

THE NEW MIDDLE AGES



QUEENSHIPⁱⁿ
MEDIEVAL FRANCE,
1300 - 1500

Murielle Gaude-Ferragu
Translated by Angela Krieger



The New Middle Ages

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Murielle Gaudé-Ferragu

Queenship in Medieval France, 1300–1500

Translated by Angela Krieger

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Cover illustration: Coronation of Marie of Brabant, Philip III's second wife, at the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Paris, BnF, Fr. 6465, fol. 292, *Grandes Chroniques de France*, illustrated by Jean Fouquet (c. 1455-1460).

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To Juliette, Chloé and Capucine

THE QUEENS OF FRANCE (FOURTEENTH- FIFTEENTH CENTURIES)

The Last Direct Capetians

Joan of Navarre (d. 1305), wife of Philip IV the Fair (d. 1314): Queen of France

Margaret of Burgundy (d. 1315), first wife of Louis the Stubborn (future Louis X, d. 1316): convicted of adultery in 1314 and imprisoned at Château-Gaillard

Clementia of Hungary (d. 1328), second wife of Louis X: Queen of France

Joan of Burgundy (d. 1330), wife of Philip V (d. 1322): Queen of France

Blanche of Burgundy (d. 1326), first wife of Charles IV (d. 1328): convicted of adultery (her marriage was annulled in 1322)

Marie of Luxembourg (d. 1324), second wife of Charles IV: Queen of France

Joan of Évreux (d. 1371), third wife of Charles IV: Queen of France

The House of Valois

Joan of Burgundy (d. 1349), wife of Philip VI of Valois (d. 1350): Queen of France

Blanche of Navarre (d. 1398), second wife of Philip VI: Queen of France

Bonne of Luxembourg (d. 1349), wife of John (future John II, d. 1364)

Joan of Boulogne (d. 1361), second wife of John II: Queen of France

Joan of Bourbon (d. 1378), wife of Charles V (d. 1380): Queen of France

Isabeau of Bavaria (d. 1435), wife of Charles VI (d. 1422): Queen of France

Marie of Anjou (d. 1463), wife of Charles VII (d. 1461): Queen of France

Margaret of Scotland (d. 1445), wife of Louis (future Louis XI, d. 1483)

Charlotte of Savoy (d. 1483), second wife of Louis XI: Queen of France

Margaret of Austria (d. 1530), young fiancée of Charles VIII: called the 'Little Queen' (her engagement was broken off in 1491)

Anne of Brittany (d. 1514), wife of Charles VIII (d. 1498) and subsequently Louis XII (d. 1515): twice crowned Queen of France

Joan of France (d. 1505), first wife of Louis XII: their marriage was annulled in 1498, and Louis XII subsequently married Anne of Brittany

Mary of England (d. 1533), second wife of Louis XII: Queen of France

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Part I Acceding to Royal Dignity	9
1 Marrying the King	11
<i>Matrimonial Strategies</i>	15
<i>Royal Weddings</i>	22
<i>Love and Separation: The Royal Couple</i>	30
2 Marrying the Monarchy: The Queen's Coronation	41
<i>The Body in All Its Majesty: The Coronation of Joan of Bourbon</i>	42
<i>'God Save the Queen': The Symbolism of the Queen's Coronation</i>	45
<i>The Forgotten Coronation?: Queens of the Fifteenth Century</i>	47
3 Bearing the Blood of France	53
<i>The Indispensability of Motherhood</i>	54
<i>The Purified Woman: Lying-In and Child Rearing</i>	59
<i>The Mother as Educator</i>	63

Part II	A Woman in Politics: The Power of the Queen	75
4	The ‘Profession’ of Queen	77
	<i>Capetian Queens and Salic Law</i>	78
	<i>Transformations in Reginal Power: Acting in Politics</i>	84
	<i>Heiress Queens and Dowager Queens: The Territorial Inscription of Reginal Power</i>	100
5	The ‘Government of Women’: Delegating Power and Regency	109
	<i>Regency ‘Orders’: Female Power?</i>	110
	<i>Female Regency in Action: Seats of Power and Governance of the Kingdom</i>	118
	<i>The Historiographical Posterity of Women in Power: ‘Bad’ Queens</i>	126
6	The ‘Queen of Ceremonies’	131
	<i>The Queen’s Public Body: The Role of Representation</i>	132
	<i>The Queen’s Allegorical Body: Entry Ceremonies</i>	135
	<i>The Queen’s ‘Final Triumph’: Death and Funerals</i>	141
Part III	The Symbolic Government	151
7	Courtly Society: The Queen in Her <i>Hôtel</i>	153
	<i>The Queen’s Apartments</i>	154
	<i>The ‘Court of Ladies’: The Queen’s <i>Hôtel</i></i>	156
	<i>Courtly Life</i>	161
8	The Road to Eternity: Devotions and the Divine	169
	<i>The Mirror of Christian Perfection</i>	170
	<i>The Queen as ‘Mother of the Poor’</i>	172
	<i>Religious and Sacred Foundations</i>	176

