moretta south of Turin.

The founder of the Solaro di Moretta was Agaffino I, son of Benentino Solaro. In 1362, together with his nephews Bonifacio and Stefano Borgognone, he purchased the lordship of Moretta from Giacomo of Savoy, prince of Acaia. Each of the three men were vested with 1/3 of the fief. Agaffino I’s descendants preserved their 1/3 share in the fief of Moretta intact over the centuries. On the other hand, between the fifteenth and the seventeenth centuries the descendants of Stefano Borgognone diluted their share into fractions that ultimately amounted to barely 1/60 ownership of Moretta. Bonifacio’s descendants took advantage of this by increasing their own influence over the fief, eventually controlling almost half of it. The line descending from Bonifacio became known as the Solaro del Borgo and included siblings Manfredo and Maria, Manfredo’s daughter Ottavia, and brothers Carlo and Ludovico. At the beginning of the sixteenth century Agaffino’s line, the main Solaro lineage, divided into two branches, thus separating their 1/3 share of Moretta in half: Faraone II continued as the leader of the primary Solaro di Moretta

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21 Branches included the Solaro della Chiusa, the Solaro del Borgo, the Solaro di Macello, the Solaro di Villanovo, the Solaro di Monasterolo, the Solaro di Govone, the Solaro di Stupinigi, and the Solaro di Mondovi.
22 Information about the origins of the Solaro family comes from the inventory to the Solaro di Moretta archive in the State Archives of Turin. ASTC, Inventory no. 318.
line while his brother, Giovanni Bartolomeo, founded the cadet branch of the Solaro della Chiusa. Each of these two branches inherited 1/6 of the fief.

Thus by the time of the marriage of Ottavia and Filiberto, there were numerous Solaros who could claim the title of consignori di Moretta, but only the “di Moretta,” “della Chiusa” and “del Borgo” lines had actual control over the fief: the members of those three lines lived in the Castle of Moretta, which was the center of the family’s power. The castle was apportioned into three wings for the use of each branch. Together, the three branches formed the feudal consortile of Moretta. As nobles with feudal jurisdiction, they were responsible for the administration of justice in their fief and, as lords and landowners, they enjoyed extensive wealth and patronage power. A marriage between Ottavia and Carlo or Ludovico Solaro would have united two branches of the Solaro del Borgo, giving the brothers a greater share of control over the fief. By marrying elsewhere, Ottavia took her inheritance of the “totality of her father’s property” outside of her lineage and into the Savoy-Racconigi family, which was clearly a bitter disappointment for her cousins.

The Solaro/Savoy-Racconigi marriage was short-lived. In early 1585, Duke Carlo Emanuele invited Ottavia’s husband Filiberto and his brother Giovanni Battista to accompany him to Spain for his marriage to Philip II’s daughter, Infanta Catalina Micaela. Like the majority of early modern nobles, Filiberto and Ottavia were engaged in numerous lawsuits. Thus, upon his departure from Piedmont, Filiberto submitted a petition to have all of their suits suspended

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23 This line, the main lineage of the Solaro will be discussed later in this chapter, as Maria Solaro’s daughter Elisabetta married into it when she married Faraone III (d. 1635), head of the lineage.
24 During the late sixteenth century, the head of this branch was Carlo Ubertino I, who married Lucrezia della Rovere in 1558. Their children included Emanuele Filiberto, governor of Vercelli (d. 1622).
25 Manfredo Solaro and his distant cousins Carlo and Ludovico Solaro descended from this branch.
26 By the beginning of the eighteenth century the fief was vested to the descendants of these three families: 13/30 to the Solaro della Chiusa, 12/30 to the Solaro del Borgo, and 5/30 to the Solaro di Moretta. Despite the minority quota, the Solaro di Moretta had the most stable presence, as their main economic interests were focused around Moretta.
until he returned from Spain. It is unclear which lawsuits specifically were pending at this time, but later documents mention the fact that before she died Ottavia was involved in a legal dispute with Francesco Solaro, the father of her cousins Carlo and Ludovico, who challenged her inheritance when her father Manfredo died without male heirs. On January 26, 1585, Carlo Emanuele granted Filiberto’s petition, ordering “our magistrates, ministers and officials” to suspend “all of the suits of the petitioner spouses...until our return to Turin.” On January 29, Filiberto departed Turin with the duke and his entourage.

Although the time and place of her death are unclear, Ottavia died shortly after Filiberto’s departure. Claimants to her inheritance immediately began to file their petitions before the Senate of Piedmont in Turin. Filiberto, on the road with the duke, sent a petition back to Turin to Filippo d’Este, who had been left to govern in the duke’s stead, requesting that “the signora Ottavia having died...those who have claims to the goods and inheritance of the deceased Manfredo Solaro, which were established as the dowry for signor Filiberto” should wait to pursue their claims until Filiberto returned to Turin. On February 21, the governor commanded that all legal activity involving Ottavia’s inheritance be suspended “until his [Filiberto’s] return to this city from Spain.”

27 Carlo Emanuele I, January 26, 1585. SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 1. “Carlo Emanuel per gratia di dio duca di Savoia...A nostri magistrati ministri et officialli... vi mandiamo di dover sopra seder da ogni et qualonche process.e in tutte le causa delli giugalli supp.ti o sii di qual si voglia di luoro sino al ritorno nostro in Turino da viaggio di Spagna che siamo hora per far.”


29 SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 1. “...per parte del Il.mo Sig.e Filliberto de Savoia esser manchata la Sig.ra Ottavia Solara sua moglie per la cui morte essendo come se dice chi pretende raggione nelli beni et heredeta del fu sig.e Manfredo Solaro suore constuita in dotte al detto sig.e Filliberto tentando di volerlo molestar avanti il suo ritorno di Spagna no ostante la general supercess.e in tutte le cause de queli ss.ri che sono al viaggio con S.A. e la particolar da lui ottenuta in ogni cause sue et di detta fu s.ra sua consorte...”

30 Filippo d’Este, marchese et luogotenente generale per S.A. February 21, 1585. SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 1. “Comandiamo...di non molestare in modo alcuno esso supp.nte... annullando ogni cosa fatta in tal modo doppo la morte della sig.ra Otavia ...che si osservi interamente il pre.te rescrifito di supercessione nelle gia dette cause del supp.nte sino al suo ritorno di Spagna in questa citta sotto le pene de qual et come in esso rescrìto...”
Duke Carlo Emanuele married Catalina Micaela in Saragozza on March 11. During the festivities that continued throughout the months of March and April, the duke “and many gentlemen” fell seriously ill.\textsuperscript{31} Although the duke recovered, both Filiberto and his brother Giovanni Battista died. A Piedmontese chronicle from the time reported that, on the day that Filiberto and Giovanni Battista died, “it was found to have rained blood in Panchaliero [one of the family’s Piedmontese fiefs], marking the death of the two Racconigi brothers in Spain.”\textsuperscript{32} The deaths of the two younger Savoy-Racconigi brothers left Bernardino, the oldest brother, as the sole remaining male in the family. As he would himself leave no heirs, the line of the Savoy-Racconigi ended with his death in 1605, as discussed in chapter 3.

\textit{Maria Solaro and Her Family}

Maria Solaro was Ottavia’s aunt. Her parents were Ludovico Solaro and Ludovica, whose natal family is unknown. Ludovico and Ludovica had five children: Manfredo, Gabriele, Giovanna, Maria, and Paola. In 1566, Manfredo and Maria married the two children of Senator Ottaviano Cacherano, count of Osasco.\textsuperscript{33} Maria, who is described as “between sixteen and twenty-five years old” (a common legal designation) at the time, married Annibale Cacherano and Manfredo married Annibale’s sister Margarita.\textsuperscript{34} The marriages were made “in confirmation and renewal of the ancient friendship and kinship” (\textit{anticha amicitia et parentella}) between the two families.\textsuperscript{35} Senator Cacherano promised to provide a dowry of 3,500 gold scudi for

\textsuperscript{31} Giulio Cambiano di Ruffia, “Memorabili,” 219. “...in Spagna fu amalata S.A. et molti gentilhuomini, tra quali sono morti...il signor Filiberto et il signor Gio. Battista di Racconisio...”


\textsuperscript{33} Ottaviano Cacherano d’Osasco was the most authoritative Piedmontese jurist of his time. The Cacherano d’Osasco were a noble family known for their longstanding loyalty to the House of Savoy and for producing generations of senators and legal experts.

\textsuperscript{34} The dowry instrument for these marriages was signed on June 9, 1566 at the Castle of Macello. SdM, mazzo 14, fasc. 6.

\textsuperscript{35} SdM, mazzo 14, fasc. 6. “...per confirmatione e renovazione della anticha amicitia et parentella...”
Margarita. In exchange, Manfredo promised his bride an “augmento” of 1,000 gold scudi. The “aumento dotale,” or counter-dowry, was an optional contribution from the groom’s family. Usually negotiated as a percentage of the dowry itself, it was essentially a security deposit, ensuring that if the groom died, the widow would have enough to live on between the dowry and the aumento. It also relieved the bride’s family of some of the financial burden of the marriage “so that the bride’s family could display generosity that exceeded its means, which raised its standing and also enhanced the prestige of the groom’s family because it was seen to have attained such a high dowry.”

Maria’s dowry and counter-dowry mirrored those of her new sister-in-law, Margherita. Since Maria’s father was deceased, it was her mother Ludovica and her brother Manfredo who promised the Cacherano family 3,500 gold scudi for Maria’s dowry and her groom Annibale promised an “augmento” of 1,000 gold scudi. Thus the two dowries mirrored each other precisely and no exchange was made: “the generosity of each side, even without an actual exchange of assets, reflected well on the other and accrued honor to both.”

Annibale and Maria had one child, a son Emanuele, while Manfredo and Margarita also had one child, Ottavia. Although the precise date is uncertain, archival records show that Annibale died sometime in 1577, because by the summer of 1578 Maria is described as having completed a year of mourning for her husband and as being ready to remarry. On July 10, 1578 Maria’s dowry was established for her second marriage to Bonifacio San Martino, count of Ozegna, member of a very old and powerful family from the Canavese. This time, her dowry

37 Ibid., 39.
38 On June 18, 1578 an instrument made between Maria and her former father-in-law Ottaviano Cacherano d’Osasco settling the restitution of her dowry stated that “fussi desoluto tal matrimonio per la morte del detto fu s.r Don Annibale et passato l’anno del luto...” SdM, mazzo 14, fasc. 9.
was a very respectable 8,000 gold scudi.39 Maria’s new husband was a knight of the prestigious Order of SS. Maurizio e Lazzaro as well as a loyal servant of both Duke Emanuele Filiberto and his son Carlo Emanuele I. A patent issued to Bonifacio by Carlo Emanuele I in 1595 described the count’s years of service “in various honorable and important appointment” as ducal ambassador to the king of Spain, to the emperor, to “various Italian princes,” and to the Holy See, which he performed “to our very great satisfaction.”40 The duke also recalled Bonifacio’s illustrious lineage, mentioning “the long and loyal service that so many of his ancestors have given.” Bonifacio’s grandfather had received the title of count of Ozegna from the duke of Savoy and had passed it on to his son Gaspare, Bonifacio’s father41 who, “in keeping faith with our ancestors in the past wars...suffered the ruin of his castles.”42 In fact, during the 1590s, Bonifacio was engaged in major repairs and renovations to the castle of Ozegna.

The will of Manfredo and Maria’s mother, Ludovica, indicates that by 1574 their father Ludovico had died and that the only surviving siblings at that point were Manfredo, Maria, and Paola.43 Manfredo was named the universal heir of both his father and his mother, a role which entailed both benefits and burdens.44 Generally, when drafting a will, the testator would appoint a universal heir and then list specific bequests, or legacies (legati) intended for family, friends, servants, and religious institutions. The universal heir was the party whom the testator designated to receive the remainder of the estate after the testator’s wishes were carried out, meaning after

40 ASTF, Camera dei Conti, Patenti Regie, mazzo 24, 248. “...in diversi honorati et importanti carichi...con molta nostra sodisfacione...et la longa et fedel servitu che tanto molti suoi antecessori hanno fatto.”
42 Ibid., 248.
43 SdM, mazzo 11, fasc. 6.
44 Ludovico Solaro had originally named both Manfredo and his brother Gabriele as his universal heirs, but Gabriele died in 1574. SdM, mazzo 10, fasc. 3.
any legacies were distributed and any debts paid. The appointed individual was responsible for paying all of the testator’s debts even if they exceeded the amount left in the testator’s estate. Manfredo therefore distributed his parent’s bequests as indicated in their wills, including specific sums of money for his sisters Maria and Paola, and then kept the remainder of their estates for himself. At some point after their mother’s death, their sister Paola also died, leaving a son, Giovanni Maria. Thus, by 1585, the remaining members of Ludovico and Ludovica Solaro’s family were Maria and her children and Paola’s young son, Giovanni Maria. The end of the male line of this particular branch of the Solaro family left a tempting opening for Maria’s cousins Carlo and Ludovico to raise various claims to the inheritance that Manfredo had received from his father and passed on to Ottavia before they both died.

Maria’s Cousins, Carlo and Ludovico Solaro

The dispute between Maria and her cousins was bitter and hard fought. It coincided with the meteoric rise of both Carlo and Ludovico at the ducal court in Turin. During the last years of the sixteenth century, her cousins were becoming powerful courtiers with close ties not only to the duke of Savoy but to the French court, where members of their lineage had been active for generations. Carlo and Ludovico’s grandfather Carlo Solaro had obtained a place as page at the court of Charles VIII of France through the patronage of Luisa of Savoy (1476-1531), sister of Duke Carlo II of Savoy (r. 1504-1553) and mother of Francis I of France. As an adult, Carlo Solaro served both Charles VIII and Louis XII in their military endeavors. When Francis I succeeded to the throne, he appointed Carlo a gentleman of the chamber, a position that was followed by many military and diplomatic offices in the service of the French crown. When

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45 Both parties were descended from Bonifacio II Solaro. Maria’s branch were the descendants of his son, Manfredo. Carlo and Ludovico were descended from Bonifacio’s son Vasino.
46 Angius, Sulle famiglie nobili, vol. 1, 944.
Carlo died in France in 1552, a great marble tomb was erected for him in Tours, where the accomplishments of this “most splendid knight...most dear to Francis I” were enumerated.\textsuperscript{47}

Carlo’s firstborn son joined the church, but his second born son, Francesco, followed in his footsteps by serving at the French court as master of the horse and gentleman of the chamber.\textsuperscript{48}

Francesco married a Piedmontese noblewoman, Lucrezia, daughter of Bongiovanni Costa, count of Polonghera. Carlo and Ludovico were their only children.

Carlo and Ludovico focused their careers on service to the dukes of Savoy. Carlo, the oldest son, was appointed ducal ambassador to France and later master of the horse in the household of Carlo Emanuele I’s son, Prince Maurice of Savoy (1593-1657).\textsuperscript{49} Ludovico, the younger son, started his career as a page for Carlo Emanuele and, by 1597, had become a gentleman of the chamber.\textsuperscript{50} While Carlo’s career was predominantly a diplomatic one, Ludovico focused on the military. Between 1590 and 1592 he took part in the duke’s invasion of Provence and in 1602 he participated in the “Escalade” of Geneva, a failed attempt by the duke to take the city.\textsuperscript{51} In 1603 he was appointed captain of harquebusiers. After war broke out with Spain in 1613, Ludovico valiantly defended the Sabaudian domain of Oneglia on the coast, but was eventually forced to surrender it to the Spanish. He then moved on to Nice to organize Sabaudian defenses there and in 1615 he was named they city’s military governor, an office that he held until his death ten years later.

The duke increased Ludovico’s feudal holdings several times over the years as a reward for his dedicated service. In 1592, Ludovico was created count of Macello and Torre San

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 946. The tomb was destroyed by Huguenots when they sacked the churches of Tours in 1562. It was restored by his grandsons Carlo and Ludovico in 1616.
\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} An earlier attack on Geneva in 1582 was one of the sources of Bernardino of Savoy-Racconigi’s fall from favor, described in ch. 2.
Giorgio, two fiefs that had been held by the Solaro family since 1418, which were now made into counties for Ludovico by ducal patents.\textsuperscript{52} In 1613, Carlo Emanuele invested Ludovico with the fief of Dogliani and granted him the title of marquis. As a result, Ludovico’s lineage became known as the Solaro di Dogliani. In exchange for the fief, Ludovico paid the duke 9,000 ducatoni and ceded him the rights pertaining to the fief of Saint-Vincent in the Valle d’Aosta, which had been part of the dowry of his wife, Paula de Challant, daughter of Claude de Challant and Bona of Savoy-Racconigi (sister of Bernardino and Filiberto of Savoy-Racconigi).\textsuperscript{53} In 1621, he was invested with the fief of Villar del Varo. In addition to his numerous feudal holdings, the duke made him a knight of the Order of SS. Maurizio and Lazzaro in 1606.

\textit{The Lawsuit: the Alleged Fideicommisum}

After several years of litigation over Manfredo and Ottavia’s assets, on April 13, 1589, Manfredo’s widow Margherita (now countess of Gattinara), reached a settlement agreement with Carlo and Ludovico, in which they terminated their dispute.\textsuperscript{54} Maria Solaro and her nephew Giovanni Maria who, as a minor, was represented by his father Guido Alphonso, count of Cumiana,\textsuperscript{55} continued the suit. The central issue in the case turned around the provisions of two wills: that of Maria’s father Ludovico and that of Ludovico’s son and universal heir, Manfredo. Maria and her nephew based their claims on an alleged \textit{fideicommissum} established by Ludovico Solaro in his will. The \textit{fideicommissum}, a testamentary restriction on alienation of property,

\textsuperscript{52} Mongiano, “Ludovico Solaro.”
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. Ludovico married Paola, daughter of Claude de Challant, on May 6, 1598 and the couple had seven children: Giovanni Francesco Emanuele, marquis of Dogliani, consignore of Moretta, Macello and Torre San Giorgio and count of Cavaglià (the latter title was inherited from his paternal uncle); Carlo, who died without issue; Maurizio, who pursued a career in the church and became bishop of Mondovì in 1642; Carlo Gerolamo, first marquis of Borgo San Dalmazzo; Bona Lucrezia, who married Carlo Provana, count of Collegno; Vittoria Margherita, who married Emanuele Solaro, count of La Chiusa, a distant cousin, in 1649; and Francesca, who married Count Carlo Emanuele Scaglia di Verrua.
\textsuperscript{54} SdM, mazzo 27, fasc. 3. Settlement agreement of April 13, 1589.
\textsuperscript{55} Guido Alphonso had married Maria’s sister, Paola. They had one son, Giovanni Maria.
allowed a testator to bequeath his property to one person and to bind that person to preserve what
he had received in order to pass it down again to the next generation. Originally a feature of
Roman law, this device was increasingly popular in Italy from the fifteenth century. The purpose
of the *fideicommissum* was to keep the family patrimony intact and prevent bits and pieces from
being sold off over the generations. As Thomas Kuehn noted, “*fideicommissa* were at the head of
dynastic ambitions” as the “*fideicommissum* became a regular and important weapon in the legal
 arsenals of families bent on preserving their standing, in wealth and reputation, particularly in
symbolically and economically significant holdings.”56 A widespread tool used to preserve noble
property, the device nevertheless created strained relations and disputes between family
members, as excluded individuals often attacked the *fideicommissum* after the testator’s death in
order to obtain a portion of the deceased’s inheritance.

As in litigation over other types of family inheritance, legal disputes involving this device
were usually based on competing interpretations of the inheritance rules as established in the
testator’s will. Maria and her nephew argued that in his will, Ludovico Solaro established the
alleged *fideicommissum* by bequeathing

to signori Manfredo and Gabriele and any other male children that may be born
the Castles, places, and jurisdictions of Osasco...and his part of the Castles,
places, and jurisdictions of Macello, Moreta and Torre di S. Giorgio, with the
fixed and moveable goods and claims pertinent to them, each of them [Manfredo
and Gabriele] substituting for the other, and if said male children die without male
children *they will be substituted by the agnates nominated herein* [Francesco,
Carlo and Ludovico’s father, and his lineage] as pertains to the feudal property
and they will be substituted as pertains to the allodial and rustic property, by
signore Gioanna, Maria, and Paola and any other children that may be born both
male and female in equal portion [emphasis added]57

57 SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 3. “...alli sign.ri Manfredo e Gabriele et altri figli maschi che nascessero li Castelli, luoghi,
et giurisdizioni di Osasco...più la suoa parte de Castelli, luoghi, e giurisdizioni di Macello, Moretta et della Torre di
S. Geogio, con li beni stabilli e mobilli e ragioni a quelli pertinenti, sostituzendi l’un all’altro, e figli maschi del
predeffonto e luoro mancando senza figli maschi substititi nelli feudali li agnati ivi nominati e nelli allodiali e
rusticali substituti le ss.re Gioanna, Maria, e Paola e tutti gl’altri figli nascituri si maschi che femine in egual
portione...”
Maria and her nephew claimed that the deaths of her brothers Manfredo and Gabriele had triggered the alleged *fideicommissum* in their favor, at least with regard to non-feudal assets. In Ludovico’s will, a distinction is made between feudal property on the one hand and alodial and rustical property on the other. Alodial was the term used to distinguish land held without obligation to a feudal overlord from the majority of land, which was held through feudal tenure.\(^{58}\) Maria and her nephew argued that they, not their distant cousins, were next in line to inherit Ludovico’s non-feudal property because of the substitution that Ludovico had made in favor of his daughters in the event that his male lineage died out. The Solaro brothers responded that “the alleged *fideicommissum* was not triggered, Signor Manfredo having died and left his daughter Signora Ottavia after him, thus, the conditions for the alleged *fideicommisso* have not been met.”\(^{59}\) In other words, because Ludovico had successfully passed his inheritance down to his son, Manfredo, and because Manfredo had in turn passed it down to his only child, Ottavia, the requirements that would trigger the substitution in favor of Ludovico’s daughters had not been met. Manfredo’s property had passed down to Ottavia. The death of Ottavia without any children did not, the brothers argued, mean that Manfredo’s property now passed back up the line to Manfredo’s sisters. Instead, they argued that, at this point, it was necessary to look to Manfredo’s will.

Manfredo’s will named Ottavia his “universal heir...to both alodial and feudal property” (*herede universale...si’ d’allodiali che di feudali*)\(^{60}\) provided that, “as the aforementioned

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\(^{58}\) “Land held absolutely in one’s own right, and not of any lord or superior.” *Dizionario Giuridico Italiano- Inglese/Italian-English Law Dictionary*, ed. Francesco de Franchis (Milano: Giuffrè editore, 1996). The closest concept in the common law system is the estate in fee simple, which indicates absolute ownership.

\(^{59}\) SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 3. “...non è venuto il caso delli fideicommissi pretenduti per esser morto il Signor Manfredo, lasciata doppo se la Signora Ottavia sua figluola, qual sa mancar la conditione del preteso fideicommisso.”

\(^{60}\) FdC, mazzo 7, fasc. 82.
signora Ottavia is still unmarried” she should “take as her legitimate husband...a gentleman of
the house and family of Solaro of one of these four castellate...that is, Macello, Morreta, Villa Nova Sollara and Monesterolo.” As indicated in Carlo and Ludovico’s complaint at the
beginning of this chapter, had Ottavia wished to comply with her father’s wish for her to marry
within the Solaro family, Carlo and Ludovico were the only reasonable choices for her, as they
were the only eligible young men in the four named lineages of the Solaro family. If Ottavia
decided to go against her father’s wishes and take a husband from another house (as she did by
marrying Filiberto of Savoy-Racconigi) Manfredo left her a sum of money and then replaced her
as his universal heir with Carlo and Ludovico: “he personally [di bocca soa] named the
aforementioned signori Carlo and Ludovico of Solar” as his “universal heirs.” Manfredo
recognized that, since he only had one child, who was as yet unmarried, it was also a possibility
that, whomever she decided to marry, Ottavia could die without children and his lineage would
end: “should that happen...that said testator’s legitimate line both male and female should
end...he substitutes...signori Carlo and Ludovico, Solaro brothers, sons of the Most Illustrious
Francesco Solaro cousin of said signor testator.” Carlo and Ludovico claimed that because
Ottavia had married outside the House of Solaro, they were now Manfredo’s universal heirs.
Should that claim be deemed invalid, they also argued that Manfredo’s will contained a
substitution that had been triggered when he died without male heirs, even though the word
“male” was not expressly stated.
The cousins alleged that they had a claim to both Manfredo’s non-feudal and feudal property because Manfredo’s lineage had ended without male heirs, triggering the substitution established in his will in their favor. During the initial phase of the lawsuit when Manfredo died, Ottavia and her mother Margherita had argued that the substitution the brothers claimed in Manfredo’s will had not been triggered “since said deceased signor Manfredo left his daughter signora Ottavia and because the conditions should not be limited to males” \([\text{non si dovesse restringer la condizione ai maschi}]\).\(^{65}\) Francesco, Carlo and Ludovico’s father, countered that it was understood that Ludovico had intended “male” heirs, “even if the world males was not expressly stated” \([\text{se ben non fosse espressa la parolla maschi}]\). He also argued with specific regard to the feudal property, that, as a woman, Ottavia was ineligible to inherit feudal property. Whether women were eligible to inherit feudal lands depended on the local custom of the fief. Indeed, Margherita and Ottavia responded that Ottavia was not “barred from inheriting the feudal property since in the jurisdiction of Moretta women are entitled to inherit feudal property just as men are.”\(^{66}\)

This was the contentious situation between the two branches of the family when Ottavia decided to marry Filiberto. The duke of Savoy himself had to get involved in the marriage negotiations in an attempt to prevent conflict and smooth the path for his cousin, Filiberto. All of the parties involved in the negotiations were aware of the stipulation in Manfredo’s will regarding Ottavia’s choice of husband. The duke sought legal counsel to determine whether Ottavia and Filiberto should marry. Since “said signor Filiberto was not a gentleman from one of the four castellate in said Testament...His Highness sought the opinion of the most Illustrious

\(^{65}\) Settlement agreement between Margherita and Ottavia and Francesco and his sons. February 21, 1583. SdM, mazzo 2, fasc. 5.

\(^{66}\) Ibid., “non è incapace delli beni feudali per che quanto alla giurisdizione dei beni di Moretta essere le femine tanto capaci come li maschi.”
Signore and President [of the Senate] Ruffia...not only regarding the validity or invalidity of said restriction, but regarding the nature and quality of the above-mentioned fiefs left by said signore Manfredo.”67 After consulting with legal experts and finding no legal impediment for the marriage, despite the provisions of Manfredo’s will regarding Ottavia’s choice of husband, on February 20, 1583 the duke ordered Francesco to reach a settlement agreement with Margherita and Ottavia.68 The next day, the parties signed an agreement by which Margherita, on Ottavia’s behalf, promised to “restore the castles, places and jurisdictions of Moretta, Macello and Torre di San Giorgio...to the aforementioned signor Francesco Solaro.”69 For his part, Francesco, on behalf of his sons Carlo and Ludovico, consented “that the marriage of the aforesaid signora Ottavia with the Most Illustrious signor Filiberto of Savoy should take place,” a marriage that was “outside of the House of Solaro,” promising that his sons “would not disturb said signora Ottavia in any way regarding the paternal inheritance to which she is entitled...as though she had been married in the House of Solaro.”70 The parties specified that the settlement agreement had not “prejudiced in any way the substitution made by the deceased signore Manfredo in favor of said signori Carlo and Ludovico” in the event of Ottavia’s death without children. The plaintiffs entered into this settlement agreement on February 21, 1583, the day before Ottavia’s dowry instrument was signed for her marriage to Filiberto of Savoy-Racconigi.71

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67 FdC, mazzo 7, fasc. 82. “…detto sig.e Filiberto non era gentilhuomo d’una delle quattro castellate nel detto Testamento...Sua Altezza havesse ricercato il parere del molto Ill.ro Sig.e Presidente Roffia...non solo sopra la validità et invalidità di tal privatione, ma etiando della natura e qualità delli feudi sopra menzionati lasciati da detto sig.e Manfredo.”

