

# **BOLLETTINO DEL MARCHESATO**

Organo di informazione del Circolo Culturale "*I Marchesi del Monferrato*"  
a cura di Roberto Maestri

e-mail: [marchesimonferrato@yahoo.it](mailto:marchesimonferrato@yahoo.it) - c.f. 96039930068 - sito web: [www.marchesimonferrato.com](http://www.marchesimonferrato.com)



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## **Editoriale**

Questo è il dodicesimo numero del nostro Bollettino.

Come potrete leggere nelle pagine seguenti, l'attività celebrativa per l'arrivo dei Paleologi da Bisanzio è proseguita intensamente, con numerosi incontri di cui troverete i resoconti qui di seguito mentre le immagini fotografiche – per non rendere troppo "pesante" il file di questo documento - sono state inserite nella sezione Eventi del nostro sito web <http://www.marchesimonferrato.com/Eventi.htm> .

Sono in dirittura d'arrivo anche diverse iniziative editoriali, non solo collegate alle attività celebrative, di cui parleremo nel prossimo numero del Bollettino.

Vi invitiamo quindi a visitare il ns. sito web per essere sempre informati sul calendario degli incontri in programma e Vi diamo appuntamento a gennaio.

*Roberto Maestri*

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## **VII Centenario dell'arrivo in Monferrato dei Paleologi di Bisanzio**

Il progetto celebrativo dedicato ai Paleologi sta raccogliendo sempre maggiore interesse da parte di enti, associazioni e singoli.

Sono previsti ancora alcuni incontri nel 2006, di cui forniamo un elenco aggiornato alla data di spedizione del presente Bollettino, mentre altre iniziative ripartiranno nella primavera del 2007:

### **Rocca de' Baldi (CN)**

25 novembre      Incontro su "*Le Celebrazioni dei Paleologi di Monferrato*"

### **Chivasso (TO)**

13 e 20 dicembre      Conferenza su "*La Dinastia dei Paleologi di Monferrato*" presso l'Università delle Tre Età

Le informazioni in "tempo reale" riguardo alla programmazione degli eventi sono consultabili alla pagina [http://www.marchesimonferrato.com/Paleologi\\_celebrazioni.htm](http://www.marchesimonferrato.com/Paleologi_celebrazioni.htm) del nostro sito web.

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## ***Maria Porfirogenita, figlia di Manuele I Comneno***

Grazie alla segnalazione della nostra Associata MARIANNE GILCHRIST pubblichiamo questo interessante saggio dedicato alla figura di Maria Porfirogenita moglie bizantina del "nostro" Ranieri di Monferrato.

Il saggio è tratto da *De Imperatoribus Romanis* pubblicato sulla *Online Encyclopedia of Roman Emperors* (<http://www.roman-emperors.org/maryp.htm>)

Crediamo si tratti di un prezioso approfondimento per lo studio di una delle vicende più interessanti riguardanti le vicende degli Aleramici in Oriente.

La figura di Ranieri di Monferrato è già stata analizzata esaurientemente da WALTER HABERSTUMPF nel suo saggio *Ranieri di Monferrato: ricerche sui rapporti fra Bisanzio e gli Aleramici nella seconda metà del XII secolo*, in "B.S.B.S." 81 (1983) = *Aleramica*, pp. 603-639.

Crediamo che questo saggio dedicato alla figura della principessa Maria sia utile per una analisi approfondita di un personaggio spesso considerato marginale per lo studio dell'Impero Bizantino, ma certo rilevante per i nostri studi dedicati al Monferrato.

Ringraziamo quindi la dottoressa Gilchrist per averci dato la possibilità di rintracciare – all'interno delle innumerevoli pagine della rete Internet – un saggio storico che pensiamo risulterà inedito per molti dei nostri lettori.

## Maria Porphyrogenita, daughter of Manuel I Comnenus

LYNDA GARLAND University of New England, Australia

ANDREW STONE University of Western Australia

Maria Porphyrogenita (also known as Maria Caesarissa, or 'Maria the Caesar's wife') was the only surviving child of Manuel I Comnenus and his first wife Bertha-Irene of Sulzbach. The wedding of her parents had taken place in January 1146,<sup>1</sup> and she was probably born in March 1152. According to Cinnamus, she was hailed as 'empress', i.e. given the title Augusta, at her birth.<sup>2</sup>

For the greater part of her life, Maria was only a pawn in the manoeuvring of dynastic politics, until she became involved in an insurrection against her step-mother's regime during the brief reign of her brother Alexius II.

### Maria and Béla of Hungary

Her mother, Bertha, died in 1158, and from the end of 1161 Maria had to share the palace with a new step-mother, Maria of Antioch, who was probably not much older than herself. Manuel's new wife would naturally have taken precedence in court ceremonial. However, until her brother Alexius II was born on 14 September 1169,<sup>3</sup> Maria was the heir presumptive to the throne. At the age of eleven years she was betrothed by Manuel to Béla of Hungary, second son of Géza II (1141-1161), who came to be educated in Constantinople in 1163 and was given the rank of despot.<sup>4</sup> Béla took the Byzantine name of Alexius.

Béla was a good match, even for an imperial princess. The Hungarians had originally insisted, against Manuel's wishes, that Géza be succeeded by his elder son István (Stephen) III (1161-1172), Béla's older brother. Manuel had expected Géza's brother, István IV, who was married to Manuel's niece Maria, to succeed him. It was the custom for the king of Hungary to be succeeded by a younger brother, but in this particular case the Hungarians were afraid of overt Byzantine influence.<sup>5</sup> Manuel finally agreed to the succession of István III because of the realisation that Béla was István III's natural successor. If Béla were married to his daughter, he would therefore be the father-in-law of the heir presumptive of the kingdom of Hungary.