9 The Queen's Treasury: Art, Literature and Power	187
<i>Art and Politics: The Queen's Treasury</i>	188
<i>Books and Culture: The Queen's Library</i>	193
<i>Queens as Cultural Advocates and Patronesses</i>	198
Conclusion	203
Sources and Selected Bibliography	209
Index	219

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	<i>Portrait of Anne of Brittany</i> , Jean Bourdichon, <i>Grandes Heures d'Anne de Bretagne</i> (Tours, 1505-1508), Paris, BnF, Ms. Latin 9474, fol. 3.	13
Fig. 1.2	<i>Isabeau of Bavaria</i> , London, British Library, Ms. Harley 4431, fol. 3.	14
Fig. 4.1	Seal of Anne of Brittany, Queen of France (1498?), round seal, fragment measuring 75 mm. This seal was molded using an original impression loaned by Mr. Ronan de Chef du Bos in 1933.	103
Fig. 5.1	Seal of Isabeau of Bavaria, round seal, 89 mm.	121
Fig. 6.1	Joan of Bourbon's funeral convoy (1378), Paris, BnF, Fr. 2813, fol. 480 v°.	146

Introduction

In September 2004, analysis of Agnès Sorel’s remains caused a stir.¹ A team of 28 researchers, led by the paleopathologist Dr Philippe Charlier, wanted to determine if Charles VII’s well-known mistress, who died prematurely in February 1450, had been poisoned. The investigation was undertaken when her tomb was transferred from the royal castle in Loches to the Collegiate Church of Saint-Ours. On examining hair samples taken from the deceased woman, scientists found a large amount of mercury, which had led to her quick demise after she had ingested it. Although her death was probably accidental, since the woman known as the ‘Lady of Beauty’ (*Dame de Beauté*) had been prescribed a pharmaceutical treatment using mercury salts to fight off an intestinal parasite, the mercury levels were so high that the possibility of criminal intent was also raised. As early as 1450, rumors of murder had also spread throughout the French court, but no conclusive proof was ever found to support this claim. In any case, the ‘crime of poison’ was always mentioned in cases of sudden death.²

The name of Agnès Sorel—who was reputed for her beauty and intelligence in addition to being gifted with a real sense of politics, influencing Charles VII’s government on numerous occasions—nonetheless remains firmly planted in the minds of the French. Jean Fouquet’s famous posthumous portrait of her also glorified her memory. The Lady of Beauty is

¹ Philippe Charlier, *Médecin des morts. Récits de paléopathologie* (Paris: Fayard, 2006).

² Franck Collard, *Le crime de poison au Moyen Âge* (Paris: PUF, 2003).

exquisitely depicted as a crowned Virgin Mary holding the Infant Jesus on her lap, displaying a fashionable hairstyle for her time, and wearing an unlaced bodice.³

Unlike her bothersome rival, Charles VII's wife and 'inglorious queen'⁴ Marie of Anjou has remained in the shadows of history. And she is not alone, for most of the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century female sovereigns have been completely forgotten. Except for historians, who still recalls the names of Clementia of Hungary, Joan of Burgundy, Joan of Évreux, Joan of Bourbon and Charlotte of Savoy? Only two queens from this period continue to figure in historical output devoted to the time: Isabeau of Bavaria and Anne of Brittany, the former for the political role she played during the civil war and the signing of the Treaty of Troyes in 1420 (when she became the woman who sold the kingdom of France to the English) and the latter because of her mythologized status as the last Duchess of Brittany, said to have fought to maintain the independence of her principality until the very end.⁵

Further emphasizing the oblivion into which these queens have fallen, no courtly portrait placed them at the forefront of a historical event. The superb iconographical cycle Marie de' Medici commissioned from Rubens in 1622 to decorate the Luxembourg Palace in Paris and which depicted her triumphant majesty for posterity was still a long way away.⁶ Indeed, for some time the easel portrait was reserved only for monarchs in France (up until the reign of Charles VII), but their wives were still rarely represented during the fifteenth century. Only a watercolor depicting a lost portrait of Marie of Anjou is found in the Gaignières collection held at the French

³ Anvers, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten (1452-1455), *Jean Fouquet, peintre et enlumineur du XV^e siècle*, ed. François Avril (Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, 2003), 121–29.