68 Settlement agreement between Margherita and Ottavia and Francesco and his sons. February 21, 1583. SdM, mazzo 2, fasc. 5.

69 Ibid. “...rimetter al predetto sig.r Francesco Solaro...li castelli, luoghi e giurisdizioni di Moretta, Macello et Torre di San Giorgio.”

70 Ibid. “...che si facia matrimonio della predetta sig.ra Ottavia con l’Ill.mo sig.r Filiberto di Savoia...fuori della casa Solara...non darano molestia alcuna alla detta sig.ra Ottavia nel heredita paterna a lei spettante...come se si fosse maridata in casa Solara.”

71 SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 3. “…pregiudicato in modo alcuno alla sustituzione fatta dal fu Sig.e Manfredo in favor di detti sig.ri Carlo et Ludovico.”
The Lawsuit: the Alleged Fraud

When Ottavia died, Carlo and Ludovico asserted their claims to the remaining portion of Ottavia’s paternal inheritance. Maria and her nephew Guido Alfonso brought suit against them citing the provisions of Ludovico’s will and alleging that they were the beneficiaries of the substitution in his fideicommissum. In preparation for the suit, it was necessary to obtain original copies of the wills of both Ludovico and Manfredo. An original copy of Manfredo’s will was located at the home of the notary who had drafted it. Notary Giuvenal Megliore had since died but, with the assistance of his widow, Madonna Caterina, officials were able to locate the will among his papers.\(^2\) When it came to Ludovico’s will, however, the Senate encountered a problem. Ludovico’s will had been drawn up on January 31, 1560 by notary Giacomo Billia and had been registered and filed with the Senate. When it became necessary to extract the official copy of Ludovico’s will from the Senate archives, Georgio Razini, notary and secretary of the Senate, produced the will “with an express protest of disapproval of the cancellation of the word ‘masculis’ as appears in this extract.”\(^3\) The Latin word “masculis” had clearly been physically marked out in this copy of Ludovico’s will, thus calling into question the validity of the document. Who had cancelled out the word and why? Unfortunately, notary Billia was deceased by the time of the lawsuit. Billia was from the town of Buriasco, just north of Macello, where he was not only a notary but had also been the bailiff of the Solaro family’s castle of Macello. His son, Gio Amedeo Billia was also a notary and was eventually questioned as to the validity of Ludovico’s will. Giacomo Billia had kept a copy of the will in his records, which would have shed some light on the original wording of the document but, as it turned out, Billia’s home and

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\(^2\) SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 1.

\(^3\) SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 3. “...con expressa protesta di non approvar la cancellazione della parola Masculis, come in detto estratto appare.”
papers had been “burned in said place of Buriasco by the enemy in the year 1595 when it was besieging Cavour.”

Thus, other means had to be found to establish the validity of Ludovico’s will and his intent in establishing the fideicommissum. On January 4, 1597, a “rotolo monitoriale” was published demanding that anyone who had any information should come forward regarding the identity of whomever “may have altered any word of the Testament of the deceased signore Ludovico Solaro” specifically whether anyone “had marked out the word masculis which was part of the condition of a substitution made in said testament” in order to “defraud and harm the substituted persons.” In addition, the rotolo requested that anyone come forward who “had seen the marking out of the word masculis” written using ink that was different from that in which “the rest of said Testament had been written.” Witness statements were taken at the beginning of 1598 and submitted on May 15. At some point, Billia’s son came under suspicion. He was “detained and conducted to prison in the city of Turin where he was examined” concerning “suspicion of fraud” with regard to Ludovico’s will. Records of his questioning and imprisonment do not appear to have survived and it is unclear what happened to him.

The witnesses were questioned concerning the fire at Billia’s home in Buriasco. The fire was conclusively proved to have taken place and to have destroyed the notary’s records. The suit continued throughout 1598 until it was suspended for some months due to the plague. When the

74 Ibid. The enemy in question was Henry IV’s general Francois de Bonne, duke of Lesdiguières, who had invaded Piedmont. “...abbruggiate nel detto luoco di Buriasco nell’anno 1595 dal nemico, mentre si assediava Cavor.”
75 A “rotolo monitoriale” was a document that was posted at local churches and would contain a request for informatio n upon penalty of excommunication.
76 SdM, mazzo 2, fasc. 9. “...qualonq persona sapesse o havesse sentito...ch’alcuno...havesse alteratto alcuna parola del Testamento del fu sig.e Ludovico Solaro... havesse cassatto una parola masculis apposta in conditio ne d’una substitutione fatta in detto testa.to per frodar et dannificar le persone substitute.” “...havesse visto detta cassatura della parola masculis et qualche altra parola scritta di diverso et differente inchiostro da quello del quale era scritto il restante di deto Testamento.”
77 SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 3. “...dettenuto et condotto in pregione nella presente citta di Turino ove fu esaminato” concerning “sospitione di falcita.”
case resumed, the Senate was collecting various copies of Ludovico’s will to ascertain the
original wording. Since the official copy filed with the Senate was potentially fraudulent and any
copies kept by the notary had been destroyed in the fire, the Senate identified occasions when
Ludovico’s will had been produced in different lawsuits. Fortunately for the Senate, Ludovico’s
will had been involved in a number of disputes and the records of those cases were available. By
late 1600, the Senate had found a number of copies of the will that had been accepted as valid in
other suits.\textsuperscript{78} Those wills proved to “lack the word masculis.” So who marked out the word
“masculis” in the Senate’s copy? Could it have been Ludovico’s sons, Manfredo and Gabriele,
foreseeing that they would die without male heirs? Surely not. At the time of the will, the two
sons “who were in the flower of their youth,” would never have considered that they would die
“without sons and that one of them would leave only a daughter,” such that they would have
“gone to bribe the notary Billia and his son and have them cancel out the world masculis.”\textsuperscript{79} It
seemed unlikely that the two brothers would have contemplated such a dishonorable act or that
they would have considered such an act necessary. Neither brother was married at the time. They
had their whole lives ahead of them, and they surely imagined that they had plenty of time ahead
of them to marry and have sons. Could Ottavia or someone acting on her behalf have marked out
the word? Surely that was also unlikely. No, the Senate concluded that the mostly likely scenario
was that the “cancellation of the world masculis had been carried out by none other than the
same notary who had written it by mistake.”\textsuperscript{80} The notary, realizing that he had included the
word in error, had marked it out in order to comply with “the intent of signor Ludovico the

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Ibid. “...ch’erano giovani nel fiore della sua etta,” would never have considered that they would die “senza figli
maschii et lasciar solamente uno di loro una figliola,” such that they would have “andatti a corompersi il nodaro
Bilia et il figliolo et farli cassar la parola masculis.”
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid. “...la cassatura della parola masculis si sia fatta fare ne da altro che dal istesso nodaro che l’havesse scritta
per errore senza commissione contro la mente del signor Ludovico testatore.”
testator.” The other available copies of the will seemed to confirm this theory, as they were all written without the word “masculis.”

An unsigned and undated opinion by a legal expert found in the Solaro di Moretta archives provides information about Maria’s legal arguments at this point in the case. The expert, probably retained by Maria, argued that “the cancellation of certain words and the addition of others...does not pertain to our case because it regards the substitution made in bequeathing the castles and places of the fief and the jurisdiction and it appears that it only concerns the substitutions of those fiefs.” Thus the presence or absence of the word only impacted the claim to the family’s feudal holdings, not the rustical and alodial property.

On May 22, 1602, the Senate handed down its sentence in this suit. The Senators upheld Carlo and Ludovico’s claim that there was no fideicommisum applicable to this case: “we hereby deny the parties’ claims as superfluous, as the claimed fideicommissum was not present.” The Senate ordered “that the defendants must be released from the plaintiff’s claims, as we hereby release them.” Although Maria continued to appeal the case, her actions appear to have been unsuccessful, and the feudal and alodial lands that had passed from Ludovico to Manfredo and then to Ottavia were diverted from their lineage over to their cousins, Carlo and Ludovico Solaro.

Maria and Her Allies

The tension between the Solaro brothers, on the one hand, and Maria, on the other, continued for decades, but 1598-1602 was the period of the most intense conflict between them.

81 SdM, mazzo 13, fasc. 9. “...quanto a la difficutà de la cassatura d’alcune parole et aggiunta d’altre, essa non pertenga al caso nostro perché ella si suppone fatta ne la substitutione nel ligato de Castelli et luoghi di feudo et jurisdizioni et pare che sia solo interesse dele substitutions in quei feudi.”
82 Sentence of May 22, 1602. SdM, mazzo 12, fasc. 3. “...pronontiamo reietta le dedutioni dale parti come soverchie, non esser luogo al suplicato fideicomisso, ma doversi assolvere, come asolviamo li convenuti dale domande delli attori.”
83 Ibid.
Unfortunately for Maria, she was working from a position of relative political weakness compared to her cousins. By the time that the sentence was issued in their lawsuit in 1602, Carlo and Ludovico had both risen rapidly at the Sabaudian court. Ludovico in particular enjoyed significant prestige. Maria’s second husband, Bonifacio San Martino, had died in 1600 and Maria found herself with few allies. A widow with no living siblings, Maria needed a strong ally to join her cause against Carlo and Ludovico. She turned to her distant cousin Faraone III Solaro. As the direct descendant of Agaffino I, the first lord of Moretta, Faraone was the head of the main lineage of the Solaro family. Maria struck up an alliance with Faraone. After a first marriage with Caterina Passavino in 1593, Faraone married Maria’s younger daughter, Elisabetta, in 1602, just months before the sentence was handed down in her case. This marriage not only united the main lineage with a cadet branch of the Solaro del Borgo, but also united two highly driven individuals: Maria and Faraone. From that point on, Carlo and Ludovico clashed repeatedly with Maria and her son-in-law, who frequently worked together to curb the ambitions of their distant cousins.

With the entrance of Faraone into the fray, the brothers faced an intimidating rival who was also conducting a brilliant career at the Sabaudian court. Faraone was the second son of Giovanni Francesco Solaro and Olimpia Scarampi del Cairo. His older brother, Agaffino V, had chosen a religious vocation later in life, receiving a degree in theology in 1613, joining the

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84 Dowry instrument of Caterina Passavino, April 14, 1593. SdM, mazzo 14, fasc. 19. Caterina Passavino was the daughter of Aloisio Passavino of Brasicarda.
85 Dowry instrument of Elisabetta Solaro, January 5, 1602. SdM, mazzo 14, fasc. 22. Elisabetta’s dowry consisted of 4,000 scudi.
86 Dowry instrument of Olimpia Scarampi, November 3, 1567. Olimpio was the daughter of Giovanni Guglielmo Scarampi del Cairo. She married Giovanni Francesco Solaro, son of Faraone Solaro. SdM, mazzo 14, fasc. 7.
87 March 20, 1613. Degree received by Agaffino V Solaro from the college of the Company of Jesus in Ivrea. SdM, mazzo 4, fasc. 12.
household of the duke’s son, Cardinal Maurice of Savoy, in 1617 and becoming bishop of Fossano in 1621. Faraone joined the household of the duke’s heir, the future Vittorio Amadeo I, becoming his maggiordomo in 1619. He was later appointed maggiordomo to Vittorio Amadeo’s sister, Margaret of Savoy, following her to Portugal when her cousin Philip IV of Spain appointed her vicereine of that kingdom in 1634. Faraone had five sons and three daughters, although it is unclear which children were from his first marriage and which were from his second marriage to Maria’s daughter, Elisabetta. His children’s careers reinforced the family’s ties with the ducal family as they served in the households of the duke and duchess in various positions. Faraone’s descendants continued their loyal service to the House of Savoy through the nineteenth century.

There were numerous points of contention between Maria and Faraone and the Solaro brothers, particularly during the early years of the seventeenth century. Faraone soon enlisted another ally into the conflict: the head of the Solaro della Chiusa lineage, Emanuele Filiberto.

91 March 10, 1635. Certificate issued by Antonio de Morales of the Company of Jesus that Count Faraone Solaro di Moretta was laid to rest in their church in Lisbon, where he died in Margherita’s service. SdM, mazzo 3, fasc. 3.
92 His second son, Bonifacio, became maggiordomo for Vittorio Amadeo I’s wife, Marie Christine of France in 1635, and then for her daughter-in-law Maria Giovanna Battista of Savoy-Nemours. He married Maddalena del Carretto, governess of Vittorio Amadeo’s daughters, in 1646. A daughter, Olimpia Margherita, was appointed lady of the chamber of the princesses of Savoy in 1626.
93 Faraone’s grandson Giovanni Battista III was first commander of Vercelli and then governor of Carmagnola during the campaign of Vittorio Amedeo II against France in 1690. Indeed, most of his descendants decided on military careers, and often rose to hold important positions at court. Giuseppe Antonio Agaffino (1707-1885) was a gentleman of the chamber, first of Carlo Emanuele III, then of Vittorio Amedeo III. His son Gaspare Giacomo (1751-1818) was scudiere and then gran maestro di camera of the duke of Genevese. His son Faraone V (1781-1856) was in turn Carlo Alberto’s gentleman of the chamber. The counts resided primarily in Turin, although they did not own a palazzo in the city and spent significant periods of every year at the castle of Moretta. The last count of Moretta was Emanuele Solaro, who died in 1878.
94 SdM, mazzo 27 and mazzo 38 contain records of various disputes between the Solaro branches during this period. Disputes between their descendants are found in mazzo 40.
Solaro, governor of Vercelli (d. 1622).\textsuperscript{95} Emanuele Filiberto often joined in these conflicts against Carlo and Ludovico, and his alliance with Maria and Faraone did much to counteract the powerful brothers, as it essentially amounted to an alliance between the main Solaro di Moretta (Faraone), the Solaro del Borgo (Maria) and the Solaro della Chiusa (Emaunel Filiberto) against the other Solaro del Borgo branch (Carlo and Ludovico) which became the Solaro di Dogliani when Ludovico became the first marquis di Dogliani in 1615.

In addition to the inheritance litigation described in the first part of this chapter, the brothers asserted full jurisdiction over cases of “seconda cognizione” (first appeal) heard by the tribunal of Moretta, which they eventually agreed to share with other members of the consortile. There were similar conflicts over the appointment of the bailiff of the castle of Moretta, which were resolved by arbitration. The representatives of the various branches also clashed over control of “the two rooms that are located one above the other under the chapel of said Castle,” which they finally agreed should be shared by all of the lords in common “and that said Signor Faraone may not use them except in common and with the consent of the other signori.”\textsuperscript{96} There was even some contention over who would keep the keys to the castle, and it was decided that “the keys to the Castle” would be “held by the porter” and available to all the lords to use. There was also a dispute over the farmlands controlled by the various members of the family, with Carlo and Ludovico claiming the right to “make a wall in a straight line” between their farmland and “the garden of Count Emanuel.” The outcome of that claim is unclear as, in that case, the

\textsuperscript{95} Faraone III and Emanuele Filiberto were cousins, both descending from Agaffino I, the first lord of Moretta. They shared a common great grandfather, Agaffino III, whose oldest son, Faraone II (d. 1546) was Faraone III’s grandfather. His second son, Bartolomeo was the founder of the “della Chiusa” line and Emanuele Filiberto’s grandfather. Emanuele Filiberto married Paola Provana in 1591. Their son, Carlo Ubertino II (d. 1639) played an important role in the Piedmontese Civil War fighting on the side of Madama Marie Christine.

\textsuperscript{96} Sentence of March 29, 1602. SdM, mazzo 27, fasc. 5. “...le due stanze che sono l’una sopra et l’altra sotto la capella di detto Castello...et che detto Sig. Faraone non possa usarne salvo come cose comuni et col beneplacito delli altri sig.ri.” “...le chiavi del Castello” would be “in poter del portinaro.”
arbitrators postponed their decision until an on-site visit could be made to their land to collect “the necessary information.” Conflicts over the castle continued well into the seventeenth century. In 1656, for example, the descendants of the original parties clashed over the use of the castle’s courtyard, in which the former marquis of Dogliani had ordered a garden to be cultivated, which encroached on the courtyard space of the count of Moretta and the marquis of La Chiusa.

Conclusion

After the period of intense conflict in the first decade of the seventeenth century, relations between the two families became more distant and clashes between them tapered off to the occasional dispute over use of the castle, as described above, which tended to be resolved quickly via arbitration and settlement. This decline in conflict was likely due to the fact that Ludovico Solaro acquired the marquisate of Dogliani in 1615 and his sons Giovanni Francesco and Carlo Girolamo acquired Borgo San Dalmazzo a few years later. Dogliani is located about 57 km to the southwest of Moretta, just east of Fossano. Borgo San Dalmazzo is located about 55 km directly south of Moretta and just a few km south of Cuneo. These gains appear to have shifted the center of their economic interests elsewhere, alleviating much of the tension between the Solaro branches.

Carlo and Ludovico Solaro won their lawsuit against Maria Solaro and ultimately gained both the feudal and non-feudal property of Maria’s father, Ludovico. They benefitted both from support at court and from the trend towards favoring the claims of agantic kin over the claims of women. Maria, on the other hand, entered the conflict from a position of political weakness.

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97 SdM, mazzo 27, fasc. 5. “...far una muraglia retta linea” between their farmland and “il giardino del Conte Emanuel.”
98 SdM, mazzo 40, fasc. 2.
Although it appears that Carlo and Ludovico came out on top in their conflict with Maria, it is interesting to note that, once Maria joined forces with the other two branches of the Solaro family, litigation between the Solaro branches multiplied. The explosion of disputes over the keys to the castle, rooms in the castle, and physical divisions of the castle and its gardens among the branches demonstrate how nobles tied access to and control of physical space to political power. Maria was unsuccessful in her inheritance lawsuit, but she was successful at winning the heads of other family branches to her side. Ultimately, under pressure from Maria’s son-in-law, Faraone III Solaro and Emanuele Filiberto Solaro, Carlo and Ludovico turned their attention to Dogliani and Borgo San Dalmazzo, leaving the Solaro di Moretta, the Solaro del Borgo, and the Solaro della Chiusa to enjoy the family’s historic fief of Moretta.
Figure 3a. The Solaro Family Lineages
The Main Lineage, the “Solaro di Moretta” descending from Agaffino I, first lord of Moretta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benintino Solaro di Asti</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agaffino I, (1/3 Moretta, 1362)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Giovanni I (d. c. 1385)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agaffino II (d. c. 1450)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faraone I (d. c. 1474) m. Margherita Villa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agaffino III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faraone II (d. 1546) m. Caterina Provana di Faule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gio. Francesco (d. 1579) m. (1567) Olimpia Scarampi di Cairo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agaffino V, bishop of Fossano (d. 1625)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faraone III (d. 1635) m. (1) Caterina Passavino di Brasicarda (2) Elisabetta San Martino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gio. Battista, Jesuit (d. 1630) (2) 9 children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 This cadet branch of the Solaro di Moretta took the name Solaro della Chiusa from 1627, when Count Carlo Ubertino II was vested with Chiusa.
Figure 3b. The Cadet Branch “Solaro del Borgo” descending from Bonifacio Solaro

Bonifacio

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Filippo (d. c. 1400)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bonifacio II</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sebastiano</th>
<th>Manfredo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>descendents</td>
<td>Ludovico</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manfredo</th>
<th>Gabriele</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. Margherita</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ottavia (d. 1585)</th>
<th>Maria (d. 1617)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. Filiberto of Savoy-Racconigi (d. 1585)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>m. Ottavio Parpaglia</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paola m.</th>
<th>Guido Alfonso di Cumiana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Annibale Cacherano</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Bonifacio San Martino</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Giovanni Maria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(1) Emanuele Cacherano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2) Diana San Martino</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Francesco</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. Lucrezia Costa di Polonghera</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carlo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. (1598) Paola di Challant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st marquis of Dogliani</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlo Geronimo</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Carlo Geronimo</th>
<th>Gio Francesco Emmanuele</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>m. Silvia Villa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 3c. The Cadet Branch “Solaro della Chiusa” descending from Giovanni Bartolomeo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Giovanni Bartolomeo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlo Ubertino I m. Lucrezia della Rovere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emanuele Filiberto</strong> (d. 1622), governor of Vercelli m. Anna Provana di Beinette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carlo Ubertino II, vested with fief of La Chiusa (1627) m. Margherita Ferrero della Marmora</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emanuele Filiberto II m. Vittoria, daughter of Ludovico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solaro di Dogliani</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Photos 4-5. Castle of Moretta today.
Chapter 4  
A Mother’s Dilemma: Beatrice Langosco and Her Children: 1577-1612

On the 22nd of December in the year 1584, Lady Beatrice petitioned his Most Serene Highness, stating that when she had no other children but the Lady Matilda she had accepted the renewal of the investiture [of the fief of Pianezza] for herself and, after herself, for said Lady Matilda... but having since been placed in marriage by the good will of His Highness [Duke Carlo Emanuele I], and having had children from it, she petitions to have said investiture... declared... invalid and of no value.¹

From the records of the lawsuit between Lady Matilda of Savoy and her half-brother Gherardo Martinengo concerning the fief of Pianezza

Introduction

Beatrice Langosco di Stroppiana is well known to historians of the House of Savoy as the mother of three of Duke Emanuele Filiberto’s illegitimate children. Baron Antonio Manno, the author of Il Patriziato Subalpino, a multi-volume work on the history of the noble families of Piedmont, described Beatrice as “infamous for her disreputable affair [brutti amori] with Emanuele Filiberto.”² Little is known about Beatrice other than the broad outlines of her life.

The daughter of Emanuele Filiberto’s gran cancelliere, she was married twice: to Giovanni Francesco Scarampi, count of Vesime (sometime between 1565 and 1570) and then to Francesco Martinengo, count of Malpaga (in 1583). At some point either during or after her first marriage, Beatrice entered into a long-term relationship with the duke. When Beatrice gave birth to their third child, Matilda, in 1578, Emanuele Filiberto legitimized their two surviving children and granted the fief of Pianezza to Beatrice and her heirs “both female and male.”³ Located about 12

¹ MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358, 4-5. “Nell’anno 1584 alli 22 di Decembre, essa Dama Beatrice narra a S.A. Sereniss., che quando haveva solo Donna Amatilda, e no altra figliuolanza, prese la renovazione dell’investitura, per le, e dopo lei, per essa Donna Amatilda...et essendosi col buon volere di S.A. collocata in matrimonio, dal qual ha havuto, et è per havere figliuolanza...supplica dichararsi...detta investitura...nulla, invalida, et di niuno valore....”
³ December 6, 1578. ASTC, Scritture della città e provincial di Torino in Paesi, Città e Provincia di Torino, Pianezza, mazzo 22, fasc. 7. “...tanto femine, che maschi....”
km northwest of Turin on the banks of the Dora Riparia, a tributary of the Po River, Pianezza was a valuable fief whose wealth derived from the production of wheat and wine.4

After the duke died, Beatrice married her second husband and they had six children together. Once she had children from a legitimate marriage, Beatrice faced a dilemma with regard to the inheritance of her daughter Matilda, the only surviving child of her relationship with Emanuele Filiberto. Beatrice found herself at the center of a clash of normative systems: should she act in a way that favored Matilda and the dynasty from which her daughter descended, the House of Savoy? Or should she act in a way that favored her legitimate children and her husband’s lineage, the Martinengo? From the time of her second marriage, the inheritance of the fief of Pianezza was a particular source of contention between Beatrice, Matilda, and the Martinengo family. Prior to her marriage, Beatrice had petitioned the new duke, Carlo Emanuele I, to specify that the fief should pass to Matilda after her death. After her marriage to Martinengo, Beatrice began repeatedly petitioning the duke to bar Matilda (his own half-sister) from inheriting Pianezza in favor of Beatrice’s legitimate Martinengo sons. The series of requests she made to the duke demonstrate the pressures Beatrice faced in her new marriage with regard to her ownership of the fief. During her lifetime, Carlo Emanuele complied with Beatrice’s requests, confirming that the fief would go to Beatrice’s legitimate sons rather than to Matilda.

Beatrice’s numerous petitions raise questions about her sense of loyalty and of family identity. It was certainly not unusual for women to have two sets of children from different fathers. What makes Beatrice’s case interesting, however, is that her first set of children were bastards, but they were princely bastards. Her second set of children, although legitimate, could

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4 To get a sense of the value of the fief, Emanuele Filiberto had recently purchased it for 25,000 gold scudi. Almost twenty years before, in 1559, half of the fief had been sold to Lorenzo Nomis for 8,900 gold scudi.
not boast such lofty kinship ties. The high status of her illegitimate children created problems that would not have existed in the more typical situation with two sets of children of similar status. Indeed, Matilda’s status as the beloved half-sister of the duke of Savoy seems to have deprived Beatrice of some flexibility in how to handle her children’s affairs and her relationships with them. In addition, evidence from her petitions suggests that, despite her petitions on behalf of the Martinengo lineage, Beatrice herself continued to identify with her natal family even after her marriage, suggesting that underneath the tension she experienced in balancing her Savoy and Martinengo children, Beatrice’s situation was further complicated by her ongoing allegiance to the Langosco lineage.

**Beatrice Langosco’s Family**

Beatrice’s father was Giovanni Tommaso Langosco, the count of Stroppiana (d. 1575), and her mother was Langosco’s first wife, Delia Roero di Sanseverino. The Langosco family was an old noble family from Pavia that had divided into a multitude of branches based in Piacenza, Brescia, and Vercelli. Giovanni Tommaso’s branch of the Langosco had settled around Vercelli at the beginning of the sixteenth century. In 1573, the Duke Emanuele Filiberto made Stroppiana, a fief located about 6 miles southeast of Vercelli, into a county for his *gran cancelliere*, and the name “Langosco di Stroppiana” was adopted for this branch of the family. Giovanni Tommaso Langosco studied law and began his service to the House of Savoy as a legal consultant and then as ambassador of Emanuele Filiberto’s father, Duke Carlo II (r. 1504-1553). His first diplomatic mission took place in 1543, when the duke sent him to Charles V’s court in Vienna. By 1546, he was travelling with the imperial army in its campaign against the Lutheran

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7 Ibid.
Schmalkaldic League. There, he met the duke’s son, Emanuele Filiberto, who was already distinguishing himself through military service to the emperor. In the following years, Langosco became part of the close circle of advisors of Emanuele Filiberto, who succeeded his father in 1553. When the duke was invited to the wedding of Mary I of England and Philip II of Spain in 1554, he sent Langosco to England ahead of him as his ambassador.⁸

After several more diplomatic missions, Langosco rejoined Emanuele Filiberto, accompanying the duke during the last stages of the Habsburg-Valois Wars. In 1558 and 1559, Langosco assisted in negotiations for the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis (April 3, 1559) and worked on the terms of the marriage contract between Emanuel Filiberto and Marguerite de Valois. He then travelled to the French court to make arrangements for the wedding, which took place on July 9, 1559. Langosco joined the retinue that accompanied the duke and his new duchess from France to Nice and then, in 1560, to Piedmont, where the duke was establishing his new capital in Turin. It was at this time that Langosco was appointed gran cancelliere as a testament to his long and faithful service to the House of Savoy.⁹ He died on Mary 18, 1575 after months of illness which had confined him to his bed, leaving behind his second wife, Antonia di Montafia, their children Carlo Emanuele, Margherita, and Ludovica, as well as Beatrice, his only child from his first marriage.¹⁰

Beatrice’s date of birth is unknown and there is very little information about her youth. Given her father’s prestigious position, she certainly grew up in contact with the ducal court in Turin. Sometime between 1565 and 1570, she married Giovanni Francesco Scarampi, count of

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⁸ A detailed account of Giovanni Tommaso Langosco’s tenure as ambassador to England, including transcriptions of his correspondence, is found in Gaudenzio Claretta, Il duca di Savoia, Emanuele Filiberto e la corte di Londra negli anni 1554 e 1555. Reminiscenze storico-diplomatiche raccolte su documenti inediti (Pinerolo: Tipografia Sociale, 1892).
⁹ Raviola, “Langosco, Giovanni Tommaso.”
¹⁰ Ibid.
Vesime, a nobleman from Asti. Scarampi was sent to Madrid by Duke Emanuele Filiberto and died there in 1575. In his testament, drawn up in Madrid on October 24, 1573, Scarampi, who had no children, left all of his property to his sister Claudia, excluding Beatrice from any inheritance. Some historians have speculated that Scarampi’s faraway mission to Spain and his decision to omit his wife from his testament are evidence that the duke may have already shown interest in Beatrice, causing tension between the couple.