Manuel therefore concluded a pact with the Hungarian king, István III, in the autumn of 1163. He would support István's regime, while István's brother Béla was to come to Constantinople and be betrothed to Maria Porphyrogenita. Frangochorion (Fruska Gora) and Sirmium (the region between the Danube and the Sava) were to be granted to the Byzantine emperor as Béla-Alexius'

<sup>1</sup> OTTO OF FREISING, *Gesta Friderici*, 1.23, p. 363; CHONIATES, *Historia*, 72-3; CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 2.4 (CSHB, 36).

<sup>2</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 170-1, cf. 81; CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 3.11 (CSHB, 118); WILLIAM OF TYRE, *A History of Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, 22.4: William himself was present at the festivities. For the date of Maria's birth, see P. MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos 1143-1180* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 198, 243 (1152).

<sup>3</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 168-9. For the date of his birth, see P. WIRTH, 'Wann wurde Kaiser Alexius II geboren?' *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, 49 (1956) 65-7; JONES, *Eustathios of Thessaloniki*, note on Eustathius, 14. For Manuel's desire for a legitimate son, see CHONIATES, 81-2 (when the patriarch Cosmas cursed the womb of Bertha of Sulzbach).

<sup>4</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 112, 128; CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 5.5 (CSHB, 214-15). The *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* queries Cinnamus' statement that Béla was named despot: *ODB* 1.278 *sv* Béla III (C.M. Brand).

<sup>5</sup> CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 5.1 (CSHB, 203); CHONIATES, *Historia*, 126-8.

appanage. Béla's credentials were examined by the sebastos George Paleologus, who ascertained the state of affairs at the Hungarian court and then escorted Béla to Constantinople. Manuel was keen to secure Byzantine rule of the border regions, but, more than that, he clearly envisaged a future union of Hungary and Byzantium. Cinnamus states that 'he desired with all his might to lay claim to Hungary, which is situated in the midst of the western nations.'<sup>6</sup> However István was not entirely happy with this arrangement. He broke the treaty and there were continual outbreaks of war over Béla's heritage between 1163 and 1167.<sup>7</sup>

### **Maria as heir presumptive**

Maria of Antioch, whom Manuel had married on 25 December 1161, was still childless, and so in 1165/66 Manuel fixed the succession on Maria and her fiancé, should he die without a male heir.<sup>8</sup> His decision to pass the succession to Maria and Béla in default of a son provoked criticism, as it seemed designed to secure the throne to an Hungarian. Manuel's cousin Andronicus Comnenus took the oath to the couple only with reluctance, with the comment, 'what madness is this of the emperor to deem every Roman male unworthy of his daughter's nuptial bed, to choose before all others this foreigner and interloper to be emperor of the Romans and to sit above all as master?' In this he had the support of many, who saw the decision as unwise both for Maria's sake and for the empire.<sup>9</sup> As well as receiving a suitable education at the Constantinopolitan court, Béla was engaged in campaigns in Hungary in 1165-1167, perhaps with a view to giving him suitable military experience for an emperor designate. He was present at Manuel's siege and capture of Zeugminon in 1165, and involved in Manuel's campaigns against István III in Sirmium, his inheritance, in 1166.<sup>10</sup> Since not only was Béla's brother apparently childless, but it was the law in Hungary that the crown passed to the survivors of brothers,<sup>11</sup> Maria might well have looked forward at this point to becoming both Empress of Byzantium and Queen of Hungary.

### **Maria's changing future**

However, Manuel was still prepared to consider other options for Maria: in 1166 or 1167 he undertook marriage negotiations with a view to an alliance with the young Norman king of Sicily, William II, whose father William I had died in May 1166 (William II had been born in 1154, and so was not inappropriately young for Maria). William's regents however finally declined the proposal and the engagement with Béla continued in force.<sup>12</sup>

Maria's status changed drastically at the birth of Alexius II on 14 September 1169. To have been presented with a young brother and supplanter at the age of seventeen must have been a disappointment (especially as Maria of Antioch had previously suffered at least one miscarriage).

<sup>6</sup> CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 5.1, 5.5 (CSHB, 203, 214-15); CHONIATES, *Historia*, 127.

<sup>7</sup> CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 5.6, 5.8 (first war), 5.10, 5.13-17 (second war), 6.7 (third war).

<sup>8</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 137.

<sup>9</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 5.16, 6.3, 6.6 (CSHB, 245, 260, 268).

<sup>11</sup> CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 5.1 (CSHB, 203).

<sup>12</sup> J. PARKER, 'The attempted Byzantine alliance with the Sicilian Norman Kingdom (1166-7),' *Papers of the British School at Rome*, 11 (1956), 86-93.

Maria's future was also affected in other ways. Shortly afterwards, perhaps in March 1171 when the oaths of allegiance were transferred from Maria and Béla to the young Alexius II, Maria's engagement to Béla was broken off. Béla was given the high rank of Caesar, perhaps as a consolation, and was betrothed instead to Maria of Antioch's half-sister Anne of Chatillon, who was visiting Constantinople with her brother Baldwin III of Antioch.

Béla's future was, however, to be assured: in 1172, on the death of his elder brother István III, he was invited by the Hungarians to take over the throne of Hungary as Béla III (1172-1196). Manuel sent Béla and Anne to Hungary after Béla had taken an oath to always act in the interests of the Byzantine empire. Béla was accompanied by the protosebastos John Comnenus and a Byzantine army.<sup>13</sup> Maria was now neither heir-presumptive of Byzantium, nor Queen of Hungary, an honour which was reserved for her step-mother's sister. Anne died in 1184, but her daughter Margaret of Hungary was to become the second wife of Isaac II Angelus and thus the empress of Byzantium.

