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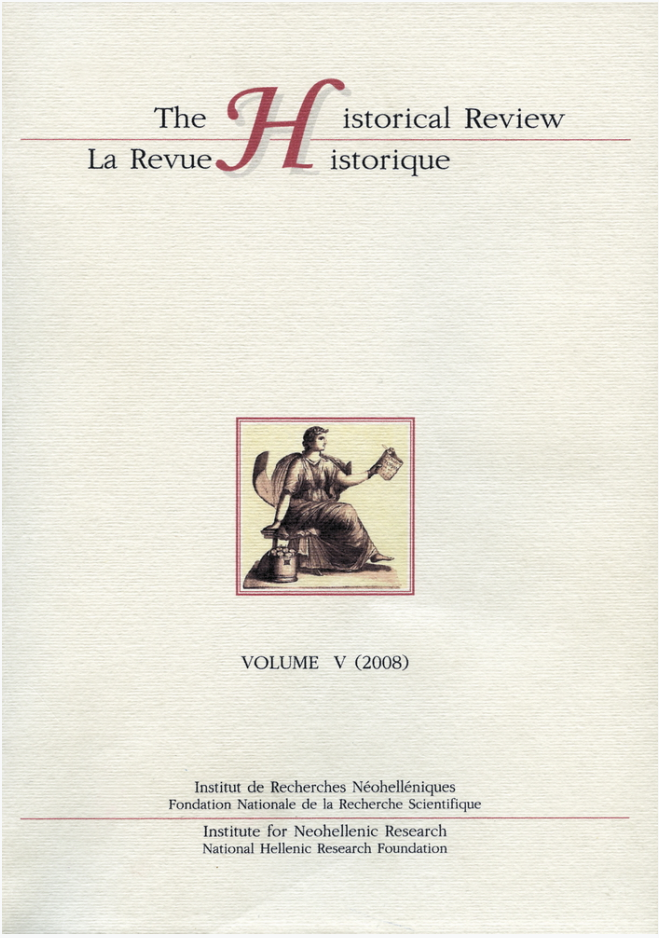

Roberto Maestri (ed.), L'arrivo in Monferrato dei Paleologi

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Emperor Andronicus Palaiologos,
wall painting in the monastery of St Ioannis Prodromos, Serres, Greece.

Roberto Maestri (ed.),
L'ARRIVO IN MONFERRATO DEI PALEOLOGI DI BISANZIO (1306-2006),
Studi sui Paleologi di Monferrato,
Alessandria: Circolo Culturale "I Marchesi del Monferrato", 2007, 125 pages.

The aim of this elegant volume dedicated to the 700th anniversary of the arrival of the Palaiologoi of Byzantium in Montferrat is to make this important period in Italian and international history better known to the general public. It consists of a selection of eight short papers written by scholars specialising in the history of Piedmont and shedding light on several hitherto little-known aspects of the history of Montferrat. It will hopefully prove a useful contribution to the historiography relating to north-western Italy and the important role played by the Byzantine Palaiologos dynasty, which was peacefully established in Montferrat. It is edited by Roberto Maestri, the founder of the Cultural Association of the Marquises of Montferrat in Alessandria, an important province in Piedmont. It includes a select bibliography, illustrations and maps relating to the period in question.

The individual papers are:

"Teodoro Paleologo, un dinasta bizantino in Monferrato", pp. 7-37, by Roberto Maestri, president of the Cultural Association of the Marquises of Montferrat.

Maestri approaches the difficult and complex problem of the succession to the Marquisate of Montferrat following the death in 1305 of the last Aleramic marquis of Montferrat, John I, leaving no male heir. (The family was descended from the Lombard family of Aleran). His closest relative was his sister Iolanda (Irene after her marriage to the Byzantine emperor, Andronicus II Palaiologos, in 1284), who accepted the succession in favour of her son, Theodore. The rest of the paper is dedicated to the activities of the new marquis in Montferrat, and to his rivalry with the other political powers in the area from his settlement there in 1306 to his death in 1338. He received the oath of homage from his subjects (*Theodorus excellentissimi imperatoris Graecorum filius porphyrogenitus, Comninus, Paleologus, dei gratia marchio Montisferrati*), while his efforts to prevail and be accepted in the area are described in detail. He took over control of Asti, Alessandria and Chivasso, the most important city in his Piedmontese dominion. This period was dominated by the rivalry between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines (supporters of the imperial house), and Piedmont played an important role through the involvement of Genoa, the Angevins, the

Visconti of Milan and the emperor, Henry VII of Luxembourg. A detailed description of some of the important events in the years that followed includes hostilities in Montferrat between Palaiologos and the Angevins of Achaia, who also had claims to Piedmont and threatened his dominion, and Palaiologos' embassy to the pope to seek the union of the two churches. Theodore Palaiologos bequeathed all his possessions in Byzantium and Italy to his only son, John.

"Cavalieri, baroni e prelati astigiani in Oriente (sec. XIII-XV)", pp. 39-57, by Walter Haberstumpf (Turin Research Centre).