It is unclear when the relationship between the duke and Beatrice began. Nineteenth-century historians of the House of Savoy, wishing to render the affair more acceptable to their readers, tended to argue that it began after 1575, when the two were both widowed. Other historians have surmised that the relationship started earlier, and that Scarampi’s mission to Madrid, as well as the rising career of Beatrice’s father, were due at least in part to Beatrice’s favor with the duke. Carlo Dionisotti, in fact, argued that the duke appointed Langosco his gran cancelliere in 1560 “not so much because of his qualities as because of his loyalty and the duke’s intimate relationship with his daughter,” dismissing Langosco as “an honest pettifogger, not a statesman.” Gaudenzio Claretta disagreed, maintaining that the relationship between the duke and Beatrice began only after her father’s promotion, when Emanuele Filiberto, “had occasion to frequent Langosco closely due to his office and not before” and, going often to his gran cancelliere’s home, the duke “had the opportunity to admire the beauty of that damsel and to fall in love with her.”

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11 Claudia Maria Scarampi was married to Bonifacio Valperga di Caluso. See ASTC, Scritture della città d’Asti in Paesi, Asti, mazzo 20, fasc. 15-17, for records of the lawsuit between members of the Scarampi family and Claudia Maria Scarampi over succession to the fiefs and property of the deceased Giovanni Francesco Scarampi.
12 The duke’s consort, Marguerite de France, died in 1574.
14 Claretta, Il duca di Savoia, Emanuele Filiberto e la corte di Londra, 73.
The relationship between Emanuele Filiberto and Beatrice resulted in three children: Ottone, who died as a small child, Beatrice, and Matilda. Roberto Oresko analyzed the marriage and career patterns of the illegitimate offspring of the House of Savoy, noting that bastards of the house consistently became clients to the dukes as loyal courtiers and military leaders and by making marriages that served the interests of their ducal half siblings. Indeed, the many illegitimate children of both Emanuele Filiberto and his son Carlo Emanuele I played key roles at the Sabaudian court in Turin. Oresko calculated that Emanuele Filiberto was the father of eight illegitimate children, while Carlo Emanuele I fathered eleven. He noted that these numbers may not be complete, given the complexities of illegitimacy. Children born to women of modest backgrounds may have grown up in obscurity, while the children of noblewomen often lived prominent lives that left more traces in the archives. As Oresko noted, “although the identities of a few of the mothers remain shadowy, it is clear that the mothers of the legitimized offspring were scarcely girls of the street. Some came from extremely distinguished families and formed durable relationships with their ducal lovers.”

Emanuele Filiberto’s relationship with Beatrice Langosco di Stroppiana, a woman from an eminent noble family, is an example of one such long-term relationship.

Illegitimate daughters like Matilda could be legitimized to make them attractive on the marriage market. A legitimized daughter could be used to make and solidify alliances with noble families of lesser rank than the House of Savoy. “In the profoundly hierarchical court society of early modern Europe much importance was attached to the rank of a prince’s ‘servants,’ those in

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16 Ibid., 43.  
17 Ibid., 44.
his service,”¹⁸ and the dukes worked to bring noble families into their clientele systems. One of the most effective ways to tempt lesser noble houses into the fold was by marriage. A marriage between a legitimate daughter of the house to a lesser noble, however, would not have been considered appropriate due to the difference in rank. “Although marriage of a legitimate daughter, a princess of the House of Savoy, into one of these families would have been an unacceptable mésalliance, an illegitimate daughter could be used to bridge the hierarchical gap, but only if she were recognized and, preferably, legitimized.”¹⁹ For prospective husbands and their families, legitimized daughters were attractive brides due to the opportunities such matches offered for access to and favor with the dukes.

From the time of their births, illegitimate daughters Beatrice and Matilda were intended for strategic marriage alliances that would serve the interests of the dynasty. They were both legitimized: Beatrice in 1577 and Matilda in 1578, when she was a baby.²⁰ Beatrice was then promised in marriage to Filiberto Ferrero-Fieschi di Masserano with a substantial dowry of 30,000 gold scudi.²¹ The girl died in 1580, however, before the marriage could take place.²² The duke began negotiating a match for the infant Matilda with Giovanni Francesco Spinola, son of Genoese patrician Alfonso Spinola.²³ The marriage was to take place when Matilda came of age, but the plans fell apart when the duke died. It would be up to Matilda’s half-brother, Carlo Emanuele I, to consider her marriage prospects.

¹⁸ Ibid., 48.
¹⁹ Ibid.
²⁰ Matilda’s date of birth is uncertain, but is usually accepted as 1577 or 1578.
²¹ Alice Raviola, “Beatrice Langosco,” DBI vol. 63, 2004. Masserano was a small principality located between Piedmont and the duchy of Milan.
²² Oresko, “Bastards as Clients,” 47. The dukes of Savoy continued their efforts to bring the princes of Masserano into their system of clientele and in 1645, Filiberto di Ferrero-Fieschi’s daughter, Claudia, married one of Carlo Emanuele I’s illegitimate sons.
²³ These negotiations are referred to in MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358.
Matilda’s mother Beatrice Langosco maintained her status at court despite Emanuele Filiberto’s death. In 1583, she married her second husband, Francesco Martinengo, count of Malpaga (1548-1621). The Martinengo were patricians from Brescia and were therefore subjects of the Republic of Venice rather than subjects of the dukes of Savoy. After an early career in the service of Venice, Francesco Martinengo entered the service of Emanuele Filiberto in 1567.\(^{24}\) The duke must have been quite pleased with Martinengo, because he created him a knight of the Order of SS. Annunziata in 1576.\(^{25}\) From 1584 to 1589 Martinengo served as Carlo Emanuele I’s gran scudiere and was part of the group of nobles who accompanied the duke to Spain for his marriage to the Spanish infanta Catalina Micaela in 1585.\(^{26}\) The marriage between Francesco Martinengo and Beatrice Langosco was therefore an alliance between two influential nobles at the Sabaudian court.

**The Fief of Pianezza**

Beatrice’s second marriage triggered conflict over the inheritance of the fief of Pianezza. Located northwest of Turin along an ancient Roman road, the small town of Pianezza has a long history. A map drawn up in 1031 refers to the town as Planicia.\(^{27}\) In 1360, Count Amedeo VI of Savoy granted the fief to two brothers: Stefano and Giovannino Provana of Vinovo.\(^{28}\) It was inherited through this noble Piedmontese family for the next two centuries. In 1559, the fief was in the hands of three Provana brothers. When one of the brothers, Antonio Provana, died, he requested in his testament that his brothers provide his daughter and their sister with proper dowries. In order to meet this significant financial burden, brothers Giovanni Francesco and


\(^{25}\) March 25, 1576. Cigna Santi, 85.

\(^{26}\) Paolo Cozzo, “Francesco Martinengo Colleoni.”


\(^{28}\) Ibid., 441.
Guglielmo Provana sold half of the fief of Pianezza to Lorenzo Nomis, “of the nobles of Susa,” for the price of 8,900 gold scudi.\textsuperscript{29} Nomis was invested with one half of the fief in 1560.\textsuperscript{30} The other half continued to be shared by the two Provana brothers. After Guglielmo Provana died in 1569, Duke Emanuele Filiberto invested the surviving Provana brother, Giovanni Francesco, with a full half of Pianezza. When Lorenzo Nomis died, his sons Cesare, Alessandro and Carlo Francesco inherited his half, each holding one-sixth of the fief.\textsuperscript{31}

In 1578, Cesare Nomis (also acting on behalf of his two minor brothers) and Giovanni Francesco Provana sold the entire fief of Pianezza to Duke Emanuele Filiberto.\textsuperscript{32} The duke then sold it to Beatrice Langosco for 25,000 gold scudi.\textsuperscript{33} At the time, Beatrice was a widow whose only children were those she had with the duke. The terms of the transfer to Beatrice stated that Beatrice accepted Pianezza for herself and for her descendants “both female and male” (tanto femine, che maschi). Shortly afterward, the duke was succeeded by his son, Carlo Emanuele I. The new duke planned to reconfirm Beatrice’s investiture of Pianezza, but Beatrice first requested that he make a change to the wording of the investiture document. On August 11, 1581, Beatrice petitioned that the original wording (“tanto femine, che maschi”) be altered to reflect the fact that Beatrice had only one remaining child, Matilda. In order to ensure with certainty that the fief would pass to Matilda after her death, Beatrice wished to accept the investiture of Pianezza “for herself and after herself for the Most Illustrious Lady Matilda her daughter, and her descendants, and if she dies without descendants, for the heirs and successors

\textsuperscript{29} The history of the transfers of the fief of Pianezza from 1559 through 1625 is given in MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358. See Casalis, \textit{Dizionario geografico}, 439-448 for a detailed history of ownership of the fief through the eighteenth century.
\textsuperscript{30} Casalis, \textit{Dizionario geografico}, 444.
\textsuperscript{31} The investiture of Cesare, Alessandro and Carlo Francesco Nomis took place on April 11, 1570.
\textsuperscript{32} Instruments of August 15, 1578 and September 14, 1578. MdR, mazzo 278.
\textsuperscript{33} Sale to Beatrice Langosco di Stroppiana, December 6, 1578, registered by the Camera di conti on December 20, 1578. ASTC, Scritture dele città e provincia di Torino in Paesi, Pianezza, mazzo 22, fasc. 7.
of said Lady Beatrice.” A few days later, Carlo Emanuele officially invested Beatrice with Pianezza using the requested wording, specifically indicating that Matilda would inherit the fief after Beatrice. He also elevated the fief into a marquisate in Beatrice’s favor, thereby making her marchesa of Pianezza and further solidifying her status at court.

**Beatrice Langosco’s New Family and the Dispute over Pianezza**

Two years after this investiture was made with specific reference to Matilda, Beatrice married her second husband, Francesco Martinengo. They eventually had six children, including three sons (Gherardo, Gaspare Antonio, and Michele Bartolomeo). The arrival of these legitimate children complicated the family dynamic between Beatrice and Matilda. The marquisate of Pianezza was a significant inheritance and Beatrice and her new husband wished to ensure that, after her death, it would pass to their sons rather than to Matilda. The following years witnessed a flurry of legal activity on the part of Beatrice to secure Pianezza for her Martinengo heirs. First, Beatrice changed her testament. Her original testament, drawn up in 1580 just after Duke Emanuele Filiberto died, provided that Matilda would inherit Pianezza. In 1584, Beatrice changed her testament to leave Pianezza to her husband, Francesco Martinengo.

A couple of months later, Beatrice made sure that this change was endorsed by the duke. In her petition to Carlo Emanuele, she explained that “when she had no other children but the Lady Matilda she had accepted the renewal of the investiture [of the fief of Pianezza] for herself and, after herself, for said Lady Matilda.” Her situation had changed, however, “having since been placed in marriage by the good will of His Highness [Duke Carlo Emanuele I], and having

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34 MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358. “…per lei e dopo lei per l’Illustrissima Signora Donna Amatilda sua figliuola, e descendenti da essa, e mancando senza descendenti, per gli heredi e successori di essa Dama Beatrice.”
36 August 29, 1584. Alice Raviola, “Langosco, Beatrice,” *DBI*. She changed her testament again on May 24, 1597 to specify that their oldest son, Gaspare Antonio, should inherit Pianezza.
37 MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358. See above for full quote.
had children from it, she petitions to have said investiture... declared... invalid and of no value.”

In other words, Beatrice petitioned the duke to restore the validity of the original 1578 investiture (which simply stated that the fief would go to Beatrice’s descendants “tanto femine, che maschi”) and to declare the 1581 investiture (which specifically named Matilda as Beatrice’s successor to Pianeza) to be null and void. Carlo Emanuele complied with Beatrice’s request, issuing a declaration “that the Marchesa of Pianezza [Beatrice] may freely dispose of the Marquisate of Pianezza despite the second investiture made by her in favor of her daughter Lady Matilda, with annulment of said investiture.”

In addition to the fief of Pianezza, Beatrice and Francesco wished to secure the rest of Beatrice’s assets for their legitimate sons over Matilda. Beatrice requested that Carlo Emanuele issue an additional declaration regarding the matter. The duke’s declaration, issued on May 13, 1586, stated that, having previously granted “to Matilda, daughter of Beatrice Langosca, lady of Pianeza, to be able to inherit the property of her mother, a widow at the time,” he now reversed that prior declaration, ordering that it “must be annulled upon supplication of said Beatrice, since the mother, who has married Count Francesco Martinengo, has had male children.”

The following year, Beatrice petitioned to have Matilda summoned before the Senate of Piedmont “to participate [intervenir] in the registration of the order and declaration” of 1586.
The archival records do not state why Beatrice wished to summon Matilda, who would have been about eight years old at the time, but she likely intended to have her daughter consent to the duke’s declaration and relinquish her rights to Pianezza before the Senate. Beatrice’s various petitions raise a number of questions about her relationships with both her daughter and her new family. Why was Beatrice working so hard to disinherit her daughter? Was she simply responding to pressure from her husband to secure their sons’ futures? Did she believe that, as the duke’s half-sister, Matilda’s future was ensured even without Pianezza? The duke’s response to Beatrice’s petition to have Matilda summoned before the Senate provides some interesting indications as to Beatrice’s reasoning:

Carlo Emanuel by the grace of God Duke of Savoy, Prince of Piedmont. The Illustrious Lady Beatrice Martinengo Langosco Marquise of Pianezza having petitioned us to permit her to have her daughter Lady Matilda summoned before our Senate of Piedmont to participate in the registration of our order and declaration of May 13, 1586. We, recalling that statement and since the nomination of said Lady and, after her, of said Matilda and her descendants in the marquisate of Pianezza...was made when she was a widow and said Lady Matilda her only child and that it was done at our request to obey us and please us but not by her own free will [non di libera sua volonta] and as the aforesaid things are true as we hereby attest that they are and [since] after that, said Lady with our good will was married to the Illustrious...Count Francesco Martinengo from which marriage she has children and as we do not wish that any...other legal formality be observed in said registration....We hereby declare that it was not our intention....to have prejudiced or altered the form and nature of the purchase agreement and first investiture of said Marquisate of Pianezza...We therefore annul said second Investiture... specifically with regard to said nomination of Lady Matilda and her descendants.... Done in Turin the 11th of February 158742

42 Feb. 11, 1587. Patenti, registro 19, 419v-420. “Carlo Emanuel per gra. di Dio Duca di Savoia Principe di Piemonte Havendone l’Ill.re Dama Beatrice Martinenga Langosca Marchesa di Pianezza supp.to che si contentassimo permettergli di far chiamar Dona Mattilda sua figliola avanti il Senato nostro di Piemonte per intervenir alla interinazione del ordine e dichiaratione n.ra fatta li tredeci di maggio M.D. ottanta sei Noi raccordendoli di essa dichiaratione et atteso che la nominatione fatta per detta Dama doppo se di essa Mattilda e descendenti da quella nel marchesato di Pianezza...fu in tempo che era vidova con detta dona Mattilda unica figliola et a nostro richiesta per obedirne et conpiacierne ma non di libera sua volunta et essendo le cose predette vere con cossi le attestiamo gionto che doppoi essa Dama con nostro bon voller ha contratto matrimonio con l’Ill.re cavagl.er del ordine e Gran scudier nostro il conte Francesco Martinengo del qual matrimonio ne ha figliolanza ne vollendo che si osservi ne attendi nella mentionata interinazione intimatione ne altra formalita giudiciale...Dichiariamo che no’ fu mente n.ra...di haver voluto pregiudicar ne alterar la forma e natura del contratto di accompra e prima investitura di detto Marchesato...Annulliamo perciò detta seconda investitura...e specialmente nella detta nominatione di Dona Mattilda e descendenti...Data in Torino li undeci di febraro M.D. ottanta sette....”
The above declaration, which confirmed Matilda’s disinheritance, provides crucial information about the dynamic between Beatrice and the duke in this matter. The duke stated that the specific “nomination” of Matilda in the investiture of 1581 “was made when she [Beatrice] was a widow” and that “it was done at our request to obey us and please us but not by her own free will.” This indicates that when Carlo Emanuele renewed his father’s investiture of Beatrice, it was he himself who prompted Beatrice to request the change in wording to secure the inheritance of Matilda. Beatrice explicitly made this claim herself a few years later, in 1592, when she submitted another petition to the duke in which she asserted that the specific nomination of Matilda in 1581 had been made “due to obedience, due to fear” [per obedire, per timore]. In that petition, Beatrice argued that she had been coerced into requesting a change in the original wording of the investiture by the duke. This argument depended on the well-established legal concept of “reverential fear,” or fear of authority. Invoking reverential fear (metus reverentialis) meant that Beatrice could not have given proper and full consent to the change in the investiture because she was intimidated by the duke, a person who was in a position of great authority over her, a person on whom she depended and whom she was expected to obey. Typically, relationships that could give rise to reverential fear were those between young people and their parents, between wives and husbands, servants and masters and, as in this case, subject and sovereign. Under canon law, consent to a contract could be invalidated on the grounds of duress when one party exerted compulsion sufficient to sway the will of a “constant man” (metus...

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43 MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358.
44 Early modern legal experts debated the conditions under which reverential fear could be considered sufficient to rescind an individual’s consent. See, for example, the cases of forced monachizations described in Anne Jacobson Schutte, By Force and Fear: Taking and Breaking Monastic Vows in Early Modern Europe (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2011), 130-158 and the discussion of the impact of reverential fear on marriage contracts in Wim Decock, Theologians and Contract Law: The Moral Transformation of the Ius Commune (ca. 1500-1650) (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 250-254.
cadens in virum constantem).\textsuperscript{45} Canonists debated the extent to which reverential fear was sufficient to meet this standard. In order to overturn a contract, was it sufficient for such fear to be caused by verbal abuse or did it need to be accompanied by physical violence? Did the “constant man” test apply differently to women, who could not be expected to display the fortitude of a man?\textsuperscript{46}

In his 1587 declaration, the duke admitted that Beatrice’s petition to change the wording of the investiture in 1581 “was done at our request to obey us and please us but not by her own free will.” There are two reasons why Carlo Emanuele may have pushed Beatrice to nominate Matilda specifically. First, there is ample evidence of the duke’s great affection for his half-sister, who was about fifteen years younger than him, throughout his reign.\textsuperscript{47} He protected and supported her on numerous occasions, incorporating her into his children’s household, granting her a palazzo in Turin, and supporting her in her later lawsuits. It is therefore not surprising that he took this opportunity to attempt to safeguard Matilda’s inheritance. It is also likely that, in changing the wording of the investiture to refer specifically to Matilda, the duke considered himself to be complying with his father’s intent in the original investiture. Emanuele Filiberto granted Beatrice the fief of Pianezza in order to provide for her and for their children. In 1581, Carlo Emanuele may well have foreseen the possibility that Beatrice would remarry and wanted to ensure that his father’s wish would be carried out and that Matilda would inherit Pianezza.

Given the duke’s dedication to protecting his half-sister, why was he so compliant with Beatrice’s continuous requests to disinherit her? A possible answer lies in Carlo Emanuele’s political position in the 1580s. He succeeded his father in August 1580 at the age of eighteen.

\textsuperscript{45} Decock, \textit{Theologians and Contract Law}, 240.
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 225-231.
\textsuperscript{47} See ch. 5 for more information on the relationship between Carlo Emanuel I and Lady Matilda.
Emanuele Filiberto, “the victor of St. Quentin, left behind a challenging legacy, especially in terms of prestige... Carlo Emanuele wished to demonstrate with his actions that he was capable of holding up to comparisons with his father, and even of surpassing him.” An intelligent and capable soldier, Carlo Emanuele abandoned his father’s prudent policy of seeking to maintain a balance between France and Spain, and adopted a more aggressive foreign policy. In the summer of 1582, he directed a failed attempt to take the city of Geneva, a Protestant stronghold that the duke would continually threaten throughout his reign. In 1588 he seized the marquisate of Saluzzo, which led to war with France.

Although a foreign noble from Brescia, Martinengo was clearly an important player at the court of Savoy, having been made a knight of the Order of SS. Annunziata by Carlo Emanuele’s father in 1576. Martinengo’s importance at court grew further during the 1580s, when he accompanied Carlo Emanuele to Spain for his marriage to infanta Catalina Micaela and served as the duke’s gran scudiere. The ambitious young duke was facing many challenges in his quest to surpass his father’s legacy, and likely decided to grant Beatrice’s requests in order to satisfy an important player at his court, knowing that he could take care of Matilda in the meantime and revisit the issue later.

A second motivation prompted Beatrice to disinherit her daughter. In later petitions, it became clear that the marriage between Beatrice and Francesco Martinengo had been conditional.

48 Emanuele Filiberto led the Spanish Habsburg troops to victory over the French at St. Quentin in 1557, a decisive moment in the Italian Wars
50 Carlo Emanuele threatened Geneva repeatedly during his fifty-year reign. Most notably, he engaged in a four-year war with the city from 1589 and 1593, and carried out a surprise attack on the city in December 1602 (the “Escalade” of Geneva).
52 March 25, 1576. Cigna Santi, 85.
upon Matilda’s exclusion from Beatrice’s inheritance. In that sense, Pianezza was likely seen by Martinengo as an additional part of Beatrice’s dowry which would be paid at Matilda’s expense. Despite the duke’s assent to Beatrice’s requests, Beatrice and her husband continued to be concerned with the inheritance of Pianezza. In 1592, when Matilda was about fourteen years old, Beatrice submitted a petition that provides additional evidence as to the family dynamic. In this petition, Beatrice argued that the duke had promised to have Matilda’s nomination in the investiture document annulled when Beatrice married Francesco, and that “without such promise the marriage would not have taken effect” because without the annulment, any legitimate children that the couple would have “would be defrauded from the succession.” Beatrice stressed that “the marriage was contracted by mediation and by order of the duke.” In response, the duke reconfirmed that Beatrice had the right “to freely dispose of the Marquisate of Pianezza, to sell it or alienate it to whomever she prefers.”

Carlo Emanuele’s statement reveals an additional reason for Beatrice and Francesco’s renewed concern over Pianezza: Matilda’s dowry. As she was now of an age to be married, the couple were worried that Matilda might attempt to claim the fief as part of her dowry. It is likely that Beatrice assumed that the duke, who had already taken Matilda under his protection, could provide for his half-sister’s dowry. Indeed, Carlo Emanuele addressed this concern directly, undertaking responsibility for providing Matilda with an appropriate dowry: “he [Carlo Emanuele] takes responsibility for her [Matilda’s] dowry...and...the dowry that he will give to Lady Matilda will be commensurate what she could have expected from the succession of said

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53 MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358, p. 7. “d’averne promesso l’annullazione quando si maritò, e che senza tal promessa il matrimonio non haverebbe havuto effetto, et atteso che...havendo massime figliuolanza legittima che restarebbe frodata dalla successione.”

54 Oct. 25, 1592. Patenti, registro 43, 185v-187. “...concediamo ad essa Marchesa di Pianezza di potere liberamente et come meglio gli parerà alienar et far contratto del detto Marchesato di Pianezza con tutte sue ragioni attioni et diritti.”
Marquisate in portion and payment.” Indeed, when Matilda married Carlo Simiana d’Albigny in 1607, Carlo Emanuele was quite generous, increasing her dowry from the 30,000 scudi that his father had established for her to 60,000 scudi “in demonstration of the affection that he has always had and continues to have for said Lady Matilda his sister.”

Pianezza and Primogeniture

It is unclear where Matilda was living after her mother’s marriage to Francesco, but at some point during the 1590s Matilda joined the household of Carlo Emanuele’s daughters. By the late 1590s, Matilda was settled securely with her Savoy relatives as a beloved member of the family. Around 1600, Carlo Emanuele made a gift to Matilda of a palazzo in Turin (see ch. 5), which he may have considered additional recompense for the substantial loss of her maternal inheritance. In the meantime, Beatrice’s influence at court had started to wane. Indeed, as Alice Raviola pointed out, Beatrice’s marginalization from court around 1598 became so complete that historians, noting her disappearance from the archival records around this time, mistakenly assumed that she died at that time (she actually died in 1612). This dramatic decline in favor coincided with her husband’s departure from Piedmont and from the duke’s service. Francesco Martinengo, “heavily accused of excessive sympathy towards France by the pro-Spanish faction of the court,” had left the Sabaudian military and entered the service of the Republic of Venice. Beatrice may have been contemplating abandoning her interests in Piedmont as well. In 1597, she attempted to sell the fief of Pianezza to a certain Battista Lazzeri of Milan. The sale of

55 MdR, mazzo 282, 1358, p. 7. Registered on October 27, 1592. “Nell’anno 1592 alli 25 di Ottobre S.A. fa altra più ampia dechiaratione... e promette far ratificar e renonciar la Signora Donna Amatilda, la cui dotatione prende sopra di se... e che la dote, che si darà a Dama Amatilda, sia per la portione, e pagamento di quanto li potesse spettare per la succession di detto Marchesato....”
56 February 26, 1607. ASTC, Matrimoni Real Casa, mazzo 25, fasc. 2, sottofasc. 2.2. “...per dimostratione dell’affettione che sempre ha portato, et porta a detta Sig.ra Donna Matilda sua sorella....”
57 See chapter 5, in which Matilda’s correspondence is analyzed.
58 Alice Raviola, “Langosco, Beatrice,” DBI.
59 Ibid.
Pianezza did not go through, however, because it became tangled up in a lawsuit and Lazzeri died before the situation could be resolved. The fief was returned to Beatrice, which required a renewal of her investiture. This time, Beatrice asked the duke to make an additional change to her investiture and “establish primogeniture in Pianezza.” Once again, the duke accommodated Beatrice’s request, investing her with the fief with the right of primogeniture, to be passed down to her son Gaspare Antonio Martinengo “and subsequently to his sons under primogeniture...and in the event that said Gaspar Antonio has no sons, to Caterina Martinenga, the firstborn child of the Marchesa.”

By resorting to primogeniture to secure the inheritance of Pianezza, Beatrice would seem to fit within the increased emphasis on family lineage, unity and prestige identified by David Sabean and Simon Teuscher during this time period. Beatrice Langosco and Francesco Martinengo identified primogeniture as a long-term strategy that would enhance the family fortunes. By 1597, Beatrice’s petitions had secured Pianezza for the Martinengo lineage, but with an important provision regarding their daughter, Caterina. If Beatrice’s sons predeceased her, the fief would go to her oldest child with Francesco, Caterina, who was charged with “the duty of bearing the name and arms of Langosco, and to provide sufficient dowries for her sisters from the income without diminishing the Marquisate.” This investiture ensured that the fief would stay within the Martinengo family after Beatrice’s death. The requirement to bear the Langosco name, however, shows that Beatrice continued to see her natal family as integral to her identity.

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60 Records of the suit are found in MdR, mazzo 281, fasc. 1354.
62 May 24, 1597. Patenti, registro 25, 75-77. “investiamo la suddetta Dama Beatrice...et doppo lei per Gaspare Antonio Martinengo...et successiva.te per li figli primogeniti maschi...et mancando tutti li figli di detto Gaspar Antonio senza filiolanza masculis per Caterina Martinenga primogenita di d.a marchesa.”
63 Sabean and Teuscher, “Kinship in Europe,” 1-32.
64 MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358, p. 8. “...con il carico di portar il cognomen et arma Langosca, e di dotar le sorelle competentemente dello rediti senza diminui il Marchesato....”
Indeed, the struggle regarding her identity and loyalty centered not only on the tension between her children’s two lineages (Savoy versus Martinengo), but also included her own family of origin.