⁴ Bernard Chevalier, 'Marie d'Anjou, une reine sans gloire, 1404-1463', in *Autour de Marguerite d'Écosse. Reines, princesses et dames du XV^e siècle*, eds. Geneviève and Philippe Contamine (Paris: H. Champion, 1999), 81–99.

⁵ Tracy Adams, *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010); Rachel Gibbons, 'The Queen as "Social Mannequin": Consumerism and Expenditure at the Court of Isabeau of Bavaria (1393-1422)', *Journal of Medieval History* 26, no. 4 (2000): 371–95; and *Anne de Bretagne. Une histoire, un mythe* (Paris: Somogy, 2007).

⁶ Fanny Cosandey, *La reine de France. Symbole et pouvoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), 333–60.

National Library⁷ in addition to Jean Hey's moving portrait of the 'Little Queen' (*la petite reine*) Margaret of Austria, who was the future Charles VIII's fiancée at the time. She never became Queen of France, having been dismissed from court in 1491, when the king wanted to marry Anne, heiress to the duchy of Brittany.⁸ In contrast, numerous paintings representing 'powerful women' of the same period have been conserved, such as those representing Louis XI and the Duchess of Bourbon's daughter Anne of Beaujeu or those depicting Isabella of Portugal, Duchess of Burgundy and wife of Philip the Good, Grand Duke of the West.⁹

The memory of these forgotten queens therefore needs to be revived. Even so, such a task should not be about leading the reader through a gallery of individual portraits, but should, more fundamentally, involve examining the nature of their power and their roles within the court and kingdom of France. Well before the time of Catherine and Marie de' Medici, these women were playing an essential role in the monarchy, not only because they bore the weight of their dynasty's destiny but also because they embodied royal majesty alongside their husbands.

Indeed, since women were excluded from the French crown in 1316, they could only be 'queen consorts', meaning simply the wives of kings. Contrary to other European states, a princess of the French blood could not inherit the kingdom and become a full-fledged queen wielding the complete range of political powers.

All of them were also subject to the same rules governing the female sex. During the Middle Ages, women did not enjoy the same rights as men. From a legal standpoint, they were perpetual minors, depending first on their fathers and then on their husbands. To both, they had a duty to obey and to submit.¹⁰

The source of female inferiority, whereby a woman was deemed physically and mentally weaker than her male counterpart, lay in the Creation.

⁷ Collection Gaignières, Bibliothèque nationale de France (hereafter referred to as 'BnF'), Paris, reproduced in Contamine, *Autour de Marguerite d'Écosse*, Fig. 3.

⁸ New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Lehman Collection (1490-1491), reproduced in *France 1500. Entre Moyen Âge et Renaissance* (Paris: Réunion des Musées nationaux, 2011), 165.

⁹ Anne de France et Pierre de Bourbon by Jean Hey, 1492; Paris, Louvre Museum *Isabelle de Portugal* by Petrus Christus, 1470-1473, Bruges, Groeningemuseum.

¹⁰ Didier Lett, *Hommes et femmes au Moyen Âge. Histoire du genre XIF-XV^e siècle* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2013).

God had first created man in his image. Born of Adam, woman was supposed to act as his companion and assist him in procreation. All fault lay primarily with the woman, for Eve had allowed herself to be seduced by the snake and led her companion down the path of disobedience. Thus, being too vulnerable to temptation, woman found herself subjugated to man, within both marriage and the Cité. During the thirteenth century, the spread of Aristotle's ideas further reinforced clerics' misogyny. According to the philosopher, nature—not God—demanded the distinction between the sexes for the survival of the species. It had endowed man with a strong physique and a developed intellect and woman with a soft, weak body and little wisdom.

