

Women and power in the Middle Ages: political aspects of medieval queenship

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In diesem Paper stellt sich die Frage nach der Rolle und den Aufgaben der mittelalterlichen Königin in West- und Südeuropa. In den letzten Jahren sind zahlreiche Studien zu diesen Aspekten erschienen, jedoch sind noch weitere Forschungen notwendig, um Klarheit über die Bedeutung der mittelalterlichen Kaiserin und Königin zu gewinnen. An dieser Stelle soll lediglich eine Einführung in einige Fragestellungen gegeben und anhand von ausgewählten Beispielen erläutert werden. Die mittelalterliche Königin hatte nicht nur Aufgaben im eigenen Haushalt wahrzunehmen, sondern konnte ebenfalls in der Rechtsprechung, in der Verwaltung, in auswärtigen Beziehungen, als Mäzenin und caritative Wohltäterin etc. tätig werden. Welcher Spielraum ihr eingeräumt wurde, hing von den jeweiligen Umständen und Epochen ab.

Es gibt unterschiedliche Typen mittelalterlicher Königinnen. Zunächst einmal finden wir Königinnen, die den Thron ererbt hatten, weil ein männlicher Erbe fehlte. Die größte Gruppe jedoch wirkte als Ehefrauen von Königen, als Witwen von Königen, als Mütter und Regentinnen von Königen. Regentinnen konnten eine beträchtliche Machtfülle erlangen. Im folgenden werden einzelne Beispiele angeführt, um zu zeigen inwieweit mittelalterliche Königinnen eine aktive politische Karriere verfolgen konnten bzw. auch, wie einige von ihnen durch widrige Umstände bestimmt, scheiterten. Die ausgewählten Beispiele beziehen sich auf einen Zeitraum vom Früh- bis zum Spätmittelalter und umfassen einen geographischen Bereich, der von Deutschland über England und Frankreich bis auf die Iberische Halbinsel reicht.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Women and power in the Middle Ages" is a very broad field of research and often a quite complicated one, because we are not too well informed about medieval women ¹. Some general

works and several case studies have been published during the last decades, but nevertheless a lot of research work is still to be done ².

In this text we shall focus on queens because if we were to discuss the political participation of all noblewomen, like duchesses, countesses and princesses, the topic would become much too broad. Sometimes those women had even more possibilities to participate actively in politics than queens and empresses.

First of all, we must examine the possible sources. Do they really inform us about the activities of medieval queens? If we take a closer look at chronicles (one of the most frequently used kinds of medieval sources), we notice that they are mainly written by men and they do not often mention women. Chronicles written by women are very rare. Very often queens are only mentioned in some of the so-called decisive moments of their lives or the life of their husband, the king. Chroniclers mention the royal wedding, the birth of the royal children (the names of the daughters are even often omitted), the death of the queen (quite often after giving birth to a child), the new marriage of the king and so on. Medieval noble women often appear to be reduced to performing one task alone: they had to produce children and naturally give birth to a male heir.

But was this indeed the daily life of a queen? If we have a closer look at other sources such as private letters, household books and personal testaments, we can see, in many cases, that these women were quite often directly involved in politics in the different fields mentioned above. Therefore a serious research work should include an analysis of different types of sources – not only official ones like royal chronicles, because in these chronicles the role, position and importance of the king is specially emphasized. He is depicted as the active person and the leading character. But if we observe private correspondence, household books and testaments and so forth we will see that very often the queen too was actively involved in political life. Such sources show us, for example, that queens had their own household, their own responsibilities and that they also made charitable donations with their own money.

In general queens had to assume different tasks. First of all the queen was responsible for her own household. It was separate from that of her husband and sometimes even in a different palace, especially in the Later Middle Ages. The queen's name is more or less often mentioned in royal documents of all kinds. The royal household could be compared to a kind of company with many employees. But the queen had to assume tasks not only within the palace but in the kingdom itself as well. Some queens took part in the practice of law, acting as judges and issuing legal documents.

We must take into consideration the fact that the queen normally was not a poor woman; she had her own possessions and lands and she was a feudal seigneur having her own subjects and her own income. She gave fiefs to her vassals and controlled them; therefore she was the head of an administration. And in many cases the queen helped her husband govern the kingdom. In quite a few documents her name was mentioned as being associated with that of the king, as participating in power, as being present in assemblies and so forth. Many times the queen had her own opinion if the king wanted to appoint administrators. But the tasks of queens were not limited to the territory of their own kingdom. Many queens participated actively in the field of international relations, especially when they were strangers themselves in their kingdom and acted as ambassadors for their home-coun-

try. Sometimes, queens were even sent abroad or to a part of the kingdom which was far away from the centre, the capital. There they acted as lieutenants on behalf of the king and were provided with special administrative and governmental power.

Like the king, the queen was also a patron of culture. Often she used her own money for her projects. She ordered civil and religious buildings to be built and decorated by the most fashionable artists. Queens often founded monasteries and chapels and contributed therefore to the establishment of dynastic memory. Many works of charity were not made only on the basis of pious considerations and for the relief of the poor; they were closely linked to the memory of the donor's own family and its members and the alms were directed to specific scopes.

We may distinguish between different types of queens. First of all, we can find reigning queens who received this right by heritage. They inherited the kingdom because their father did not leave a male heir. Some of these medieval queens are quite well known. By analysing this list we can see that there were no reigning queens in France because of the Salic law, which excluded women from the 14th century on. There were no empresses ruling in their own right, because emperors were always elected and it was not foreseen that a woman could be elected. But nevertheless some empresses were involved in politics. Secondly, we can find queens who received their title and power because they were married to a king. This was the normal and most frequent case. Thirdly, we have to mention the widowed queen or the dowager-queen. She acted as a regent during the minority of her son. Legally a widow had many more rights than a married woman who was under the "tutorship" of her husband.

Before presenting some examples, let us mention that not all medieval queens were really interested in politics; some really did not want to participate actively. But many queens were well educated and even learned persons and often had more intellectual interests than their husbands. Many of these women really had to struggle within the royal family to be allowed to participate in politics. But when successful what were they allowed to do? Were there special fields of activities entrusted to royal women? Or did they act like their male colleagues? We will examine some specific cases relating to the Empire, the kingdoms of England and France and the Iberian kingdoms of Aragon and Castile in order to have an overview.

2. QUEENS AND EMPRESSES

First, we will consider briefly some examples concerning the Empire. Already in the times of the Merovingians and the Carolingians we see that queens participated actively in politics and power³. Bertrada (†783), the wife of king Pepin III, took part in government, for example while her husband was leading a military campaign in Italy against the Langobardian kingdom. Bertrada represented him at home and negotiated in critical situations between both kingdoms by travelling to different regions in Europe such as Bavaria and Italy. Her successors as well were very often directly involved in politics, but they also had other tasks. The Carolingian queen was the head of the royal household. In some texts the queen is expressly considered as an assistant for all matters concerning the government of the kingdom and the administration of the palace. The king and the queen formed a team.