**Beatrice Langosco and the Question of Family Loyalty**

Beatrice’s strategy to enhance the Martinengo and Langosco lineages (in the event that Caterina inherited Pianezza) meant that, during her childhood, Matilda was excluded from inheriting Pianezza in favor of her legitimate half-siblings. Without knowing Beatrice’s personal thoughts on her treatment of Matilda, her reasoning must be inferred from her actions. In the conflict between Matilda’s inheritance rights and the Martinengo patrilineage, Beatrice firmly aligned herself with her marital house. In her pioneering essay, “The Cruel Mother,” Christiane Klapisch-Zuber studied the family memoirs of Renaissance Florence to draw conclusions about women’s roles in the early modern house or *casa*. She concluded that “houses were made by men” and that “women were passing guests in these *case*, in both the material and the symbolic sense of the word *casa***.” Marriage, widowhood, and remarriage meant that women transitioned from house to house throughout their lives. When they married, they left their natal house and entered their husband’s house. When he died, they remarried and moved on to another house.

As they transitioned from one household to another, Klapisch-Zuber’s Florentine sources painted a picture of two types of women. First were the “obedient” daughters who complied with the marriage strategies of their fathers and brothers who wanted to reclaim their dowries in order to make alliances with another lineage. Such “obedient” women became “cruel” mothers, accepting separation from their children, who remained with their deceased husband’s family in

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order to leave with their dowries and make new marriages. The dowry, although under the husband’s temporary control during marriage, remained the wife’s property. When her husband died, therefore, the woman could reclaim her dowry and use it to make another marriage to benefit her natal family. Florentine family memoirs distinguished between such “cruel” mothers and “good” mothers who did not recover their dowries. Instead, such mothers refrained from remarriage, remaining loyal to their dead husband’s lineage and to their children.

Since it was published in English in 1985, Klapisch-Zuber’s portrayal of the “cruel” mother has sparked conversation among scholars of early modern Italy. Although not married to the duke, Beatrice Langosco faced a dilemma that was similar to that of the early modern widow/mother. When Emanuele Filiberto died, Beatrice seized the opportunity to enter into a marriage with a respected nobleman at court and to have a family of legitimate children. Her later petitions made it clear that Carlo Emanuele engineered the match (or, at the very least, fully approved of it) and that the marriage would never have taken place without her commitment to Francesco Martinengo that she would secure the inheritance of Pianezza for their children. In this way, Beatrice could be seen as one of Klapisch-Zuber’s “cruel” mothers, leaving her child behind and taking all of her financial resources with her in order to start a new family.

Beatrice’s situation, however, differs from the cases considered by Klapisch-Zuber and complicates her argument in a number of ways. First, the father of Beatrice’s first children was a sovereign prince and, as they were not married, their children were bastards. Her marriage to Martinengo resulted in legitimate children, but children who could not boast kinship with the duke of Savoy. In addition, the language in the last investiture of Pianezza, which included the requirement that Carterina Martinengo take up the Langosco name and arms indicates, as stated

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66 See, for example, the forum organized in “Quaderni storici” in 1989 (vol. 24, no. 71) to discuss Klapisch-Zuber’s book “La famiglia e le donne nel Rinascimento a Firenze,” which had been published in Italy the year before.
above, that Beatrice remained attached to her natal family despite many years of marriage with Francesco Martinengo.

Throughout the myriad petitions and investiture documents, one wonders how Beatrice thought about her children. Did Matilda perhaps represent a relationship that had been forced upon Beatrice and that she saw as hindering her future prospects after Emanuele Filiberto died? Did she, for that reason, resent Matilda and feel more devoted to her Martinengo children? Or was she simply constrained by the unusual situation in which she found herself after Emanuele Filiberto died? While women often had children from different fathers as they moved from one marriage to another, Beatrice’s situation was complicated by the fact that Matilda was not only illegitimate but a half-sister of the duke. Matilda’s status as a bastard of the House of Savoy created problems for Beatrice that would not have existed had her daughter been the product of a legitimate marriage with a nobleman. Indeed, this situation created a great amount of tension for Beatrice in how to handle her two sets of children. The number and frequency of Beatrice’s petitions to the duke is evidence of her preoccupation with this unusual situation and the pressure she likely felt from her husband to resolve it in favor of the Martinengo family. The fact that her marriage was conditional upon Matilda’s disinheritance demonstrates Beatrice’s lack of choice and flexibility in this matter. Her last action with regard to her children’s inheritance was the 1597 specification that her daughter Caterina would “bear the name and arms of Langosco” should she inherit. Made fourteen years into her marriage, this condition may have been Beatrice’s attempt to impact her children’s inheritance in a way that reasserted her own family identity after years of conflict over Matilda’s inheritance.
Historians have argued that the role of early modern aristocratic women as mothers was overshadowed by their role as wives. When women married, their husbands expected them to fulfil their obligations to their marital house first. Their duties as mothers were secondary. As Gabriella Erdélyi put it in her study of widows in seventeenth-century Hungary, “female identity...was more decisively shaped by the social bond created through marriages than the blood tie of maternity.” Beatrice Langosco’s duty to Matilda was overshadowed by the requirements of her new position in the Martinengo family. Was she, however, a “cruel” mother? Although her abandonment of Matilda to the protection of the duke seems cruel, she must also have known that Carlo Emanuele would see to his half-sister’s interests. When Beatrice married, Matilda transitioned into the household of the duke’s children, where she remained until adulthood. The duke provided her with a large dowry and arranged a prestigious marriage for her. Given Carlo Emanuele’s support for Beatrice’s marriage to Francesco Martinengo and his ongoing acquiescence to their petitions over the years, it seems that the duke had agreed to give Pianezza to the Martinengo and incorporate Matilda into his own family and to provide for her.

A final postscript to Beatrice’s struggle to obtain control over Pianezza for her legitimate children occurred when Beatrice died. As she had feared, as soon as her mother died Matilda filed a suit against the Martinengo family in order to obtain the fief. In response to Matilda’s action, Carlo Emanuele changed his stance on Pianezza again. After years of complying with Beatrice’s requests, the duke confirmed the 1581 investiture which specifically named Matilda as Beatrice’s successor to Pianezza, revoking all of the subsequent contrary declarations that he had made at

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Beatrice’s request. In setting out his reasoning for reversing his many prior declarations, the duke stated that Beatrice’s petitions were made “at the suggestion of the Marchese, her [Beatrice’s] husband” and that the claim that Beatrice had acted under reverential fear “was a false pretext.”

This underscores the likelihood that, as discussed above, Carlo Emanuele complied with Beatrice’s positions at the time in order to placate Francesco Martinengo in the moment and reconsider the matter at a later date. The next chapter will analyze the second part of the struggle for Pianezza between Matilda and her legitimate half-brothers.

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69 June 28, 1614. Patenti, registro 32, 159-160. “…pare doppo fu maridata la d.a Dama Beatrice Langosco col Conte Francesco Martinengo all’hora gran scudiere di V.A. ad importunità e soggestione d’esso si siano fatte diverse dichara.ni deroganti et annulanti la seconda Investitura e totalmente escludente d.a Donna Matilda, essa però esistente in pupillar etè et non mai sentita ne chiamata sotto non vero preteso ch’essa fu marchesa per timor reverentiale fosse indotta a prender Investitura simile il che non è vero perché la procura da lei fatta a renovar l’investitura fu spontanea…”
**Figure 4. Timeline of Events, Requests, and Claims Regarding the Fief of Pianezza, 1578-1614**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 6, 1578</td>
<td>Duke Emanuele Filiberto sells the fief of Pianezza to Beatrice Langosco “per lei, e suoi discendenti tanto femine, che maschi”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 20, 1578</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco is formally invested with the fief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 30, 1580</td>
<td>Duke Emanuele Filiberto dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 11, 1581</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco petitions Carlo Emanuele I to have the original wording of the investiture altered to refer specifically to Matilda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 15, 1581</td>
<td>Carlo Emanuele I invests Beatrice Langosco with Pianezza using the altered wording and elevates the fief to a marquisate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1583</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco marries Francesco Martinengo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 29, 1584</td>
<td>Beatrice changes her testament to leave Pianezza to her husband, Francesco Martinengo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 22, 1584</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco petitions the duke to annul the previous investiture referring specifically to Matilda and to restore the validity of the original 1578 investiture (with the “tanto femine, che maschi” wording)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 29, 1585</td>
<td>Carlo Emanuele I annuls the second investiture and restores the validity of the initial investiture, specifying that Beatrice Langosco “potrà disporre liberamente del Marchesato di Pianezza”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 13, 1586</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco claims that the specification of Matilda in the 1581 investiture had been the duke’s idea and that she complied to please him and because she had no other children at the time. The duke again confirms that the second investiture is null and void.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 11, 1587</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco expresses her intent to summon Matilda before the Senate to participate in the registration of the duke’s order of May 13, 1586. Carlo Emanuele I states that no more formalities are needed and confirms that the second investiture is annulled.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 25, 1592</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco argues that her marriage to Martinengo was conditional upon her promise to have Matilda’s nomination in the investiture annulled. The duke reconfirms that Beatrice may sell the fief as she sees fit and undertakes to be responsible for Matilda’s dowry, which will be commensurate with what she could have expected from Pianezza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 24, 1597</td>
<td>The sale of Pianezza from Beatrice Langosco to Battista Lazzeri falls through and the duke re-invests her with the fief. The investiture specifies that the fief will pass to Beatrice’s son, Gaspar Antonio Martinengo under primogeniture. Beatrice changes her testament to reflect this, adding language that, should her daughter inherit, that Caterina will “bear the name and arms of Langosco.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1612</td>
<td>Beatrice Langosco dies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1614</td>
<td>Matilda presents her claim to Pianezza before the Senate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 28, 1614</td>
<td>Carlo Emanuele I confirms the 1581 investiture, revoking all contrary declarations as they were based on petitions with wording that was “untrue” and made “at the suggestion of the Marquis, her [Beatrice’s] husband”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 5. The Langosco and Simiana di Pianezza Family Tree

Giovanni Tommaso Langosco di Stroppiana (d. 1575) m. Delia Roero di San Severino

Duke Emanuele Filiberto + **Beatrice Langosco** (d. 1612) m. (1) Gianfrancesco Scarampi di Cortemiglia
                      (2) Francesco Martinengo di Malpaga – See below

**Matilde di Savoia** m. (1607) Carlo Simiana d’Albigny

  Carlo Emanuele Filiberto Giacinto (d. 1677) m. (1630) Giovanna Arborio di Gattinara

    Carlo Giambattista (1634-1706)\(^1\) m. (1) (1659) Giovanna Maria Grimaldi di Monaco (d. 1694)
              (2) (1695) Anna Cristina Isnardi di Caraglio (1669-1724)

          (1) Maria Irene Delfina (1670-1725) m. (1691) Michele Imperiali (1673-1738)  (2) Delfina (1700-1775) m. Carlo Solaro del Borgo

                      Andrea Imperiali (1697-1734) m. Anna Caracciolo
                      Giuseppe Vincenzo Gaudenzio Solaro
                      Michele Imperiali (1719-1782)

\(^1\) Until his father died in 1677, Carlo was known as the marchese di Livorno (near Vercelli). See his connection with the Bobba family in chapter 6.
Figure 6. The Martinengo Family Tree

Bartolomeo Martinengo m. Paola da Ponte

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Francesco Martinengo (1548-1621) m. (1583) Beatrice Langosco, widow (d. 1612)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Caterina Gaspare (d. 1625) Gherardo (1601-1643) m. Flavia Bonelli Delia, nun Paola, nun Michele Bartolomeo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaspare Giacinto (1641-1698) m. Chiara Camilla Porcellaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pietro Emanuele (1687-1756) m. (1695) Ludovica Gambara Cecilia m. Venceslao Martinengo (1642-1712)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marianna (1704-1758) m. Luigi Martinengo (1694-1764)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venceslao Martinengo (1731-1813) m. Caterina Martinengo (1738-1807)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 5. The Inheritance of a Bastard Princess: Donna Matilda and the Fief of Pianezza, 1577-1639

Among all of the anguish I have suffered, which has not been small...the greatest has always been to see myself deprived, not only of your presence but of your favor...but now that it has pleased God in his goodness and Your Highness in your kindness to give me a sign not only of the restitution of your favor, but to grant me such mercy...for my matters and those of my son, regarding the possession and investiture of Pianezza...I humbly beseech you...to deign with your authority to settle the matter of Pianezza...with which...I can pay off my debts and support myself in that state that it has pleased God to give me in this world.

June 26, 1614, Matilda of Savoy to her half-brother, Duke Carlo Emanuele I

Introduction

This chapter is a case study of the inheritance lawsuits of an illegitimate daughter of the duke of Savoy, Matilda of Savoy (1577/78-1639), known as “Donna” (Lady) Matilda to her contemporaries. Matilda’s correspondence and the records of her lawsuits provide an opportunity to study the relationship between an illegitimate woman and her legitimate half-siblings from both her father and her mother’s marriages. When her mother died, Matilda became involved in a legal dispute against her mother’s legitimate sons over their respective claims to inherit the fief of Pianezza, which Matilda’s father had granted to her mother. Although illegitimate, Matilda had much in her favor. On the one hand, she was the daughter of the duke of Savoy. She was recognized and legitimized by her father, Duke Emanuele Filiberto. She had a close relationship with the Savoy family throughout her life, particularly her half-brother Carlo Emanuele I, and could generally depend on her princely half-siblings and their children to support her when needed. On the other hand, her legal opponents were respected noblemen born from her mother Beatrice Langosco’s lawful marriage to Francesco Martinengo. Matilda and her half-brothers

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1 Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, June 26, 1614. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Fra tutti i travagli da me sofferti che non sono de minori...il maggiore fu però sempre di vedermi priva, non solo della presenza ma della gratia sua...ma hora ch’ha piaciuto alla bonta d’Ildio et benignita di Vostra Altezza di darmi segno non solo della restituzione nella gratia sua, ma di favorimi di tanta mercedi...per le cose mie et di mio figlio, del possesso, et investitura di Pianezza...la supplico humilmente...degnarsi con l’autorita sua stabilire le cose di Pianezza...con quale...posso sodisfare i debiti et mantenermi in quel stato che piacque a Dio produrmi in questo mondo.”
fought fiercely over their mother’s property, each side petitioning Carlo Emanuele I to intervene in the case in their favor, drawing on all of the legal and extra-legal means at their disposal to secure their inheritance.

Ultimately, Matilda’s efforts were unsuccessful. While Carlo Emanuele was generous with his half-sister (granting her pensions and other properties to support her), this chapter argues that the duke could not fully bring Matilda in as a client for the dynasty due to Beatrice’s actions (described in chapter 4) and due to the Senate’s preference for male primogeniture. Indeed, although Carlo Emanuele put pressure on the Senate to find in Matilda’s favor, his support did not achieve the desired outcome. The example of Carlo Emanuele and Matilda demonstrates that while the ruler might exert pressure on the law courts to reach the outcome he favored, the senators could and did resist when they disagreed with the duke. In this case, the final sentence issued during Matilda’s lifetime regarding the fief of Pianezza came a few years after Carlo Emanuele’s death. Despite his clear support of Matilda’s claim, the Senate supported her half-brothers and their claim to Pianezza via primogeniture.

Early modern inheritance practices were complicated by the presence of illegitimate children like Matilda, who could be denied the right to inherit unless they were legitimimized; even then, their rights might be challenged by legitimate family members. There were a number of reasons why a father might wish to have illegitimate offspring legitimimized. He might have no legitimate children at all or his legitimate children might all be female. A family could also manipulate illegitimacy and legitimation to achieve a long-term goals. For elite families in

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2 See Jane Fair Bestor, “Bastardy and Legitimacy in the Formation of a Regional State in Italy: The Estense Succession,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 38, 3 (1996): 549-585. Bestor describes how, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the house of Este successfully combined strategies involving bastardy, legitimation and seniority of age among children to further their family practice of serial fraternal lordship, in which brothers succeeded each other. Obizzo III d’Este even delayed marrying his mistress until she was on her death bed so that all of his sons would be illegitimate and none could claim superior status over the others by legitimate birth
particular, bastards could be highly valuable tools to the lineage. As noted by Robert Oresko, from the mid-sixteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century, the House of Savoy systematically appointed its male bastards to positions of major responsibility within the state (e.g. as ambassadors, governors, and military commanders), while its illegitimate daughters were used to make marriages that furthered the dynasty’s long-term strategies.³ Both Matilda’s father and her half-brother, Carlo Emanuele I, recognized that as an illegitimate daughter Matilda could play an important role for the dynasty, making a strategic marriage to a client of the House of Savoy that would have been inappropriate for a legitimate daughter, who could hope for a more exalted match.

Matilda’s fight for Pianezza also demonstrates the importance of viewing inheritance strategies as long-term activities. While the actions of Matilda and her legal adversaries might seem at first to be merely self-serving, each side was acting as part of a larger strategy to benefit their lineage as a whole. Thomas Kuehn’s study of repudiated inheritances in Florence makes a convincing case for considering inheritance maneuvers as lengthy processes that continued for years, even decades.⁴ He argued that inheritance maneuvers that might seem to be assertions of individualism could be part of a larger family strategy when viewed long-term. He showed that individuals might repudiate their inheritance as one of many tools that Florentine families used in a coordinated manner to consolidate and preserve their wealth. Through repudiation, an heir could shift property around, placing it where it was most needed to serve larger family interests. For example, an inheritance could be repudiated in order to provide a dowry for a female family member whose marriage would enhance the standing of the kinship group as a whole. Family

³ Oresko, “Bastards as Clients.”
members joined together to exploit inheritance rules, with individual members finding it advantageous to work toward a common goal, as they would benefit (even if only indirectly) from the wealth and status of their extended family. Matilda saw her mother’s inheritance as the key to enhancing her son’s standing and rehabilitating the reputation of their lineage after the execution of Matilda’s husband, Carlo Simiana d’Albigny (c. 1570-1608). Above all, Matilda’s correspondence reveals her preoccupation with passing her mother’s inheritance on to her son in order to increase his standing at the court of Savoy. A young widow, Matilda spent most of her adulthood pursuing this goal. Her descendants likewise recognized the importance of continuing to pursue Matilda’s claims. Generation after generation, they submitted petitions and summoned the descendants of Matilda’s half-brothers to court well into the eighteenth century.

Matilda of Savoy’s Family and Early Life

Matilda of Savoy was the illegitimate daughter of Duke Emanuele Filiberto and a noble widow, Beatrice Langosco (d. 1612). There are very few traces of Matilda during the first twenty years of her life. The numerous petitions submitted to Carlo Emanuele I by Matilda’s mother Beatrice regarding Matilda’s inheritance, described in chapter 4, are the only sources pertaining to her early life and they do not reveal much. As stated in chapter 4, it is unclear where Matilda was living when her mother married Francesco Martinengo in 1583. By her early twenties, however, she was living in a “palacio” (as she referred to it) or “palazzo” in Turin that had been provided to her by Carlo Emanuele.\(^5\) A few years later, the duke officially transferred the

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property to Matilda as an irrevocable gift. She also spent much time at court with the duke’s family, serving in the household of Carlo Emanuele’s children, her half-nieces and nephews. After the flurry of Beatrice’s petitions during Matilda’s childhood, most of the information available about Matilda’s adult life comes from records of her lawsuits, which will be discussed below, as well as her personal correspondence. The archives contain a wealth of letters written by Matilda, revealing her thoughts, her worries, and her ambitions in her own voice. Forty-one letters written by Matilda to her relatives have survived for the years between 1597 and 1638. Most are addressed to her half-brother, Carlo Emanuele I, with some addressed to his son, Vittorio Amedeo I and to his son’s consort, Marie Christine of France. The letters show that Matilda enjoyed a close relationship with her father’s family, particularly with Carlo Emanuele. Her first surviving letter was sent to the duke in 1597, when Matilda was about nineteen years old, just weeks after the death of Carlo Emanuele’s beloved wife, Catalina Micaela (1567-1597), daughter of Philip II. The letter reveals that Matilda was a member of the household of the duke’s daughters, who ranged in age from two to eight years old. In the letter, Matilda reassured her half-brother, who was away from Turin when Catalina Micaela died, that although the loss of

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7 Matilda’s letters to the dukes are found in the Archivio di Stato di Torino in the “Lettere Principi naturali” (Lettere PN) collection, which contains the correspondence of the illegitimate sons and daughters of the House of Savoy.

8 Carlo Emanuele I’s daughters were Margherita (1589-1655), Isabella (1591-1626), Maria Apollonia (1594-1656), and Francesca Caterina (1595-1640). It was something of a tradition for illegitimate daughters of the house to serve in the household of the duke’s daughters. Years later, Duchess Marie Christine wrote to her brother-in-law, Don Felice, from Turin, “J’envoye la Donna Marguerite de Savoie [illegitimate daughter of Carlo Emanuele I and Margherita di Rossiglione] auprès de ma fille: vous aurez soin qu’elle soit traitée comme était Donna Mathilde auprès des infantes.” Marie Christine to Don Felice, May 1, 1639, cited in Claretta, Storia della reggenza di Cristine di Francia, Duchessa di Savoia, con annotazioni e documenti inediti. Documenti (Turin: Stabilimento Civelli, 1869), 130.
the duchess “has made this house a valley of tears” Matilda was staying close to his daughters: “the princesses are well, I take care to serve them as I should” [le principese estano bene, yo cura di servirle como devo]. Matilda prayed to God to console her brother during this time of “such grave loss.” Catalina Micaela’s influence at court and on Matilda was strong. In this letter, as in others written around this time, Matilda switched between Italian and Spanish, with one letter written exclusively in Spanish.

**Matilda’s Marriage and Widowhood**

There is no surviving correspondence by Matilda between 1602 and late 1608, so there is no direct testimony of her reaction to the major events that took place in her life during that time, namely her short-lived marriage to the French noble Carlo Simiana d’Albigny (c. 1570-1608). Matilda and Simiana were married in Turin on February 26, 1607. Simiana, an ambitious noble from Provence, had made a name for himself during the French Wars of Religion as a devout Catholic who championed the Catholic League and refused to entertain any compromise with the Huguenots. As such, he entered the service of the Catholic Carlo Emanuele I rather than serve his own king, Henry IV, the Huguenot leader who converted to Catholicism in 1593. In 1602, Simiana led Carlo Emanuele’s ill-fated Escalade, the duke’s disastrous attempt to conquer the Protestant city-state of Geneva. Defeated by the town militia, Simiana was forced to order his 2,000 troops to retreat. Despite this catastrophe, the duke named Simiana a knight of the chivalric Order of the SS. Annunziata. This great honor was conferred on Simiana at the same

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9 Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, December 26, 1597. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Dio guardi di V.A. e dio ha consolazione che sera necessaria a tanta grave perdia...le principese estano bene yo cura di servirle como devo...e fata questa casa un vale di lacrime dio lo consoli tutto e guardi la ser.ma persona di V.A.....”
ceremony that the knighthood was granted to the duke’s sons, Filippo Emanuele, the prince of Piedmont, and Vittorio Amedeo, the future duke of Savoy.\textsuperscript{12} In 1605, the duke invested Simiana with the fiefs of Roato and Maretto (east of Turin, near Asti), and elevated them into marquisates to increase Simiana’s prestige “in consideration of the service rendered by him and by his family in time of war.”\textsuperscript{13}

The honors given to Simiana culminated in his appointment as the governor of the duke’s duchy of Savoie across the Alps, and his selection as husband to the duke’s half-sister, Matilda. A 1605 codicil to Carlo Emanuele’s testament, explaining his appointment of Simiana as governor, reveals that the duke had decided on the marriage a couple of years before it took place: “As for the government of Savoie, one cannot do better than the person of Monsignor d’Albignì [Simiana], since he is both a soldier of experience and valor and of great quality and, certainly, accompanied by Lady Matilda those States beyond the mountains can only be quite comforted and the Prince quite tranquil.”\textsuperscript{14} The duke held both Simiana and Matilda in high regard and, by arranging their marriage to each other, Carlo Emanuele considered that he was also forging a capable political partnership that he could trust to govern Savoie, a strategically important duchy that bordered the kingdom of France.

The couple’s wedding was marked by several days of celebrations in Turin, a further indication of Carlo Emanuele’s esteem of both bride and groom. Pietro Contarini, Venetian ambassador to the court of Savoy, reported to the Doge on February 28, 1607: “I return from Court, where there have been tourneys all through the night to celebrate the wedding of signora Lady Matilda, as the signor Duke wished to honor me not only by having me present at said

\begin{footnotes}
\item[13] June 20, 1605. ASTR, Patenti camerali (art. 687, par. 1), 1605-1607, 28, 381-382V.
\end{footnotes}
wedding but also at the dinner and at the jousting of His Highness with the Princes...and with many other knights.”  

The newlywed couple left Turin a month later so that Simiana could resume his duties as governor of Savoie. Contarini reported that the duke travelled to the royal palace at Rivoli, just west of the city, “to say farewell to signora Lady Matilda, who is about to depart very soon with Monsù d’Albegni for Savoie.”

Just short of a year later, a dramatic series of events took place that ended Matilda’s brief marriage. In January 1608, Simiana suddenly fell out of favor with Carlo Emanuele. The duke was disillusioned with the alliance he had solidified with Spain via his marriage with Catalina Micaela, who had died in 1597. For several years, he had been considering the possibility of drawing closer to France. He began negotiating with Henry IV, an alliance which would be solidified in the Treaty of Bruzolo in 1610. Nineteenth-century historian Domenico Carutti described Simiana’s reaction to the duke’s shift in policy: “fiercely opposed to Henry IV, very bitter towards the Huguenots...and completely devoted to Spain...he carried out private correspondence with Philip III.” In addition to possible secret negotiations with the king of Spain, Simiana may even have been planning to cede the duke’s strategic Alpine fortress of Montmelian to the Spanish. It is unclear how the duke became aware of Simiana’s illicit correspondence with the king of Spain. Another nineteenth-century historian, Ercole Ricotti, posited that “perhaps some intercepted letter aggravated or confirmed certain doubts” but Ricotti

15 Pietro Contarini to the Doge, February 28, 1607. Quoted in Carlo Pio de Magistris, Carlo Emanuele I e la contesa fra la repubblica veneta e Paolo V (1605-1607), Documenti (Venice: Visentini, 1906), 342-344. “Io ritorno da Corte, dove tutta questa notte si è torneto per l’occasione delle nozze della Sig.ra Donna Matilda, havendomi il Sig.r Duca voluto honorare non solo con farmi assistere ad esse nozze, ma anco alla cena ed all’abbattimento fatto da S.Alt. con li Principi...et con molti altri cavagliere.”
16 Pietro Contarini to the Doge, March 30, 1607. Quoted in De Magistris, Carlo Emanuele I, 463. “...per dar il buon viaggio alla Sig.ra Donna Matilda, che sta per partire di hora in hora con Monsù d’Albegni verso Savoia.”
17 For example, Carlo Emanuele showed more interest in Italian alliances, as seen in the 1608 marriages of his daughters Margherita and Isabella with the Gonzaga and Este families.
18 Carutti, Storia della diplomazia vol. 2.
19 Ricotti, Storia della monarchia vol. 3, 382.
also thought it possible that Simiana was not guilty of treason but was simply a scapegoat offered up by the duke to Henry IV: “perhaps he thought it necessary to get rid of a fractious man whose loyalty was not assured at all and, with his death, to give the king of France a pledge of his faith.”