As an excuse to break off Maria's engagement with Béla, Manuel may have decided to invoke the law of consanguinity, forbidding the marriage of close in-laws, i.e. those within the sixth degree of relationship.<sup>14</sup> Maria was the granddaughter of Piroška of Hungary, daughter of László I (1077-1095), Béla's first cousin three times removed. While this could hardly have been an obstacle, Béla's uncle István IV (1162) had married Maria, daughter of Manuel's older brother Isaac. Béla's uncle was therefore married to Maria Porphyrogenita's first cousin (though this would not have been a problem had the marriage still seemed politically eligible).

### Search for a husband

Manuel now had to find a new husband for Maria, who at twenty years of age was old for a Byzantine bride. Manuel still had no interest in the sons of Byzantine aristocratic families, instead surveying eligible suitors abroad who were either unmarried rulers, or the heirs to thrones. Manuel's final choice was once again William II of Sicily. Arrangements for the betrothal were agreed in 1172, but Maria never left for the West.<sup>15</sup> Rather embarrassingly, William and his entourage waited for his promised imperial bride at Taranto in southern Italy, only to find that they had been jilted. The chief Norman source who reports the event expresses outrage at this behaviour on the part of the Byzantine emperor.<sup>16</sup> Manuel had thought better of the match, and it is possible that Henry the Lion, Duke of Bavaria, may have held out a proposal for a match between Maria and the German imperial house.<sup>17</sup> If this suggestion is correct, the alternative marriage did not come to pass. We are told by Nicetas Choniates that Maria continued to have many suitors.<sup>18</sup> Maria therefore had failed

<sup>13</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 169-70; CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 6.11 (CSHB, 287).

<sup>14</sup> CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 6.11 states that, 'Béla had previously been set apart for son-in-law to the emperor, ... but since the law of consanguinity hindered it, he wedded the empress' sister' (trans. BRAND, *Deeds of John and Manuel Comnenus*, 214); Cinnamus implies that István IV married Maria in 1161 following the death of Géza II (CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 5.1; CSHB 203); cf. CHONIATES, *Historia*, 126 who states that they were married in Constantinople between 1154 and 1158.

<sup>15</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 170.

<sup>16</sup> ROMUALD OF SALERNO, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, vol. VII/1, p. 216.

<sup>17</sup> MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 92-3.

<sup>18</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 171.

not only to become Queen of Hungary, but also to marry William II of Sicily, and possibly John 'Lackland', later John I of England, and Henry, the son of Frederick Barbarossa, into the bargain.<sup>19</sup>

### Renier of Montferrat

Manuel continued to temporise, now he had an heir. Maria, however, was unlikely to have been as patient. Finally, his mind was made up by the Peace of Venice of 1177 signed between Pope Alexander III, the German emperor Frederick Barbarossa, William II of Sicily, and the communes of Lombardy. This was effectively an anti-Byzantine coalition, and Manuel felt the need to secure allies on the western flank of this bloc. To this end he concluded a marriage pact with William 'the Old' of Montferrat (in north-western Italy), whereby William's youngest son Renier was to marry Maria.<sup>20</sup> Coincidentally, two other sons of William, Conrad and Boniface, were to also leave an indelible mark on the Byzantine empire. Everyone felt that it was high time that Maria settled down. Choniates' describes her in terms which make her seem an unhappy victim of her father's political manoeuvring:

"The maiden, a princess wooed by many, was like Agamemnon's daughter Electra, raving long in the palace and, stately as a white poplar wet with dew, longing for the marriage bed. Later, after the emperor had given the matter much thought, she became the consort of one of the sons of the Count of Montferrat, who was fair of face and pleasant to look upon; his well-groomed hair shone like the sun and he was too young to grow a beard, while she had passed her thirtieth year and was as strong as a man."<sup>21</sup>

Choniates is here exaggerating a little regarding Maria's age, for she cannot have been more than twenty-seven at Renier's arrival, but it is clear that the match must have seemed a come-down. Instead of a splendid alliance with a ruler or heir to the throne in western Europe, Maria had to remain in the palace at Constantinople and make do with the younger son of a marquis, who (born c. 1163) was at least 10 years her junior. Renier, who was now given the name 'John', arrived in Constantinople in the August or September of 1179. John was given the rank of Caesar (hence Maria is often known as Maria Caesarissa to distinguish her from her step-mother) and the couple are often jointly termed 'the Caesars' by historians: doubtless Maria dominated her young, foreign, husband and they were seen as working as a team.

The marriage of Maria and Renier was celebrated at the same time as that of prince Alexius with Agnes, daughter of Louis VII of France, on or before 2 March 1180. The double wedding was celebrated by the patriarch, Theodosius Boradiotes. Eustathius of Thessalonica composed an oration for the occasion describing how the wedding banquet was spectacularly conducted in the Hippodrome,<sup>22</sup> and William of Tyre eulogised the lavish wedding celebrations.<sup>23</sup> It was a chance for

<sup>19</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 112, 128, 137, 170; MAGDALINO, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 89, 92; on Manuel's marriage policy, see MAGDALINO, 209-17

<sup>20</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 171, 200.

<sup>21</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 170-1 (trans Magoulias, 97). Electra was the daughter of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra; she was deliberately kept unmarried by her mother and step-father (Aegisthus), her father's murderers, to ensure there were no rivals to their regime.

<sup>22</sup> EUSTATHIUS OF THESSALONICA, *Opera Minora*, 170-81.