The empresses during the Ottonian and the Salian periods often occupied a central position in the government. Their tasks were not officially defined or written down but nobody argued against their active participation. We may mention the case of Queen Maud (†968), the wife of king Henry I. She was a very learned woman while her husband, the first Ottonian, was not able to read or write. Maud trained her son, the emperor Otto I, to become a learned person, too. This is symptomatic for this period. Knowledge was transmitted by learned women and learned monks and priests. When the first universities were founded in the 13th century women were excluded from knowledge. German queens and later empresses were crowned like their husband, a fact which emphasises their importance. Maud was even called in documents *co-regnante*; the queen was considered to be the *consors regni*.

The wife of emperor Otto I, Adelaide (†999), born a Burgundian princess and widow of king Lothar I of Italy, was actively engaged in politics. Her name is mentioned in many official documents and she acted as a governor in Italy on behalf of her husband. When Otto I died in 973, she continued to reign as a regent despite the fact that her son was eighteen years old. Medieval princes normally came of age at fourteen. Shortly afterwards, Otto II forced Adelaide to resign as a regent. But Otto III was married to a strong woman as well, Theophano (†991), a Byzantine princess who became one of the most important empresses of the Middle Ages. When Otto III died in 983, Theophano, with her mother-in-law Adelaide, and her sister-in-law Maud, an abbess, took over the government of the Empire to secure it for her little son Otto III against his enemies. Otto was just three years old when his father died. The clergy, princes and barons of the Empire mainly supported Theophano.

The empress was quite successful and acted as a very self-confident person who was very sure of herself and her imperial rank. This can be seen in many documents; she did not sign using the title of a widowed empress or regent but she called herself frequently *Theophano divina gratia imperatrix augusta* and in an even more important manner *teophanius divina gratia imperator*. Hence Theophano took a male name and title. The dates indicated in the document mention the number of years since her own coronation as an empress and not those of the reign of her son. It is possible that Theophano followed a Byzantine example because Byzantine empresses like empress Irene in the 9th century signed documents as *Eirene basileus*. But it is possible that Theophano wanted to stress as well in the Western Empire that she was reigning by her own right, independently. But after having reigned during eight years, Theophano died suddenly and her mother-in-law Adelaide took over the government alone. When Otto III came of age in 994, he took over the government and sent his grandmother back to her native country of Burgundy ⁴.

During the following centuries other empresses like Kunegunde (†1033), the wife of Henry II (†1024), participated actively in politics ⁵. Politically active female members of the Salian dynasty were for example Gisela of Swabia (†1043), wife of emperor Conrad II (†1039), and Agnes of Aquitaine (†1077), the widow of Henry III (†1056) and mother of emperor Henry IV (†1106). Agnes became regent after the death of her husband. But then an opposition formed by princes and clergy acted against her. Some bishops openly stated that women were on the same intellectual level as children and that they should not and could not govern a kingdom or empire. Finally, Agnes resigned in 1062 and went to live in a monastery in Rome where she died ⁶.

A hostile attitude towards the active participation of queens and empresses in politics can still be seen in the following decades and centuries. In the middle of the 12th century, empresses of the Holy Roman Empire no longer played an important role in politics, except in exceptional cases. They were slowly excluded from politics and only allowed to govern their own possessions. In the 14th century, emperor Charles IV (†1378) decided that during official festivities the empress should walk behind the emperor. Her table should be smaller and not so high as that of the emperor. Some historians say that the weakness of the royal power in Germany and the development of territorial states had a negative effect on the role of the empress. The position of the queen and/or empress changed. When at last trained administrators came to live and work in the palaces, the help of the queen in governing the kingdom/empire was no longer needed. She was forced to concentrate her energies on her personal “court”, belongings and estates ⁷.

3. QUEENS OF ENGLAND

The situation in other parts of Europe was quite different. Here we wish to analyse some examples of medieval queens in England. Only a few queens like Isabella of Gloucester, first wife of king John I (†1216) or Mary de Bohun (†1394), wife of king Henry IV (†1413) were members of English feudal families: many English queens came from the kingdom of France and a smaller number of queens were born in other European countries like Scotland, Flanders, Hainault, Navarre, Castile, Provence and Bohemia. Some of these queens became quite famous because of their involvement in politics ⁸.

One of the most important English queens was Eleanor of Aquitaine (†1204), wife of king Henry II (†1189), and the subject of many studies and even contemporary motion pictures ⁹. Still today Eleanor is considered by many historians one of the most important female personalities of the Middle Ages and one of the most active queens in politics. She was born in 1122 as the heiress of the mighty duke of Aquitaine and eventually became the first wife of king Louis VI of France in 1137. She was immediately interested in politics, but found an enemy in Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis who influenced her husband as well. Eleanor took part actively in the crusade of 1146 and accompanied her husband. Eleanor gave the king two daughters but no male heir and finally the marriage was dissolved in 1152. The duchess of Aquitaine returned to her homelands and then married the young Henry of Anjou in the same year. Two years later he became king of England and Eleanor was queen for the second time. Their combined territories were much larger than those of the French king. During her English marriage she gave birth to five sons and three daughters and assured the royal succession in England. King Richard I “the Lionhearted” (†1199) and John I Lackland (†1216) succeeded their father. Eleanor was clearly involved in the government of the kingdom of England and her own duchy of Aquitaine and acted as regent when her husband was absent.

In her later years, Eleanor and her husband became estranged. The restless queen finally left for Aquitaine where she governed for a time, but then she started a rebellion against her husband and was supported by her sons. But Henry II was able to defeat his wife and he imprisoned her in 1173. She was kept as a royal prisoner more or less until the death of the king in 1189. Then she started a new political career at the age of sixty-seven and gov-

erned England on behalf of her son Richard who was on a crusade. After the death of Richard in 1199, she was able to secure the throne for her youngest son John I. She even managed to travel a lot. For example she visited Cyprus, where the wedding of Richard and Berengaria of Navarre took place, and Castile, where her daughter Eleanor was married. The Queen decided to marry her grand-daughter Blanche to the future king Louis VII of France and accompanied the bride personally to France in 1201. Finally, she retired and died in the abbey of Fontevrault in 1204 ¹⁰. [See *Plate 1*]

Quite a few of Eleanor's successors as queen of England continued to be involved directly in politics. Let us just mention some examples. Queen Eleanor of Provence (c. 1220-1293) was born the daughter of Raymond Berengar, count of Provence. She was married in 1236 to king Henry III of England (1207-1272) who became king in 1216 as heir of king John I Lackland. The king and queen had a happy marriage. One of Eleanor's sisters was Margaret of Provence, wife of king Louis IX of France. Like her sister, Eleanor was a very ambitious woman and because of her activities she became quite unpopular in England. Eleanor was able to gain a strong influence on her husband and therefore she managed to provide many members of her French and Savoy family with huge possessions, fiefs and honours in England. As a consequence of this widely discussed misbehaviour, in later centuries foreign princesses who married English kings were no longer allowed to include their relatives or other foreigners in their household.

Queen Eleanor administered her own possessions, which increased enormously during the years of her marriage. Nevertheless, she needed a great amount of money because her expenditure was much higher than her income. Naturally her attempts to get it also contributed to her unpopularity. Queen Eleanor supported her husband in his political tasks and at a certain moment she was named regent of Gascony, an English possession on the Continent. When her husband had to fight against the rebellious barons in England and was defeated in Lewes, Eleanor was forced to go to France to find refuge, but she tried to use her jewels and money to build up a fleet and an army to support her husband. She was in continuous contact with her sister Margaret and other relatives in order to continue her involvement in English politics. At her husband's death in 1272, she became regent for her son, who took over the government when he came back to England. Eleanor changed her life slowly and finally, after a couple of years, she went to live in a nunnery where she died in 1291 ¹¹.