More recently, in his biography of Carlo Emanuele, Stéphane Gal placed Simiana’s fall from grace within the context of a greater plan by the duke to send a warning to any courtiers who might challenge his decision to shift his allegiance from Spain to France: “The duke had been preparing his entourage by various measures signaling the gradual change of direction. The most spectacular of these was probably the execution of his brother-in-law...Charles de Simiane d’Albigny...for high treason.” Simiana’s sudden fall from grace in January 1608 shocked the duke’s courtiers, as he had been one of the duke’s most trusted advisors for many years. Gal characterized the failed Escalade as a turning point for Simiana, so that he lived “in a kind of obsession with his failure against the city of Geneva in 1602,” continuously warning the duke “against the deceptive practices of France” which he believed would soon take over the city. Gal pointed out that the friendship between the two men was based on Simiana’s military competence, which the duke valued, and their shared desire to conquer the Protestant city one day. The duke’s change in attitude towards France fundamentally changed all of that, particularly because, “as a French renegade, [Simiana] was hated by Henry IV and his mere presence alongside the duke could hinder the understanding between the two sovereigns.” Simiana had become an embarrassment to Carlo Emanuele and he began watching his advisor closely, soon discovering, to his great dismay, that Simiana had taken up a direct correspondence with Pedro

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20 Ricotti, Storia della monarchia vol. 3, 381.
21 Gal, Charles-Emmanuel, 387.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid.
Henrique de Acevedo, count of Fuentès, governor of the Spanish Duchy of Milan. According to Gal, the duke was finally prompted to take action when Simiana, in agreement with the Spanish, raised troops and fortified the mountain stronghold of Montmèlian under the pretext of protecting it from the French.

Simiana’s actions were in direct contravention of the duke’s orders to him and, as a result, the duke turned on the man he had implicitly trusted less than a year before. Simiana was called back to Turin from Chambèry, the capital of Savoie and, after a brief meeting with the duke, he was conveyed to the castle of Moncalieri, just outside Turin. He was executed there on the night of January 17, 1608. Simiana’s immediate arrest and execution without any hearing or trial was “striking in its rapidity and described as a thunderbolt from Jupiter.”24 Gal concluded that the duke was very purposefully using Simiana as an example for the rest of his court. Carlo Emanuele’s actions were “those of a prince who did not wish to entertain a debate on the advisability of a rupture with Spain.”25 Indeed, by taking such decisive action against one of his closest advisors as well as his brother-in-law, the duke “demonstrated to his courtiers that his position was unshakable and that he would not accept any complacency with regard to Spain.”26

The only historian to address Matilda’s fate during these events was Ricotti, who reported that upon his death, Simiana’s family was imprisoned and Matilda was sent to a convent.27 Unfortunately, Ricotti did not provide any further details and, as there is no surviving correspondence from Matilda during this period, it is impossible to ascertain her reaction to her husband’s fall from favor or to discover her precise whereabouts. Her next letter to the duke was written on November 29, 1608, months after her husband’s execution. From that point in late

24 Ibid., 388.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
1608 through 1611, Matilda either signed her letters “from Arignano,” a small town 9 miles east of Turin, or specified no location at all. Her correspondence from Arignano shows that her life had changed after her husband’s execution. She was no longer residing at court with the ducal family or at her palazzo in Turin. It is uncertain where she was living in Arignano. As Ricotti suggested, she may have been living in a convent, but there is not enough information from her letters to be certain, nor could I discover whether there was indeed a convent in Arignano during the early seventeenth century.

Matilda’s first letter to Carlo Emanuele from Arignano is the first of many in which she lamented her reduced circumstances. It described a dispute she was having with a servant who had left her service and was threatening her with legal action: “my servant Caterina has been plaguing me for some months demanding that I give her 200 ducatoni which I put aside for her dowry since leaving the palazzo.” The “palazzo” is likely the one that the duke had gifted her in Turin, which she left when she married Simiana and moved to Chambéry the year before. Since Caterina left Matilda’s service “at her whim without my knowing or consenting,” Matilda considered herself absolved of the obligation to pay Caterina’s dowry. Caterina returned, however, demanding the money and Matilda, so that Caterina “would not go bothering Your Highness” promised to pay her the interest on the 200 ducatoni “as I could not pay her the principal, on the condition that she would live in the fear of God, at her home, without wandering here and there.” As recounted by Matilda, this “kind offer” was met with “very arrogant words,

[28] Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, November 29, 1608. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Sono alcuni mesi che Caterina mia serva mi tormenta a cio gli dia 200 ducatoni quali sin nel’usir di palazzo gli mesi da banda, per sua dote...hor essendosi mandata a sua voglia sensa mia saputa ne consenso io restavo asolta...di dargli un soldo avendola sodisfata abastanza di cio meritava la sua servitu, con tutto cio per che non andase a inportunar V.A. gli fece esibir l’interese di deti 200 non potendo dargli il principale, con conditione cha atendese a viver nel timor di dio, a casa sua, senza andar vagando o qua o la, ma non solo a voluto acetar la mia cortese oferta ma a usato meco termini arogantis.i sin a dire che mi torbre al giuramento, ch’io gli avea promesso 300.”
even saying that she would swear an oath that I had promised her 300” rather than the original 200 agreed on.

In addition to being abandoned by her servant, Matilda also found herself in need of money. Some of her letters contain either pleas to the duke for aid or thanks to him for sending her funds. In August 1611, Matilda wrote to Carlo Emanuele to thank him for sending her 2,000 scudi, which “helped this poor widow” when “I was reduced to extreme necessity.” Just a few days later, however, Matilda wrote again, referring to a lawsuit she had pending against a certain Antonio Pobbo, and asking the duke to see that a judgment be issued against her legal adversary. Although she did not provide details of the lawsuit, it seems that Pobbo owed Matilda some money and that she wanted a judgment issued in her favor ordering him to pay her. She wrote to the duke: “I implore you to please favor me with an order... that would help me since I am in such misery that I have no way of being able to buy daily food, as I know that Your Highness has been fully informed.”

Matilda’s letters demonstrate that her primary concern during this difficult part of her life was her son’s future. Born shortly after her husband’s death, Matilda named her son Carlo Emanuele Filiberto in honor of her Savoy relatives. By doing so, Matilda reasserted her loyalty and familial connection to the House of Savoy. Indeed, the early years of her widowhood as her son grew up were devoted to raising him as both a devout Catholic and preparing him to be a loyal client of the duke. Over the years, she wrote regularly to her half-brother to encourage him to look with favor on her son despite the shame of her husband’s death. Although Carlo

29 Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, August 16, 1611. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “…ha aiutata questa povera vedova…ero in estrema necessita ridotta.”
30 Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, August 25, 1611. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Supplico si compiacca di favorirmi della condana...accio mi possa aiutare poi che mi trovo in miseria tale che non ho il modo di poter comprare il vitto quotidiano, come so che V.A. è stata a pieno informata.”
Emanuele Filiberto expressed an inclination for a church career, Matilda persuaded him, as his family’s only heir, to become a soldier and a courtier and to marry. In 1630, Carlo Emanuele Filiberto married Giovanna Arborio di Gattinara, daughter of marchese Carlo Antonio Arborio di Gattinara, a nobleman from Vercelli. At the age of twenty-five, he was rewarded for his valor in battles against Genoa and Monferrato by being named Duke Vittorio Amedeo I’s ambassador to Vienna. After Vittorio Amedeo died, Matilda and her son supported the duke’s widow, Marie Christine of France, during the Piedmontese Civil War (1638-42). Carlo Emanuele Filiberto Simiana became one of the dowager duchess’s closest advisors and allies.

**Matilda’s Contested Inheritance: the Fief of Pianezza**

Carlo Emanuele Filiberto Simiana’s later success as a military leader, diplomat, and courtier was due in large part to Matilda’s relentless campaign to rehabilitate the family’s standing at the court of Savoy after her husband’s execution. Much of her activity centered around her struggle to obtain the fief of Pianezza, which she considered to be her rightful inheritance from her mother, Beatrice Langosco. When Beatrice died in 1612, Matilda petitioned the duke to claim Pianezza as “successor to the fief” based on the 1581 investiture.\(^{31}\) As described in chapter 4, the 1581 investiture, made before Beatrice remarried, stated that Beatrice received the fief “for herself and after herself for the Most Illustrious Lady Matilda her daughter, and her descendants.”\(^{32}\) When Beatrice died, the most recent investiture was the investiture of 1597, which specified that the fief would go to Beatrice’s son, Gaspar Antonio Martinengo.

Matilda reminded the duke that her mother had remarried while she was still a minor child and that the actions that her mother had taken to have the 1581 investiture annulled had been “urged with importunity by him [Martinengo]... using the false pretext that she was forced

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\(^{31}\) MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358.

\(^{32}\) Ibid. See the previous chapter for the full quote.
by reverential fear.” Further, Matilda argued that she herself, although directly impacted in these changes, had never had the chance to state her case. With this petition to the duke, Matilda launched a lawsuit against her Martinengo step-family which would continue between them until she died 20 years later, when it was immediately picked up by her son. The initial litigants were Matilda and her stepfather, Francesco Martinengo. Martinengo responded to Matilda’s claims by arguing that the fief of Pianezza was his children’s rightful inheritance from their mother. Initially, Matilda had the upper hand. In the five years since her husband’s execution, Carlo Emanuele had continued to send her money and, eventually, their warm relationship returned. Throughout 1613 and 1614, she was in close contact with the duke about “my matters and those of my son” as she often referred to her inheritance from Beatrice. In October 1613, Matilda received word that the duke had agreed to take a look at the matter of Pianezza personally. She wrote to him to thank him “for having deigned to having seen to my matters and those of the marchese my son...” having been “informed of the good part that Your Highness has played in this work, and having received such good from it you may believe that the obligation that I owe to you will never leave my mind.”

On June 7, 1614, the matter seemed as though it might finally be settled. Carlo Emanuele granted the fief of Pianezza to “Lady Matilda of Savoy, and her descendants, and if there are

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33 June 28, 1614. Patenti, registro 32, 159-160. “…pare doppo fu maridata la d.a Dama Beatrice Langosco col Conte Francesco Martinengo all’ora gran scudiere di V.A. ad importunità e suggistione d’esso si siano fatte diverse dichara.ni deroganti et annullanti la seconda Investitura e totalmente esclludente d.a Donna Matilda, essa però esistente in pupillar età et non mai sentita ne chiamata sotto non vero preteso ch’essa fu marchesa per timor reverentiale fosse indotta a prender Investitura simile il che non è vero perchè la procura da lei fatta a renovar l’investitura fu spontanea...”

34 Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, October 28, 1613. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “L’inchusa direttiva a S.A. non contiene altro che ringratiarla d’essersi degnata far proveder di persona che atenda alle cose mie et del Marchese mio figliuolo...informata della buona parte che ha havuto V.A. in questa opera, dalla quale ricevendo tanto bene puo creder che mai mi si partira della mente l’obbligo che le devo.”
none, to the Heirs and Successors of the late Lady Beatrice her Mother.”35 This established that Pianezza would go first to Matilda and would only be inherited by the Martinengo family if Matilda’s line died out. On June 28, the duke also confirmed the terms of Beatrice Langosco’s 1581 investiture of Pianezza that specifically named Matilda as her successor to Pianezza “against the claims of Count Francesco Martinengo, husband of the late Beatrice.”36 He clarified that he had not intended “by the declarations granted to the late Beatrice Langosco marchesa of Pianezza to have prejudiced the claims of Lady Matilda of Savoy regarding Succession to the Fief and Marquisate of Pianezza, under the Investiture of 1581.”37 Why would the duke reverse the multiple prior declarations he had made on this matter, in which he had complied with Beatrice’s requests to exclude Matilda over the years? The duke addressed this issue directly, stating that his prior decisions had been based on petitions that contained “untrue” statements and that Beatrice had made these requests “at the suggestion of the Marchese, her husband.”38 In short, the duke concluded that Beatrice had submitted her petitions to disinherit Matilda under pressure from her husband. In addition, the duke ordered Martinengo, “who had filed a suit against the marchesa [Matilda] concerning the inheritance of her mother, Lady Beatrice Langosco,” to return to Matilda some of her mother’s “jewels of very great price.”39 Matilda was

35 ASTC, Scritture della città e provincia di Torino in Paesi, Pianezza, Fasc. 1. “...a Donna Matilde di Savoja, e discendenti da essa, ed in mancanza di essi a favore degli Eredi, e Successori della fu Dama Beatrice sua Madre.”
37 ASTC, Scritture della città e provincia di Torino in Paesi, Pianezza, Fasc. 2. “...per li rescritti declaratorii concessi alla fu Beatrice Langosco Marchesa di Pianezza di aver voluto pregiudicare alle ragioni di Donna Matilde di Savoja circa la Successione al Feudo, e Marchesato di Pianezza, a cui viene chiamata per l’Investitura del 1581.”
38 June 28, 1614. Patenti, registro 32, 159-160. “...taccia la verità del fatto, et a mera importuna[?] e suggestione della marchese...suo marito.”
39 ASTR, Patenti camerali (art. 687, par. 1), registro 32, 366-367. 1614-1615. “Cessione e remissione fatta da S.A. alla Marchesa di Pianezza del palazzo ‘esistente in questa città al fondo della gran piazze del castello,’ confiscato insieme a tutti i beni del Conte Francesco Martinengo, che aveva intentato una lite con la Marchesa a proposito dell’eredità della di lei madre, Donna Beatrice Langosca, comprendente alcune ‘gioie di molto gran prezzo.’”
relieved that the duke had taken her side so completely in the dispute. She wrote that she was profoundly grateful to him for having given her “a sign not only of the restitution of your favor, but to grant me such mercy...for my matters and those of my son, regarding the possession and investiture of Pianezza.”

The Martinengo family, however, was not the only obstacle that Matilda faced in obtaining full and undisputed hold over Pianezza. As described in chapter 4, when the Nomis brothers had sold the fief to the duke of Savoy in 1578 so that he might in turn transfer it to Beatrice, two of the brothers, Alessandro and Carlo Francesco, were minors. When they reached the age of majority, they refused to ratify the sale that their older brother had made. In 1593, they had petitioned to have the sale rescinded, claiming that they had the right to take back their portions of Pianezza immediately. Similar to the argument that Beatrice herself had made the previous year, the Nomis brothers claimed that their older brother, Cesare, had been intimidated by the duke into selling Pianezza “by reverential fear of the Prince.”

Their older brother, who was “very young” (molto giovine) at the time, found himself urged to make the sale by the duke’s officials and “he did not dare oppose it” (non ardi far opposition) even though the contract was “unduly detrimental” (tropo dannoso). Since that time, Cesare Nomis “has repeatedly said and declared that he did not make the sale willingly, but only because he was forced and due to reverential fear.” At the time, Beatrice had dismissed the Nomis brothers’ arguments by saying that, if what they said was true, then their “claims of harm and fear are personal” and therefore should not be made against her, as the innocent investee, but should instead be addressed

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40 Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I. June 27, 1614. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “...segno non solo della restit.e nella gratia sua, ma di favorirmi di tante mercedi...per le cose mie et di mio figlio, del possesso, et investitura di Pianezza.”
41 MdR, mazzo 279, fasc. 1344. “...per timore riverentiale del Prencipe....”
42 Ibid. “...ha più e più volte detto e dichiarato ch’esso non haveva fatto volontieri la vendita, ma solo per forza e timore riverentiale.”
“against His Highness or his ministers” (contro S.A. o suoi ministri) who had unduly pressured Cesare Nomis.43

In 1595, the Nomis brothers called a number of witnesses to provide testimony supporting their claim that they had been intimidated into selling their half of Pianezza to Emanuele Filiberto in 1578. Their father, Lorenzo, had died in 1569, leaving three sons and three daughters, all minors, in the care of their mother Caterina. One witness, Gio Battista Marchetto, had been present when the sales agreement was signed. He recalled that Cesare Nomis was “a beardless youth at the time” and that his mother Caterina “complained much that her children were forced to sell said place of Pianezza against their will and she sighed with tears in her eyes.”44 When Cesare signed the agreement, “he showed...that he was entering into said contract reluctantly and against his will” such that the witnessed believed “that if he had dared he would have resisted greatly.”

The Nomis brothers were also embroiled in a lawsuit against Francesco Martinengo concerning the Martinengo claim to Pianezza through Beatrice. On February 8, 1622, Francesco Martinengo died in Brescia.45 On July 30, 1622, the Nomis brothers decided to cut their losses and came to an agreement with Matilda. They renounced their opposition to the sale of their half of the fief in 1578, and sold all of their claims to Pianezza to her for 8,000 ducatoni.46 Twenty months later, however, the sale had not yet been approved by the duke, which meant that Matilda and her son could not yet live there. Matilda wrote to the duke’s son, Vittorio Amedeo, to ask

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43 Ibid. “...le attioni per la lesionne, e timore sono personali....”
44 MdR, mazzo 280, fasc. 1348. “…all’hora giovane sbarbato.” Caterina “si doleva molto che suoi figli fossero astretti a vendere detto luogo di Pianezza contra loro volere et sospirava con le lagrime agli occhi.” “…dimostro...che mal volenteri et contra suo volere faceva detto contratto...che crede che se havesse arditto haverrebbe fatto grande resistenza.”
45 Cigna Santi, 85.
46 Settlement agreement between Matilda and Cesare and Lorenzo Nomis. ASTC, Scritture della città e provincia di Torino in Paesi, Pianezza, mazzo 22, fasc. 9.
that he intercede with the duke “so that I can retire to Pianezza, which is my greatest desire...also in order to provide the things that are necessary for my son...I dare to beg Your Highness’s mercy, humbly beseeching you to favor me with your intercession.” 47 Vittorio Amedeo took swift action on Matilda’s behalf. One month later, in April 1624, Matilda wrote to thank him for his “merciful intercession” which had enabled her “to retire to Pianezza.” 48 Always mindful of her son’s future prospects, Matilda emphasized that her son was also grateful, and asked the prince to “deign to accept the lives and wills of both of us.” On July 3, 1624, Matilda reported that she had finally arrived in Pianezza: “due to the continuous intercession of Your Most Serene Highness I received cavaglier Gabaleone...to conduct me to Pianezza where I have been since yesterday evening.” 49 Carlo Emanuele I issued a patent officially approving the sale a few months later, on November 3, 1624. 50

Matilda’s joy and relief at finally being permitted to return to Pianezza was short-lived. Although the claims of the Nomis brothers had been dispensed with, the Martinengo family persisted in their claims to the fief. Days after her arrival in Pianezza, Gaspare Antonio Martinengo, Beatrice and Francesco’s oldest son, summoned Matilda before the Senate. In his summons, dated July 12, 1624, Martinengo’s attorney argued that after Martinengo had “possessed the fief and property of Pianezza, as true marchese of said place, invested by Your Highness, for a long time and without protest or opposition by anyone, he has since 1613 found

47 Matilda of Savoy to Vittorio Amedeo I, March 18, 1624. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “...concedermi il pouter ritirar a Pianezza il che vien da me tanto mag.e men.e desid.to...anche per puoter proveder mio figl.o delle cose neces.e...ho preso ardire di raccorrer dalla clemenza di V.A. supplicando umilis.mente a favorirmi della interces.e sua.”
48 Matilda of Savoy to Vittorio Amedeo I, April 25, 1624. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “...nella concessione ottenuta da SA ser.ma mio sig.re alla pietosa intercessione sua di potermi ritirar a Pianezza...si degni accettare le vite e le volontà d’ambi due.”
49 Matilda of Savoy to Vittorio Amedeo I, July 3, 1624. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “...abondantiss.amen.e et sopra ogni mio merito mi si comunica la benignità di luoro Altezze, mentre per le continuate intercessione di V.A. Ser.ma ricevo il Cavaglier Gabaleone...per condurni a Pianezza dove mi ritrova da hier sera.”
50 Patent granting the duke’s approval for the transfer. ASTR, Patenti camerali (art. 687, par. 1), registro 44, 215v-257v. 1625-26.
himself stripped of this possession, because it has been occupied by the Most Illustrious signora Lady Matilda of Savoy.” Martinengo’s attorney argued that his half-sister’s occupation of Pianezza was based on “unfounded claims made at a time when he [Martinengo] could not travel to Piedmont due to justified impediments.” The same day, a summons was issued for Matilda to appear before the Senate.52

Gaspare Antonio died shortly thereafter in 1625, and so the suit was taken up by his younger brother, Gherardo Martinengo. From 1625 until his death in 1630, Carlo Emanuele was preoccupied with war and a complex series of foreign affairs, as he became involved in several conflicts related to the Thirty Years’ War. In March 1625, he joined with France in launching an attack on the Republic of Genoa. The governor of Spanish Milan reacted quickly, attacking the Sabaudian states in April.53 This failed attempt to capture Genoa led the French to reconsider their alliance with the duke of Savoy against Spain: “The French regime under Cardinal Richelieu’s direction was having serious misgivings about the confrontation with Spain in north Italy, given pressure from critics within France and from the papacy to give priority to the Huguenot problem.”54 As a result, in March 1626, Richelieu abandoned his alliance with Carlo Emanuele and entered into the Treaty of Monzón with Spain. This was a pivotal moment for Carlo Emanuele and he, in turn, began distancing himself from France. Political events continued to take dramatic turns in northern Italy. In 1627, Duke Vincenzo II of Mantua and Monferrato

51 Copy of Martinengo’s petition of July 12, 1624, found in Matilda’s correspondence in Lettere PN. “Ser.mo sig.e il Conte Gaspare Antonio Martinengo dopo haver per longo spatio di tempo et senza contraditione et oppositione d’alcuno posseduto il feudo et beni di Pianezza, come vero Marchese di esso luogo, da V.A. investito, hora si ritrova dal 1613 in qua spogliato di tal possesso, per esser stato occupato dall’ILL.ma sig.ra D. Matilda di Savoia.”
52 Summons issued July 12, 1624, found in Matilda’s correspondence in Lettere PN.
53 Toby Osborne, Dynasty and Diplomacy in the Court of Savoy: Political Culture and the Thirty Years’ War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 94
54 Ibid., 100.
died, triggering the War of the Mantuan Succession (1628-1631), in which Carlo Emanuele fought as a claimant.\textsuperscript{55}

As these events transpired, Matilda and Gherardo Martinengo’s lawsuit continued. Carlo Emanuele received regular reminders from Matilda regarding her claim to Pianezza and her son’s inheritance. In 1628, she wrote to Carlo Emanuele, referring to “my infinite desire to see the marchese my son recognized and received by Your Highness as his most humble servant.”\textsuperscript{56} In 1630, she reminded the duke that “when you favor the greatest wishes of the son, you fulfill the last wishes of his Mother.”\textsuperscript{57} Carlo Emanuele died while on campaign a few months later on July 26, 1630. He was succeeded by his son, Vittorio Amedeo I. Two years later, on June 4, 1632, a sentence was issued in the Martinengo lawsuit against Matilda.\textsuperscript{58} The decision was made by senators Gio Antonio Bellone, Ulisse Galeano, Amedeo Benzo, and Carlo Filippo Morozzo, and was approved and issued by Cardinal Maurizio, who had been delegated to the task by his brother the duke.\textsuperscript{59} In a striking departure from Carlo Emanuele’s 1614 declaration in favor of Matilda, the senators held that Martinengo was entitled to three fourths of the fief of Pianezza while Matilda’s claim was relegated to the remaining fourth:

We hereby pronounce that Signor Marchese Martinengo is entitled to three fourths of the Marquisate, fief, jurisdiction, and feudal properties of Pianezza, and

\textsuperscript{55} The end of the direct male line of the Gonzaga family caused a succession crisis for the duchies of Mantua and Monferrato (a duchy on Piedmont’s eastern border) in which there were several claimants, including Carlo Emanuele. The duke of Savoy joined with Spain in invading Monferrato in March 1628. The crisis was resolved by the Treaty of Cherasco in 1631, in which Carlo Gonzaga, the duke of Nevers, a French noble and cousin of the deceased Vincenzo II, was confirmed as duke. The treaty also granted the Piedmontese towns of Pinerolo and Casale to France, giving them control of key Alpine passes.

\textsuperscript{56} Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, January 22, 1628. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “L’adempimento dell’infinito mio desiderio di vedere da V.A. riconosciuto e ricevuto per humis.mo servidore il Marchese mio figl.o.”

\textsuperscript{57} Matilda of Savoy to Carlo Emanuele I, January 29, 1630. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Mentre favorisce i primi desiderij del figlio, compisce insieme gli ultimi voti della Madre.”

\textsuperscript{58} MdR, mazzo 282, fasc. 1358. Also ASTC, Scritture della città e provincia di Torino in Paesi, Pianezza, mazzo 22, fasc. 10.

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid. Pronontiamo esser spettato e spettar al Sig. Marchese Martinengo le tre parti delle quattro del Marchesato, feudo, giurisdittione, e beni feudali di Pianezza, e l’altro quarto esser spettato, e spettar alla Sig. D. Matilda in virtù delle ragioni acquistate dal Senatore Carlo Francesco Nomis, condennando perciò la Sig. D. Matilda alla remissione delle dette tre parti d’esso Marchesato giudisdtittione, e beni feudali...”
that *Signora* Lady Matilda is entitled to the remaining fourth by virtue of the claims purchased from Carlo Francesco Nomis, we hereby order *Signora* Lady Matilda to return the said three fourths of said Marquisate, jurisdiction, and feudal properties...

According to this sentence, Martinengo was deemed to be Beatrice Langosco’s legitimate successor to Pianezza. Indeed, the sentence stated that Matilda was entitled to a portion of the fief not via inheritance through her mother Beatrice or due to the 1581 investiture document, but because of the sale that the Nomis brothers had made to her in 1622.

The 1632 sentence was a severe blow to Matilda’s ambitions to recover Pianezza and establish a legacy for her son. In order to analyze this moment in her fortunes, it is necessary to recall the support that Matilda received from the duke from the moment she submitted her claim to Pianezza before the Senate in 1614. In response to her initial petition, Carlo Emanuele confirmed the 1581 investiture and stated that all past declarations that he had made on the matter were based on “untrue” petitions that were made “at the suggestion of the Marquis,” Beatrice’s husband. In 1622, when the Nomis brothers relinquished their claim to their former half of Pianzza in exchange for a payment of 8,000 ducatoni, and the duke delayed in approving the sale, Vittorio Amedeo nudged him and the matter was resolved within the month, enabling Matilda to settle in Pianezza. The 1632 sentence, however, made it clear that Matilda had no claim to Pianezza through her mother, despite Carlo Emanuele’s 1614 declaration. Her claim to Pianezza was found to be based on the sale made to her by the Nomis brothers in 1622 and, despite the fact that they sold her their ½ claim to the fief, the 1632 sentence concluded that she was only entitled to ¼ of it.

Although the 1632 sentence contains no hint of the senators’ reasoning beyond clarifying that they found the basis of Matilda’s claim to be the 1622 sale, edicts issued during the

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60 June 28, 1614. Patenti, registro 32, 159-160.
seventeenth-century provide the sovereign’s response to the application of male primogeniture among the Sabaudian nobility. A 1648 edict provided for primogeniture and encouraged it as a means to increasing the glory of the nobility:

As the example of our Most Serene Predecessors...urges Us that it is better for Us to maintain and increase the splendor of the Nobility, especially those who...as holders of jurisdictions and feudal property, represent and constitute the principal ornament of our Crown, thus persuaded by this reasoning, and having reflected and considered that the division of fiefs has lessened that same splendor in the principal, and most noble families of these States...that opening up to our Vassals...succession by primogeniture would go to promoting that dignity...

A more specific edict that encouraged the practice more forcefully was issued by Duchess-Regent Maria Giovanna Battista in 1680. In the edict, the duchess explained:

The use of Primogeniture is very ancient, and after it took root in the crowned heads, it was introduced into the most principal families, and finally it was spread to other persons of note, or desirous of being of note...this matter...unites reputation and interest, exciting claims no less than any other, disturbing the Tribunals with disputes, and impoverishing Litigants with expenses

Throughout the seventeenth century, many Piedmontese families concentrated the family inheritance in the hands of a single male heir, whether they formally designated this as primogeniture or not. Although the edicts on primogeniture did not explicitly bar women from being named as the main heir, it was, in practice, unlikely. “With the consolidation of

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61 Giovanni Battista Borelli, *Editti antichi e nuovi de’ sovrani prencipi della real casa di Savoia, e de magistrate di quà da monti, raccolti d’ordine di Madama Reale Maria Giovanna Battista* (Turin: Bartolomeo Zappata Libraro di S.A.R., 1681), 849-50. July 16, 1648. “Come l’esempio de’ Serenissimi nostril Predecessori...ci rimostra quanto a Noi convenga il mantenere et accrescere lo splendore della Nobiltà, massime di quelli...possessori di giurisdizioni, et beni feudalì rappresentano e costituiscono il principale ornamento della nostra Corona, così persuasi da questo motivo, et havendo fatto riflesso, e considerato, che la divisione de’ feudi habbia non poco scemato lo stesso splendore nnel principal, e più nobili famiglie di questi Stati...che perciò l’aprire a sudetti Vassalli nostri...la facoltà di stabilire...successione primogenitale, verebbe ad operare in essi gli effetti di quel decoro....”

