

*La Diplomatie de la France en Italie du nord au temps de Richelieu et de Mazarin.*  
Anna Blum.

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Under Cardinal-Ministers Richelieu and Mazarin, France engaged in a provocative diplomatic penetration into the heart of Habsburg interests in Northern Italy between 1624 and 1659. Anna Blum's lucidly written account of this policy persuasively demonstrates that Northern Italy, and particularly the Po-Valley duchies of Savoy, Parma, Mantua, and Modena, constituted an important if often overlooked front in the era's Habsburg-Bourbon conflict. This account is based on Blum's well-received 2010 doctoral thesis, directed by diplomatic historian Lucien Bély. Bély selected it to inaugurate a new series in modern history from publisher Classiques Garnier, and contributed its preface. Underpinned by a substantial secondary literature, the volume draws primarily on diplomatic memoirs and dispatches uncovered during Blum's extensive research in French, Monegasque, and Northern Italian state archives.

The volume is divided into two largely independent sections. The first, and stronger, masterfully and fluidly untangles the complex political intrigues, interests, and French interventions in the Po-Valley duchies, and especially Savoy, between France's 1635 entry into the Thirty Years' War and the 1659 Peace of the Pyrenees. Blum follows Sven Externbrink's 1999 study of Richelieu's pre-1635 Italian policies, though with less attention to setting the Cardinal-Ministers' policies into domestic French or broader European frameworks. She focuses instead on the articulation of convergent and divergent interests between France and its Northern Italian allies, and the progressively elaborated diplomatic networks that sustained these anti-Habsburg alliances for nearly twenty-five years.

While France had no real territorial interests in Northern Italy, it possessed important strategic interests: the region's "Spanish Road" was crucial to Habsburg military recruitment and communications. Yet balance-of-power politics was not France's only motive for intervention: Blum shows that French diplomatic engagement in Northern Italy also played a significant symbolic role on the European stage. French attempts to construct and maintain an anti-Habsburg league in Northern Italy were couched in the language of *libertà d'Italia*, presenting France as a puissant yet disinterested guarantor of that liberty. Blum explores how the warfare of 1635–42 tested this league, concluding that dissensions between allies and French military successes only reinforced France's self-proclaimed role of arbiter. French influence reached its height in the 1640s, adding new formerly Habsburg territories and allies, and reviving dreams of a French Naples. Yet French influence met its limits at Westphalia, as Blum's chapter on France's ambiguous advocacy of divergent Northern Italian, and especially Savoyard, interests at the peace congresses details. The final chapter illustrates how Mazarin's policies of marital alliances in the 1650s helped partially recoup France's severe territorial, military, and diplomatic setbacks during the Fronde. By 1659, France had the upper hand in Northern Italy and could effect a return to the *status quo ante*, albeit with subtle shifts in hierarchy among her Italian allies.

The second section, on diplomatic practice, will be of broader interest, but would have benefited from a more systematic approach and editorial eye. It is divided into three thematic chapters, on "quotidian diplomacy," negotiators, and princely actors, each supported by Blum's wide reading in French and Italian diplomatic archives. The detailed yet loosely structured chapter on "quotidian diplomacy" emphasizes constraints on communications, the language of dispatches, and, most valuably, the considerable diplomatic role played by pensions. Blum shows that French pensions were crucial sources of revenue for seventeenth-century Northern Italian elites, and were thus key instruments in constructing and maintaining alliances; pensions' prominence in negotiations meant an equally prominent mediating role for financial experts. Blum's second chapter, on negotiators, examines French diplomats' increasingly systematic recruitment through kinship networks and ministerial clienteles. She postulates that the 1630s and 1640s saw the institutionalization and standardization of French diplomacy. In the section's final chapter, Blum charts the centrality of princely marital alliances in the era's diplomacy, and in particular Mazarin's celebrated marital politics.

A young and promising historian, Blum died in 2012 while preparing the volume for publication. Her premature death meant that the work is not as polished as it might be: it would have been strengthened by a closer integration of the two sections, perhaps even an inversion of their order. Additionally, one encounters inconsistencies in footnotes and tables, nor is the bibliography comprehensive. These are minor points, however, in a volume that will offer specialists a rich and fluid analysis of French diplomatic interventions in Northern Italy, and many useful insights into the era's diplomatic practices. It is a fitting monument to a historical career cut tragically short.

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