



The Symbolic Strategies of Amédée VIII: A Utopian Vision Examined through Alignments and Artistic Representations

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Abstract

This article explores the intricacies of the Duchy of Savoy during the 15th century, exploring its complex connections with Africa, the Crusades, and the Holy Empire. Focused on the reign of Amadeus VIII, who later became Pope Felix V, the study investigates the unique devotion to Saint Maurice d'Againe and Saint Anthony the Great within the Duchy. The research unveils new evidence through architectural alignments, religious symbolism, and artistic representations, notably analyzing Konrad Witz's "La Pêche miraculeuse." It discovers significant alignments from Chambéry to Ripaille, Basel, and Magdeburg, indicating political and symbolic strategies. The article introduces the concept of an "inclined cross," aligning Savoy with Magdeburg, Cyprus, Rhodes, and Turin. The symbolic reading of the Savoy Knot, associated with the motto Foedere et Religione Tenemur (F.E.R.T), suggests a mnemonic tool possibly derived from maritime practices, providing insights into the Duchy's unique strategies and perspectives. This Savoyard motto, a relic of the Middle Ages and some of its medals or coins, happily cultivated its reputation for mystery or obscure meaning. The methodology involves expanding references, exploring heraldry, and examining religious and spiritual connections. The article proposes a potential link between Savoy's alignments and Egyptian or Ethiopian influences, supported by pilgrimages from these regions. It suggests the existence of a coherent utopia imagined by Amadeus VIII, fostering a new perspective on the artistic achievements of the time. The erasure of symbolic constructions, orchestrated by subsequent figures like Enea Silvio Piccolomini, is discussed, leaving enigmatic traces of the Duchy's engagement with Africa.

Introduction

In the early 15th century, Europe was entangled in a prolonged conflict while witnessing a renewed interest in the East through the Crusades. This era of alliances ended abruptly with the Fall of Constantinople. Amidst these events, the Duchy of Savoy, under Duke Pope Amédée VIII, stood as a territory somewhat removed from the conflicts, prominently associated with the cult of Maurice d'Againe (Ripart, 2006). Noteworthy exchanges occurred with the African continent during this time, a theme explored more specifically by recent works such as Krebs (2020), shedding light on the artistic interactions between European and Ethiopian kingdoms. It arouses the interest of distant pilgrims.



Returning to this cult of Maurice d'Agaune, we will examine new evidence showing that more elements deal with this symbolism.

This article focuses on Savoy and aims to probe the underexplored relationship between ancient paintings, architectural structures, and their connections to the African continent. Drawing from evidence such as diplomatic missions and relics associated with Maurice d'Agaune, this study examines the symbolism embedded in architectural alignments, motto references, and a remarkable painting from the period – Konrad Witz's "La Pêche miraculeuse," housed in Geneva. Building upon previous research (Sylvand, 2022), this article seeks to elucidate the significance of Maurice d'Agaune's theme in Savoy at that specific time.

Discussion of the Objectives

The analytical dimension of the article centres on three distinct objectives within the discussion. Firstly, it aims to explore new evidence related to the cult of Saint Maurice d'Agaune, particularly focusing on manifestations with historical significance. These manifestations are evaluated for their artistic importance and the symbolic alignments they propose in connection with the Duchy's motto. The objective is to expand the understanding of the cult and its contextual relevance.

Secondly, the discussion digs into the political and symbolic strategy of the Duchy, examining the implication of these elements within the broader historical context. The article suggests that these symbolic references go beyond mere continuations of past cults and form a cohesive symbolic construction. This objective aligns with Hablot's (2019) research on the identity construction of European houses based on symbolic keys, emphasising these elements' political and symbolic significance within the Duchy.

The third objective involves investigating the erasure of this symbolism from historical records. The article highlights the resignation of Pope Amadeus VIII and the subsequent obscuring of the symbolic construction associated with him. It traces the erasure of these symbolisms, particularly by figures like Enea Silvio Piccolomini, who played a significant role in reshaping historical narratives. This objective aims to understand the deliberate efforts to erase certain symbolic elements and the consequences of this erasure on the historical memory of the Duchy.