<sup>23</sup> WILLIAM OF TYRE, 22.4; trans. Babcock & Krey, *A History of Deeds*, 2.450, 'any attempt to describe in detail all the wonders of those days would be utterly futile....the games of the circus which the inhabitants of Constantinople call

the Byzantine court to impress the West with its grandeur and sophistication. Once again Maria must have felt upstaged as it was the alliance of Alexius and Agnes which was the more politically significant. Moreover the ceremonial surrounding the reception of the new child bride must have thrown Maria's own age into sharp relief. There is a possibility that even at this point Maria Porphyrogenita may already have aligned herself against her western step-mother and alongside the anti-Latins in the capital. After all, with Maria Porphyrogenita remaining in the palace unmarried until her late twenties, relations with her step-mother can not have been tranquil. She had even had the frustration of seeing her step-mother's sister becoming queen of Hungary in her stead. When in 1179, the young Agnes, daughter of Louis VII of France, arrived to marry Alexius, this proved the crowning point of Manuel's pro-western policy, and a further demotion for Maria Porphyrogenita: the new princess, bride of the heir to the throne, of course took precedence over her sister-in-law. William of Tyre records that Agnes, who now took the name Anna, was eight years of age on her arrival (she had actually been born in 1172).<sup>24</sup>

Agnes' ceremonial welcome by her new sister-in-law Maria Porphyrogenita is depicted in the manuscript of a poem no doubt intended to be delivered at court to celebrate this occasion. The manuscript, with its lively illustrations, may have been commissioned by Maria of Antioch for presentation to the new child princess (At fol. 7r, Maria of Antioch is herself splendidly represented as a dominant figure in the proceedings). Maria Porphyrogenita, the 'empress', is described as greeting her new sister-in-law in a specially erected tent outside the walls of Constantinople after Agnes herself has been properly dressed as 'empress' for the occasion.<sup>25</sup> The poem tacitly emphasises the superiority of the western bride over her sister-in-law, with Maria performing obeisance to Agnes, who is specifically called the more beautiful of the princesses: 'one of these was the glory of the whole West, your own lively form of air and crystal, while the other, the second, Augusta, unable to bear comparison with your beauty, was your sister-in-law the porphyrogennete.'<sup>26</sup>

### The regency

On the death of Manuel on 24 September 1180, Maria of Antioch became regent for the young Alexius II, at the same time taking the veil, as Manuel had insisted she do on his death. Her regime was seen as pro-Latin and quickly became unpopular, especially when the empress gave the reins of power to her husband's nephew, Alexius the protosebastos, who was assumed to be her lover. Maria Porphyrogenita, like the rest of the Comnenian family, was furious at the assumption

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hippodromes, and the glorious spectacles of varied nature shown to the people with great pomp during the days of the celebration; the imperial magnificence of the vestments and the royal robes adorned with a profusion of precious stones and pearls of great weight; the vast amount of massive gold and silver furniture in the palace, of untold value ...the valuable draperies adorning the royal abode ...the numerous servants and members of the court, the magnificence of the nuptial splendour, and the generous gifts which the emperor lavished on both his own people and on strangers'.

<sup>24</sup> WILLIAM OF TYRE, *History of the Deeds Done Beyond the Sea*, 13.4.

<sup>25</sup> M. JEFFREYS, 'The Vernacular eisiterioi for Agnes of France,' *Byzantine Papers. Proceedings of the First Australian Byzantine Studies Conference, Canberra, 17-19 May 1978*, ed. E. Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys & A. Moffatt (Canberra, 1981), 101-15; cf. A.F. STONE, 'The Oration by Eustathios of Thessaloniki for Agnes of France: a Snapshot of Political Tension between Byzantium and the West,' *Byzantion*, 73 (2003), 112-26. While Cicely Hennessy has recently argued that the manuscript is of a Paleologue date, this has been rebutted by CICELY HILSDALE, "Constructing a Byzantine augusta: a Greek book for a French Bride," in *Art Bulletin* (Sept., 2005), 48.

<sup>26</sup> JEFFREYS, 'Eisiterioi,' 109.



of power by the protosebastos, and enraged at the thought of 'the protosebastos disporting himself in her father's marriage bed'. She was also jealous of the dowager empress's power as regent for the brother whose birth had denied her the chance of inheriting the throne. 'Reckless and masculine', she even wrote to Andronicus Comnenus inciting him to rebel against her step-mother's regime.<sup>27</sup>

A conspiracy was formed, primarily of family members, around Maria and Renier to assassinate the protosebastos on 7 February 1181, not much more than four months after Manuel's death. The regency was very unpopular. The occasion was the procession of the emperor and protosebastos to celebrate the festival of Theodore the Martyr of Christ, but the plot was thwarted. The conspirators were arrested and summarily tried and convicted with the empress and Alexius II presiding, quite improperly as Choniates records.<sup>28</sup> No action was taken against Maria and Renier, and they fled for protection to St Sophia (before Easter, 5 April 1181), where not only the patriarch Theodosius Boradiotes and the clergy took pity on them, but the populace at large backed them enthusiastically. Confident in popular support, they refused the offer of an amnesty.<sup>29</sup>

Maria represented herself as escaping from the anger of her step-mother and her violent 'lover', and won the support of the anti-Latin party with coin donatives. Her demands were that the protosebastos be expelled from the palace and her fellow-conspirators undergo a new, fair, trial.<sup>30</sup> Choniates makes it quite clear that the populace, rather than revolting spontaneously, was deliberately inflamed by Maria over several days. The crowd was fired up by priests and anathematised the empress and protosebastos in the hippodrome (these shouts could certainly have been heard in the palace). Maria was able to raise enough troops to defend St Sophia, which she fortified, enlisting Georgian and Italian mercenaries (Choniates considered this scandalous).<sup>31</sup> The populace now rose in revolt, gathering at the turning-post of the Hippodrome (connected to the Great Palace), and tearing down the houses of the rich and those supporting the protosebastos' regency, including that of the eparch Theodore Pantechnes. Further, the 'Caesars' (Maria and Renier) had the houses adjoining the Great Church and the Augusteum (the main entrance to the palace) demolished, and sentries placed in readiness for battle at the Augusteum, as the protosebastos was gathering troops in support of himself and the empress-regent.<sup>32</sup> Skirmishing may have taken place over a number of days, but Nicetas Choniates gives a detailed account of the culmination of the conflict which began at dawn on 2 May 1181, between the supporters of the protosebastos and those of Maria Porphyrogenita.<sup>33</sup> At midday, the battle was evenly contested, with Maria's troops, although smaller in number, being favoured by topographical considerations

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<sup>27</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 230-231.