This paper relates to barons and churchmen from the Lombard city of Asti, Piedmont, who were active in the eastern Mediterranean, Romania and Cyprus accompanying the Aleramic leaders on the Crusades. Contemporary chronicles state that several knights, clergymen and merchants from Asti followed the Aleramic crusaders into the eastern Mediterranean. Even after the fall of Aleramic rule in Thessaloniki in 1224 and the settlement of the Palaiologoi in Montferrat, Asti maintained relations with the Levant, and several individuals from the city are mentioned by name, foremost among them Henry of Asti, who, considered capable of uniting the Christian powers, was appointed an apostolic delegate during the 1344 Crusade against the Turks. His death had a serious impact on the Sancta Unio. By the late fourteenth century, due to the economic crisis facing Asti, its presence in Mediterranean affairs declined radically in importance.

"Annone dall'anno 1250 al 1350", pp. 59-66, by Francesco Mai (local history researcher).

This paper focuses on the local history of another city in Piedmont, Annone, during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and on its political and military significance in the region. Annone appears in the sources for the first time in a document from 933. Granted to the community of Asti in 1095, the castle was under imperial domination until the thirteenth century, during which time its military importance is noted, while its continued dependence on Asti is proved by a document dating from 1214. The city was taken over by Marco Visconti in 1321, then by John II Palaiologos, Marquis of Montferrat, in 1356, and conquered once again in 1360 by the Milanese, who retained control for almost three centuries. That the city flourished economically is clear from a document published in 1913 referring to a commercial fair for local products held in the city in the mid-fourteenth century.

"Alba all'epoca dei Paleologi, Marchesi di Monferrato", pp. 67-78, by Giulio Parusso (journalist and author, local history expert).

This paper focuses on the local history of Alba. Covering the period of Palaiologos rule in Alba, it provides details on its post-Aleramic history. The Angevins sought to take control of Piedmont, and Charles II – and, later, Robert – succeeded in securing the investiture of the county. The rivalry between the Ghibellines (supporters of the imperial house) and the Guelphs (supporters of the Angevins) is described, as is Alba, passing from Visconti rule to the Marquis of Montferrat, John II, in 1369. After John's death in 1372, Alba passed to his heirs, John III and Theodore II Palaiologos. This was followed by the complex, turbulent period of Palaiologos dominion in Montferrat, as Alba passed to the Palaiologoi of Montferrat in 1435. The treaty of Lodi brought peace to the area in 1454. The last Palaiologos marquis died in 1533, marking the start of a war of succession for Montferrat.

"Il Rinascimento ad Alba. L'arte del Macrino", pp. 79-87, by Antonio Buccolo (historian).

Macrino (real name: Gian Giacomo of Alladio) was a celebrated painter of the Cinquecento in Alba. Though Casale Monferrato was the capital of the marquisate, Alba was Montferrat's second city and representative of the Renaissance in the area. That Palaiologan culture exerted a powerful influence on Montferrat is clear from the work of Macrino of Alba. The paper describes the main features of his works (e.g. *Madonna col bambino*) and in so doing sheds light on the humanism developing in the area.

"La beata Margherita di Savoy, 1382-1464", pp. 89-95, by Giulio Parusso.

Margaret of Savoy is considered the patron saint of Alba. The daughter of the Prince of Achaia, Amadeus of Savoy, she grew up amidst the turbulence of incessant conflict between Savoy and Montferrat, but was more interested in the spiritual life. Married against her will to the Marquis of Montferrat, Theodore II, she isolated herself in Alba after his death in 1418 and the marriage of his two children. She died in the city in 1464.

The last two papers in the volume are dedicated to archival research in Montferrat:

"Fonti storiche del Monferrato presso l'Archivio di Stato di Alessandria", pp. 97-106, by Gilda Pastore, vice-president of the Alessandria Archives.

Italy's numerous provincial archives are of great importance to historians researching Italian history prior to the unification of Italy. The Duchy of Montferrat has left traces in a number of archives. This paper refers to the state archives in Alessandria, another important city in the Marquisate of Montferrat. A wealth of documents (registry and notarial documents) held there sheds light on the history of Montferrat under the Aleramics (1000-1300), the Palaiologoi (1306-1536), the Gonzaga lords of Mantua and the lords of Savoy. In addition, other archives (the Casale Monferrato archive and such private archives as those of Ferrari de Castelnuovo, Astori, Civalieri di Masio and the Archivio del Tribunale di Casale) provide information on Piedmontese, but also Italian and European history.

"La cartografia del Monferrato. Prime riflessioni di una ricerca in corso", pp. 107-123, by Maria Vittoria Giacomini (architect).

This final paper refers to the historical cartography of the Marquisate of Montferrat as a political entity which occupied an important place in western Italy for 600 years. The paper uses archival material (maps, drawings) to illustrate the topography of Montferrat, its most important sites and the changes that occurred down the centuries. Fifteenth- and sixteenth-century cartography is acknowledged as an extremely important tool in the study of the territory and its frontiers, and complements other disciplines in providing an idea both of the territory and the changes to which it was subject. Medieval cartography is based on territory, but also on beliefs and oral traditions, and thus also provides fascinating information on the cartographer's social backdrop. Changes to the boundaries of the marquisate over the centuries are extremely complicated and hard to visualise fully. However, the localities noted are extremely useful in forming the background to the political and military history of Montferrat, which influenced Italian history. Archival material and cartography can thus shed light on the study of the most important cities of Montferrat (Acqui Terme, Casale Monferrato Alba, Chivasso) through the centuries. Any such collection of archival material is also precious for facilitating a more profound understanding of the history of Montferrat.

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