Methodology

In this research endeavour, a systematic plan has been devised to ensure the production of replicable results. The study's systematic approach encompasses various key actions and considerations, all directed towards a comprehensive exploration of symbolic relationships, heraldry, and the religious connections associated with the historical figure of the Duke of Savoy. Additionally, the investigation examines the trope of inversion, exemplified by the symbolic interpretation of entities like the black swan, drawing on the theoretical framework established by Taleb (2008). The study also explores the potential repurposing of navigation tools for the creation of terrestrial landmarks and alignments.

The initial phase involves an exhaustive review of existing literature to identify the current state of knowledge and pinpoint any gaps in understanding. A theoretical framework is then established based on the works of prominent scholars such as (Hablot, 2019; Taleb, 2008), guiding the subsequent investigative steps. The symbolic analysis unfolds by scrutinizing known representations, expanding the field of references, and meticulously examining symbolic relationships, with a particular focus on heraldry. Simultaneously, the study probes into the religious and spiritual connections of the Duke of



Savoy during the specified historical period. A dedicated exploration of the trope of inversion follows, with an emphasis on identifying its regular and undeniable manifestations. Specific instances, such as the symbolic interpretation of the black swan, are subjected to scrutiny, unravelling their significance.

The study also investigates the intriguing prospect of transposing navigation tools, originally designed for maritime purposes, to create terrestrial landmarks and alignments. This involves a meticulous examination of tools like marine knots associated with the motto of Savoy during the relevant time frame. Collaboration plays a pivotal role in the research process, as the study engages in exchanges with Longhi (2016), a specialist in Piedmontese castle construction from the historical period under investigation. This collaborative effort addresses the acknowledged lack of data on terrestrial alignments, with insights sought on potential extrapolation from marine cartography, a point discussed with Michéa (2008). The subsequent phases involve systematic data collection across various facets of the study, including symbolic representations, heraldic elements, religious connections, and navigation tools.

To ensure the replicability of results, the study adopts measures such as comprehensive documentation of methodologies, procedures, and tools used. Detailed descriptions of data sources are provided, fostering transparency and facilitating future replication by fellow researchers in the field. By executing this thorough and transparent methodology, the study aspires to contribute significant insights into the historical context surrounding the Duke of Savoy and the broader thematic areas under investigation.

Starting point: The known field of references to Maurice d'Agaune in 15th century Savoy

Amédée VIII's reign was characterised by the devotion to saints, notably Saint Maurice d'Agaune and Saint Anthony the Great. Later, Amadeus VIII became pope under the name Felix V and was sometimes described as a bigot; he was not superstitious but seemed very attentive to the symbolic vehicle attached to these celebrations. The cross of Saint Maurice, the Savoy knot and direct references to the symbolism conveyed by these saints seemed important to the new duke. Later, he would be attentive to the visual symbolisms attached to the Council of Basel, which opened in the year 1431, and he participated in the shift in its visual representations, which merged Saint Maurice and Balthazar in the adoration of the Magi (Collins & Keene, 2023). Amédée seemed less sensitive to the personality of these saints than to their very particular symbolic significance.

The first was Maurice d'Agaune, a 3rd-century martyr revered in Valais on lands that Amédée controlled. He offered the Abbey of Saint Maurice a central piece of land on the edge of Lake Geneva at Ripaille near Thonon, where he founded a charterhouse to which he paid great attention. Maurice was an important protective saint (with a shield) from the Middle Ages, linked to the first conversions of leaders in the north of the Alps (Dehoux, 2012). Maurice, also a protector of Burgundy, was one of the protectors of the Holy Empire. Pibiri (2020) showed how the strategy of elevation of the Duchy of Savoy under the protection of the Holy Empire was the subject of a meticulous strategy at the time of Amadeus VIII.

Other Saints linked to this universe would have their importance, such as Saint Victor (companion of Saint Maurice) or Saint Grat, particularly when Louis and Anne built their Bethlehem Chapel in Geneva next to the lake. The next generation, however, became closer to the Franciscan Friars Minor.



This article highlights the strategic elevation of the Duchy under the Holy Empire's protection, emphasising the symbolic significance of these saints rather than personal connections.