Tales about the inequality of the sexes were continually revived. There were a multitude of anti-female proverbs and discourses, such as this particularly juicy quote: 'Woman is an evil that man cannot avoid.'¹¹ Preachers also devoted a large part of their sermons to female sins. As the worthy descendants of Eve, women were said to be temptresses, liars and gossips, at once lustful, proud and backstabbing. Some texts were especially virulent, such as that of the Dominican Antoninus of Florence (d. 1459), who drafted a lengthy list in a pastoral manual detailing the sins of woman (in alphabetical order), which included everything from 'Avid Animal', 'Concupiscence of the Flesh' and 'False Faith' to 'Mountain of Pride', 'Talkative Throat' and 'Vanity of All Vanities'.¹²

Such a level of acrimony was exceptional and aimed primarily at converting attitudes. Other authors were more nuanced, acknowledging female virtues like gentleness and a naturally compassionate heart. This latter virtue likened women to the Virgin Mary, the mother of God who was 'blessed among women' and whose depiction as the Virgin of Mercy spread throughout the Medieval West. As mediator and universal advocate, the Queen of Heaven protected the faithful and preserved them from earthly peril.¹³

¹¹Sophie Coussemacker, "La femme est un mal que l'homme ne peut éviter", ou peut-on sauver son âme à la cour?, À la lecture des traités didactiques castillans du XII^e au XIV^e siècle", in *Expériences religieuses et chemins de perfection dans l'Occident médiéval. Études offertes à André Vauchez par ses élèves* (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2012), 375–90.

¹²Antoninus of Florence, *Summa theologica* (Verona: Ex typographia Seminarii, apud Augustinum Carattonium, 1740), 3:25.

¹³Jacques Dalarun, 'Regards de clercs', in *Histoire des femmes. Le Moyen Âge*, eds. Georges Duby, Michelle Perrot and Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (Paris: Plon, 1991), 39; Hélène Millet

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, both men and women voiced their defense of the ‘second sex’.¹⁴ Among them was Christine de Pizan, one of the most important writers of the Late Middle Ages, and Jean Gerson, Chancellor of the University of Paris—both of whom contributed to the ‘Debate of the *Romance of the Rose*’.¹⁵ In a treaty written in 1401, Christine de Pizan strongly reacted to the misogynistic allegations contained in the *Romance*, which at that time was celebrated by Charles VI’s secretaries Jean de Montreuil and Gontier Col. ‘Who are women?’ she wrote. ‘Are they serpents, wolves, lions, dragons, vipers or devouring beasts? And, by God, they are your mothers, your sisters, your daughters, your wives and your friends. They are you yourselves, and you yourselves are they!’¹⁶

However, one should not misunderstand this pervading misogyny, for the idea that women were weak and inferior was shared by all. Even Christine de Pizan never challenged the idea that women should obey their husbands. In *The Book of the Three Virtues*, she thus reminded the princess in her parable that she was supposed to be controlled by her ‘lord’.¹⁷ In a lengthy defense of female honor (*The Book of the City of Ladies*), however, her words were more nuanced, including the addition that woman was created from Adam’s rib in order to be by his side as ‘a companion ... whom he would love as if they were one flesh, and not his servant lying at his feet’.¹⁸

To each his or her own role then, as everyone was supposed to acknowledge. Men had the public sphere, justice, government and the necessities of war, while women had the domestic sphere, submission to their husbands and child rearing. There were numerous legal and political implica-

and Claudia Rabel, *La Vierge au Manteau du Puy-en-Velay. Un chef-d’œuvre du gothique international (vers 1400-1410)* (Paris: Fage, 2011).

¹⁴ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York City: Vintage Books-Random House, 1989; first published 1949).

¹⁵ Françoise Autrand, *Christine de Pizan. Une femme en politique* (Paris: Fayard, 2009), 379–98.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

¹⁷ ‘She will be humble toward him in deed, word, and attitude. She will obey him without complaint.’ *A Medieval Woman’s Mirror of Honor: The Treasury of the City of Ladies, Christine de Pizan*, trans. Charity Cannon Willard (New York: Persea Books, 1989), 98.

¹⁸ ‘He put Adam to sleep and created the body of woman from one of his ribs. This was a sign that she was meant to be his companion standing at his side, whom he would love as if they were one flesh, and not his servant lying at his feet.’ Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Rosalind Brown-Grant (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1999), 22.

tions behind this asymmetry between the sexes.¹⁹ Contracts, donations and testaments underwritten by a woman had to be drafted with either her father's or her husband's consent. Similarly, at the district, seigneurial and kingdom levels, authority was primarily wielded by men. In Italian cities, women could eventually engage in economic dealings, but they were not under any circumstances allowed to elect anyone or be elected to any office. They neither took oaths, participated in public life nor intervened in assemblies.²⁰

When it came to passing on property, however, it was proper to establish regional differences according to inheritance customs. Furthermore, the absence of a male heir often authorized a woman to wield power. In reality, women thus had to play diverse political and economic roles in addition to religious and cultural ones.