62 Ibid., 850-851. “L’uso delle Primogeniture è antichissimo e dopo che s’è radicato nelle Teste coronate, si è anco introdotto nelle Fameglie principali, e finalmente si è diffuso nelle altre Persone cospicue o desiderose di cospicuità. E perchequesta materia, ch’unisce la reputatione all’interesse, eccita non meno di qualsivoglia altra le presentioni, ch’inquetano i Tribunali con le dispute et impoveriscono i Litiganti con le spese...”


64 Cavallo notes that it was only in the eighteenth century that women in Piedmont “came to be actually barred from becoming general heirs to the family property,” Ibid.
primogeniture, increasing emphasis was placed, at the ideological level, on the male line and its dominant role in keeping the family name and estate.”

Matilda’s loss to the Martinengo family could be seen as part of this increasing trend towards male primogeniture as a response to concerns regarding the division of property within noble families. In Matilda’s case, the Senate balanced the claims of an illegitimate woman with the primogeniture-based claims of her legitimate half-brothers and, despite her familial connection with the duke, decided in favor of male primogeniture. It is interesting to note, however, that primogeniture generally involves a father passing property to his son. Here, Beatrice’s property was acquired by her sons at the expense of their older half-sister. The fact that the fief in question came from their mother raises the question as to whether Matilda’s situation is truly a case of male primogeniture winning out over the claims of a daughter.

**Matilda’s Legacy**

From 1632 on, Matilda seems to have relinquished her battle against the Martinengo and to have focused instead on furthering her son’s career. In 1632, Carlo Emanuele Filiberto Simiana received his first political appointment as Vittorio Amedeo’s extraordinary ambassador to Emperor Ferdinand II. In 1634, he bought the fief of Livorno (referred to as Livorno “Vercellese,” i.e. near Vercelli) and was given a seat on the duke’s Council. He had also embarked on an illustrious military career. As her son made his way in court and military life, Matilda continued to support him by writing regularly to the duke, giving him gentle reminders of their family ties. In April 1634, Matilda wrote to Vittorio Amedeo, addressing him as her “nephew” (nepote) to “remind him of the continued and very intense desire that he [her son] will

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65 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
always have...to serve you.”68 She signed the letter “most affectionate and devoted servant and Aunt” (affett.ma et divot.a serva et Zia). A few weeks later, she wrote him again to express concern for his health: “We have been very worried here about the health of Your Excellency” and let him know that she had gently chided her son, “the marchese,” asking him “not to keep boring Your Excellency” with long letters (“the marchese writes a lot to you and at length”).69 In October, she reminded the duke that “there is no one at this Court who feels more obligated or has greater desire to carry out your commands than me.”70

In her later years, Matilda, a devout Catholic, dedicated much of her energy to religious causes and to works of charity. She began corresponding with Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot de Chantal (1572-1641, canonized 1767), founder of the Order of the Visitation.71 With the support of the bishop of Turin, Mons. Antonio Provana di Collegno and of duchess of Savoy Marie Christine, Matilda worked with Chantal to found the Monastero della Visitazione (Convent of the Visitation) in Turin. In addition to working personally to obtain all the necessary permissions for the convent and donating 3,000 ducatoni and two farms to the Order,72 in September 1638 she travelled to the Valle d’Aosta with a small retinue to greet Chantal and accompany her to

68 Matilda of Savoy to Vittorio Amedeo I, April 28, 1634. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Alt.mo et Ecc.mo Sig.re et nepote...procuoro di rendermi men lontana in questa carta, con recordargli il continuo et intensiss.mo desiderio, che sempre portara...a servirla.”
69 Matilda of Savoy to Vittorio Amedeo I, June 1, 1634. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Siamo stati qua in pena della salute di V.E... Il Marchese le scrive tanto al longo che mi pare d'esser in necess.tà rimettendomi a lui di non tediar anco VE.”
70 Matilda of Savoy to Vittorio Amedeo I, October 13, 1634. Lettere PN, Mazzo 5. “Non ha a questa Corte persona che si senta piu obligata ne piu desiderosa d’eseguìr i suoi comandi di me.”
71 The Order of the Visitation was founded in 1610 by Francis de Sales and Chantal in Annecy. The “Visitation” refers to the Virgin Mary’s visit to her kinswoman Elizabeth. The Order was known for its public outreach and works of charity at a time when many convents remained strictly cloistered. Convents were established all over France, spreading throughout Europe and then to North America. There are currently 150 Visitation convents throughout the world.
72 For Matilda’s efforts to support the new convent, see Gaudenzio Clareta, Storia della Reggenza di Cristina di Francia Duchessa di Savoia con annotazioni e documenti inediti, vol. II (Stabilimento Civelli, Torino 1869) 345, note 1. See also the letters exchanged between Chantal and Matilda in Jeanne-Françoise Frémyot de Chantal, Correspondence, Tome V (1625-1640), ed. Marie-Patricia Burns (Paris: Centre d’études franco-italien, 1993).
Turin. On September 30, Chantal was greeted at the gates of Turin by a large number of ladies and important members of the court. Over the next few months, the two women worked closely together to organize the founding of the convent, which took place on November 21, 1638.\textsuperscript{73} Although Chantal had intended to stay longer in Turin and look after the new convent, in February 1639 she was forced to return to France, much to Matilda’s dismay, because war had come to Piedmont.

Vittorio Amedeo I died on October 7, 1637. His young son Francesco Giacinto died a year later on October 4, 1638. The Piedmontese Civil War began shortly thereafter, as Vittorio Amedeo’s widow, Marie Christine of France, fought to retain the regency of her younger son, Carlo Emanuele II, against Vittorio Amedeo’s brothers, Cardinal Maurizio and Prince Tommaso. Matilda stayed by Marie Christine’s side during the war, as her son fought on the side of the duchess regent. On July 27, 1639, both Matilda and her daughter-in-law, Giovanna Arborio Gattinara, were with Marie Christine when Prince Tommaso’s troops broke into the city of Turin and the dowager duchess was forced to flee from the Palazzo Reale to Turin’s citadel.\textsuperscript{74} Marie Christine and her supporters eventually escaped from the city and across the Alps to the duchy of Savoie. The stress of the war and flight to Savoie provided to be too much for Matilda, who was in her sixties. She died on September 7, 1639.

Her son continued to rise in Marie Christine’s service. The same month that Matilda died, Marie Christine named Simiana her \textit{luogotenente generale} in the principality of Piedmont. In

\textsuperscript{73} The Church of the Visitation and attached convent are located between modern-day via XX Settembre and via Arcivescovado in downtown Turin. The nuns were expelled during the Napoleonic occupation of Piedmont. Returned to the church in 1830, the convent was granted to the Congregation of the Mission of Saint Vincent de Paul, who holds it today. Further information on the foundation of the Order of the Visitation in Turin can be found in Frédéric Meyer, “La Maison de Savoie et la Visitation (XVIIe - XVIIIe siècles),” in \textit{Pour Annecy et pour le monde. L’ordre de la Visitation (1610-2010). Actes du colloque international d’Annecy, 1er-3 juin 2010}, eds. Marie-Élisabeth Henneau et al. (Milan/Annecy: Archives départementales de la Haute-Savoie, 2011), 43-53.

\textsuperscript{74} A description of these events is found in Claretta, \textit{Storia della reggenza} vol. 1 starting on 498 and in Ricotti, \textit{Storia della monarchia} vol. 5, 227.
1640, Simiana and marquis Guido Villa led the military assault that wrenched Turin back from Prince Tommaso. After that victory, Simiana became Marie Christine’s “true prime minister of the State, maintaining that role for over twenty-five years.” In 1642, he was the key figure managing the peace negotiations which brought about the end of the war and Marie Christine’s definitive reinstatement as regent of the Sabaudian states.

After Matilda’s death and with the civil war drawing to a close, Simiana resurrected his mother’s claim to the fief of Pianezza. On June 14, 1641, the Senate issued a new sentence, which stated that he was entitled to the three-fourths of the fief that had previously been awarded to Gherardo Martinengo. The dispute continued into the eighteenth century when, in 1712, Vittorio Amadeo II reversed the Senate’s 1641 sentence, ordering Maria Irene Delfina di Francavilla, Matilda’s oldest great-grandchild, to return the three-fourths of the fief referred to in the 1641 sentence to the Martinengo family. Maria Irene Delfina was invested with the remaining one-fourth of the marquisate. After her death it passed to her son Andrea Imperiali and then to Andrea’s son Michele Imperiali, who died without children in 1782. With no more successors from the Imperiali lineage, a cousin of the family and a descendent of Matilda, Giuseppe Vincenzo Guadenzio Solaro del Borgo, asked to be invested with one-fourth of the fief.

In the meantime, the Martinengo had been passing their claims to the fief down through their own generations. Marianna Martinengo, oldest daughter of Pietro Emanuele Martinengo, who died without male heirs, was invested with three fourths of the fief. Marianna married her cousin Luigi Martinengo and their son Venceslao was invested with the fief in 1759. When

75 Merlotti, “Pianezza.”
76 Information about the various lawsuits regarding the fief of Pianezza after Matilda’s death is found in MdR, mazzo 279, fasc. 1344 and is also recounted in Goffredo Casalis, Dizionario geografico.
77 See Figures 5 and 6 for the Langosco/Simiana and Martinengo family trees.
78 September 13, 1746.
79 March 31, 1759.
Matilda’s descendent, Giuseppe Vincenzo Guadenzio Solaro del Borgo, requested to be invested with one-fourth of Pianezza in 1783, the royal *procuratore generale* concluded that the fief could not be transmitted through women and should revert to the House of Savoy due to a lack of successors. The *procuratore generale* also summoned Venceslao Martinengo, who held the other three-fourths of the fief, stating that his claim to the fief was also invalid because it had been transmitted through a woman (Marianna). The final decision in the case stated: (1) that the one-fourth of the fief held by the Simiana lineage should have reverted to the state with the death of Matilda’s grandson Carlo Giambattista Simiana in 1706 without male heirs and (2) that the three fourths held by the Martinengo family should have reverted to the state with the death of Gherardo Martinengo’s grandson, Pietro Emanuele, in 1746 without male heirs. Full ownership of the fief therefore reverted back to the House of Savoy in 1785 and eight years later it was granted to the duke of Aosta.\(^8\)

The complicated succession of the fief of Pianezza over the generations of the Simiana and Martinengo families is not unusual in the feudal inheritances of early modern Piedmont. Fiefs brought wealth, prestige, and titles to noble families, and their inheritance was no small matter, leading to countless legal disputes. The 1632 sentence, which limited Matilda to one fourth of the fief and specified that her ownership came via her settlement agreement with the Nomis brothers, rather than via inheritance from Beatrice, was devastating for Matilda and for her son. Even though Matilda was a daughter of Emanuele Filiberto and half-sister to Carlo Emanuele I, Beatrice’s many petitions to the duke over the years and the persistence of Beatrice’s Martinengo family had ensured that any claim Matilda made to Pianezza would be an uphill battle. During her life, despite her close familial connection with the duke, Matilda’s claim

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\(^8\) Casalis, *Dizionario geografico*, 447.
was insufficient to overcome the claim of her legitimately-born half-brothers. In the wake of the civil war in which Simiana played a key role on the side of the ultimate victor, dowager duchess Marie Christine, the tide turned in the family’s favor, and Simiana was able to reobtain what his mother had lost, at least for a time.
Chapter 6. The Widow, the Gambler, and the Unruly Witnesses:
Caterina Bobba v. Mario Vittorio Bobba, 1640-1644

While the deceased signor Marchese Ascanio Bobba was living, he [the witness] saw that the
signora Marchesa [Caterina] managed the entire household and that the signor Marchese
Ascanio did not contradict her in anything.

From the testimony of Bernardino Bertolero, manservant

Marchese Ascanio wanted to leave his Nephew in a comfortable state, but his Nephew had a
habit of gambling and needed to be controlled, and the Marchese also wanted to leave the
signora Marchesa comfortable, so that there would be no conflict between the two.

From the testimony of Hercole Tagliardino, accountant

Introduction

In early 1640, Giacomo Bucchi, a soldier in the service of Piedmontese nobleman Mario
Vittorio Bobba, travelled from Turin across the Alps to Chambéry to see his employer’s dying
uncle, Ascanio Bobba. A respected military leader and a vassal of the duke of Savoy, Ascanio
had risen rapidly at the ducal court in his youth and had consolidated the fortunes and prestige of
the Bobba family over the subsequent decades. At the time of Giacomo Bucchi’s visit, Ascanio
was in his sixties and so ill that he had to receive his nephew’s representative at his bedside.

Knowing himself to be close to death, Ascanio asked the soldier to relay a message to his
nephew, Mario Vittorio. He wanted Bucchi to reassure Mario Vittorio that he had no cause to
complain of him; indeed, Ascanio, dying without any children of his own, stressed that he loved

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1 A version of this chapter has been accepted for publication in the Sixteenth Century Journal.
2 Witness no. 2 for Mario Vittorio Bobba, Bernardino Bertolero, Mario Vittorio’s manservant, 91. The records of the
lawsuit discussed in this chapter are found in the AMR, mazzo 242, fasc. 1137. Citations to this trial below will
provide witness number, name of witness, occupation if known, and page number(s). Subsequent references to the
same witness will provide last name and page number. The witness testimony starts on page 51. Unless otherwise
noted, all translations are the author’s. “Mentre viveva il fù sig. Marchese D. Ascano Bobba vedevo che la signora
Marchesa maneggiava tutta la Casa, non contradicendoli in cosa alcuna detto sig. Marchese D. Ascano.”
3 Witness no. 4 for Mario Vittorio Bobba, Hercule Tagliardino, Duchess Marie Christine’s household accountant,
108. “Signor D. Ascano, che voleva lasciar commodo suo Nepote, ma che era solito a giocare voleva ligarlo,
volendo anco lasciar bene la signora Marchesa in modo che non vi fosse da dire fra essi.”
4 Witnesses will often be referred to by their last names alone, while members of the Bobba family will be referred
to by their first names to distinguish them from each other.
his nephew and heir “even more than he would his own son.”

He was leaving Mario Vittorio well off, he said, with one stipulation. Ascanio’s wife, Caterina Bobba, would enjoy the right of usufruct over the income from Ascanio’s substantial properties while she lived, with full ownership reverting to Mario Vittorio only after Caterina died.

Knowing that his nephew would be impatient with this delay in his inheritance, Ascanio explained his reasoning to Bucchi. For years, he had been concerned that his nephew was gambling away his money. Mario Vittorio was his designated legal heir but, for his own good and that of the Bobba family, Ascanio felt he needed to prevent his nephew from immediately gambling away the Bobba inheritance. Ascanio also knew that his wife Caterina and his nephew did not get along. Anticipating problems between his two loved ones after his death, Ascanio wanted to ensure that both his nephew and his wife were left in a comfortable state “so that there would be no conflict between them.”

Thus he arranged his last will and testament so that Caterina would have a solid income to live on until she died while Mario Vittorio could look forward to a rich inheritance after his aunt’s death. In addition, in 1635 Ascanio had arranged for Mario Vittorio to marry Caterina’s daughter from her first marriage, Angela Margherita Taffino, in the hopes of promoting harmony between wife and nephew.

Despite Ascanio’s efforts, however, his death in March 1640 shortly after Bucchi’s visit resulted in a legal battle between his widow Caterina and his nephew Mario Vittorio. To prove their respective claims to the Bobba inheritance, which centered on Ascanio and Caterina’s marital relationship and on Caterina’s conduct in managing the Bobba family property and

6 Witness no. 4 for Mario Vittorio Bobba, Hercole Tagliardino, Duchess Marie Christine’s household accountant, 108. See full quote above.
finances, the litigants called 35 witnesses in total, including soldiers, merchants, local villagers, and household servants.\textsuperscript{7} The depositions given by these individuals over the course of several months in 1643 reveal two sets of witnesses behaving in surprisingly different ways. While Caterina’s witnesses paint a rosy picture of her character and her marriage to Ascanio, as one would expect of carefully chosen and prepared witnesses, Mario Vittorio’s witnesses went off script, portraying Mario Vittorio in an unflattering light and even providing support for Caterina’s case. While scholarship on court records tends to stress the agency of the questioners, witnesses were neither passive nor easily manipulated. The unusual conduct of Mario Vittorio’s witnesses challenges the assumption that because witnesses were carefully selected and coached by legal counsel, they dutifully followed instructions, resulting in witness testimony that reflects one side’s legal strategy.\textsuperscript{8} These witnesses did not parrot Mario Vittorio’s story. Instead, they seized the opportunity to express their own narratives of the facts of the case and to undermine that of Mario Vittorio.

\textit{Early Modern Politics, Agency, and Witness Testimony}

A microhistorical analysis of the unexpected behavior in this lawsuit raises two broad implications about witness testimony: first, that although witness testimony was indeed shaped by court procedure, attorneys and notaries, witnesses were not necessarily pliable individuals who were easily maneuvered by more sophisticated attorneys. Early modern people engaged with the court system periodically throughout their lives and had a good understanding of the

\textsuperscript{7} A list of witnesses for each litigant is provided in Tables 1 and 2 at the end of this chapter.
\textsuperscript{8} For instances in which witnesses assisted the litigant who called them to court by providing a narrative that was consistent with the litigant’s version of the facts, see: Thomas Kuehn, “Reading Microhistory: The Example of Giovanni and Lusanna,” \textit{The Journal of Modern History} 61, 3 (Sept., 1989), 512-534; see also the lawsuit between Jacques de Savoie and Françoise de Rohan analyzed in Matthew Vester, \textit{Renaissance Dynasticism and Apanage Politics: Jacques de Savoie-Nemours 1531-1585} (Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2012), 44-61.
workings of legal institutions and legal arguments.\textsuperscript{9} Despite the structured appearance of witness testimony, witnesses could and, in the Bobba case, did consciously take control of their depositions in order to introduce their own narratives. Second, by considering the political context in Piedmont at the time of this lawsuit (specifically, the Piedmontese Civil War, 1638-42), this chapter demonstrates that witnesses could use their self-fashioned testimonies in the courts to gain a political voice and that politically and legally savvy litigants such as Caterina Bobba could harness that voice to use against their adversaries in court.

Over the last twenty years, scholars have recognized that early modern politics were not the exclusive domain of rulers and elites. The common people impacted and instigated political changes by expressing their agency in a wide range of ways. Building on the earlier work of Natalie Zemon Davis’ sixteenth-century “rites of violence” and E.P. Thompson’s eighteenth-century “moral economy,”\textsuperscript{10} Wayne te Brake and William Beik argued that ordinary people could influence politics sufficiently to shift the trajectory of early modern political and cultural transformations long before modern democracies granted them political rights.\textsuperscript{11} Analyzing a wide range of early modern political crises, Te Brake noted that, although ordinary people were not the “principal architects” of political and cultural transformations, they nevertheless had a substantial impact on them which should be taken into account.\textsuperscript{12} William Beik reached a similar conclusion in his analysis of urban revolts in seventeenth-century France, arguing that urban

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[12] Ibid., 46.
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protest was part of a “culture of retribution” aimed at expressing popular outrage. Both Te Brake
and Beik made a convincing case for the necessity of including popular involvement and agency
in studies of early modern political history.\textsuperscript{13} Caroline Castiglione went a step further,
demonstrating that peasants in the Roman countryside were not passive bystanders to the
centralization of the state but were instead active political players who, by participating in village
government, resisted attempts by both the state and the nobility to curb their traditional rights
and tax them.\textsuperscript{14}

Revolt, protest, and participation in local government were not the only ways that
commoners expressed their will in public life; they also exploited the judicial system. Osvaldo
Raggio stressed that witnesses used legal procedures and testimony to act in political ways.\textsuperscript{15} In
his study of state formation in the Republic of Genoa, Raggio analyzed judicial records to shed
light on the complex interactions between a relatively decentralized state and local power
structures, finding that local disputes and alliances had far-reaching implications for the state.
Even before that, Carlo Ginzburg’s work on inquisitorial records had revealed that witnesses
might shape their testimony in order to try to give the judges the answers they were seeking, thus
making things easier on themselves.\textsuperscript{16} More recently, scholars have emphasized that the common

\textsuperscript{13} See also Peter Blickle, ed., \textit{Resistance, Representation, Community: The Origins of the Modern State in Europe, 13th to 18th Centuries} (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), a collection of essays which discusses popular involvement in politics in a variety of early modern European contexts.
people were aware of and familiar with juridical procedures and norms and appealed to those norms through their political acts.  

Working with judicial records to detect the political agency of the individuals involved presents a specific set of challenges for the historian. Court records are highly constructed, multi-layered documents shot through with distortion and bias. Meant to persuade the court, depositions such as those taken in this case were mediated and shaped by attorneys and by the deposition-taking process itself until the lines between historical fact, legal strategy, and fiction began to overlap and blur. Natalie Zemon Davis argued that statements made as part of judicial processes cannot be taken at face value but should be carefully assessed as forms of storytelling, and her work has inspired numerous studies on the function of narrative in medieval and early modern judicial institutions. The insights of Davis and other scholars, who have tended to focus on the narratives constructed by litigants, can be expanded to the testimony of the witnesses called by said litigants. Litigants sought to portray themselves in a way that would be most convincing and sympathetic to the court and one of the most important tools at their disposal was witness testimony. As litigants wove their narrative of the facts and strove to project a certain image, “their legal representatives and witnesses operated to construct such images for the court.” As texts that were structured and controlled for a narrow legal purpose, witness depositions do not provide historians with transparent accounts of the witnesses’ words or

19 Thomas Kuehn, “Reading Microhistory,” 525.
thoughts. For example, in his response to Gene Brucker’s *Giovanni and Lusanna*, a microhistory of a Florentine woman’s lawsuit against her wealthy lover, Thomas Kuehn noted that the plaintiff, Lusanna, and her brother Antonio “posed as seekers of legal truth and social honor” while the defendant, Giovanni “posed as a young rich boy victimized by the machinations of the low-born, profligate, and promiscuous.” Both plaintiff and defendant called on witnesses whose testimony would represent them and their actions in the best light. In doing so, witness testimony was “contrived to deceive, to slant matters deliberately, or even to fabricate.”

Thus, when reading the depositions in the Bobba lawsuit, the expectation is that rather than providing simple and factual statements about what the witnesses did or did not observe in relation to the Bobba family, they will instead reveal the legal strategies of each side, as carefully coached witnesses spun each litigant’s version of the truth. Caterina’s witnesses acted in a manner consistent with this assumption. Together, they presented a steady narrative of a capable wife who only acted with her husband’s permission and pursuant to his instructions. Mario Vittorio’s witnesses, however, did something quite different. They veered off into topics of their own choosing, spontaneously bringing up Mario Vittorio’s questionable character and his uncle’s concerns about his gambling problem, ultimately undermining his case beyond repair. This unusual behavior raises questions about the motivations that witnesses might have for going against the narrative they had been summoned to tell.

To gain a better understanding of the depositions, and thus the witnesses, in the Bobba case, it is first necessary to consider that the testimony given by these individuals was produced as part of a standardizing process. Early modern witness statements are composite documents rather than verbatim transcripts of questions and answers. Scholars have recognized the necessity

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20 Ibid., 532.
of considering the archive itself as part of a historical process rather than as a mere receptacle of facts. Applying this approach to court records means being conscious of the process used to produce legal documents during litigation and the purpose for which they were created and preserved. After all, as Shannon McSheffrey pointed out in a microhistorical study of a late medieval marriage case, “legal documents were not just inert and transparent accounts of a legal proceeding or act. These documents were written precisely because they were meant to do something.”

Witness testimony was generally written in the third person by a law clerk or notary. Rather than recording what the witnesses said word for word, the law clerk or notary would summarize and redact the witness’s words to form succinct versions of extensive interrogations. The witness’s words were structured to fit the customary patterns for legal testimony. Each witness answered the same set of questions that had been submitted by the parties and their lawyers. After the witnesses answered the questions, their answers were reframed and standardized into a simple narrative that smoothed out spoken dialect into more formal language that could be easily digested by the court. In this way, a deposition that may have been taken over several days was transformed into a generic script in which witnesses appeared to use the same vocabulary and wording and to emphasize the same points that the lawyers had deemed legally significant. Reading through the witness testimony in the Bobba case gives one the impression of encountering a meticulously produced text in which the witnesses’ original voices have been obscured by standardized wording and language.

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The Facts of the Case

Before calling witnesses, however, the Senate of Piedmont had to establish the basic facts of the case. The senators first established the background of the individuals involved in the dispute. Ascanio Bobba came from a noble family that had recently risen to great prominence when one of its members, Marco Antonio Bobba, became Bishop of Aosta (1557), participated in the Council of Trent and was made a cardinal by Pope Pius IV (1565).²⁴ Ascanio was Marco Antonio’s great-nephew. Born in 1579, Ascanio was the son of Alberto Bobba, Marquis of Graglia, and Anna Maria Costa di Polonghera. Alberto was maggiordomo of Duke Carlo Emanuele I’s household between 1597 and 1605 as well as maestro di campo of the duke’s infantry.²⁵ In return for his military service, the duke honored Alberto by creating him knight of the chivalric Ordine dei Santi Maurizio e Lazzaro in 1602 and governor of Nice in 1605.²⁶ In 1618, Alberto was invited to join the duke’s most prestigious chivalric order, the Ordine Supremo della Santissima Annunziata,²⁷ and became master of the horse for the duke’s son, Prince Vittorio Amedeo (1587-1637).²⁸ The following year, the duke granted Alberto three fiefs in the area around Biella with the title of marquis, stating that he had done so because Bobba had risen so much in dignity that his status “required greater expenses than in the past” and thus he needed greater income.²⁹

²⁶ Ibid., 261, n. 127.
²⁷ Luigi Cibrario, Notizia storica del nobilissimo ordine supremo della santissima Annunziata. Sunto degli statuti, catalogo dei cavalieri (Turin: Tipografia Eredi Botta, 1869), 79.
²⁹ Ibid., 281, n. 190, quoting ASTR, Patenti Piemonte, 25, 81v.
From early in his youth, Ascanio took advantage of the opportunities offered by his family’s high standing at court. In 1592, he began his career as a page in the ducal household.\textsuperscript{30} In 1605 he entered the service of Prince Vittorio Amedeo, and by 1615 he was one of the prince’s gentlemen of the chamber.\textsuperscript{31} Ascanio gained a reputation for courage and military prowess as he followed his prince on various military campaigns. When Vittorio Amedeo succeeded his father as duke of Savoy in July 1630, Ascanio continued as a member of the new duke’s inner circle of advisors. Like his father, he was eventually named a knight of the Ordine dei Santi Maurizio e Lazzaro and of the Ordine Supremo della Santissima Annunziata, the highest honors for a nobleman at the court of Savoy.\textsuperscript{32}

The archives do not contain much information about his wife Caterina’s origins.\textsuperscript{33} She was the only surviving child of a landowner from the small Piedmontese town of Cantogno,\textsuperscript{34} Aureglio Inveraldo. Aureglio owned a villa and farmland south of Turin, just outside of the town of Savigliano, where he came into the sphere of the Taffino family, a military family based in Savigliano. Through witness testimony, the Senate established that Caterina had first been married to Count Camillo Taffino, one of her father’s business associates. It was this marriage that likely first brought Caterina into contact with court life in Turin, where she developed a close relationship with the duke’s wife, Duchess Marie Christine of France (1606-1663).\textsuperscript{35} Witnesses recalled that Count Taffino died in 1629, “a year before the plague arrived,” and that Caterina married her second husband Ascanio in early 1630 “just before the plague reached

\begin{footnotes}
\item[31] Ibid.
\item[32] Cigna Santi, 144. Ascanio was created a knight of the Ordine Supremo della Santissima Annunziata on 24 March 1638 by dowager duchess-regent Marie Christine of France.
\item[33] See the family trees at the end of this chapter for Caterina’s two families by marriage.
\item[34] Cantogno is located south of Turin, just west of Moretta and Racconigi.
\item[35] Marie Christine was the second daughter of Henry IV of France and Marie de’ Medici. She married Vittorio Amedeo in 1619.
\end{footnotes}
Savigliano.” At the time of this marriage, Caterina was one of Duchess Marie Christine’s *dames d’honneur*. She had four children from her first marriage: Giusto Aureglio, future governor of Savigliano, Antonio, Angela Margherita, and one daughter (name unknown) who became a nun.