Her daughter-in-law was Eleanor of Castile. This wedding was arranged while Eleanor of Provence was regent of Gascony. The marriage was part of a peace treaty between England and Castile, which also claimed possessions in Gascony. Eleanor of Castile (c. 1240-1290), half-sister of king Alfonso X the Learned of Castile (†1284) was married to Edward (1239-1307), eldest son of Eleanor and Henry, in 1254. When Edward succeeded to his father in 1272, Eleanor of Castile became queen of England but she never became as powerful as Eleanor of Provence and was never officially named regent by her husband ¹².

Eleanor of Castile's son, king Edward II of England (1307-1327), was born in 1284 and in 1308 married Isabella of France (1296-1358), daughter of king Philip IV the Fair of France. This marriage proved to be a very unhappy union because of the homosexuality of the king, but eventually a male heir, the future king Edward III, and three other children were born. In 1324 Isabella was sent as an intermediary by her husband to France to negotiate a peace



Fig. 1
Philippa of Hanault.

between the kingdoms. Isabella decided to stay in France with her son and soon afterwards decided to take a lover, Roger Mortimer, and to start her own political career. She was a very independent woman, openly committing adultery and living with her lover. When she was forced to leave France, she returned to England with an army. Isabella had assembled a great number of supporters and managed to govern the kingdom for a short period on behalf of her son. During the minority of Edward III, Isabella and Mortimer reigned until 1330. That year, the new king turned eighteen and was able to take over the government, supported by several courtiers. He ordered Mortimer to be executed and kept his mother as a prisoner but did not dare let her face a public trial. At first Isabella was deprived of all her possessions but gradually she succeeded in regaining them. She was never able to act again on the political scene but she led a comfortable life as a noble lady in Norfolk and died peacefully in 1358. Still today queen Isabella is known as the “she-wolf of France” and described as a very unpopular queen ¹³.

Isabella’s daughter-in-law proved to be quite a different personality but nevertheless she was also influential, although she stayed a bit more behind the scenes. The son of Edward II and Isabella of France, king Edward III (1327-1377), was born in 1312 and married in 1328 to Philippa of Hainault (c. 1315-1369) (Fig. 1). This union was a quite happy one

and Philippa was later well known as a patron of the famous chronicler Jean Froissart. But she was also actively interested in politics and able to act some times on the political scene, exerting some influence. She accompanied her husband on many travels. For example, we may mention her intervention in Calais, pleading for the burghers of Calais condemned to death by her husband ¹⁴.

As a final and also striking example let us consider Queen Margaret of Anjou (1429-1482) (Fig. 2) who was born as the daughter of René, duke of Anjou and married to king Henry VI of England in 1445 to secure peace between France and England at the end of the Hundred Years War. Margaret was a very determined woman and exercised considerable political influence at the royal court. When her husband started suffering from a mental illness in 1453, Margaret's political influence became more important as she tried to support her husband and young son during his minority in her fight against her rival, duke Richard of York. She led the royal forces against the duke of York, who was killed on the battle-field in 1460, but finally the son of the deceased duke, Edward, continued the fight against Margaret and her family and took the throne in 1461 as king Edward IV (†1483). Henry VI was captured by his enemies in 1463 and murdered in 1471, his son Edward was killed in a battle in the same year. Queen Margaret was kept as a prisoner and finally released in 1475 after the French king had paid a ransom. She had to renounce all her rights and return to France, where she died quite miserably in 1482 ¹⁵.

4. QUEENS OF FRANCE

Let us have a brief look at the kingdom of France. In the kingdom of France we cannot find queens reigning in their own right, by birth ¹⁶. Until the 14th century, this would have



Fig. 2
Mrgaret of Anjou.

been possible in theory, but in fact never happened because all the French kings left male heirs. But we can find many French queens who were politically very active, such as, for example, queen Constance of Arles (†1032), the second wife of king Robert the Pious (†1031). She came from Provence and wanted to support people from that region. Chronicles show us that the pious king feared his wife because of her character. Queen Anne of Kiev (†after 1075) came from Russia and acted successfully as a regent for her son Philip I (†1108).

But the most famous French example of a successful female regency is that of Blanche of Castile (†1252). It is interesting to note that Blanche was the grand-daughter of the famous Eleanor of Aquitaine, the exceptional queen who was first married to king Louis VII of France, then to king Henry II of England. Blanche was the daughter of Eleanor of England and Alphonse VIII of Castile. Obviously she had inherited her political ambitions from her grand-mother. Eleanor travelled personally to Castile to choose her as a bride for the son of the French king, the future Louis VII. King Louis VII (†1226) died after a few years and Blanche became the regent for her son, the new king Louis IX (†1270), the future Louis the Saint. Blanche reigned over the kingdom with only the help of advisers; when her son came of age, she still continued to be involved actively in politics and again became a regent when her son left France to lead a crusade. Blanche was especially successful in establishing the inner stability in the kingdom ¹⁷.

King Louis (†1270) himself was married to Margaret of Provence (†1295) who also had strong political ambitions like her sister, Eleanor of Provence, the wife of king Henry III of England (†1272). In Margaret's case we can see that quite often young queens had only limited possibilities to act on the political scene while their mothers-in-law were still alive and also actively involved in politics. Blanche controlled even the private life of the young couple who had to live on separate floors; eventually Louis gave orders to construct a hidden staircase so that he could meet his wife secretly; they were finally able to have many children.

The memory of the famous queen Blanche was still alive long after her death. In a miniature of the 14th century, Blanche is represented a powerful queen and a regent. She is shown as crowned queen sitting on a throne while her little son king Louis is sitting in front of her reading a book; he is accompanied by his teacher, a friar. It is clear that Blanche was supervising the education of her son. In a second contemporary image [See Plate 2], which was made around 1235, we can see both protagonists, Blanche and Louis, again. They are sitting on thrones placed on the same level, although only Louis is holding a sceptre. It is interesting to see that Louis, who was already married at that time to Margaret of Provence, is still represented sitting on the throne beside his mother, the dowager queen, and not beside his wife, the young queen. His mother was the dominant character on the political scene, meanwhile Margaret had to stay in the background. Only after Blanche's death in 1252 can we find Margaret depicted regularly with her husband. Margaret had no official political life before the death of her mother-in-law, as is clearly demonstrated by the royal iconography.

Queen Margaret accompanied king Louis on crusades, but until 1252, the year in which Blanche died, the young queen was not allowed to be openly involved in politics. Her per-

sonal dream was to become a successful regent like Blanche. Margaret wanted to take power after the death of Louis, who was not healthy. Finally he died on a crusade in 1270. But Margaret was not appointed regent: not only because her son was already of age but also because she had committed a fatal error years before. Long before the death of her husband, she had forced her son Philip, at that time already eighteen years old and of age, to secretly swear that he would accept her as a regent until he was thirty. This was totally unusual and legally not allowed. Soon after having made this oath, Philip realised what he had done and informed his father who became furious and immediately wrote to the pope, the only person who could release a person from an oath. From that time on, king Louis never named Margaret regent when he left France. After his father's death in 1270, Philip III (†1285) took over the government without any problems. Margaret had to retire and spent her last years in a monastery where she died in 1295 ¹⁸.