First evidence, the alignments from Chambéry

Many monuments from the time of Amédée VIII suffered destruction in later periods, notably two important for our subject, the Chartreuse de Ripaille and the Convent of the Minor Brothers of Rives in Geneva, where Anne and Louis erected the chapel of Bethlehem intended to become the future necropolis of the dynasty. The Sainte Chapelle of the Château de Chambéry, though the only surviving building from Amédée VIII's time, displays a peculiar orientation. The chapel is located on a spacious site with fewer constraints. However, the orientation of its choir was strange: Firstly, the chapel is on an alignment which goes towards the Ripaille site. By extending this alignment further, in a remarkable way, it passes through Basel (where the council that would elect him Pope would later be held) and Magdeburg, the city of Sigismund I in Saxony. The alignment can be read as the sign of a marked allegiance to the Holy Empire and Saint Maurice, which is verified in the presence of Ripaille in the axis. Ripaille is the new place proposed by the Duke to the Abbey of Saint Maurice to build a new charterhouse on the lake's southern shore, more anciently linked to Savoy. Here, he established his order of Chivalry, dedicated to Saint Maurice (formerly Order of the Black Swan then Order of the Necklace). (fig 1).

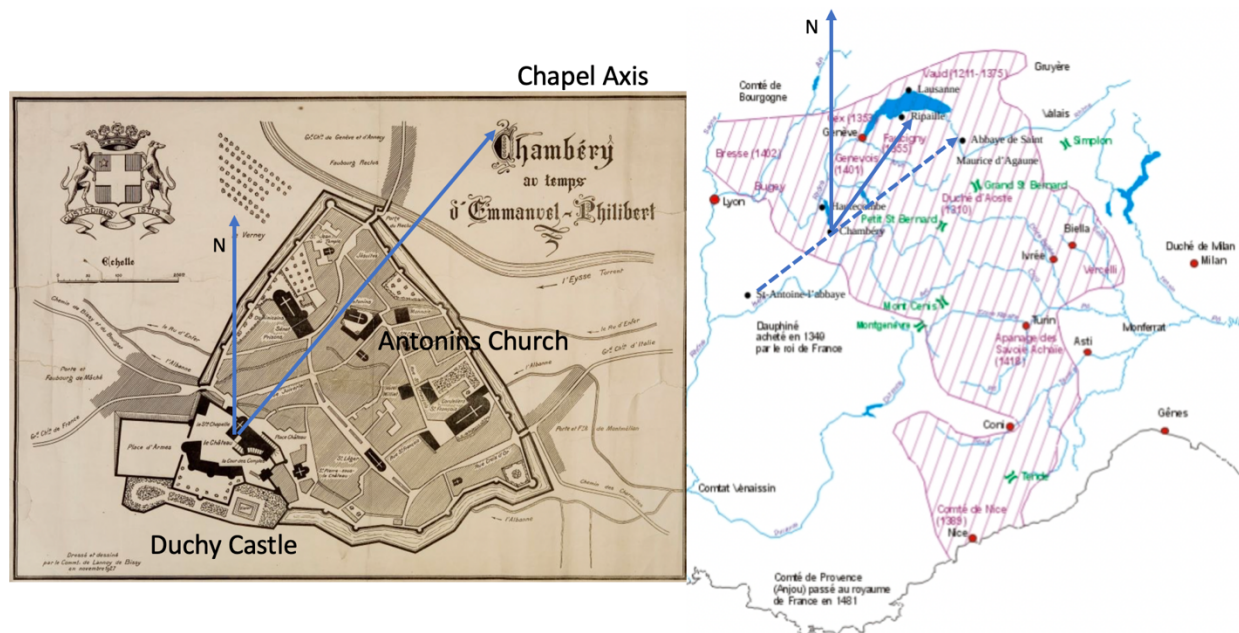


Fig. 1: The alignment of the new Sainte Chapelle towards the church of Antonins and Ripaille in Chambéry, an axis which extends towards Basel and Magdeburg in Saxony.

Secondly, if we take the relationship between Saint Anthony and Saint Maurice, Chambéry is on an axis between the two Abbeys. The Duke seemed to correct this axis towards Ripaille slightly, and he returned "in front" of the chapel, on the axis, a site to the Antonins where he offered a central church. There is, therefore, a "strong temporal axis" already linked to the figure of Maurice d' Agaune.