At some point prior to her second marriage to Ascanio Bobba, Caterina’s father died. As his only child, she inherited his villa named “Cosmera” just outside of Savigliano as well as a tidy sum of money. Cosmera included rich farmland and constituted the main part of Caterina’s dowry. For his part, Ascanio had sizeable holdings northeast of the capital in the form of four profitable fiefs. His father Alberto’s fiefs of Peglia, Graglia, Polone, and Sordevolo were transmitted to Ascanio in 1619 when Alberto died. In 1626, Ascanio was granted the fief of San Genuario. He also received significant income from his position as the duke’s Master of the Horse. Thus the marriage between Caterina and Ascanio brought together two wealthy and well-connected individuals. After their marriage, the newlyweds enjoyed a comfortable life as rich landowners who played influential roles at the court of the duke of Savoy.

With Ascanio often away on military campaigns in the service of the duke, Caterina divided her time between Cosmera, where she managed the farmland and oversaw the sale and shipment of crops, and the couple’s stately palazzo in Turin. She also spent a significant amount of time at court with Duchess Marie Christine. Her daughter from her first marriage, Angela Margherita Taffino, was invited to join her mother at court as one of the duchess’s *filles*

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36 Witness no. 5 for Caterina Taffino Bobba, Gioianni Brè, a servant at Cosmera, 60. “Dice...esser un anno prima del contagion....”

37 Caterina’s maidservant, Stefania Vignardi testified in a later suit that Caterina had two sons and two daughters from her first marriage, and that her oldest daughter was a nun at the Convent of Santa Margherita in the town of Chieri. MdR, mazzo 243, fasc. 1139, 12-13.

38 See the end of the chapter for pictures of “Cosmera” today.

39 9 December 1619. ASTR, Patenti camerali, 35, 81v-83.

before her marriage to Ascanio’s nephew Mario Vittorio. The Bobba family’s comfortable life, however, was soon interrupted by the outbreak of the Piedmontese Civil War.

**The Bobba Family and the Piedmontese Civil War**

On 7 October 1637, Duke Vittorio Amedeo I died, leaving his five-year-old son Francesco Giacinto as his successor. The duke’s widow, Marie Christine, Louis XIII’s sister, declared herself regent, holding a ceremony in which her son’s vassals, magistrates, and officials swore loyalty to her in that capacity. Her husband’s younger brothers, Cardinal Maurizio and Tommaso, prince of Carignano, were living in Rome and in the Low Countries, respectively, when the duke died. Irritated that their sister-in-law had assumed the regency without consulting them, the brothers feared that a regency under French princess Marie Christine would lead to French domination of their nephew’s lands. Although relations between the dowager duchess and her brothers-in-law became tense, they managed to avoid open conflict. On 4 October 1638, almost exactly a year after the death of Vittorio Amedeo, young Francesco Giacinto also died.

Marie Christine had only one remaining son, four-year-old Carlo Emanuele. The next in the line of succession after Carlo Emanuele was his uncle, Cardinal Maurizio, followed by Prince Tommaso and Tommaso’s three sons. Given the new situation, the two uncles insisted that they play a more active role in the regency. When Marie Christine tried to forbid them from returning to Turin, the princes, who were openly allied with Spain and the Holy Roman Empire, gathered their Habsburg allies and marched on Piedmont. This was the beginning of the Piedmontese

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41 Angela Margherita first appeared on the duchess’s payroll as one of her *filles d’honneur* in 1632 as “La Damoyselle Taffin.” ASTR, Camera dei conti di Piemonte, Real Casa, Art. 219, Conti della tesoreria della casa delle reali duchesse di Savoia, mazzo 3, 1632.

42 “Una succinta relazione del giuramento prestato a Madama Reale Cristina come Tutrice e Regente, 17 ottobre 1637.” ASTC, Tutele reggenze e luogotenenze, mazzo 3, no. 2.

43 It is important to note that although they are often treated together, each of the Savoy brothers had his own alliances and ambitions that were potentially at odds with those of the other.
Civil War, fought between the duchess’s allies, known as the madamisti (Marie Christine was referred to as Madama Reale) and the princes’ faction, the principisti.44

During the war Ascanio Bobba threw his support behind Marie Christine. In April 1639 he was appointed maestro di campo generale of her army. As principisti troops closed in on the capital, Ascanio led the defense of Turin against the Savoy brothers and their Habsburg allies until the city fell to Prince Tommaso and his Spanish allies in July 1639. Forced to abandon the royal palace, Marie Christine sought safety in Turin’s citadel, which was still manned by a French garrison, eventually fleeing from there over the Alps to Chambéry with her closest supporters, including Ascanio, Caterina, and Angela Margherita. When the invading army entered the city, Ascanio and Caterina’s palazzo was targeted by the soldiers and sacked along with the houses of other prominent madamisti. One witness recalled that “when the signora Marchesa [Caterina] fled to the Citadel due to the arrival of signor Prince Tommaso, she took care to take her little dog with her and left her jewelry in the house, which was plundered by soldiers.”45 Gio Mondino, a jeweler in Turin, remembered that “a few days after Prince Tommaso arrived, four soldiers came into his shop” with some jewels to sell, telling him that “they had taken them from Marchese Bobba’s house.”46 The Bobba family’s holdings outside of Turin were also impacted as the war swept through Piedmont. Ascanio’s fief of San Genuario was hit particularly hard. One witness recounted that the Bobba family’s properties at San Genuario “were ruined after the arrival of Prince Tommaso.”47 Other witnesses noted that

44 Published in the nineteenth century, Gaudenzio Claretta’s work is still the most comprehensive history of Marie Christine’s regency and the Piedmontese Civil War. Claretta, Storia della reggenza di Cristina di Francia.
45 Witness 10 for Mario Vittorio Bobba, Gio Battista Viansone, occupation unknown, 102. “Quando la signora Marchesa per la venuta del signor Prencipe Tomaso si ritirò in Cittadella hebbe cura di portarseco una Cagnolina, e lasciòle sue gioje in casa, quali furono dalla Soldadesca depredate.”
46 Witness no. 6 for Mario Vittorio Bobba, Gio Mondino, jeweler, 102. “Alcuni giorni dopo la venuta del signor Prencipe Tomaso, andarono a sua Bottega quattro Soldati...quali gli dissero che havevano preso in Casa del signor Marchese Bobba alcune gioje da divideresi tra essi.”
47 Viansone, 105. “Li beni di S. genuario sono stati rovinati doppo la venuta del Prencipe Tomaso.”
Spanish soldiers looted the livestock at San Genuario while the farm buildings were ruined due to “the poor treatment they received at the hands of Prince Tommaso’s soldiers” and had been left abandoned. 48 As the war continued, the Bobba family’s crops went unharvested and the fields were left to ruin.

Ascanio and Caterina continued to serve Marie Christine in exile in Chambéry, but Ascanio soon became ill. Caterina’s witnesses described her care for her husband during the last months of his life. Ascanio’s secretary, Gio Andrea Ferraro, stated that his employer’s illness lasted for about two months, during which Caterina incurred significant expenses “for medicines and doctors and other expenses that are usual during the illnesses of such personages.” 49 The duchess made her personal pharmacist available to the Bobba family to provide Ascanio with medicine that they hoped would bring him back to health, but to no avail. Ascanio died in March 1640. This must have been a particularly difficult time for Caterina, as her daughter Angela Margherita also died in Chambéry two months later.

In September, Marie Christine’s French allies regained control over Turin and she soon returned to the capital, reasserting her authority as her son’s regent. The civil war dragged on for two more years, punctuated by periods of truce. Finally, on 14 June 1642, the dowager duchess and her brothers-in-law reached a compromise. 50 Maurizio and Tommaso recognized Marie Christine as regent in exchange for a voice in her regency government. In addition, each prince received a governorship, Maurizio over Nice and Tommaso over Ivrea and Biella. In order to

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48 Tagliardino, 204. “...depone pure del mal trattamento fatto alle cassine di S. Genuario dalla Soldatesca del signor Prencipe Tomaso.”

49 Witness 16 for Caterina Taffino Bobba, Gio Andrea Ferraro, Ascanio Bobba’s secretary, 87. “La malattia del fu signor Marchese Bobba continuò due mesi circa, nella quale la signora marchesa fece molte, e gravi spese si de’ medicinali, che Medici, & altre spese, che si sogliono fare nelle malattie di simili personaggi.”

50 Copies of the treaty are found in ASTC, Materie politiche per rapporti all’interno, Tutele, reggenze e luogotenenze, mazzo 4, 59.
safeguard against future succession disputes, Maurizio resigned his cardinalate and married his
niece, Marie Christine’s daughter Ludovica.⁵¹

Caterina Bobba brought suit against Mario Vittorio the same month that Marie
Christine’s regency was definitively secured through the peace treaty. The damage done to the
Bobba properties had left the family’s finances in disarray. The war had hindered the normal
functioning of administrative and judicial operations and had also prevented Mario Vittorio, as
Ascanio’s heir, from having a full inventory made of his uncle’s estate. Now that the political
situation was calming, Caterina asserted her claim to the usufruct of the Bobba fiefs, to her
dowry, to certain jewels that she claimed were gifted to her by her husband and to furnishings
and silver that she claimed that Mario Vittorio had taken when her husband died. Caterina also
wanted Mario Vittorio to return 4,000 doppie to her that she claimed had been given to her by
her father as an extra-dowry sum (stradotali).⁵² Finally, she argued that she had spent a large
sum of money during Ascanio’s final illness in Chambéry to pay for medicines, doctors, and
Ascanio’s funeral and that Mario Vittorio, as the heir, should reimburse her for those costs.

In her case before the Senate, Caterina claimed that the farmland she had inherited from
her father and brought to the marriage as her dowry was highly profitable, and that upon their
marriage, Ascanio took charge of it, collecting the harvests and selling them to customers in
Turin. She argued that he had received a solid income from Cosmera and fully enjoyed its
extensive income, which he spent as he wished. Mario Vittorio, on the other hand, claimed that
the property that Caterina brought to her marriage to his uncle was of little value and that her

⁵¹ ASTC, Matrimoni Real Casa di Savoia, Addizione, fasc. 18.
⁵² Extra-dowry, or stradotali items were gifts made by fathers to their daughters at marriage. Separate from the
dowry, these items were the full property of the woman, who could transmit them or leave them to whomever she
wished in her testament. There was some debate as to who had the rights over the interest generated by stradotali.
As Sandra Cavallo points out, “some judgments implied that income from extra-dowry property was due to the
husband only if such interest was employed for the benefit of both husband and wife, others that a husband had
unconditional rights, and some even that interest belonged to the wife.” Sandra Cavallo, Charity and Power, 176.
poor management of Cosmera and of Ascanio’s own properties had deteriorated their worth. Hinting that her role as the manager of the Bobba family property was inappropriate for a wife, he argued that during her marriage to his uncle, Caterina had taken advantage of Ascanio by managing both her dotal property (the villa Cosmera and its farmland) and Ascanio’s properties and fiefs, collecting the income from all of them and frivolously spending it such that Ascanio had difficulty paying the household servants.

The Witnesses and their Testimony

From the beginning of the suit, the widow Caterina seemed to have had the stronger case and the more effective witnesses. She called 22 witnesses, while Mario Vittorio called only 13. Most of Caterina’s witnesses were natives of her hometown of Savigliano. They knew her and her family well. Some had worked for her father or her first husband and were familiar with the villa Cosmera. Others were neighbors. When asked about the value of Cosmera’s farmland, the amount of grain it produced, and where the grain was eventually sold, Caterina’s witnesses were able to give precise answers. Their close relationship with the parties in question and their familiarity with the Bobba household were the basis for their credibility as witnesses. For example, witness Gio Battista Porta of Savigliano explained that he had known both Caterina’s father and her first husband for many years. Sixty years old at the time of his deposition, Porta “was raised with said signor Count Aureglio [Caterina’s father] from four years old until fourteen” and, as an adult, went on to serve in both the household of Caterina’s first husband and later as a cavalryman in his company.53 Porta described himself as being quite close with

53 Witness no. 4 for Caterina Taffino Bobba, Gio Battista Porta, lieutenant, 58-59. “Essersi allevato con detto Signor Conte Aureglio d’anni quattro fino alli quatordecì, che è andato a servir per paggio il Sig. Marchese di Caraglio, & doppo haver continuato a servire il Sig. Conte Camillo Taffino per suo paggio, indi cameriere, & finalmente per Soldato nella sua Compagnia de Cavalli.”
Aureglio as well (“molto suo famigliare”), noting that he spent a lot of time with Aureglio when Aureglio stayed at Cosmera during the summer months.

Caterina’s witnesses stressed that, upon their marriage, Ascanio took full decision-making control over her dowry, namely the farm at Cosmera. They recalled that Ascanio immediately sent servants to Savigliano to visit the farm, taking note of the quantities of grain and wine produced there and directing their shipment to Turin for sale. Gioanni Brè, a 25-year-old servant at Cosmera, recalled that “after said marriage the signor Marchese sent one of his agents to Savigliano, called Gionni, whose last name he did not know, who visited all the granaries in said city and at Cosmera...and took count of all the grain, and then returned to Turin.”54 Gio Marengo of Savigliano agreed that “after said marriage, the signor Marchese sent his servants to Savigliano and had them send most of said grain to Turin, and he had them sell the rest in said city of Savigliano.” The witness knew this, he said, because “his father-in-law helped load up the grain.”55 In their narrative, Ascanio immediately took control of Caterina’s dowry, disposing of it as he thought best and sending his servants to carry out his orders. These witnesses portray Ascanio as having complete authority over the Bobba family’s estates and as making all of the decisions. When Caterina is mentioned by them at all, it is only to state that she carried out her husband’s instructions for the estates when he was absent.

In comparison with the succinct statements made by Caterina’s witnesses, who confined themselves to answering the questions posed without deviating into other subject matters, the

54 Witness no. 5 for Caterina Taffino Bobba, Gioanni Brè, servant, 63. “Haver doppo detto matrimonio il sign. Marchese mandato in Savigliano un suo Fattore chiamato Gioanni, ignorando il Cognome, qual visitò tutti gli granari tanto esistenti in detta Città, e nella Cosmera...credendo, che detto Gioanni facesse misurar tutti li grani, con essersi indi tornato a Torino.”

depositions given by Mario Vittorio’s witnesses were lengthy and discursive, meandering off into topics of their choosing. Of his thirteen witnesses, two were his own manservants, one was described as his “subject,” and one was a soldier in his employ. Two other witnesses had worked in Ascanio and Caterina’s household. All of these witnesses were in a position of familiarity with the Bobba household. They were verbose, spontaneously offering details about the family dynamics between Ascanio, Caterina, and Mario Vittorio. Mario Vittorio’s manservant, forty-four year old Baldassare Poma, was the most talkative of all.\(^{56}\) When asked about Caterina’s involvement in running the couple’s estates, Poma specified that “the signora Marchesa managed and administered not only her own dowry and extra-dowry property, meaning the income from the farms of Cosmera, but also the property of said deceased signor Marchese [Ascanio].” He stressed, with some disapproval, that Caterina freely spent the income as she liked and that her spending went to her benefit rather than to benefit the Bobba family. According to him, Caterina poured Ascanio’s money into the various lawsuits she had pending against her sons from her first marriage to Count Taffino. Giacomo Bucchi claimed to have heard Ascanio complain that “the lawsuit between her and signor Conte Taffino had cost him so much that it had emptied his purse.”\(^{57}\)

In addition to spending on her legal issues, the witnesses also noted that Caterina spent lavishly on her daughter Angela Margherita from her first marriage. The girl was living at the court of Duchess Marie Christine and it was important for Caterina that her daughter make a

\(^{56}\) Poma, 88-89. “Teste primo sig. Baldassare Poma d’Albiano d’anni 44, cameriere del signor Marchese capitulante...desiderando la vittoria della Causa per il detto signor Marchese dice che...la signora Marchesa maneggiava e amministrava non solo li suoi beni dotali, e stradotali, cioèli redditi delle cassine della Cosmera, ma anche li beni proprij d’esso fu signor Marchese, retirando li fruti, facendo vender le vettovaglie, retirando li denari, tanto della Cosmera, che di S. Genuario e Bianzèe altri proprij di detto sign. Marchese, spendendo senza che il medemo l’impedisse in cosa alcuna.”

\(^{57}\) Bucchi, 98. “De auditu dal signor Marchese D. Ascanio mentre lui teste praticava in sua Casa che...la lite tra esso e il sign. Conte Taffino gli costava tanto che gli haveva vuotata la borsa.”
good impression there. Gio Francesco Borello, a notary who had worked as Ascanio’s secretary from 1635 to 1636, described how Caterina, collecting money from the family’s various sources of income, including Ascanio’s salary as Master of the Horse, “maintained la signora her daughter sumptuously in clothes, jewels and other gifts...so that she would be well esteemed and loved...maintaining her splendidly at Court.”

Poma dismissed the expenses for Angela Margherita’s court lifestyle as “superfluous.” He recalled that Caterina had often sent him on errands to pick up rich fabrics and clothing that had been made for Angela Margherita by well-known merchants like Spanish-born Giuseppe Reyaudo (also a witness for Mario Vittorio). This “superfluous” spending included indulging Angela Margherita’s sweet tooth by sending her delicious treats (merende) to enjoy and share with friends at court.

Witness and notary Gio Francesco Borello claimed that these personal expenses were so great that the couple’s household struggled for money and the servants were only paid with serious difficulty, despite Ascanio’s sizeable income. The witness knew this, he claimed, because Ascanio had asked him to keep account of his wife’s spending even though Caterina herself “did not want any account to be kept of it whatsoever, but wanted to spend as she pleased.” Apparently, Caterina wanted to use her position as the manager of the family finances to spend without the proper husbandly oversight. Even as Ascanio’s income was siphoned off and his household suffered from the lack of funds, witness Poma claimed that Ascanio “never

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58 Witness no. 13 for Mario Vittorio Bobba, Gio Francesco Borello, notary, 95. “La signora Marchesa...retirando li denari e redditi...spendendoli a suo piacere...a mantener sontuosamente vestiti, e gioje, e altri regali...acciò fosse ben vista e amada la signora sua figlia...la quale detta signora Marchesa manteneva splendidamente a Corte.”


61 Borello, 95-96. “Il sig. Marchese Ascanio li faceva tener conto di tutto ciò, che s’esigeva, e la signora Marchesa non voleva, che se ne tenesse conto alcuno, ma che voleva spender a suo cost, e piacere.”
stopped her from doing anything.”

Bernardino Bertolero, Mario Vittorio’s manservant, agreed that Caterina held the purse strings in the Bobba family. When Ascanio was alive, he said, Bertolero observed that Caterina managed the “entire household” and Ascanio “did not contradict her in anything.” Their income, Bertolero said, was used as Caterina wished. Gio Domenico Gamachio also emphasized that Caterina was the one running the household and overseeing the family finances. During Ascanio’s life, Gamachio visited the Bobba household many times and personally observed Caterina giving money to the household purser for everyday expenses. He noted that the income from Ascanio’s fiefs was paid directly into her hands.

Another witness, Duchess Marie Christine’s household accountant, observed that when Ascanio needed money he went to his wife because she was the one who took care of the finances and she would spend the money as Ascanio asked. Agostino Astrua was responsible for collecting Ascanio’s income from his fief of Graglia and delivering it to him. He recalled that he had been carrying out this task for years when Ascanio “ordered him to give it [the income from Graglia] to the signora Marchesa, as she was the one who collected the income, not just from him, but from various others from San Genuario e Bianzè and others of his lands, and that she would issue a receipt for it.”

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62 Poma, 89. Caterina spent money “senza che il medemo [Ascanio] l’impedisse in cosa alcuna.”
63 Bertolero, 91. “La signora Marchesa maneggiava tutta la Casa, non contradicendoli in cosa alcuna detto sig. Marchese D. Ascanio.”
64 Witness no. 3 for Mario Vittorio Bobba, Gio Domenica Gamachio, a subject of Mario Vittorio Bobba, 91.
65 Tagliardino, 92.
Thus far Mario Vittorio’s witnesses seem to be staying on script, supporting his claims regarding Caterina’s financial management of the household, a role that Mario Vittorio criticized as inappropriate and that enabled her, he argued, to take advantage of her husband’s generosity and goodwill towards her. According to his witnesses, Caterina had total control over the household spending, over her dowry income from Cosmera and even over Ascanio’s income from his fiefs and his salary as Master of the Horse. Mario Vittorio clearly intended their testimony to support his claim that Caterina was putting her own interests over those of the Bobba family.

When it came to Ascanio’s relationship with his nephew, however, Mario Vittorio’s witnesses started to make statements that conflicted with his claims. In his deposition, soldier Giacomo Bucchi, the witness who was sent by Mario Vittorio to visit Ascanio during his final illness in Chambéry, raised Ascanio’s concerns over his nephew’s gambling. Indeed, Mario Vittorio’s gambling and irresponsible money management were hot topics amongst his own witnesses. Manservant Bernardino Bertolero recalled being asked “repeatedly” by Ascanio whether his nephew was still gambling and, after Bertolero answered in the affirmative “many times,” Ascanio explained that he wanted Mario Vittorio to be his heir but that he would need to arrange his inheritance in such a way that Mario Vittorio “would not have the opportunity to gamble.”

Likewise, Duchess Marie Christine’s household accountant heard repeatedly from Ascanio that he wanted to leave his nephew in a comfortable position, but that Mario Vittorio gambled and needed to be controlled. Even the witness most critical of Caterina, manservant Poma, reported that he had often heard Ascanio say that “it was not his intention to deprive him

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[Mario Vittorio] of his property, but only to retrain him so that he would not gamble,” since his nephew “gambled everything he could.”

Unsurprisingly, Mario Vittorio’s gambling problem was not actually a part of any of his legal claims or arguments. His witnesses raised this issue of their own accord and not in response to any questions about it. Interestingly, Caterina’s witnesses did not address Mario Vittorio’s gambling, or his character, at all. They steered clear of the subject, simply answering the questions posed without adding any additional information or opinions about Mario Vittorio. This is likely a testament to Caterina’s confidence in the strength of her claims. Thus, Mario Vittorio’s own witnesses created crucial doubts about his character and worthiness as Ascanio’s heir in their testimony before the Senate.

Taking a closer look at their statements about Caterina, Mario Vittorio’s witnesses also undermined his claim that Caterina was taking advantage of her husband, mismanaging their assets, and acting in a role that was inappropriate for a wife. Although they noted that Caterina was spending the family’s money, his witnesses plainly stated that all of Caterina’s household management activities were done with Ascanio’s full consent. After all, her husband never “contradicted her in anything.” The witness testimony makes it clear that Ascanio, often on the road in the service of the duchess, trusted his wife to see to the daily operation of their household finances despite occasional concerns about her overspending. Managing the family’s finances was not an unusual role for a noble wife in a society where the men were often away at war or on diplomatic missions, and the senators hearing this case would certainly have considered this to be a weak argument on Mario Vittorio’s part.

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68 Poma, 107-08. “Bisognava ligare nel suo Testamento il signor Marchese suo Nepote, perche giocava tutto, non essendo la mente di detto fu signor Marchese stata di privarlo de’ suoi beni, ma solo di rafrenarlo, acciò non giocasse.”
Furthermore, although Mario Vittorio complained that Caterina spent frivolously, his
witness Gio Battista Viansone contradicted this claim, admitting that Caterina spent the income
from her dowry estate in Savigliano “to benefit the entire Casa.”\textsuperscript{69} Giacomo Bucchi stated that
“said Marchesa spent in the service of her husband, as well as for her daughter, who was at
Court.”\textsuperscript{70} Although it appears that Ascanio was sometimes concerned that his wife was spending
too much, a man of his status and proximity to the duke and duchess would certainly have been
aware that his stepdaughter Angela Margherita’s appearance at court reflected on her family, and
that a certain amount of spending was necessary for her to maintain her coveted position within
the duchess’s household. Angela Margherita was one of only eight \textit{filles d’honneur} at the
duchess’s court and thus only eight noble families could boast of having a daughter living under
the duchess’s guidance. Marie Christine’s \textit{filles d’honneur} were “young representatives of the
nobility, called to court between the ages of 7 and 10, whose education was personally assigned
to the duchess, who also took care of choosing their husbands and of their dowry.”\textsuperscript{71} Indeed,
Angela Margherita’s position at court and relationship with the duchess was likely one of the
reasons that Mario Vittorio considered her to be a suitable bride. Even Mario Vittorio benefitted
from Caterina’s purchases for Angela Margherita, as they served to maintain and increase her
status at court. It is also interesting to note that, despite Mario Vittorio’s claim that Caterina was
spending so much on herself and on her daughter that the household servants went unpaid, none
of the servants on either side of the case complained that this had happened to them.

\textsuperscript{69} Viansone, 93-94. “Venendo occasione di far qualche pagamento, lo faceva per servizio di detto sig. Marchese...si spendevano anche delli grani, e vini, che venivano dalle Cassine di Savigliano per beneficio di tutta la Casa.”
\textsuperscript{70} Bucchi, 94. “Detta Marchesa spendeva per servizio del marito, ma anche della figlia, che era in Corte.”
Out of Mario Vittorio’s thirteen witnesses, which individuals provided the most negative testimony and which were more supportive of him? When looked at individually, it is clear that the family servants had the most to say about Mario Vittorio’s character and were most critical of him. His two servants, Baldassare Poma and Bernardino Bertolero, along with Duchess Marie Christine’s accountant Hercole Tagliardino provided the most harmful testimony, raising the matter of Mario Vittorio’s gambling problem and Ascanio’s concerns for the family patrimony with Mario Vittorio as his heir. Although Tagliardino was not a member of the Bobba household, he stated that he was “very familiar with the house of said signor Marchese.”

Soldier Giacomo Bucchi, who recounted his visit to Ascanio in Chambéry, also mentioned Ascanio’s concerns, but emphasized that Ascanio loved his nephew “even more than his own son.” Another soldier, Gio Gonatana, who had served Ascanio for several years, stressed that Ascanio greatly loved Mario Vittorio and said nothing about his character.

Which witnesses were most supportive or critical of Caterina? Although the witnesses were not asked about Mario Vittorio’s character or his relationship with his uncle, the witnesses were specifically questioned about Caterina’s conduct as the manager of the family property. The majority of Mario Vittorio’s witnesses supported Caterina by specifying that her management of Ascanio’s property and income was carried out with Ascanio’s full knowledge and support. Baldassare Poma and Ascanio’s secretary Gio Borello seemed to criticize Caterina’s excessive spending for her daughter at court, but admitted that she spent to benefit the household and with her husband’s knowledge. Bertolero, Tagliardino, Sclaverano, Astrua, and Viansone were not critical of Caterina’s role and agreed that she acted under the approval of her husband. Gamachio stated that Caterina managed the household money but did not say what her husband thought of

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72 Tagliardino, 92. “…essendo lui Teste molto famigliare della Casa di detto sig. marchese.”
her activities. Some witnesses, such as the jeweler and the merchant, naturally had no knowledge of the inner workings of the Bobba household given their limited interactions with the family members.