Let us mention briefly the changes that took place in France concerning queenship during the 14th century. Until 1316 it would have been theoretically possible, as we have seen, for a French royal princess to inherit the kingdom, although this never happened in reality because until that year every French king left a male heir. In 1316 king Louis X died leaving only a daughter and a pregnant wife. His brother Philip became regent during the pregnancy. A little boy, king John I, was born, but he died after a couple of days. The regent was interested in becoming king himself and did not want to see his niece Joan, the legal heiress, on the throne. He asked several lawyers who taught at the Sorbonne to declare that female persons were not allowed to succeed to the kingdom and to reign or even to pass the heritage on to their male children. This so-called Salic Law, made at that time, was presented as very ancient, dating back to the Franks.

Philip V (†1322) and his younger brother Charles IV (†1328) finally died without leaving a male heir, which meant the end of the male succession in the Capetian family. The Valois dynasty became the new royal family of France. No further French king changed this law. In later centuries experts expressed their fear of a reigning French queen. They believed that a woman would be too weak to reign or would marry a foreign prince who might gain influence in the kingdom of France. In 1374 and 1407 royal orders were published which defined exactly the role of a queen as a regent ¹⁹.

The political importance of queens nevertheless remained. Several queens acted as regents and were quite powerful, like Isabeau of Bavaria (†1435) (Fig. 3), who however was not a very popular queen and regent. She was born in 1370 in Munich as the daughter of duke Stephan III of Bavaria and the Italian princess Taddea Visconti of Milan. In 1385 Isabeau was married to king Charles VI of France (†1422) who suffered from a mental illness from 1392 on and was incapable of reigning. Isabeau was involved not only in familiar conflicts but in the troubles of the Hundred Years War and the struggle over succession between her son and the English king Henry V as well. Her fate proved quite unhappy and dramatic and has been the subject of scientific studies and of novels and so forth. Especially in novels and drama Isabeau is depicted as an immoral and evil woman ²⁰.

When king Louis XI died in 1483, his son and successor Charles VIII (†1498) was too young to reign but his widow was not appointed regent. The king did not want his wife, queen Charlotte, to be regent but left the regency instead to his eldest daughter Anne de

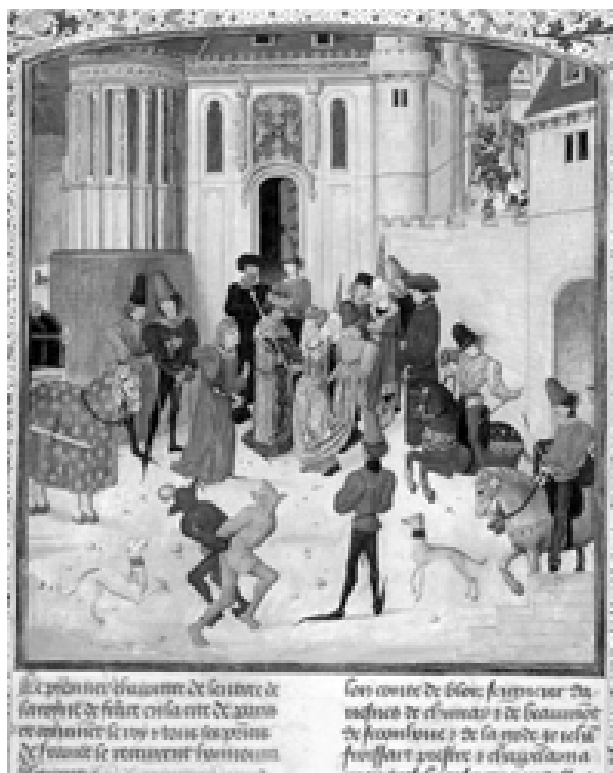


Fig. 3
Isabeau of Bavaria.

Beaujeu (†1522) who indeed was a very efficient regent. She was a very intelligent woman who proved capable of assuming this task in difficult times. Charles VIII himself married another important woman, Anne of Brittany (†1514), the heiress of the duchy of her birth. She was directly involved in politics during her times, at the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern period, as queen of France and especially as duchess of Brittany. After the Charles' death she married his successor Louis XII (†1515). When Anne died in 1514 she left her duchy to her daughter Claude (†1524) who became the wife of king Francis I of France (†1547). From that time on Brittany was part of the kingdom of France. Her second daughter, Renée, was married to the duke of Ferrara and became well known as an intellectual woman involved in the Reformation movement ²¹.

5. QUEENS OF CASTILE AND ARAGON

Let us now consider the Iberian Peninsula in the Middle Ages mentioning a few examples of the political activities of medieval queens. Queen Urraca of Castile (†1126) (Fig. 4). inherited the kingdom in 1109 after the death of her father. After the death of her first husband, a prince of Burgundy who had come to Castile to fight against the Muslims, she married King Alfonso I of Aragon called “the Fighter”. This marriage could have been the first step towards a reunification of Aragon and Castile but the couple continued to reign sep-



Fig. 4
The *signum* of Queen Urraca.

arately and independently in their own kingdoms. Especially Urraca's son Alfonso from her first marriage was very reluctant to see his step-father involved in Castilian politics. Husband and wife were both strong personalities and finally the marriage ended up in a divorce granted by the pope. Urraca continued to reign as a queen and later married a local nobleman ²².

King Alfonso I of Aragon died without leaving children and in his testament stated that he wanted to give the whole kingdom to the military orders. His family refused to accept his last will and therefore his brother Ramiro, who was at that time a Benedictine monk, was forced to leave his monastery and marry a princess of Aquitaine to produce heirs. Finally, a daughter named Petronilla was born, but Ramiro obviously preferred the monastic life and engaged his baby-daughter to the much elder count of Barcelona, proclaimed her queen of Aragon and returned to his monastery.

Petronilla became queen of Aragon at the age of two; at the age of fourteen she married her fiancé, count Ramon Berenguer IV of Catalonia who lived in Barcelona. It is interesting to see that she was raised in the household of her husband in a traditional manner and during her marriage she was never really independently active in politics. Officially she was the queen and had to sign all necessary documents, but the decisions were obviously made by her husband. Ramon Berenguer never became king of Aragon, it was still Petronilla who held the *regnum* and the *potestas*. But he acted as tutor and as regent for his wife. In her testament she declared that her only son – not her husband – should be the next king of Aragon. Only in case of the premature death of her son Alfonso, should her husband become king. When Ramon Berenguer IV finally died in 1162, Petronilla appeared on the political scene on her own and acted as a queen although only for brief time. Then she transmitted her power directly to her grown-up son, retired from politics and died in 1173 ²³.

It seems quite clear that Petronilla had political abilities, but she had never been trained to live her ambitions openly. She had been raised since she was a baby to be a perfect wife

and mother. Furthermore this education had taken place in the household of her future husband who was not interested in having an independent wife. By contrast, Urraca of Castile had been prepared carefully for many years to take power and reign as an independent queen.