Second evidence: The symbolic representation of the space of Konrad Witz's Pêche "miraculeuse"



The article introduces a remarkable painting by Konrad Witz, "La Pêche miraculeuse," commissioned by Amédée VIII. This came as a strange realisation that the pope at the Council of Basel, Amédée VIII, had taken over the commission for the Altarpiece of Saint Pierre Cathedral in Geneva, commissioned by the Archbishop of Metz and created by Konrad Witz (1400-1446) (Elsig & Mentz, 2013). Despite the renovations, we can also guess it under the face of one of the kings of the Adoration des Mages. However, one of the most intriguing panels of Western painting was that of the *Miraculous Fishing*, which, apart from the parable, represented one of the first naturalistic landscapes of Western painting with the representation of the shore of Lake Geneva. The painting has been the subject of numerous comments on its framing (Wolf, 2022), which did not hold the view of the city.



Fig.2. *La Pêche miraculeuse* by Konrad Witz (Geneva Museum of Art and History). The alignment of Christ and the Môle corresponds to the dotted axis, orthogonal to the Chambéry Ripaille axis examined previously.

However, upon reading the previous architectural notes, it is possible to make a new remark and hypothesis. On a plan, the alignment of Christ and the mountain of Môle and the Saint Victor priory (another reference to Saint Maurice, of whom he is one of the companions) draws an exact perpendicular to the previous axis, that is, the complement of the cross (fig. 2). Further, in this framework, the ends of the table drew the directions of Chambéry and Ripaille, embracing this Savoyard territory. In addition, the location on the bank opposite Christ, at the level of the ramparts and the entrance to the city, is the exact location of the convent of the Friars Minor, where the chapel of Bethlehem, necropolis of Anne and Louis, could be erected.

Complementary alignments up to Turin: "the inclined cross"

Let us summarise the situation. We have a strong symbolic alignment that looks like a tilted cross. It points to Magdeburg in Saxony and Cyprus, two important and alternative places to Jerusalem chosen by Amédée VIII on the advice perhaps initiated by his grandfather. Three other sites provide these references, and there are undoubtedly others.

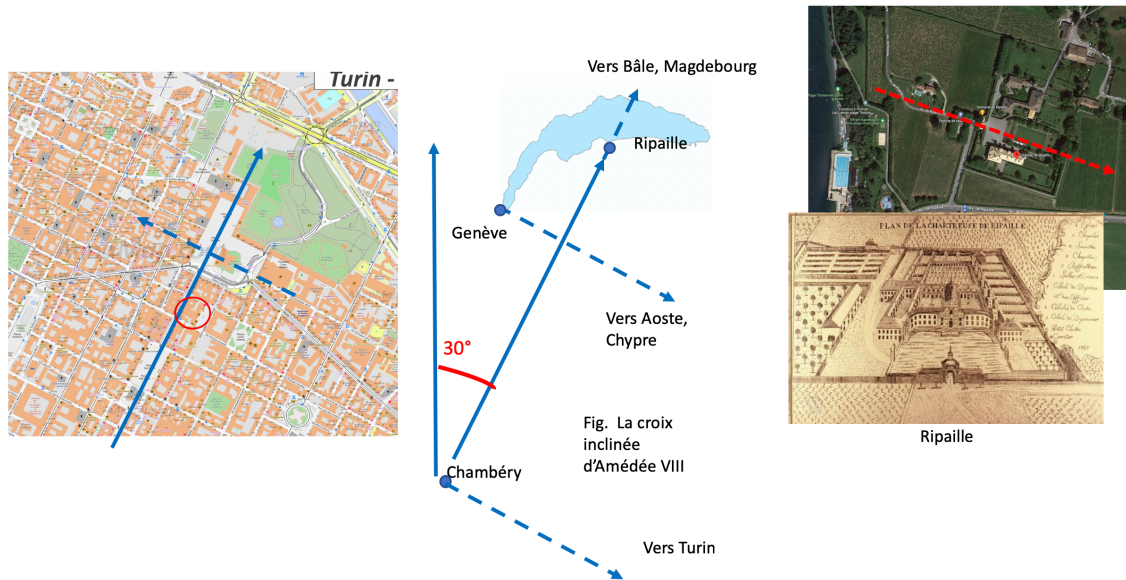


Fig. 3: Summary of the alignments in Savoie, which draws a cross inclined at 30°

The first is the Ripaille site with an inclined orientation. This site is important because, despite its subsequent destruction during the Swiss incursions of the Reformation, it was built in a utopian way to accommodate members of the order of Saint Maurice.