<sup>28</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 231-2; EUSTATHIUS, *Capture of Thessaloniki*, 14-15. The conspirators included Alexius the sebastocrator (Manuel's illegitimate son), John and Manuel the sons of Andronicus, Andronicus Lapardas, and John Camaterus the city eparch and many others. William of Tyre, 22.5 dates the discovery of the conspiracy to 1 March 1181.

<sup>29</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 232-3; EUSTATHIUS, 16. According to Eustathius, 15, the empress and judges were only concealing their true wishes, and were planning to 'bring disaster crashing down on the Caesars and arrest them.' This was then the reason for their flight to St Sophia.

<sup>30</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 232.

<sup>31</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 232-3; EUSTATHIUS, 20; GRUMEL, *Regestes*, 1156

<sup>32</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 233-6.

<sup>33</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 236-41.

detailed in Choniatēs' account. However, the weight of numbers of the protosebastos' troops prevailed in the end, and eventually, after suffering heavy casualties, the insurrectionists were driven back into St Sophia. Maria, supported by the patriarch, now sought a truce, which was negotiated by the grand dux, Andronicus Contostephanus and the grand hetaireiarch John Ducas Camaterus along with other officials on 3 May. A full amnesty was granted Maria and her supporters and she and Renier were allowed to return to the palace.<sup>34</sup>

The conflict won the name of the 'holy war' because the patriarch Theodosius had supported the insurrection and allowed the 'Caesars' to take over St Sophia as their base. The protosebastos, therefore, won over many bishops to his side by gold and drinking parties, to encourage them to support the patriarch's deposition. According to Eustathius the patriarch was seized during a visit to the palace to exchange the Easter kiss of peace with the emperor (Choniatēs provides a different version, in which the patriarch was only arrested after the final battle). Certainly, the patriarch was confined in the monastery of Christ Pantepoptes and the protosebastos unsuccessfully tried to have him deposed. In the face of the empress' and clergy's support for the holy man, the protosebastos had to back down and reinstate him a month later to triumphal acclaim by the populace. This aggression against the patriarch gave Maria Porphyrogenita the opportunity of promoting her cause as a 'holy war' against the pro-Latin forces of evil.<sup>35</sup> Clearly she was not only an instigator of the assassination attempt on the protosebastos, but an active aggressor in the insurrection in the capital. Following the amnesty, Choniatēs actually criticises Maria for her evident thirst for battle and terms the episode an 'inglorious war':

'Nor do I absolve the suppliant kaisarissa (Caesarissa) from guilt, inclined as she was towards reckless acts and agitation against the government'<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, she was aware of the inexcusable nature of her actions. The stirring speech which Choniatēs records as delivered by Renier to his troops on 2 May outside St Sophia clearly tries to make excuses for the armed rebellion against 'compatriots and coreligionists'. Renier blames these for mismanagement of the empire and sees his own side as compelled by necessity to oppose them and as innocent of all crime. Ignoring the assassination attempt on the protosebastos, he blames the other side for taking up arms against them and for trying to drag asylum-seekers from sanctuary; under these circumstances, he tells his troops, wife's servants and Latin bodyguard, it is perfectly reasonable and right for them to defend themselves and even to consider themselves as the defender of St Sophia and its treasures against 'blood-thirsty murderers' in search of plunder from the holy church.<sup>37</sup> We need not take this as a literal account of proceedings, though Renier doubtless made a speech. But whatever his facility in Greek at this point, the sentiments and expressions must be those of Maria, even if it was Renier who gave voice to them.

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<sup>34</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 240-1.

<sup>35</sup> EUSTATHIUS, 18, cf. 20, 23, 28; cf. CHONIATES, *Historia*, 241-3.

<sup>36</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 241 (trans. Magoulias, 136).

<sup>37</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 238-9 (trans. Magoulias, 134-5)

## Maria's death

Maria Porphyrogenita had encouraged Andronicus Comnenus to seize power. His take-over was to be accompanied by the murder of the Latins in the city and other atrocities.<sup>38</sup> Though Maria had been one of his chief supporters, ironically, as he started his reign of terror in 1182,<sup>39</sup> she was one of his first victims. One of her family eunuchs, Pterygeonites, who had even been a retainer of Manuel's, was bribed by Andronicus to slowly poison her. The same fate shortly overtook Renier, and the 'same cup' was said to have poisoned both of them.<sup>40</sup> Thus Andronicus was able to work his way towards his murder of the empress-regent, Maria of Antioch, and that of the young emperor Alexius II.

## Conclusion

Maria Porphyrogenita had been one of the main opponents of her step-mother's regency. Perhaps inheriting her uncompromising disposition from her mother Bertha, she was charged with 'masculine' and reckless conduct by contemporaries. Embittered at having spent most of her life ingloriously in the women's quarters and at being cheated of a suitable marriage with a western ruler, she was clearly jealous of her beautiful western step-mother in whose shadow she had lived since 1161. She may have felt greatly inferior: Cinnamus conventionally calls her 'outstanding in beauty' but there is no other evidence for her physical charms.<sup>41</sup> Her opposition to her step-mother's regency, and to the power given to Alexius the protosebastos, is understandable, given the gossip about their love-affair. Arguably, Maria of Antioch was not a successful regent, and there was clearly dissatisfaction both in the city and at court. But despite all Maria Porphyrogenita's aggression towards the regime, there is no hint that she was aiming to depose her younger brother or angling for the throne for herself and her husband. Of course, she may well have felt herself a more suitable regent for her brother than her step-mother and have been aiming at taking over the regency herself. While her invitation to Andronicus Comnenus to take action against the regime helped to provoke the crisis, it can also be understood as an attempt to protect her brother's throne: Andronicus, prior to his actual take-over, was seen by everyone as the natural protector of the rights of Manuel's son.<sup>42</sup> It is significant, too, that in his move towards sole power, he saw Maria Porphyrogenita as one of his main obstacles: presumably he knew that, however much her future had been sacrificed to her father's foreign policy, she would uphold her brother's right to rule.