In Castile we can find a similar situation concerning the transmission of the royal power from mother to son, but this case is somewhat different. Berenguela of Castile (†1246) was the eldest daughter of king Alfonso VIII and Eleanor of England, a daughter of the famous Eleanor of Aquitaine. Her sister was Blanche of Castile, the above-mentioned queen of France. Like Blanche, Berenguela was a very intelligent woman who was deeply interested in politics. She was married to king Alfonso IX of León and had a son, Fernando, and several other children. Because of consanguinity, her marriage was finally dissolved. After the death of her father and her mother in 1214 she acted as a regent for her younger brother Henry who died in 1217. At that moment, Berenguela became the official heiress of the crown of Castile and possessed the *regnum* and the *potestas* and would have had the possibility to reign as a queen of Castile like Urraca. But Berenguela decided otherwise and transferred her power directly to her seventeen-year-old son Fernando because she wanted him, as heir of the kingdom of León, to unify both kingdoms in the near future. This actually happened in 1230 after the death of Alfonso IX. Berenguela resigned but continued to be active in politics helping her son in all aspects of political life in Castile and abroad by maintaining close relations with many neighbours. It was her decision to marry Fernando III to a grand-daughter of the emperor Frederick Barbarossa in 1219 and to reinforce the international position of the kingdom of Castile in Europe. This German heritage would later help her grandson, king Alfonso X, to be elected emperor ²⁴.

But Berenguela was not the only queen in her family to be involved in politics. Another case of a very active Castilian queen is that of Violante of Aragon, a daughter of king James I the Conqueror of Aragon. She was married to king Alfonso X of Castile, son of the above-mentioned Fernando III and Beatrice of Swabia. During the first years of her marriage she travelled a lot to help maintain peace between Castile and Aragon. In later years, she also founded monasteries and promoted the rise of the Mendicant Orders. In 1275 her eldest son Fernando died suddenly, leaving behind a wife Blanche, daughter of the above-mentioned king Louis IX of France, and several children. Normally, their eldest son would have become the next king of Aragon, but king Alfonso preferred to recognize his second son Sancho as heir. Violante and her daughter-in-law did not share his opinion and protested, but finally the situation took a dramatic turn and as the two women were afraid to stay in Castile, they took the children and escaped to Aragon, where Violante's brother was king. This caused a great scandal in Europe.

Violante and Blanche tried to find supporters everywhere in Europe who would be able to defend the rights of the young children. They started to build up a political network by writing letters to Blanche's mother Margaret, the French dowager queen, her brother the French king, to the English king, to the English queen, a Castilian princess, to Isabel, queen of Portugal, to the pope and other important personalities. It is interesting to see that Blanche received open support from the queens and princesses, creating thus a kind of female network in politics. Finally, after negotiating, Violante returned home but never was really reconciled with her husband. Blanche stayed behind and continued her fight

until her brother signed a peace treaty with king Sancho IV of Castile and recognised him as king. She was forced to ratify that treaty as well and then she retired to a French nunnery where she died in 1323. Violante spent several years in Castile consecrating her life to pious works, but occasionally made her way back to the political scene supporting for example her son Sancho, who had started a rebellion against her estranged husband, the king. She died probably in 1300.²⁵

In those conflicts between the future king Sancho IV and his father king Alfonso X, it was not Violante who acted as an intermediary but her daughter-in-law, the famous Mary of Molina (†1321) who tried to reconcile father and son. Since the first moments of her marriage to Sancho, Mary is shown in the documents and chronicles as a very active person and strong assistant of her husband. When he died quite young in 1295 she became the official regent for her son Fernando IV (†1312) and later for her grandson Alfonso XI (†1350) during their minority. She was able to secure the throne for her offspring in a period of continuous civil war within the royal family involving their relatives; she reinforced the position of Castile against the attacks of its Christian and Muslim neighbours and played as well an important role in international relations signing for example treaties with Portugal and France and by arranging marriages for her children to maintain peace. In Spain Mary of Molina is still today known as a very capable politician and the most prominent medieval Castilian queen.²⁶

6. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion we can stress that in many countries medieval empresses and queens had the possibility of participating actively in politics. But this participation could be limited due to national practices and laws and changing times. In some countries princesses could inherit the kingdom and rule as queens, although in fact this was not very often the case because in general there were male heirs when the king died. More frequently queens were involved in politics as the wives of a king, or as a dowager queens and regents for their young sons. In those cases their power was in many cases quite important and their tasks theoretically often not limited, although in practice the queens had to find “their place” on the political stage. Some queens were not interesting in politics but most princesses were brought up to take their responsibilities. They received a good education and especially were trained to act as ambassadors of their home-country when they were married to foreign princes. We can meet these queens in situations of conflicts as intercessors, as mediators or match-makers for their children. They acted like men, led wars, made peace treaties, raised children, and took decisions concerning all fields of politics.



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NOTES

- ¹ See general information about medieval women, queens and queenship, in Shahar Sh., *The fourth estate. A history of women in the Middle Ages*, London-New York 1983; Stafford P., *Queens, concubines and dowagers. The King's wife in the Early Middle Ages*, Athens 1983; Anderson B.S., Zinsser J.P., *A history of their own: Women in Europe from Prehistory to the Present*, 2 vol., New York 1988; Erler M., Kowaleski M. (ed.), *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, Athens 1988; Brooke C.N.L., *The Medieval Idea of Marriage*, Oxford 1989; Gies F., Gies J., *Marriage and Family in the Middle Ages*, New York 1987; Gies F., Gies J., *Women in the Middle Ages*, New York 1987; Duggan A. (ed.), *Queens and queenship in Medieval Europe*, Woodbridge 1997; Klapisch-Zuber Ch. (ed.), *Histoire des femmes*, vol. 2, *Le Moyen Age*, Paris 1991; Mirrer, L. (ed.), *Upon my Husband's Death. Widows in the literature and histories of Medieval Europe*, Ann Arbor 1992; Vann Th. (ed.), *Queens, regents and potentates*, Cambridge 1993; Parsons J.C. (ed.), *Medieval queenship*, Stroud 1994; McCash J. (ed.), *The cultural patronage of medieval women*, Athens (USA) 1996; Mitchell L.E. (ed.), *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, New York-London 1999; Nelson J.L., *Medieval Queenship*, in Mitchell L.E. (ed.), *Women in Medieval Western European Culture*, New York-London 1999, pp. 179-208.
- ² This is an introduction to this subject and a brief overview of the political aspects of medieval queenship by presenting various examples from different European countries. Footnotes are used to give special reading indications. General readings are as well indicated in a "Selected Bibliography", see above.
- ³ See especially concerning the Merovingian, Carolingian period and the Holy Roman Empire Vogelsang T., *Die Frau als Herrscherin im hohen Mittelalter. Studien zur "consors regni" Formel* (Göttinger Bausteine zur Geschichtswissenschaft 7) Göttingen-Frankfurt-Berlin 1954; Konecny S., *Die Frauen des karolingischen Königshauses. Die politische Bedeutung der Ehe und die Stellung der Frau in der fränkischen Herrscherfamilie vom 7. bis zum 10. Jahrhundert* (Dissertationen der Universität Wien 132) Wien 1976; Nelson J., *Queens as Jezebels: The Careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian History, in Medieval Women*. Dedicated and presented to Professor Rosalind M.T. Hill on the Occasion of her seventieth birthday, ed. by D. Baker, Oxford 1978, pp. 31-77; Wemple S.F., *Women in Frankish society. Marriage and cloister (500 to 900)*, Philadelphia 1981; Ketsch P., *Aspekte der rechtlichen und politisch-gesellschaftlichen Situation von Frauen im frühen Mittelalter (500-1150)*, in Kuhn A., Rüsen J. (eds.), *Frauen in der Geschichte*, vol. 2 (Geschichtsdidaktik. Studien, Materialien 8) Düsseldorf 1982, pp. 11-71; Ketsch P., *Die Beteiligung von Frauen an der politischen Herrschaft*, in Kuhn A. (ed.), *Frauen im Mittelalter*, vol. 2: *Frauenbild und Frauenrechte in Kirche und Gesellschaft. Quellen und Materialien* (Geschichtsdidaktik. Studien, Materialien 19), Düsseldorf 1984, pp. 361-426; Ennen E., *Frauen im Mittelalter*, München 1984; Affeldt W. (ed.), *Frauen in Spätantike und Frühmittelalter. Lebensbedingungen – Lebensnormen – Lebensformen*, Sigmaringen 1990; Uitz E., Pätzold, B., Beyreuther G., *Herrscherinnen und Nonnen. Frauengestalten von der Ottonenzeit bis zu den Staufern*, Berlin 1990; Jäschke K.-U., *Notwendige Gefährtinnen. Königinnen der Salierzeit als Herrscherinnen und Ehefrauen im römisch-deutschen Reich des 11.*