Among other issues, the history of gender has strived to define these plural roles. The place of women in medieval society has never before so thoroughly fed historiographical output on this subject in both Anglophone countries and France. Some authors have focused specifically on 'powerful women' in the Medieval West and the notion of 'queenship'.²¹ The queen of France has inspired many studies, which have essentially centered around the Early Middle Ages (see Pauline Stafford and Régine le Jan)²² or the early modern period (see Fanny Cosandey and Bartolomé

¹⁹ Lett, *Hommes et femmes*, 133–46.

²⁰ Didier Lett, 'Genre et paix. Des mariages croisés entre quatre communes de la Marche d'Ancône en 1306', *Annales HSS* 67, no. 3 (2012): 654.

²¹ Theresa Earenfight, *Queenship and Power: Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); John C. Parsons, *Medieval Queenship* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); and Anne J. Duggan, ed., *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1997). On English queens, see Joanna L. Laynesmith, *The Last Medieval Queens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). On Spanish queens, see Janna Bianchini, *The Queen's Hand: Power and Authority in the Reign of Berenguela of Castile* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Theresa Earenfight, *The King's Other Body: Maria of Castile and the Crown of Aragon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012). On queens and princesses in medieval Europe, see: Isabelle Poutrin and Marie-Karine Schaub, eds., *Femmes et pouvoir politique. Les princesses d'Europe, XV^e-XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Bréal, 2007); Armel Nayt-Dubois and Emmanuelle Santinelli-Foltz, eds., *Femmes de pouvoir et pouvoir des femmes dans l'Occident médiéval et moderne* (Valenciennes: Lez Valenciennes n° 41/42—Presses universitaires de Valenciennes, 2009); and Eric Bousmar et al., eds., *Femmes de pouvoir, femmes politiques durant les derniers siècles du Moyen Âge et au cours de la première Renaissance* (Bruxelles: De Boeck, 2012).

²² Pauline Stafford, *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: The King's Wife in the Early Middle Ages* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983; repr. Leicester University Press, 1998);

Bennassar).²³ However, there has never been a synthesis of these studies that looks at queens of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which is what this work seeks to examine.

Such an examination leads one down many paths, where political, religious and cultural histories converge with the history of gender. It implies defining the queen's status as well as her role(s) within the royalty, the court and civil society. The female sovereign not only had rights, but duties too. She had to practice the 'profession of queen', which was not simply reduced to the acts of procreation and caring for the children of France. Far from being confined solely to the private sphere, she participated in the communication of power, and, as her husband's corporeal double, she embodied the female equivalent of majesty. At once queen of ceremonies, queen of hearts and renowned patroness, she also contributed to the proper functioning of 'court society'.²⁴ Isabeau of Bavaria even played a broader political role due to her husband's intermittent 'absences' (due to bouts of madness).

Such an examination should also make it possible to observe the transformations in reginal power, since the place and roles assigned to the queen changed greatly over the course of the Late Middle Ages. As one example among many others, her body—which was for a long time destined to be itinerant, albeit interred in the most important Parisian sanctuaries—subsequently entered the prestigious 'cemetery of kings': the Abbey of Saint-Denis. It is therefore necessary to consider the implications—if, in fact, there were any—of the rediscovery of Salic Law concerning her status.²⁵ This book commences under the reign of those 'accursed kings' (Louis X, Philip V and Charles IV, who had no male descendants),²⁶ beginning with what historians consider to be the most significant event in the history of queens: the exclusion of women from the French crown

Régine Le Jan, *Femmes, pouvoir et société dans le haut Moyen Âge* (Paris: Picard, 2001); and Marion Facinger, 'A Study of Medieval Queenship: Capetian France, 987-1237', *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 5 (1968): 3–48.

²³ Cosandey, *La reine de France*; Bartolomé Bennassar, *Le lit, le pouvoir et la mort. Reines et princesses d'Europe de la Renaissance aux Lumières* (Paris: Éd. de Fallois, 2006).

²⁴ Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, ed. Stephen Mennell (Dublin: UCD Press, 2006; first published 1969).

²⁵ Ralph E. Giesey, *Le rôle méconnu de la loi salique. La succession royale XIV^e-XV^e siècles* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007).

²⁶ Maurice Druon, *The Accursed Kings*, book 1, *The Iron King*, trans. Humphrey Hare (London: Harper, 2013; first published 1955).