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<sup>38</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 250-1; EUSTATHIUS, 28-30.

<sup>39</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 258-9.

<sup>40</sup> CHONIATES, *Historia*, 259-60.

<sup>41</sup> CINNAMUS, *Epitome*, 3.11.

<sup>42</sup> EUSTATHIUS, 21; cf. CHONIATES, *Historia*, 253-4.

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## Convegno a Chivasso

Chivasso (TO) - Sabato 16 settembre 2006.

All'interno del Palazzo dell'Economia e del Lavoro "Luigi Einaudi", in collaborazione con il Comune di Chivasso, il Gruppo Storico *Marchesi Paleologi* di Chivasso, la *Società Storica Chivassese* e l'*Accademia Aleramica*, si è tenuto un *Convegno* sul tema "La Chivasso dei Paleologi di Monferrato".

Il Convegno ha visto la partecipazione di qualificati relatori come da programma:

ROBERTO MAESTRI (Presidente Circolo Culturale *I Marchesi del Monferrato*)

*I Marchesi di Monferrato nel Mediterraneo orientale*

ALDO A. SETTIA (Presidente Associazione Casalese *Arte e Storia*)

*Teodoro I Paleologo marchese di Monferrato*

LUCA GIANAZZA (*Accademia Italiana di Studi Numismatici - Società Numismatica Italiana*)

*La monetazione dei Paleologi in Monferrato: una rilettura dei materiali*

PIERLUIGI PIANO (Archivista di Stato presso la *Soprintendenza Archivistica per la Lombardia*)

*La Marchesa Anne d'Alençon*

CARLO CARAMELLINO (*Storico dell'Arte*)

*Artisti al servizio dei Paleologi e significative influenze*

FABRIZIO FERLA (*Storico dell'Arte*)

*Appunti sulle presenze artistiche di committenza paleologa nel Monferrato: l'oreficeria e l'influenza bizantina.*

FABRIZIO SPEGIS (*Società Storica Chivassese*)

*Il castello di Chivasso in età paleologa*

MASSIMO CARCIONE (Università del *Piemonte Orientale*)

*Verso un itinerario dei luoghi dei Paleologi di Monferrato*



I lavori sono stati aperti dai saluti del Sindaco di Chivasso Dott. BRUNO MATOLA e dell'Assessore alla Cultura Dott. ALESSANDRO GERMANI.

In occasione dell'incontro è stata presentata la riproduzione del *denaro di tipo imperiale*, coniato da Teodoro I Paleologo presso la zecca di Chivasso.

Al termine dell'incontro si è svolta una piacevole cena medievale.

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## Convegno a Savona

Savona - Domenica 17 settembre 2006.

All'interno della *Cappella sconosciuta* della Fortezza del *Priamar*, in collaborazione con l'Associazione Culturale *Gli Aleramici* ed il Gruppo Storico *La Medievale* di Savona, si è tenuta la V Edizione de *Il Medioevo Svelato* sul tema "Avventure di Crociati, guerrieri e dinastie d'oltremare nel XII secolo".



Il Convegno ha visto la partecipazione di un attento pubblico che ha seguito con interesse le relazioni in programma, facendo scaturire, al termine, un interessante dibattito:

GIUSEPPE LIGATO

*Rinaldo di Chatillon, Signore di Kerak: un crociato permanente.*

ROBERTO MAESTRI

*Aleramici alle crociate, la vocazione oltremarina del Monferrato: la ricerca di un regno in Terrasanta e la conquista del regno di Tessalonica.*

CARMELO PRESTIPINO

*Gli Ospedalieri nel savonese: dalle origini al secolo XVI.*

GHASSAN SAYAF

*Al-Hashashun (Gli Assassini): una setta segreta del medioevo. Dalla Persia al Mediterraneo.*

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## Convegno a Trisobbio



Trisobbio (AL) - Sabato 30 settembre 2006.

All'interno della *Sala Convegni* del Palazzo delle Vecchie Scuole, in collaborazione con la Provincia di Alessandria ed il Comune di Trisobbio, si è tenuto il Convegno sul tema "*I Paleologi di Monferrato: una grande dinastia europea nel Piemonte tardo-medievale*".

Il Convegno, alla presenza di un folto pubblico, ha visto la partecipazione di qualificati relatori come da programma:

ROBERTO MAESTRI (Presidente del Circolo *I Marchesi del Monferrato*)

*Il governo di Giovanni II Paleologo: ambizioni e progetti incompiuti*

ENRICO BASSO (Università di Torino)

*Le ambizioni di uno Stato "minore": l'espansionismo monferrino nel XV secolo.*

RICCARDO MUSSO (Direttore dell'Archivio del Comune di Albenga)

*I Paleologi e il ducato di Milano nella seconda metà del XV secolo*

ALICE RAVIOLA (Università di Torino)

*Il Monferrato nella diplomazia delle corti padane tra Quattro e Cinquecento. Indirizzi di ricerca.*

ANDREA LERCARI (Commissione Culturale - Delegazione Ligure del S. M. Ordine di Malta)

*Famiglie genovesi e feudi monferrini: prime considerazioni dal "Catalogo del Monferrato" di Evandro Baronino.*



STEFANO GRILLO DI RICALDONE (Commissione Culturale - Delegazione Ligure del S. M. Ordine di Malta)  
*Le ricezioni di cavalieri monferrini nell'Ordine di S. Giovanni.*

MARIA VITTORIA GIACOMINI (Membro *Società piemontese di Archeologia e Belle Arti*)  
*La cartografia del Monferrato*

Le due sessioni, mattutina e pomeridiana, sono state presiedute rispettivamente da ALICE RAVIOLA e RICCARDO MUSSO.