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- ⁴ See concerning the empress Adelaide and her daughter-in-law empress Theophanu Beyreuther G., *Kaiserin Adelheid. "Mutter der Königreiche"*, in *Herrscherinnen und Nonnen*, pp. 43-79; Gussone N., *Trauung und Krönung. Zur Hochzeit der byzantinischen Prinzessin Theophanu mit Kaiser Otto III.*, in *Kaiserin Theophanu. Begegnung des Ostens und Westens um die Wende des ersten Jahrtausends. Gedenkschrift des Kölner Schnütgen Museums zum 1000. Todesjahr der Kaiserin*, ed. by A. v. Euw, P. Schreiner, vol. 2, Köln 1991, pp. 161-173; Leyser K., *Theophanu divina gratia imperatrix augusta: Western and Eastern Emperors in the later tenth century*, in Reuter T. (ed.), *Communications and power in medieval Europe. The Carolingian and Ottonian Centuries*, London 1994, pp. 143-164; Davids A. (ed.), *The empress Theophanu. Byzantium and the West at the turn of the first millennium*, Cambridge 1995.
 - ⁵ See concerning Kunegunde p. ex. Baumgärtner I. (ed.), *Kunigunde – eine Kaiserin an der Jahrtausendwende*, Kassel 1997.
 - ⁶ See Bulst-Thiele M.-L., *Kaiserin Agnes (Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance 52)* Leipzig-Berlin 1933, repr. Hildesheim 1972 and Black-Veldtrup M., *Kaiserin Agnes (1043-1077). Quellenkritische Studien (Münstersche Historische Forschungen 7)*, Cologne-Weimar-Vienna 1995.
 - ⁷ Ketsch, *Aspekte*, p. 44; Föbel, *Königin*, pp. 385ss.
 - ⁸ See in general Jewell H., *Women in medieval England*, Manchester 1996. in *the middle ages*, London-New York 1990; Ward J. (ed.), *Women of the English Nobility and Gentry: 1066-1500* (Manchester Medieval Sources Series), Manchester-New York 1995; Leyser H., *Medieval Women. A social history of women in England 450-1500*, London 1995 and for more details especially *Letters of the Queens of England, 1100-1547*, ed. by A. Crawford, Stroud 1994; Jones M.K., Underwood M.G., *The King's Mother: Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond and Derby*, Cambridge 1992; Ward J.C., *English Noblewomen in the Later Middle Ages*, Harlow 1992; Chibnall M., *The Empress Matilda*, London 1991; Stafford P., *Queens, Concubines and Dowagers: the king's wife in the early middle ages*, London 1983.
 - ⁹ Concerning Eleanor of Aquitaine just a few studies can be mentioned: Kibler W.W. (ed.), *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Patron and Politician*, Austin 1977; Pernoud R., *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, London 1967; Kelly A., *Eleanor of Aquitaine and the Four Kings*, London 1950; Bagley J.J., *Margaret of Anjou, Queen of England*, London 1948 and especially Crawford, *Letters*, pp. 30-43.
 - ¹⁰ Crawford, *Letters*, pp. 30-34.
 - ¹¹ Concerning Eleanor of Provence see Crawford A. (ed.): *Letters of the Queens of England, 1100-1547*, pp. 54-67 and Howell M., *Eleanor of Provence, Queenship in Thirteenth-Century England*, Oxford 1998.
 - ¹² Concerning Eleanor of Castile see Crawford, *Letters*, pp. 68-75 and especially Parsons J.C., *Eleanor of Castile. Queen and Society in Thirteenth-Century England*, New York 1995.
 - ¹³ Concerning Isabella of France see Crawford, *Letters*, pp. 81-92, a new biography about Isabella is still missing but her life was described in the cycle of novels written by M. Druon.
 - ¹⁴ Concerning Philippa of Hainault see Crawford, *Letters*, pp. 92-100. An exhaustive biography about Philippa has not been written yet.
 - ¹⁵ See Crawford, *Letters*, pp. 119-129 and also Bagley J.J., *Margaret of Anjou, Queen of England*, London 1948.
 - ¹⁶ See concerning the French queen Barry F., *La reine de France*, Paris 1964; Facinger M.F., *A study of medieval queenship: Capetian France. 987-1237*, in "Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History", 5 (1968) pp. 1-48; Bertièrre S., *Les Reines de France au temps des Valois*, Paris 1994; Cosandey F., *De lance en quenouille. La place de la reine dans l'Etat moderne (14e - 17e siècles)*, in *Annales HSS, juillet-août 1997*, n. 4, pp. 799-820; Cosandey F., *La reine de France. Symbole et pouvoir. XVe - XVIIIe siècles*, Paris 2000.
 - ¹⁷ See Pernoud R., *La reine Blanche*, Paris 1972 and LeGoff J., *Saint Louis*, Paris 1996; Richard J., *Saint Louis*, Paris 1983.
 - ¹⁸ See Sivéry G., *Marguerite de Provence*, Paris 1987.
 - ¹⁹ Cosandey, *Lance and Cosandey, Reine*, 20ss., 36-43.
 - ²⁰ For Isabeau see Saller M., *Königin Isabeau*, München 1979; Verdon J., *Isabeau de Bavière*, Paris 1981; concerning Isabeau and her husband Charles VI see Autrand F., *Charles VI*, Paris 1986.