Then there was Turin, which was yet to be established as the capital of Savoy but would probably become in the following century. Amédée VIII focused more on Geneva, which would soon leave the Savoyard fold. Turin was the result of the first major works following the recent securing of Amédée VIII in Piedmont, and the centre today retains a characteristic alignment aligned with the castle and the adjoining church, which would host the Shroud of the Chapel of Chambéry. This alignment was that of Chambéry. However, it was one of the palaces in the centre (circled in red) which would house the Museum of Egyptology, which remains one of the largest collections outside Egypt. During visits, it appeared difficult to conceive that the alignment of the building found a link with Egypt.

The last site which corroborates this reading is the site of the Island of Rhodes, which has had difficulty linking with the motto *Foedere et Religione Tenemur* (F.E.R.T) of the House of Savoy, which, according to tradition, is linked to this motto. However, more than Cyprus, the island, which was home to the order of the Hospitallers of Jerusalem, also seemed to correspond to this alignment. Unlike many possessions in the region, the island was free from threats, which undoubtedly did not represent positive memories of the Savoyard incursions in the east (Cyprus, the Morea and even Constantinople) (Ripart, 2008).

On the relevance of the inclined cross, it is possible to question another altarpiece linked to Savoy by Jacquelin de Montluçon, a plan designer linked to the Antonines. Representations of the old men most certainly referred to Amadeus VIII and the cross of Christ as marked by the lobes of the cross of Saint Maurice. They could also be marked by the representations of rays similar to the “*marteloires*”



(compass roses) used on nautical charts for orientations, which was perhaps a key to the tools used for such alignments.

First Analysis as a Political Strategy

At the beginning of the 15th century, the Duchy of Savoy peaked amid the chaos-shaking Europe. As mentioned above, the county's elevation to a Duchy is not accidental since it resembles a long-considered strategy. Pibiri (2020), through his experience in studies of several study possibilities and preparation of numerous embassies, showed that Amadeus VIII did not benefit from the Emperor's visit to these lands. In certain aspects, Amédée VIII seemed to adopt approaches from Amédée VI, who rubbed shoulders with the previous emperor, Charles IV (Mariaux, 2015). Amédée VI almost managed to fix a major problem between the churches of the East and West. He freed his cousin Jean V Paleologue (emperor of Byzance), forcing him to travel to Rome in 1369 and submit to Pope Urbain V. Amédée VIII the wise also noted the failures of cousin branches or allies in previous generations to build successful oriental kingdoms despite very high but brief responsibilities: Chamorel (2021) recalls that the cousin family of Savoy-Achaia would become princes of Morea (in Greece) before an inglorious retreat in Italy and its great tent Jeanne de Savoie (1306-1360) would stay few years (1328-1341) empressing Constantinople before she left the throne and flee in the Peloponnese. Amédée VIII achieved the perfect combination as he later became a duke, and his son became king (of Jerusalem). This was poised to be strategic since before Louis' marriage, he made another attempt to secure the title to the kingdom of Jerusalem claimed by the Anjou branch through the marriage of his daughter Marguerite (1420-1479) in 1431. Amédée was probably the only monarch in Europe whose two children combined this divergent title of king of Jerusalem.

Second analysis as a Symbolic strategy

Beyond these contributions, there presented a personal reading of the Savoy dynasty through a process of inversion and reversal of meaning. For this purpose, a very interesting symbol was that of the "black swan". This was the first name given in 1352 by Amédée VI to the order of Chivalry of Savoy at a time when the Crusades revived the creation of these brotherhoods, and Peter of Cyprus had just created in 1347 the Order of the Swan. The swan was a symbol traditionally associated with the Crusades, and in the Middle Ages, the black swan, as Taleb (2008) recalled, did not exist. In the 15th century, the black swan was designated as an impossible object, and it would seem very strange to name a dynastic order in this way, even if imaginary animals were regular heraldic companions (Hablott, 2019). Symbolically, in the bestiaries, the swan bore another characteristic (a bird with black flesh and plumage in disharmony) (Pastoureau, 2011). By inversion with black plumage, the swan regained its harmony. Amédée VI had probably born in mind the figure of Saint Maurice d'Agaune, who lived in the 3rd century but then appeared as a contemporary companion of Christ¹. Extraordinarily, he arrived on the lands of the Duchy of Savoy, near the Savoyard lake, as in Tiberias. From then on, it proved unnecessary to go on a crusade since this witness had already reported.

