

What's in a Name? Ceremonial Rivalry between the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the Duchy of Savoy during the Sixteenth Century

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24 January 2005

How did a dynasty legitimise its claims about rank and status in the early-modern period? How they saw themselves in the international hierarchy of royal and noble families was not always as others saw them. Yet such claims were of little use unless others, especially their rivals, recognised them. Toby Osborne took the case of Tuscany and Savoy to illustrate some of the difficulties. For the Italian dynasties of this period what mattered was getting controversial claims acknowledged by the emperor and / or the pope. Disputes between ambassadors over precedence were particularly common, most often over seating arrangements in court chapels. Since 1504 the papal court had recognised the dukes of Savoy as the senior Northern Italian princely family. However, in 1569 Pius V elevated the head of the Medici, Cosimo I, to the rank of Grand Duke of Tuscany. This immediately raised the issue as to whether a grand duke outranked an ordinary one, or more specifically, whether Cosimo now took precedence over Emanuele Filiberto of Savoy. But it was not just Emanuele Filiberto who was annoyed, for the Emperor and the Estes also had misgivings. As a compromise, Cosimo agreed to allow the Savoy ambassador to retain his precedence in the papal chapel. But the dukes of Savoy began a long campaign against the Tuscan grand ducal title. Winning this point became one of the principal aims of Savoy diplomacy. This received a setback in 1576 when the Emperor Maximilian II recognised the Medici title. The Florentine bankers-turned-grand dukes might have lacked the ancient pedigree of the Savoys, but they had more money and used it to bribe key officials at the imperial court. The next step in this long-running battle – both sides were taking the long-term view – came in 1632 when Vittorio Amedeo I

claimed to be king of Cyprus. Only by claiming a kingly title could he hope to outflank the Medici and, by then, any kingly title would do - or rather it would have done had any other court been willing to recognise it. It was therefore not until 1720, when they indisputably became kings of Sardinia, that the dukes of Savoy were finally able to claim a real victory. In this witty paper, Osborne conveyed much of the undoubted petty-mindedness of these disputes while, at the same time, never losing sight of why such issues mattered so much to the families involved.