- ²¹ For Anne see *Anne de Bretagne et son temps*, catalogue d'exposition, Nantes 1961. To avoid repetitions, this part of our paper had been shortened considerably, see for further information on the French queens and princesses the chapter in this volume by Anne Lemonde.
- ²² See in general Garrido E., Folguera P., Ortega M., Segura C., *Historia de las mujeres en España*, Madrid 1997 and especially concerning Urraca Reilly B.F., *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under Queen Urraca 1109-1126*, Princeton 1982; Lacarra J. M., *Vida de Alfonso el Batallador*, Zaragoza 1971.
- ²³ See Vajay S., *Ramire II le Moine, roi d'Aragon et Agnès de Poitou dans l'histoire et la légende*, in *Mélanges offerts à René Crozet*, ed. by Gallais P., Riou Y.-J., 2 vol., Poitiers 1966, vol. 2, pp. 727-750; Bagué E., Cabestany J., Schramm P.E., *Els Primers Comtes-Reis*, Barcelona 1960 (*Història de Catalunya. Biografies catalanes* 4), pp. 9-51; Stalls W.C., *Queenship and the royal patrimony in the twelfth-century Iberia: the example of Petronilla of Aragon*, in Vann Th. (ed.), *Queens, Regents and Potentates*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 49-62.
- ²⁴ No actual biography of Berenguela exists, but see works concerning her father and son where she is mentioned: González J., *El reino de Castilla en la época de Alfonso VIII*, 3 vol., Madrid 1960; González J., *Reinado y diplomas de Fernando III*, 2 vol., Córdoba 1983; and concerning the cultural influence of Berenguela, her mother and sister Blanca or in French Blanche see Shadis M., *Piety, politics and power: the patronage of Leonor of England and her daughters Berenguela of León and Blanche of Castile*, in McCash J. (ed.), *The cultural patronage of medieval women*, Athens 1996, pp. 202-227.
- ²⁵ The studies concerning king Alfonso X are numerous, especially concerning queen Violante and her struggle see Ballesteros Beretta A., *Alfonso X el Sabio*, Barcelona 1963; Vann Th., *The theory and practice of medieval Castilian queenship*, in Vann Th. (ed.), *Queens, Regents and Potentates*, Cambridge 1993, pp. 125-148.
- ²⁶ See the excellent biography by Gairois de Ballesteros M., *María de Molina, tres veces reina*, Madrid 2nd ed. Madrid 1968.



SOURCES

Christine de Pizan, in her *Livre des trois vertus* (or *Treasure of the City of Ladies*) describes the activities appropriate to a queen or princess. The critical edition of the text is published by C.C. Willard (Paris 1989). Christine wrote it in 1404 for Margaret of Burgundy.

CI DEVISE LA MANIERE DU VIVRE DE LA SAGE PRINCESSE ET PAR L'ADMONNESTEMENT DE PRUDENCE

Prudence, si que j'ay dit devant, avertira la sage princepce comment l'ordre de son vivre sera riglee, et par elle et par son enortement tendra telle maniere: elle se levera tous les jours assez matin, et seront ses premieres paroles adreçans a Dieu, en disant: Daigne nous, Sire, garder ceste journee de pechié, de mort soubdain, et de toute mauvaise aventure. Ainsi soit il a tous nos parens et amis, aux trespasçéz pardon, et a noz subgiéz paix et tranquillité. Amen. Pater Noster. Et du surplus d'oroisons ce que devocion lui admenistrera, ne querra entour elle avoir moult grant affaire de service; et ceste voye tenoit, n'a pas moult de temps qu'elle vivoit, la bonne et sage royne Jehanne, femme jadis du roy Charles de France, iii^e du nom, qui se levait tous les jours ains l'adjoignant, alumoit elle meismes sa chandelle pour dire ses heures, et ne souffroit que femme que elle eust se levast ne perdist son somme. Après ce que elle sera preste, yra ouïr ses messes, tant et en tel quantité que sa devocion sera, ou que loisir et temps luy donra: car n'est mie doubte que se ceste dame a qui soit commis grant gouvernement, comme plusieurs font et ont fait a leurs femmes quant les veoyent bonnes et sages et ilz aroyent hors, ou ilz estoient occupéz ailleurs, ilz bailloient la charge a elles et auctorité de gouverner tout le fait de leur seigneurie et estre le chief du conseil, – et telles dames font a excuser plus meismes vers Dieu se tant n'employent de temps en longues oroisons que celles qui plus ont loisir, ne elles n'ont pas moins de merite de bien et justement entendre a la chose publique et au bien

de tous a leur pouoir que elles aroyent de plus longuement vaquer en oroisons, s'ainsi n'estoit que elles voulsissent du tout entendre a la vie contemplative et laisser la vie active, si que j'ay dit. Car la contemplative puet bien sans l'active, mais la droicte bonne active ne puet sans aucune partie de la contemplative.

Ceste dame aura tele ordonnance que a l'issue de sa chapelle, elle meismes par humilité et devocion, en memoire et signe que elle ne doit mie despriser les povres, donra de sa main l'aumosne; et la endroit se aucunes piteuses requestes lui sont a faire, elle les orra benignement, donra a chascun gracieuse responce, et ceulz que elle pourra en brief temps expedier ne tendra par longue dilacion: et de ce faire accroistra l'aumosne, et aussi sa renommee. Si y aura aucuns pseudommes, pour ce que elle ne pourroit par aventure entendre a tout les requestes qui lui venront, qui seront commis a y entendre, et voudra que yceulx soient / charitables et expediens, et elle meismes de leurs meurs se prendra garde.

Ces choses faictes, se elle est dame qui se mesle du gouvernement, comme dit est, yra au conseil aux jours que tenir se devra; la aura tel port, tel maintien et telle contenance, quant en son hault siege sera assise, que elle semblera bien estre dame de tous, et chascun l'aura en grant reverence, comme leur sage maistresse et de grant auctorité.

Si orra diligemment ce qui sera proposé, et l'opinion de tous, et tant bien y aura son entente que elle en retenra les principaulx poins des matieres et des conclusions; et bien nottera lesquels diront mieulx, et par la meilleur consideration et avis et qui lui apparont les plus sages et de la plus vive opinion, et aussi nottera la diversité des opinions, quelz causes et quelz raisons pourroit mouvoir les disans, et ainsi en toutes choses sera avisee. Et quant venra a elle a parler ou respondre, selon le cas qui escherra, si sagement / s'avisera du faire que elle ne puisse estre repute simple ne ignorante. Et se avant la main elle puet estre informee de ce que on devra proposer au conseil, et que sur ce, se choses pesantes sont, se pourvoye par sage conseil de response, ce n'est que bien.

Avec ce, ceste dame aura establi sages preudeshommes certaine quantité, qui seront de son conseil, que elle sentira bons, loyaux, de bonne vie, et non mie moult convoiteux, car c'est ce qui honnit tout entour plusieurs princes et princeps que conseillieurs remplis de convoitise, car selon leur inclinacion ilz enduisent et enortent ceulz qu'ilz conseillent, et sans faille ceulx qui habondent en tel vice ne pourroient bien ne loyaument ne au prouffit de ame et honneur de corps conseiller, / et que ilz soient de bonne vie, et de ce doit bien enquerir la prudente dame. A ceulx elle se conseillera par chascun jour a certaine heure des besoignes que elle aura a faire. Après ce conseil du matin yra a table, / qui sera par especial aux jours solennelz et aux festes, voire le plus communement, en sale ou seront assises toutes les dames et damoiselles et les personnes a qui il apertendra, par ordre selon leurs estaz. La sera servie selon qu'il affiert a tel estat, et tandis que l'assiete durera, selon la belle ancienne coustume des roynes et des princeps, aura un pseudomme en estant au chief du dois qui dira dictiez d'anciennes gestes des bons trespassez, ou d'aucunes bonnes moralitez ou exemples. La n'aura mie grant noyse menee. Et après les tables levees et dictes graces, s'il y a princes ou seigneurs, chevaliers, escuiers ou damoyelles, ou aultres estrangiers venus vers elle, adonc comme celle qui sera en



Fig. 5
Christine de Pizan with a prince.

toutes choses enseignee et apprise, recevra chascun en tel honneur comme a lui apertendra, si que tous s'en tendront pour contens: parlera a eulx par maniere rassise a joyeux visage, aux anciens d'une guise plus / pesante, et aux joennes d'une aultre plus riant. Et se adonc vient la a parler ou ouïr de aucuns esbatemens ou d'aucunes joyeusetéz, elle s'i saura contenir par si plaisant maniere que tous diront que c'est une gracieuse dame et qui bien scet son maintien en tous endroiz.

