Scholarship on powerful women and politics is currently of great interest to historians across time periods. For elite families, a woman’s marriage not only established and solidified relationships but also served as a tool to elevate a family’s status within European politics. This collection of essays traces the centuries-long relationship between the royal dynasty of Portugal and the House of Savoy. The repeated unions between these two houses from the twelfth century onward exemplify the way that dynasties exploited kinship ties to cement and increase their prestige. This volume, initially published in Portuguese in 2012, brings together an international group of scholars to trace the balance in this hitherto overlooked relationship as it shifted and changed over the centuries.

Maria Alegria Fernandes Marques opens the collection with the starting point of the relationship: the marriage of the first king of Portugal, Alfonso I, to Mafalda of Maurienne and Savoy in 1146. Alfonso sought a consort of well-established pedigree to help legitimize his rule, and through his marriage with Mafalda he gained her family’s powerful connections with the royal house of France and the dukes of Burgundy. Drawing out the very little information available about Mafalda, Fernandes Marques explores Mafalda’s role as a mother, focusing particularly on her daughter Teresa/Mafalda, who married the count of Flanders and the duke of Burgundy and was much involved in European politics.

The next marriage considered in this volume took place almost four hundred years later. In 1521, Beatrice of Portugal married the duke of Savoy, Charles II. Ana Isabel Buescu focuses on Beatrice’s early life at the Portuguese court, while Pierpaolo Merlin picks up with Beatrice’s marriage to the duke. By this time, the Portuguese crown had solidified its prestige among the royal houses of Europe, and both authors point out that this marriage was considered somewhat beneath a princess of Portugal. Merlin, however, notes that this was an alliance involving more than just the houses of Portugal and Savoy; indeed, it was part of a complex balancing of powers both between European dynasties and on the Italian peninsula. Beatrice, with a strong sense of pride in her status, introduced new court models that would be followed by later duchesses of Savoy. A capable regent for her husband, she was also a staunch champion of ducal sovereignty in the face of encroachment by local lords.

Blythe Alice Raviola analyzes the political career of the much-maligned Margaret of Savoy, the connecting point between Portugal and Piedmont...
during Spanish rule of Portugal. Daughter of the infanta Catalina Micaela and Charles Emanuel I, duke of Savoy, in 1608 Margaret became the duchess of Mantua and Monferrato upon her marriage to Francesco Gonzaga. When he died, she became a key figure in the European-wide conflict over the succession of Monferrato. Loyal to the Spanish crown and politically ambitious, Margaret was appointed vicereine of Portugal by her cousin Philip IV of Spain, but faced insurmountable difficulties governing a Portugal that was already boiling with resentment against Spanish rule. Her government buckled in 1640 and Margaret returned to Spain.

Just twenty years after Margaret’s removal, another woman of the House of Savoy arrived in Portugal. Maria Francesca Isabella of the Nemours branch of Savoy married Alfonso VI in 1666. Isabel M.R. Mendes Durnon Braga describes Maria Francesca Isabella’s arrival at the deeply factional Portuguese court. The weak King Alfonso was soon ousted by his brother Dom Pedro, who seized power as regent. Maria Francesca Isabella’s marriage to the king was annulled and she married Pedro, giving birth to their daughter Isabella Luisa. Toby Osborne continues Maria Francesca Isabella’s story by focusing on the “grand dessin” between the Portuguese queen and her sister Maria Giovanna Battista, mother and duchess regent of Savoy, to marry their children to each other. The planned marriage between Isabella Luisa of Portugal and Victor Amadeus II, duke of Savoy never came to pass, most notably because the marriage would have required the duke to leave his duchy to live in Portugal. Nevertheless, the intense negotiations between these two dynasties is a fascinating moment in the relations between them. Osborne points out that this failed betrothal was part of the House of Savoy’s ongoing ambition to obtain a royal title through prestigious regal connections.

Two centuries later the House of Savoy produced another Portuguese queen. In the mean-time, the Piedmontese dynasty had achieved its much-desired royal title and become the sovereigns of the new Kingdom of Italy. Maria Antónia Lopes explores the political and dynastic motivations behind the marriage of Luis I of Portugal and Maria Pia of Savoy, daughter of the first king of Italy. In 1861, the Portuguese dynasty was in dire need of an heir, while the new rulers of Italy sought a connection with a well-established European monarchy. In addition, both families were Catholic, rendering the match the most natural choice. Lopes dismantles the black legend that later arose around the queen, arguing that a negative representation does not tally with Maria Pia’s contemporary reputation as a queen who was loved and respected for her charity work and compassion for her people.

Pierangelo Gentile closes this collection with the only essay that does not focus on women. He discusses the two moments when Portugal took in Sabaudian kings as exiles: in 1849, when Carlo Alberto, king of Sardinia, abdicated the throne, and a hundred years later, after the short reign of the last king of Italy, Umberto II. Gentile’s chapter provides closure to this history of the relationship between Portugal and Piedmont. After an arduous journey by land to reach Portugal, Carlo Alberto survived his exile in Porto for only three months. Umberto II, on the other hand, lived almost forty years in Portugal after the Italian monarchy was abolished in 1946.

The choice to trace the relationship between two dynasties over a period of centuries will hopefully inspire other similarly long-term dynastic studies. By following the thread of Portuguese/Piedmontese relations over eight hundred years the authors have provided an intriguing look into the gradual but purposeful kinship strategies of two houses that used marriage and diplomacy to become greater power players in European politics. The accelerated growth of the House of Savoy and Portugal’s role within this growth was particularly interesting. This successful collaborative ef-
fort by an international group of scholars ought to serve as a starting point for further comparative studies of dynastic tactics and of the role of political women from the medieval period to the twentieth century.

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Citation: Catherine Ferrari. Review of Lopes, Maria Antónia; Raviola, Blythe Alice, eds. Portogallo e Piemonte: nove secoli (XII-XX) di relazioni dinastiche e di destini politici. H-Italy, H-Net Reviews. May, 2018.

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