Further evidence: F.E.R.T, the meaning of a knotted motto, a first key?

F.E.R.T was another Savoyard symbol which played on the symbol and the opposition. The motto held a love knot of uncertain origins and obscure meaning as its symbol. However, Hablot (2019) did

¹ This inversion of values on skin tone is an important point developed about the song *Se la Face ay pale* by Dufay written for the wedding of Louis de Savoie and Anne de Lusignan. (Sylvand 2022)



not insist on the motto's meaning, which integrates a first play on words, the “lakes of love” symbolising the knot in 8. Nevertheless, this motto and its references appeared late in the Middle Ages. The most promising field of research linked to the heraldry evoked complex circulations of meaning, including mentions of texts that could be validated through their written meaning and their oral meaning by considering different languages or codes.



Fig.4: An example of a symmetrical representation of the Savoy knot, the J and its symmetrical S on a stained-glass window by Janin Loysel (1439) made for Amédée VIII in Ripaille.

The obscure meaning of the symbol posed a dilemma in its reading. Since Amédée VI initiated the Savoy Knot, it is plausible that Amédée VIII paid particular attention to it because of the connection to his name, probably the eight drawings and a lying 8. The term lakes (for interlacing) of love also resonates in a particular way due to the importance of at least two lakes for the Savoyard dynasty. Lake Bourget, near which the Abbey of Hautecombe was established, was home to the tombs of the dynasty and Lake Geneva, near Ripaille and Geneva. The subject of the painting *La Pêche miraculeuse* by Konrad Witz, supposedly proved a naturalistic representation of Western painting, with Lake Geneva assimilated to Tiberias. Notably, Louis and Anne had a chapel built on the banks of Geneva in Bethlehem overlooking Christ de Witz. This circulation of biblical meaning attached to the territory was important for Amadeus VIII.

Noting that the Knots were often presented in more than one copy and therefore in opposing symmetry, it is tempting to consider the reading that one side of the knot represented the S of Savoy. In contrast, the symmetrical (the other face) represented the J of Jerusalem. The node constituted the link between the two letters/territories. The theme of inversion is, therefore, evident. Interestingly, a marine knot was located, which was a useful tool for navigation. Pibiri (2013) recalled the tendency of Savoyards to subcontract actions externally.

Consequently, even if the House of Savoy had a fleet in Venice, it probably rented crews. It can be deduced that the House of Savoy did not have any maritime knowledge, which is undoubtedly false as navigation on Lake Geneva was a pleasure of Amédée VIII. We should also consider in a more literal and technical way an illumination commissioned by the grandfather Amadeus VIII at the time of his 1966 journey in the *Apocalypse de Viry* or of “the Green Count” which depicts Saint Anthony leading with a cross in hand and a thread the *galea* of Amédée VI (Ciavaldini-Rivière, 2000). And this



influence is undeniable, this *Apocalypse* being the model of that ordered by Amadeus VIII, one of the best known in the world of bibliophily and preserved at the Escorial Museum.

However, the motto F.E.R.T can be, in addition to the allusion to Rhodes², be seen as a mnemonic means to remember the way of tying the knot, each letter, in lowercase, representing a step of the knot of 8. This practical vision of the motto could be a clue to the representation of the unexpected presence of these maritime tools (marteloires and knots) in another process of inversion.