Après les espices prises et que il sera temps de retraire, la dame s'en yra en sa chambre. La un petit se reposera, se besoin en a; puis après, s'il est jour ouvrier et elle n'a aucune aultre occupacion plus grant, pour eschiver oiseuse se prendra a faire aucun ouvrage, et environ elle fera semblablement ouvrir ses filles et ses femmes; et la a privé voudra que hardiement chascune devise de toutes honnestes joyeusetéz si que il lui plaira, et elle meismes rira avecques elles et s'esbatra en devisant si familièrement que toutes loueront sa grant priveté et benigneté et l'aimeront de tout leur courage. Ainsi fera jusques a heure de vespres que elle yra ouïr / en sa chappelle, se il est jour de feste, se aucune autre grant occupacion ne l'empesche, ou les dira sans faillir avec sa chappellaine. Et après ce fait, s'il est en esté, s'en yra esbatre en aucun vergier jusques a heure de soupper. La yra et venra pour sa santé, si voudra que se aucuns ont a besoingnier a elle pour certaines causes que ilz soient laisséz entrer et les orra. Après son soupper, vers le couchier, son retour sera a Dieu en oraisons, et ainsi se finera l'ordre des communes journées de la prudent princepsse vivant en bonne et sainte activeté.

THE WAY OF LIFE OF THE WISE PRINCESS

Prudence, as I have said before, will advise the wise princess how her life should be ordered, and as a result she will adopt the following way of life. She will rise quite early every day and address her first words to God, saying, "Lord, I beseech thee to guard us this day from sin, from sudden death and from all evil mischance, and also protect all our relatives and friends. To those who have passed on, pardon, and to our subjects, peace and tranquillity. Amen, Pater Noster.". She will say such additional prayers as her devotion may prompt her to, but she will not insist on having a great attendance of servants around her. (The good and wise Queen Jeanne, the late wife of King Charles V of France, followed this course when she was alive. She rose every morning before daylight, lit her candle herself to say her prayers, and did not allow any woman of hers to get up or lose sleep on her account.)

When the lady is ready she will go to hear her Masses, as many as accord with her devotion and as time and leisure will permit her. For there is no doubt that this lady, to whom great powers to govern are entrusted, will merit the trust that many lords have, and have had, in their wives when they see that they are good and prudent and they themselves have to go away to be occupied elsewhere. The husbands give them the responsibility and authority to govern and to be head of the council. Such ladies are more to be excused in the eyes of God if they do not spend so much time in long prayers as those who have more leisure, nor do they have less merit in attending conscientiously to public affairs than those who occupy themselves more with prayers (unless they intend devote themselves to the contemplative life and leave the active life).

But as I have said before, the contemplative life can manage quite well without the active, but the good and proper active life cannot function without some part of the contemplative. This lady will have such a good, orderly system that as she leaves her chapel there will be some poor people at the door to whom she herself with humility and devotion will give alms from her own hand, and if any deserving petitions are made to her, she will hear them kindly and give a gracious reply. She will not detain those that she can deal with quickly, and she will therefore increase her alms and also her great renown. If she perhaps cannot consider all the requests that are made to her, certain gentlemen will be appointed to hear them. She will wish them to be charitable and work quickly, and she herself will watch over their conduct.

When she has done these things, if she has responsibility of government, she will go to the

council on days when it is held. There she will have such a bearing, such a manner and such an expression when she is seated in her high seat that she will indeed seem to be the lady and mistress over all, and everyone will hold her in great reverence as their wise mistress with great authority. She will conscientiously hear the proposals that are put forward and listen to everyone's opinion. She will be so attentive that she will grasp the principal points and conclusions of matters and will note carefully which of her counsellors speak better and with the best deliberation and advice, and which seem to her the most prudent and intelligent. And she will also note, in the diversity of opinion, which causes and which reasons most stir the speakers. In this way she will attend to everything, and when someone comes to her to speak on a subject or to reply, according to the circumstances, so wisely will she consider the matter that she cannot be thought simple or ignorant. If she can find out in advance what someone is going to propose and what the ramifications of it may be, and if she can with wise counsel think of a suitable reply, it is all to the good. Furthermore, this lady will establish a certain number of wise gentlemen who will sit on her council, who she will deem good, loyal, virtuous and not too covetous. A great many princes and princesses are put to shame by counsellors filled with covetousness, for according to their own inclinations they incite and encourage those whom they counsel. Inevitably, those who indulge in such vice counsel neither well nor loyally, neither to the profit of their souls nor to the honour of their bodies, and so the prudent lady must inquire whether they lead virtuous lives. She will be counselled every day by these gentlemen at a certain hour about the necessary matters that she has to deal with.

After the morning council she will have her midday meal, which ordinarily and especially on solemn days and on feast will be in the hall, where the ladies and maidens are seated, and other suitable persons ranked according to their positions at court. There she will be served in a manner befitting her rank, and while the plates are still on the table (according to the fine old custom of queen and princesses) she will have a gentleman at hand who will speak of the deeds of some good deceased person, or will speak on some excellent moral subject or tell stories of exemplary lives. No dispute will be conducted there. After the tables have been taken up and grace has been said, if there are any princes or lords present, if there are any ladies or damsels or other visitors around her, then she will receive each of them in such honour as is fitting so that everyone will feel contented. She will speak to them in a thoughtful manner, with a pleasant expression; to the elderly people in a more serious manner, to the young people in a different and merrier one. And if one happens to say or to hear any amusing thing or any merriment she will know how to contain it with such a pleasant manner that everyone will say that she is a gracious lady and one who well knows her manners in all places.

After the spices have been taken and it is time to retire, the lady will go to her chamber, where she will rest for a short while if she feels the need to. Then afterwards, if it is a weekday and she has no other more important occupation with which to avoid idleness, she will take up some work, and she will have the women and girls around her to choose freely whatever she likes from all respectable kinds of merriment, and she herself will laugh with them and divert herself in private gatherings so unconstrainedly that they will all praise her great liberty and indulgence and they will love her with all their hearts. She will be occupied like this until the hour of vespers, when she will go to hear them in her chapel if it is a feast day and if no weighty business prevents her, or otherwise she will say them without fail with her lady chaplain. After doing this, if it is summer, she will go off to amuse herself in a garden until supertime, walking up and down for her health. She will wish that if any persons need to see her for any reason they will be allowed to enter and she will hear them. At bedtime she will pray to God. And that concludes the schedule of the ordinary day of the prudent princess living



SEE PLATES 1-2

in good and holy occupation.