Ai lavori ha presenziato l'Assessore Provinciale GIANFRANCO COMASCHI.

Particolarmente apprezzati sono stati gli interventi, a margine delle relazioni, del prof. GEO PISTARINO.

Al termine della giornata, la chitarrista savonese FRANCESCA GHILIONE ha offerto un breve ma intenso intrattenimento musicale.

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## **Assemblea Generale**

Il 21 ottobre, presso la sede di rappresentanza della ns. associazione nel *Palazzo dei Monferrato* a Castiglione Tinella (CN), si è riunita l'Assemblea Generale del Circolo Culturale "*I Marchesi del Monferrato*". All'incontro hanno partecipato soci, sostenitori ed amici del Circolo.

Dopo i saluti dell'Assessore alla cultura dott. BRUNO PENNA e del sig. PAOLO SARACCO, proprietario dell'immobile, sono state presentate le attività svolte dal Circolo nel corso dell'anno e sono state illustrate le iniziative previste per l'anno 2007.



E' stato dedicato ampio spazio all'analisi delle attività celebrative per i 700 anni dall'arrivo dei Paleologi in Monferrato che proseguiranno anche nel prossimo anno, alle pubblicazioni realizzate ed in fase di realizzazione (tra cui "*I Marchesi del Monferrato nel medioevo*" - Laboratorio di approfondimento per la scuola secondaria di I grado ed il volume "*Esperienza militare e di governo negli "Insegnamenti" di Teodoro I di Monferrato*" a cura di ALDO SETTIA) ed alla presentazione di alcuni progetti riguardanti attività da svolgersi sul territorio.

Il Presidente della *Accademia Aleramica* di Alba, RAOUL MOLINARI, ha illustrato ai presenti il progetto europeo di valorizzazione del territorio Monferrato che sarà avviato nel prossimo anno.

Al termine dei lavori si è tenuto un rinfresco gentilmente offerto dalla *Accademia Aleramica*.

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## **Conversazione a Cocconato**

Cocconato (AT) - Venerdì 27 ottobre 2006.

Presso il Salone Comunale, in collaborazione con l'Associazione Culturale *Pietra Cagnola*, presieduta da SILVIO NANO, si è tenuto un incontro sul tema "*Lo pane et lo vino cotidiano*" conversazioni sul modo di mangiare e bere dei nostri antenati Monferrini ai tempi dei primi Paleologi. Alla presenza di un folto pubblico sono intervenuti i relatori: GIAN LUIGI BERA, che ha trattato gli aspetti riguardanti le tradizioni alimentari monferrine nel tardo medioevo; ROBERTO MAESTRI, per l'inquadramento storico, e LORENZO FORNACA, per gli aspetti editoriali.



## **Convegno a Cuccaro Monferrato**

Cuccaro (AL) - Sabato 28 ottobre 2006.

Presso la Sala Convegni del Comune, in collaborazione con il Comune di Cuccaro, rappresentato dal Sindaco Pier Giuseppe Brusasco, e l'Associazione *Centro Studi Colombiani Monferrini CE.S.CO.M*, presieduta dall'Avv. Giorgio Casartelli Colombo, si è svolto il Convegno sul tema "*Il Monferrato tra Paleologi e Gonzaga*".

Il Convegno, introdotto da RAOUL MOLINARI, alla presenza di un attento pubblico, ha visto la partecipazione di qualificati relatori come da programma:



ROBERTO MAESTRI (Presidente del Circolo *I Marchesi del Monferrato*)

*Monferrato, uno Stato italiano tra occidente ed oriente*

MARIA VITTORIA GIACOMINI (Membro Società piemontese di Archeologia e Belle Arti)

*La cartografia del Monferrato*

RAFFAELE TAMALIO (Collaboratore *Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana*)

*Il carteggio di Margherita Paleologo presso l'Archivio di Mantova*

GIANCARLO MALACARNE (Direttore della Rivista Culturale *Civiltà Mantovana*)

*1679: la mancata vendita di Casale alla Francia - Il grande imbroglio di "Masque de fer".*

LUCA GIANAZZA (*Accademia Italiana di Studi Numismatici - Società Numismatica Italiana*)

*Le ultime fasi della zecca di Casale Monferrato*

GILDA PASTORE (Archivio di Stato di Alessandria)

*Fonti storiche del Monferrato presso l'Archivio di Stato di Monferrato*

MASSIMO CARCIONE (Università del *Piemonte Orientale*)

*Verso un itinerario dei luoghi del Monferrato*

Nell'intervallo dei lavori, si è svolta la visita al Museo *Cristoforo Colombo*.



## **Bibliografia**

Grazie al prezioso e paziente lavoro di WALTER HABERSTUMPF, è stata considerevolmente ampliata la bibliografia dei Marchesi di Monferrato che può essere consultata sul ns. sito internet nella sezione Bibliografia <http://www.marchesimonferrato.com/Bibliografia.htm>

Si tratta di uno strumento di approfondimento fondamentale per ogni ricercatore o semplice appassionato delle vicende storiche del Monferrato.

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## **Oscar per la Numismatica 2006**

È con estremo piacere che segnaliamo che il nostro Socio LUCA GIANAZZA ha ricevuto, dal *Circolo Filatelico Numismatico Reggiano*, l'Oscar per la Numismatica 2006.

Il premio è stato consegnato nella mattina di sabato 14 ottobre nel corso del XLI Convegno Filatelico Numismatico "Città del Tricolore" presso la Fiera di Reggio Emilia. Ci complimentiamo con il nostro Socio per il prestigioso riconoscimento e per il considerevole apporto che sta fornendo per una maggiore conoscenza della numismatica del Monferrato.

All'indirizzo <http://www.sibrium.org/Materiali/PaleologoMonferrato.pdf> il testo della sua relazione presentata al Convegno di Chivasso.