**Explaining the Witness’s Testimony**

By the end of the depositions, Mario Vittorio’s witnesses had done his case more harm than good, having brought his poor reputation to the Senate’s attention and even called into question his fitness as the Bobba heir. Why would Mario Vittorio’s witnesses deviate from his claims in such striking ways, undermining his arguments and speaking poorly of him? It was not unheard of for witnesses to be “difficult.” They might deny knowing anything about the facts of the case, or they might meander into irrelevant topics that did not address the questions posed. As in the Bobba case, they might even provide testimony that was detrimental to the party who called them, perhaps merely because they felt obliged to tell the truth rather than to spin a party’s narrative. Litigants chose their witnesses carefully, however, particularly in a suit such as the Bobba case in which the sizeable inheritance of a nobleman was at stake. Thus, the expectation on the part of the litigant was that the witnesses would say what they were expected to say. While one witness might go “off script,” the depositions in the Bobba case are striking precisely because Mario Vittorio’s witnesses spontaneously but consistently broached subjects that undermined his case.

There are several reasons why Mario Vittorio’s witnesses might have decided to work against him. While they were certainly prepared and coached by his legal counsel, these witnesses may nevertheless have felt compelled to tell the truth about Mario Vittorio’s gambling problem and his uncle’s concerns. They may have realized that if Mario Vittorio gambled away the family fortune, his servants might well lose their jobs, whereas continue oversight from
Caterina would guarantee their continued employment and regular payment of their wages. Indeed, Mario Vittorio’s bad habit continued throughout his life. When he died years later his only child, his daughter Cristina Margherita from his second marriage, inherited a number of his lawsuits over unpaid debts, showing that, despite Ascanio’s hopes, age did not temper Mario Vittorio’s penchant for gambling and taking out loans he had difficulty repaying. In looking for clues about Mario Vittorio’s character, it is noticeable that he did not leave much of a record in the archives and did not play a significant role at the ducal court, nor did he follow Ascanio’s illustrious footsteps into a military career.

A bundle of letters sent from members of the Bobba family to the duke twenty years after the events of this case reveals some additional clues about Mario Vittorio’s life following the lawsuit. It seems that in early 1666, Mario Vittorio caused a scandal among the nobility when he forced his unwilling daughter, Cristina Margherita, to marry Giovanni Valperga, the marchese of Olmo. Cristina Margherita, his daughter by his second wife, Laura Cristina Valle, was twelve years old at the time and therefore below the age of consent for marriage, which was thirteen. The violence Mario Vittorio allegedly used against his daughter to force her into the marriage was the subject of gossip at the duke of Savoy’s court. In February, Mario Vittorio asked Duke Carlo Emanuele II to quell the rumors about his treatment of Cristina Margherita: “I have had her brought to me in San Genuario and I must assure Your Royal Highness that she is at full liberty to declare her will...I am an honorable knight incapable of doing violence against anyone, much less my only daughter whom I love more than myself.” He went on to explain that if his daughter had temporarily forgotten “that filial obedience which is due to a father” it was only her mother’s

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73 MdR, mazzo 271, fasc. 1301, 1302, and 1304. For example, Cristina Margherita inherited a suit against Carlo Tommaso Isnardi, marquis of Caraglio, for a loan of 1,500 doppie that he made to Mario Vittorio in 1649, and a suit against Pietro Filiberto Roncas, marquis of Caselle, over her father’s debt of 500 Spanish gold doppie.
74 Mario Vittorio Bobba married the widow Laura Cristina Valle in 1651.
fault. For reasons that are unclear, Mario Vittorio claimed that his wife, Laura, was encouraging their daughter to disrespect him and defy his authority. He was certain that his daughter would “not heed the urgings of her mother who, not content to withhold the respect owed to a husband, for reasons that are completely untrue, also wants her daughter to follow her in her caprices.”

By September of that year, Cristina Margherita had fled to a convent to seek shelter and was writing to the duke herself: “To inform the world of my innocence and the many tyrannies used against me in this so-called marriage with the Marchese of Olmo, I have withdrawn to the Convent of the Crucifix...I pray Your Royal Highness to aid me with your usual mercy.”

Cristina Margherita’s pleas to the duke were successful. Her marriage to Giovanni Valperga was annulled in 1669 due to her minor age at the time of the contract. She married Francesco Maurizio Saluzzo di Valgrana shortly thereafter.

This scandalous family dispute is one of the very few pieces of evidence available of Mario Vittorio’s character and it does not provide a positive view. Was he simply an unlikeable man, perhaps a bully, who failed to inspire loyalty in his witnesses, most of whom were neighbors and servants of the Bobba family? Or was he a bad strategist, selecting his witnesses poorly? Or was he simply making do with the witnesses he had available, encouraged to pursue a weak case by attorneys greedy to keep him paying their fees? All of these possibilities could explain the kind of detrimental testimony seen in this suit.

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75 Mario Vittorio Bobba to Carlo Emanuele II, 3 February 1666. Lettere part. B, 99. “Devo assicurare V.A.R. essere in tutta liberta di dichiarare la sua volonta...sono Cavagliere di honore non capace di far violenze ad alcuno, nonché ad una mia figlia unica qual amo più che me stesso, persuadendomi che essa continuara in quella figliale obbedienza che pure è dovuta per tutte le ragioni ad un Padre...e non seguirà la persuasioni della madre che non contenta di sottrarsi essa dal rispetto dovuto al marito, con suppositioni totalmente lontane dal vero, vorrebbe ancora seguissese la figlia li suoi caprici.”

The most compelling possibility, however, is one that considers the witness’s motivations in light of the tense political context in Piedmont in 1643, when the depositions were taken. The Piedmontese Civil War had recently ended. Duchess Marie Christine, with military support from her brother Louis XIII, had forced her brothers-in-law to accept her regency and reasserted her control over the government in Turin. Caterina had a close relationship with the duchess. She had been at Marie Christine’s side during the war, fleeing Turin with her when the city was overrun by Prince Tommaso’s army. Ascanio and Caterina had paid the price for their support. Their fiefs in the countryside and their palazzo in Turin were overrun by Prince Tommaso’s soldiers and looted, which certainly had an impact on their servants and neighbors. Ascanio himself fell ill and died in the duchess’s service during the war.

This begs the question of what Mario Vittorio had been doing during the war. Some information is provided by witness depositions in a lawsuit that took place in 1649 over a gambling debt that Mario Vittorio contracted during the war. Once again, Baldessare Poma and Bernardino Bertolero were summoned to testify as servants who were present when Mario Vittorio contracted the debt. Bertolero recalled that back in 1640, “when the City of Turin was besieged by the French army, I was serving said Illustrious Marchese Bobba as his manservant.”

By that time, Ascanio, Caterina, and Mario Vittorio’s wife Angela Margherita had fled the capital with Duchess Marie Christine. From July 1639 to September 1640, Prince Tommaso had control over the city and in the summer of 1640 it was back under siege by Marie Christine’s French allies. Mario Vittorio had apparently remained behind in Turin as it came under principisti control. Bertolero recounted that “during that siege said marchese went one day

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77 MdR, mazzo 271, fasc. 1301. “Io mi raccordo che ritrovandomi dell’ anno mille seicento quaranta nella città di Torino mentre era assediato dall’armata francese, in qual tempo servivo il detto Ill.mo D. Marchese Bobba per cameriere come l’havevo servito molti anni avanti....”
to the house of Count Amedeo di Caraglio” where he saw Mario Vittorio “play cards with said Count.” He remembered that Mario Vittorio “lost a good sum of doppie...and this without having any cash in hand.”78 The witnesses noted that Mario Vittorio also socialized with Cardinal Maurizio during this time. Bertolero recalled that during the siege, Mario Vittorio “played and lost another sum at said game of cards with the Most Excellent Maurizio of Savoy.”79 Poma remembered that Mario Vittorio’s debts to both the Count of Caraglio and Maurizio of Savoy “were well known at the Court of the Most Serene Prince Tommaso.”80 Bertolero agreed that “all of this was common knowledge at that time in the City of Turin.”81

This information provides a window into Caterina and Mario Vittorio’s respective positions at the court of Dowager Duchess Marie Christine. When Caterina brought suit against Mario Vittorio before the Senate, the peace treaty between the duchess-regent and the princes of Savoy had been signed mere days before and Marie Christine was finally recognized as her son’s regent. Thus the fortunes of Caterina and other madamisti were in the ascendant after years of uncertainty. The witnesses had been directly impacted by the war. Bernardino Bertolero was from the hamlet of San Genuario, which he reported had been devastated by the war and had become “uninhabited due to the army that had passed that way.”82 The witnesses were surely relieved at the end of the war that had seen both their capital of Turin and their countryside overrun by one army after another since 1638. The signing of the peace treaties and the reinstatement of Marie Christine promised a return to the stability that had been disturbed.

78 Ibid. “...durante tal assedio detto D. marchese un giorno andò nella casa del D. Conte Amedeo di Caraglio e lo seguitavo sua persona...in quel casa che D. Marchese li giocava alla Carte con detto D. Conte Amedeo di Caraglio, con il quale al gioco perdeste una bona somma di doppie...e cio senza haver alcuni dinari avanti...”
79 Ibid. “D. Marchese Bobba giocò d’altra somma e restò perdente al detto gioco alle carte con il fu Ecc.mo Mauritio di Savoia d’altra somma di doppie...”
80 Ibid. “...alla Corte del Ser.mo P.e Tomaso et era cosa notoria...”
81 Ibid. “...di tutto quanto sovra in quel tempo nella Città di Torino n’era pubblica voce.”
82 Bertolero, 204. “Teste...depone del mal stato de beni suddetti a causa della guara, havendo veduto le suddette Cassine...disabitate a causa dell’armata che è ivi passata.”
Nevertheless, the political situation would remain unstable for some time. Given the tense climate under the duchess’s newly reestablished regency, Mario Vittorio’s witnesses may have concluded that it would be in their best interests to support Caterina. Ambitious servants would recognize that Caterina was well placed to provide them with opportunities at the regent’s court, where it seems that Mario Vittorio had a poor reputation and limited political capital. By taking control over their own testimony, these witnesses worked within the highly controlled framework of the legal deposition to express their own perception of the facts of the case and, in doing so, gained a political voice. For these witnesses, expressing support for Caterina may have meant aligning themselves with Marie Christine and her regency.

In short, there were various possible motives that may have led the witnesses to shape their testimony as they did. The witnesses may have been simply telling the truth; they may have been securing possibilities for continued future employment with the responsible Caterina; they may have hoped for advancement at court with Caterina as a well-placed patron; they may have seen Mario Vittorio as a bully and felt no need to be loyal to him. In addition, Mario Vittorio may have chosen his witnesses poorly or have been forced to make do with the individuals available to him. These possibilities are not mutually exclusive and it is likely that, for each witness, more than one motive was at play. They do, however, point to the conclusion that the witnesses were acting according to what seemed best to them rather than merely following instructions from the litigant or his attorney, who had surely hoped to rely on their testimony. Their behavior also demonstrates an awareness of the political dynamics in their society, from the ducal court to countryside hamlets.

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As the witnesses on both sides seem to have predicted, Caterina came out on top in this lawsuit. In the sentence issued in December 1644, the Senate granted her claims, confirming her right to usufruct of Ascanio’s income and ordering Mario Vittorio to reimburse her for the costs of Ascanio’s funeral. Although this segment of the suit ended with Caterina’s death in 1647, it was part of a larger dispute between the Bobba family and the Taffino family over Ascanio and Caterina’s property. As such, the suit continued for another seventy years and was inherited by another two generations of Bobba women, namely Mario Vittorio’s only child Cristina Margherita (1654-1678), and her only child Maria Giovanna Battista (1675-1741). The records of the lawsuits that arose from this original case refer back to the original depositions taken in 1643. There does not appear to have been any further witness testimony in this case.

This lawsuit encourages historians to rethink the assumption that because witnesses were coached, their testimony necessarily reflects their side’s legal strategy. Witnesses were not passive pawns in court who simply followed instructions with no thoughts of their own. They had an understanding of the legal system and of the potential significance of their own testimony. They had their own motivations and objectives, which could lead to unexpected results during questioning. The witnesses in this case used their testimony as an opportunity to distance themselves from a nobleman with a poor reputation and extensive debts and to gain a well-placed patron in Caterina Bobba. In addition, this lawsuit demonstrates that a noblewoman like Caterina with close ties to the center of power could leverage her political capital and potential value as a patron to garner support that could provide her with significant assistance in the judicial system.

The conclusions drawn in this chapter about the behavior of the Bobba witnesses make two key contributions to the historiography of popular agency in early modern political life.
First, the unusual behavior of the witnesses demonstrates that common people could and did exercise their own agency as they gave depositions. They ignored questions, went off on tangents, and raised new issues that they wanted the court to consider, stubbornly ensuring that their narrative of the facts was included in the official record of the lawsuit. Second, the witness agency demonstrated in the Bobba case contributes another chapter to the well-developed body of work emphasizing the ability of the common people to engage in public, political and juridical life in early modern Europe. These witnesses used the legal frameworks with which they were familiar in order to pursue their own interests; in this case, aligning themselves with the recent victor of a tumultuous civil war and distancing themselves from someone that the new regime likely held in low esteem.
### Figure 7.
Caterina Bobba’s Witnesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Gio Domenico Ferrero</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Cavalryman and neighbor of Caterina’s first husband</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Alessandro Mollineri</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gio Domenico Arbaudo</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Captain under Caterina’s first husband</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Gio Battista Porta</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gioanni Brè</td>
<td>Near Savigliano</td>
<td>Servant at the Savigliano estate</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bartolomeo Crestatore</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Not given; his father worked for Caterina’s father</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Count Beggiamo of Savigliano</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Nobleman</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Gio Francesco Mojaca</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Gio Marengo</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Luigi Grosso</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Attorney</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Vespasiano d’Antignano</td>
<td>Antignano (near Asti)</td>
<td>Cavalryman</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Guglielmo Sanino</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Melchior Rossetto</td>
<td>Foreigner living in Savigliano</td>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
<td>Over 40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Giuglio Helena di Cervere</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>Granary owner</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Gio Dupin Valetto</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Servant of the duchess</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Gio Andrea Ferraro</td>
<td>Asti</td>
<td>Ascanio’s secretary</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Gioanni Castelli di Contos</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Pharmacist working for the duchess’s pharmacist (Pagliero)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Sigismondo la Croce</td>
<td>Savigliano</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Grisante Ferraris</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Notary</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Ludovico Morano</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Annibale Grimaldi, Baron Boglio</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Nobleman</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Annibale Pagliero</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>The duchess’s pharmacist</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
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Figure 8.
Mario Vittorio Bobba’s Witnesses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>From</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Baldassare Poma</td>
<td>Near Trento</td>
<td>Mario Vittorio’s manservant</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bernardino Bertolero</td>
<td>San Genuario*</td>
<td>Mario Vittorio’s manservant</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gio Domenico Gamachio</td>
<td>Montaldo (east of Turin)</td>
<td>A subject of Mario Vittorio</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Hercole Tagliardino</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>The duchess’s accountant</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Giuseppe Reynaudo</td>
<td>Barcelona, living in Turin</td>
<td>Merchant</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Gio Mondino</td>
<td>Turin</td>
<td>Jeweler</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Michel Antonio Sclaverano</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Ascanio’s secretary</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Carlo Antonio Bussolino</td>
<td>Cuorgnè (north of Turin)</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Agostino Astrua</td>
<td>Graglia*</td>
<td>Judge in the marquisate of Graglia</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Gio Battista Viansone</td>
<td>Revigliasco (east of Turin)</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Giacomo Bucchi</td>
<td>Casale (east of Turin)</td>
<td>Soldier</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Gio Gonatana</td>
<td>Andorno (north of Turin)</td>
<td>Soldier, served Ascanio for 3-4 years</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Gio Francesco Borello</td>
<td>Piverone (northeast of Turin)</td>
<td>Notary and Ascanio’s secretary 1635-36</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* San Genuario and Graglia were fiefs of Ascanio Bobba, located northeast of Turin
Figure 9. The Taffino and Bobba Family Trees

The Taffino Family (Caterina’s First Marriage)

Aureglio Inveraldo | Giusto Taffino (d. 1612) m. Maria Panizza

| Caterina Inveraldo (d. 1647) m. (1606) Camillo Taffino (d. 1629)

| Giusto Aureglio (d. 1659) m. Antonia | Antonio m. Anna | Angela Margherita m. (1635) Mario Vittorio Bobba

The Bobba Family (Caterina’s Second Marriage)

Alberto m. (1581) Anna Maria Costa di Polonghera

| Ascanio (1579-1640) m. (1) Margherita Biglia (2) Caterina Taffino | Marco Antonio m. Caterina Margherita | Anna Margherita. m. Gio Rossignolo

| Mario Vittorio m. (1) Angela Margherita Taffino (d. 1640) m. (1651) (2) Laura Cristina Valle | Cristina Margherita (1654?-1678) m. (1) Giovanni Valperga (annulled 1669) m. (2) (1669) Francesco Maurizio Saluzzo di Valgrana | Maria Giovanna Battista m. (1686) Gaspare Ludovico Morozzo
Photos 6-8: Caterina Bobba’s farm and villa “Cosmera” today.
Conclusion

Since the 1980s, scholars of early modern Italy have been particularly interested in the legal status of women. In her celebrated collection of essays, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber painted a dismal picture of the lives of patrician women, fenced in by the severe legal restrictions inherent in a patriarchal system whose aim was the preservation and enhancement of the “house.”\(^1\) The “house” was constructed by the male members of the lineage, who transmitted their name and property from generation to generation “excluding women from ownership as far as they could.”\(^2\) As opposed to men, who held fixed places in the “house,” women were but “passing guests” in both their natal and marital families, as they were shifted from one lineage to another to serve the strategies of their fathers, brothers, and husbands.\(^3\)

Whereas Klapisch-Zuber saw early modern law as a “prison” for women, Thomas Kuehn concluded that if it was a prison, “it was hardly an effective one.”\(^4\) Moreover, he noted that the law also restricted men, “who faced obligations to their kin, spouses and progeny, and at times needed the consent of others, including females, to act.”\(^5\) Kuehn argued that the actual status of women in Renaissance Florence was complex and ambiguous. For example, he pointed out that Klapisch-Zuber’s portrayal of “the inalterable structural tension between lineages…would not predict an event such as a son giving property to a mother who had remarried into another lineage. But such events could and did happen.”\(^6\) In studying early modern women, Kuehn stressed moments of conflict and ambiguity. Drawing on Kuehn’s approach to the study of law

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2 Ibid., 117.
3 Ibid., 118.
5 Ibid., 104.
6 Ibid., 105.
and society, I have relied on the records of lawsuits within noble families to explore the constant negotiation inherent in women’s status rather than seeking distinct structures and sharp definitions.

The experiences of the women involved in this study show that elite women were adept at maneuvering within the legal system. They were no strangers to the law or to sophisticated legal arguments. Lawsuits provided them with opportunities to assert their claims to wealth and property and to enhance their political status, but they were also risky ventures. Sometimes even a solid legal claim was not sufficient to ensure a favorable outcome. The other side’s own political standing or the court’s preference for certain claims are some of the factors that could hinder a woman’s suit. Thus, these case studies reflect the reality that sometimes women were successful in their claims and sometimes they were not. Although a woman like Isabelle de Grillet is striking in her capacity to overcome the obstacles she encountered and to intimidate her legal enemies, a woman like Maria Solaro, just as determined in her dispute against her cousins and the veteran of much litigation, was less successful. Isabelle de Grillet’s high status and proximity to the duke of Savoy meant that she was able to act effectively and independently while Maria Solaro had to rely on aid from powerful men in her family. Women’s experiences in the law courts were impacted by their social status and their access to political and kinship networks. The six women studied in this dissertation represent the broad spectrum of possible outcomes that a noblewoman could achieve when going to court.

These case studies have also shown that it is vital to consider lawsuits in their entirety rather than focusing on the sentence or the ultimate results of a dispute. While legal victory is clear in the case of Caterina Bobba because she received a favorable sentence from the Senate, it is no less evident in the example of Isabelle de Grillet. She was successful in her legal battle
against the Luserna brothers, not because a sentence was issued in her favor, but because her adversaries grew frustrated and abandoned the field. Thus, the sentence was not always the most important moment in a lawsuit. The multiple sentences issued in disputes among the nobility and the intergenerational nature that these suits often assumed, make it necessary to consider these actions in their long-term contexts. Such a view also makes it possible to uncover the dynamic nature of these lawsuits. As years and decades passed, the motivations underlying a legal claim could change and shift as they did for the Luserna family in the Savoy-Racconigi/Luserna lawsuit.

Because of the lengthy, inter-generational nature of early modern noble lawsuits and because of the multiple sentences issued in each one over the years, I found that the most fruitful methodology for uncovering the dynamics at play between the litigants was a microhistorical approach. Focusing on a small handful of cases made it possible to trace the intricacies of noble lawsuits and to analyze the decisions that the parties made during these disputes. By studying the records of each case in depth and focusing in on decisive moments, I sought to interpret the litigants’ motivations as they pursued their claims before the Senate year after year. As I read through the extensive records of briefs and petitions, I paused at key turning points in the disputes that puzzled me: Why did the Luserna family immediately launch an appeal against the 1566 sentence that was so favorable to them? Why did the Luserna brothers abandon their suit against Isabelle de Grillet? Why was Maria Solaro’s strong claim to her father’s inheritance dismissed by the Senate in favor of her distant cousins? Why did Beatrice Langosco work so hard to disinherit her daughter Matilda? Why did Mario Vittorio Bobba’s witnesses undermine him and support his adversary Caterina Bobba? In seeking to answer these questions and interpret the motivations of the individuals involved, I placed the parties within the context of
their kinship relationships and their political standing at the court of the duke of Savoy. Aware of the limitations of my sources, I have worked to provide plausible explanations for the decisions of both the litigants and the Senate.

A microhistorical approach to these cases has enabled me to make some key observations that would not have been apparent had I followed an approach that focused on a larger sample of cases. First, as stated above, I found that the ultimate sentence in each case was less significant to the litigants than were the years of litigation that preceded it. While historians have tended to focus on the sentence to indicate the “success” or “failure” of female litigants, sometimes the sentence is deceptive in that what we might view as a success was not seen as such by the litigants. Beatrice Luserna appealed the 1566 sentence that was issued in her favor. For Beatrice and her family, that sentence was a source of frustration rather than a victory. In other cases, the absence of a sentence was significant. Although the Senate never issued a sentence in her favor, Isabelle de Grillet came out victorious in her dispute with the Luserna brothers, who abandoned their claim. Second, this approach also shed light on the dynamics of women’s patron/client relationships. Caterina Bobba successfully drew on her client network and her proximity to the dowager duchess of Savoy to win her case. Isabelle de Grillet and Matilda of Savoy, however, experienced the limitations of their reliance on powerful patrons. Finally, a microhistorical methodology revealed the dynamic nature of early modern noble litigation. While historians tend to focus on the original claims of the litigants and the sentence issued in response to those claims, a close study of the lawsuits involved in this dissertation demonstrate that the litigants’ objectives and motivations changed over the years. In the Luserna case, a suit filed in order to claim payment of a dowry gradually became associated with the family honor. In such cases, obtaining a favorable final ruling became secondary to continuing a legal battle that had become
tied up with the integrity of the family as they suffered a number of political slights over the years. These observations, crucial to understanding each dispute, are only perceptible to the historian who focuses on these unexpected moments in the case record.

This dissertation illuminates overlooked but compelling aspects of the legal agency of early modern women in Piedmont by using previously neglected sources, particularly the family archives found in the State Archives and Royal Library in Turin. It brings Piedmont into a European-wide historiographical discussion on gender, kinship, and politics. It has, however, also addressed questions that will be of interest to historians beyond early modern Italianists. By showing how the legal and the political intertwined in women’s use of legal procedures, this project enhances our understanding of early modern political culture and of women’s political roles prior their achievement of political rights. Elite women were highly active in the law courts as well as very knowledgeable about how to maneuver within them. They drew on their patronage networks, both as patrons and as clients, summoning assistance from both above and below them on the social spectrum. They made political alliances that could help them against more powerful legal adversaries. In short, they combined a savvy use of the law with political strategies that furthered their interests.

This project raises a number of questions that are crucial to understanding women’s use of the law. One issue that bears further study is the presence of the attorneys in these lawsuits. To what extent were the attorneys the ones shaping the arguments made in these cases? Although it is not always possible to identify the names of the attorneys involved, some names do appear. What kinds of networks did they have? It is probable that the attorneys for each litigant knew each other professionally. Might they also have had kinship ties with each other? Although the attorneys represented the interests of their clients, they certainly would also have had their own
interests in keeping these lengthy lawsuits going (a chance to make a name for themselves, to maintain a steady income?). From the perspective of the litigants, it is also possible that continuing to pursue a suit year after year was a good way to retain competent legal experts and to keep them on retainer. The presence of the attorney and their role in shaping the legal arguments, although outside of the scope of this project, is an essential component to understanding the workings of the early modern tribunals.

One question raised by this dissertation is the issue of primogeniture and whether it was part of a rising trend during the early modern period or whether forces had been pushing the idea for some time in the face of resistance. The cases studied herein resist the neat categorization of a rise of primogeniture and women’s resistance to it. As stated above, historians have claimed a rise in primogeniture in a range of different time periods. This dissertation suggests that the situation was likely more complex, at least in early modern Piedmont. As stated by David Siddle in his study of peasant inheritance in Savoy, historians have applied artificial definitions and classifications to inheritance strategies in an attempt to impose order out of chaos: societies have been categorized “by either partible or by impartible inheritance strategies; by composite or nuclear households; by lateral, lineal, agnatic or uterine succession.”7 Siddle warns, however, that “this urge to dichotomise...fails to do justice to the richness of strategies which peasant families employed to enlarge..and ensure the transmission of their property.”8 Indeed, he suggests that imposing a “grid” over “a range of customs and laws at a national or international scale have sometimes limited rather than extended our understanding of family structures...and inheritance.”9 Rather than focusing on single events or single generations or adopting categories

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 334.
or accepted assumptions, Siddle took a long-term approach similar to that applied in this dissertation. This led him to conclude that peasant families accumulated and transmitted property over generations using what he termed “impartible partibility.” Siddle’s work and that of Kuehn demonstrate the importance of questioning neat categories and definitions. The methodology applied in this dissertation (long term case studies) makes it possible to suggest that the generally accepted trend towards primogeniture is more complex when studied at ground level. In the cases dealing with primogeniture, a snapshot of certain moments in the lawsuit might lead to the conclusion that there is an overwhelming trend towards primogeniture. Analyzing these lawsuits over decades and generations, however, reveals that this trend is far from certain.

The long-term approach applied in these case studies, more evenly balancing the weight of the judicial sentence with the impact of the litigants’ actions throughout the life of the suit, illuminates the dynamic nature of early modern noble lawsuits. As I have shown, the central issues and arguments stressed by the litigants changed over time. This longer view offers a more complete and nuanced picture than a snapshot in time, often focusing on the sentence, whose analysis is constrained by ready-made categories. I suggest that lawsuits can be conceptualized as a cultural form, alongside other cultural forms (such as clothes, food, castles, marriage, rebellion, religious rituals and so on), by which both individual nobles and aristocratic families constructed social identities and roles for themselves in early modern society. Lawsuits, like other cultural forms, mediated relationships between individuals and between families. This dissertation has shown that as the litigants’ circumstances changed, the nature of that mediation also changed. There is much work to be done in order to more fully understand early modern society.

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10 Ibid., 338.
noble litigation in this context. I hope that this project will encourage other scholars to further explore the lawsuits of noble families in both Piedmont and elsewhere.
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