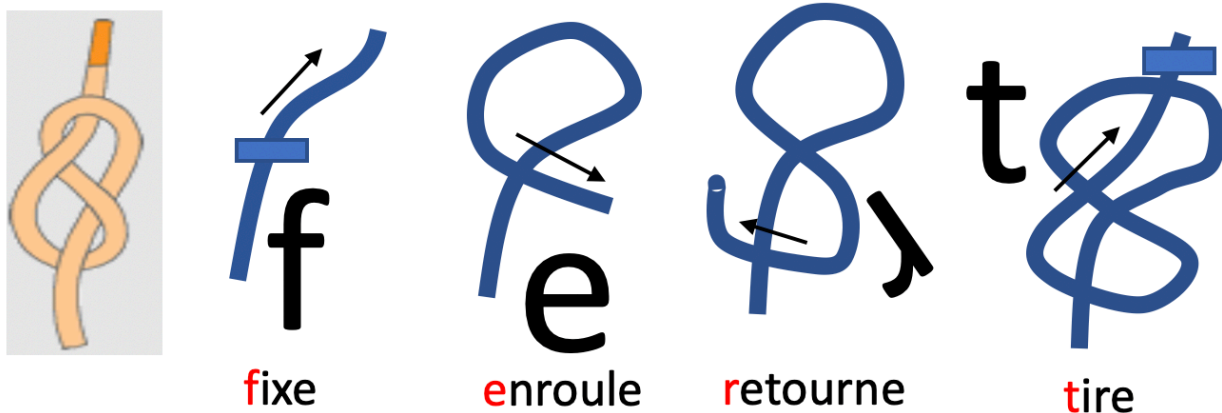


Fig.5: The four letters F.E.R.T as a mnemonic means to remember how to tie the knot in 4 steps.

On the prudence and advisability of drawing a parallel line with the Egyptian alignments and what was known about them

Evoking symbols, geometry, monumental alignments, and a Theban saint raises the curiosity to make closer connections with the Nile valley, which a few decades ago (Cannuyer, 1984) would have seemed completely anachronistic, even if Amadeus VIII was one of the father's indirect from the Turin Museum. However, (Krebs, 2021) recalled that pilgrims from African churches, coming from Ethiopia, passed through Savoy and were interested in the relics of Maurice d'Agaune. They were revered by Amédée VIII, who saw it as legitimisation. Amédée VIII undoubtedly sought to obtain information about their kingdom (which at the same time imported the know-how of Italian artisans). At the moment, there is no proof that this could have concerned Savoy. In terms of monumental alignment, can Egyptian or Ethiopian descriptions (we think of temples and pyramids) have played a role in the Savoyard alignments and reinforced Amadeus VIII in his project? Until recently, information concerning the Egyptian monuments, these wonders of the world listed in antiquity, had been thought to be completely lost in the Middle Ages, which had even mislaid the use of the word pyramid; thus, it took the Renaissance to rediscover this aspect of the antiquity (Cannuyer, 1984). However, numerous testimonies from the Middle Ages gave an overview of the cities and monuments of Egypt, mentioning these palaces and pyramids, notably through numerous Italian travellers (Gourinard, 2011). It remains uncertain to establish more precise links with Savoy, but in any case, one of the

² A popular allusion to Rhodes which would read *Fortitudo Eius Rhodum Tenuit* but which is dismissed most of the time for lack of meaning or corroboration with a real episode of conquest of the House of Savoy on the island.



sources mentioned by Henri Gourinard, *La Prise d'Alexandrie* by G. de Machaut. An indirect testimony recalled the participation of the Savoy family in this episode of the Crusades led by Pierre de Lusignan (Hardy, 2011). Undoubtedly, the Savoy family received first-hand testimonies, leading to a territory in which Amédée VIII's half-brother Humbert approached (Castelnuovo, 2003).

Conclusion

The Crusades are sometimes seen as a period of conquest that prefigures the time of explorations and conquests of the Renaissance. The relationship with Africa remains taboo, probably due to the History of Italy during the Second World War. For example, the Negus, Haile Selassie, was knighted in this order of Saint Maurice before the Italian adventure in Ethiopia. The fascination and close ties with Africa deserve to be better written. This undoubtedly explains why little effort was made to obscure certain symbols or distant attractions that were particularly vivid during the reign of Amadeus VIII. It was undoubtedly more convenient to suggest that other reasons, notably the intermediate position between France and Italy, explained this artistic flowering.

However, the coherent utopia imagined by Amédée VIII provided another perspective on achievements judged as masterpieces, such as *La Pêche miraculeuse* by Konrad Witz or the works of Dufay (examined under this prism in Sylvand 2022). These achievements also supported the thesis that the flourishing heraldry of the time was not just an abstract speculation of signs or numbers (Hablott, 2019). The political contribution of Amédée VIII was considered extremely positive (Hanne 2023). He wrote very interesting *Statutes* for Savoy, which also showed how he managed to avoid the risk of a judgment from the church on his project by defining the standards and respecting the rules (Caesar, 2019). Amid the Hundred Years' War, Amédée managed to keep the nickname "peaceful". In any case, it is a project linked to Africa whose implementation elements remain enigmatic, which contrasts with the following projects. It nevertheless left traces beyond the subsequent erasure procedures, which undoubtedly deserve to be rediscovered and put into perspective.

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