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## **Società Savonese di Storia Patria**



Abbiamo ricevuto da parte della *Società Savonese di Storia Patria* il nuovo volume *Atti e Memorie* nuova serie – vol. XLII. All'interno del volume sono pubblicati i saggi di: ANGELO NICOLINI, *Produzione e commercio dei panni di lana a Savona fra Tre e Quattrocento*; ANGELO NICOLINI, *La nave di Giovanni Adobato (1427-1430)*; GIUSEPPE MILAZZO, *La casa di Colombo a Valcada*; SANTINO MAMMOLA, *La facciata dipinta di casa Vegerio a Savona*; FURIO CÍCILIOT, *Arte rinascimentale piccapietra et alii magisteri (Savona, 1506-1570)*; FRANCO NOBERASCO, *Gian Maria Canarisio, un architetto militare campionesse al lavoro nel ponente ligure nel corso del XVI secolo*; MARIO DUPANLOUP – DOMENICO BUSCAGLIA, *Lo stato attuale delle monete delle zecche della Liguria della collezione Lamberti*; ANTONIO MARTINO, *I soldati dell'esercito napoleonico del Dipartimento di Montenotte caduti e prigionieri durante la campagna di Spagna e Portogallo (1808-1813)*; FLAVIA FOLCO, *Altri incontri con la pittura della "quasi sconosciuta" Veronica Murialdo*; MARIO STELLATELLI, *Fotografi e fotografia a Savona 1839-1939*; FLAVIA FOLCO, *La patera di Antonio Brilla scultore (1813-1891) "uno splendido cimelio della Ceramica Savonese è e resterà a Savona"*.

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## **Aleramo e i Saraceni**

"*Saraceni ad Acqui*", di GIANCARLO PATRUCCO, è un racconto storico che, come precisa l'autore, "si dipana all'interno di un quadro di fatti veri... in cui anche la narrazione più spregiudicata non abbandona mai la verosimiglianza".

Scritto con l'intento di avvicinare un vasto pubblico al passato e a tematiche storiche, è un romanzo estremamente piacevole che racconta, in modo avvincente, la sfida tra Aleramo e Sagitto, il gran rais dei Saraceni, per il possesso di Aquae (l'attuale Acqui Terme – in provincia di Alessandria).

Per informazioni ed acquisti contattare l'autore:

Giancarlo Patrucco mail: [saraprog@libero.it](mailto:saraprog@libero.it)

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## **Notice Historique et statistique sur la ville d'Acqui**

Segnaliamo un interessante lavoro riguardante la città di Acqui Terme e le sue acque termali in epoca napoleonica; si tratta della ristampa anastatica del lavoro dello studioso francese JEAN CHARLES LESNE DE MOLAING, direttore degli ospedali militari, ex agente generale dell'Esercito francese e membro di diverse società letterarie. La riproduzione di questo volume è stata possibile grazie al ritrovamento, presso la Biblioteca civica di Alessandria, di una copia dell'opera originale cui è allegata non solo la cartina delle Terme di Acqui, ma anche una planimetria a colori realizzata a mano, che potrebbe essere opera dell'autore stesso. Il volume è completato dalla traduzione del testo a cura della prof. Maria Teresa Gastaldi. Chi fosse interessato all'acquisto, al prezzo di € 12,00, può rivolgersi alla *Impressioni Grafiche* di Acqui Terme, tel. 0144.313350.



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## **Contributo Circoscrizione Europista di Alessandria**

Con determinazione del 25 settembre 2006, la Circoscrizione *Europista* del Comune di Alessandria ci ha assegnato un contributo di € 400,00 per il sostegno delle nostre attività culturali. Cogliamo l'occasione per esprimere il nostro più sentito ringraziamento al Presidente della Circoscrizione Sig. PIERO FERRERO ed al ns. Socio CARMINE PASSALACQUA, consigliere di circoscrizione, che ha sostenuto la nostra richiesta.

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## **Contributo Comune di Chivasso**

Con delibera del 15 settembre 2006, il Comune di Chivasso ci ha assegnato un contributo di € 1.000,00 per l'organizzazione del Convegno *La Chivasso dei Paleologi*. Cogliamo l'occasione per esprimere il nostro più sentito ringraziamento al Vice Sindaco ed Assessore alla Cultura dott. ALESSANDRO GERMANI per aver approvato la nostra richiesta.

## **Adesioni**

Recentemente abbiamo avuto il piacere di ricevere la disponibilità del cav. CLAUDIO MARTINOTTI di Ozzano Monferrato, della dott.ssa BEATRICE DEL BO di Milano, del dott. GIANCARLO PATRUCCO di Alessandria e del dott. GIORGIO MARENCO di Savona ad associarsi al nostro Circolo.

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Questo numero del Bollettino viene trasmesso in automatico a **443** indirizzi e-mail presenti nella nostra banca dati ed alle liste di distribuzione: **BYZANS-L** della *Università del Missouri* e **H-ITALY** della *Michigan University*, chi lo ricevesse, ma non fosse interessato potrà richiedere la cancellazione del suo nominativo inviandoci una e-mail; coloro che ritenessero interessante questo nostro lavoro ed avessero piacere che venisse inviato anche ad altre persone o Enti di loro conoscenza potranno segnalarcelo con un messaggio di posta elettronica.

Come precisato nello Statuto Sociale, il Circolo non ha finalità di lucro, ma ha comunque l'esigenza di autofinanziare le proprie attività. A tale scopo saranno graditi contributi da parte di Enti, Associazioni e singoli Privati che provvederemo a ringraziare attraverso le pagine del ns. *Bollettino*. I contributi possono essere versati sul ns. conto corrente intestato a "Circolo Culturale I Marchesi del Monferrato" presso la Cassa di Risparmio di Alessandria - Agenzia G di Alessandria - ABI 06075 - CAB 10407 - c/c 13426/2