



*Pleasure and Politics
at the Court of France:
The Artistic Patronage of Queen
Marie of Bravant (1260-1321)*

Tracy Chapman Hamilton

Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019

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Pleasure and Politics at the Court of France: The Artistic Patronage of Queen Marie of Brabant (1260-1321). By Tracy Chapman Hamilton. Turnhout: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019. ISBN 978-1-905375-68-4. 328 pp. €125.00.

Marie of Brabant, Queen of France from 1274 to 1285 as the second wife of Philip III (r. 1270-1285), has not been well studied, and until now has not notably benefitted from the wave of recent work devoted to royal women's patronage in the late Capetian period. Tracy Chapman Hamilton's long-awaited book rectifies that omission. It draws much of its inspiration from a stunning manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal Ms. 3142. The cover of *Pleasure and Politics* features the arresting opening illumination (fol. 1) from this vernacular miscellany, commissioned by Marie just before or just after the death of her husband. Queen Marie reclines on her bed, crowned in gold, robed half in fleurs-de-lys and half in the gold lions of Brabant; just below her head sits Blanche of France (daughter of Louis IX and Marguerite of Provence), also crowned as the widow of Ferdinand of Castile; with one elbow draped across Marie's impossibly long legs is the future Jean II of Brabant (Marie's nephew); and at Marie's feet is a third crowned figure, this one with a viole on his knee—none other than Adenet le Roi, the famous *trouvère* whose romances comprise a good portion of the manuscript. This startlingly intimate image encapsulates Hamilton's argument that Marie of Brabant's marriage to Philip III "transform[ed] court patronage in late-thirteenth-century Paris" (20), and indeed returns repeatedly in the analysis, serving to show Marie's self-presentation as patron, her sense of intimate artistic space, and her promotion of her own lineage and queenly identity.

Born between 1255 and 1260 (the book's subtitle is more confident than the footnotes), Marie was the daughter of Duke Henry III of Brabant (d. 1261) and Aleyde of Burgundy (d. 1273). Hamilton sketches out the flourishing cultural world of Brabant, Flanders, and Artois—the ducal and comital families were intermarried—as a backdrop to understanding Marie's eventual self-fashioning as patron in Paris. As the opening image from Arsenal Ms. 3142 reveals, Marie not only brought new literary styles with her from Brabant to Paris, but also attracted in her wake artists themselves, including Adenet le Roi. Marie married the widowed Philip III in August 1274, but the great public moment of display at Paris was her coronation on 24 June 1275. This was the first French coronation ever to take place in the spectacular yet intimate Sainte-Chapelle, built by Louis IX to house his newly purchased relics of the Passion. Hamilton effectively highlights the importance of that day, when Philip III and many nobles pledged themselves to a new (though never realized) crusade, and again ties it to Arsenal Ms. 3142

through scenes of coronation found in Adenet's writings as contained there. The most dramatic period of Marie's reign was doubtless the *affaire Pierre de la Broce*. Between late 1276 and early 1278, a series of complex accusations and counter accusations around the death of Marie's stepson Louis (eldest son of Philip III by his first marriage to Isabella of Aragon) included the charge, emanating from the king's chamberlain and favourite Pierre de la Broce, that Marie or her retinue had poisoned the prince. Hamilton effectively ties this traumatic period to "an atmosphere of relief and celebratory political triumph" (102) among Marie's kinsmen and allies in later summer and fall 1278, once Pierre had been executed. The overall thrust of Hamilton's analysis is convincing, but is somewhat marred by her claim that Marie had been imprisoned and then acquitted. Aside from later romantic legends about Marie's plight, no compelling evidence indicates a serious break between the King and Queen at this juncture, and certainly nothing like a trial that could have produced an "acquittal" (102). It is unfortunate that the author did not consult any of the many recent articles on the reign of Philip III by Xavier Hélyar, which would have provided a stronger historical-political contextualization.

From her reign as queen into her long widowhood (from 1285 to her death in 1321), Marie of Brabant continued to commission and collect a brilliant library of manuscripts, including vernacular romances, the expected breviaries and psalters, and even the *Kalendarium regine*, a fascinating astronomical treatise by Guillaume de Saint-Cloud. Some of these manuscripts are attributed to Marie's patronage for the first time here (sometimes tentatively, though the list given in Appendix I seems to jettison such caution), and Hamilton offers a multi-faceted analysis of these books as sources of pleasure, pedagogy, piety, personalization, and propaganda. A major theme is the way works commissioned by Marie stressed the Brabantine ducal house's descent from Charlemagne, making Marie's own three children potentially stronger claimants to the French throne than their older half-siblings, including her stepson Philip IV (r. 1285-1314). But Marie's patronage was not limited to books. In her widowhood she supported and visited Longchamp (west of Paris in the modern Bois de Boulogne) and Lourcine (in the faubourg Saint-Marcel, in southeast modern Paris), two houses of *Sorores minores* founded by the French royal family. More ostentatiously, she offered a "magnificent, architectural silver-gilt chasse" (201) for the relics of St. Gertrude at Nivelles, donated brilliant new stained-glass windows at the ducal chapel in Louvain and at Saint-Nicaise in Reims, and constructed a chapel at Mantes (in her dower lands). This treatment of the Queen's literary, architectural, and artistic patronage convincingly illuminates Marie's

conception of her lineage, her place at court, and her ties to a wider group of royal and noble women of her own generation and the next.

To call this book “lavishly illustrated” would be an understatement. The 165 colour illustrations are well chosen, perfectly integrated, and immaculately reproduced. The book’s €125 price tag is a comparative bargain, given that no expense seems to have been spared. The footnotes are also generous and detailed. The press, as well as the author, deserve hearty praise on these counts. Those same notes, however, also point to one of the book’s weaknesses. Over what was evidently long years of work, the author was more successful in updating some aspects of the secondary literature than others. Some notes, especially in the introduction, read like mini-historiographical essays in themselves, usefully taking the reader from the first years of the millennium up past 2015—yet a certain unevenness is evident. Aside from the omission of Héлары’s studies and a strong preference for French rather than Dutch secondary sources, there are also spots where a work has made it into the bibliography without evidently impacting the book’s analysis (for instance, page 170 considers only older partial transcriptions of the work known as the *Miroir de l’ame*, even though the 2007 critical edition and study is in the bibliography). A few lapses of historical detail can be found as well—such as the statement on page 56 that Philip III was crowned in 1270; he was in fact crowned in August 1271 after returning from North Africa.

Overall, Tracy Chapman Hamilton succeeds admirably in putting our knowledge of Marie of Brabant’s patronage on an entirely new footing. Although this is not (and was not intended to be) a fully rounded study of the Queen, it offers an illuminating new look into queenship at the end of the Capetian thirteenth century that can be placed next to Lindy Grant’s excellent recent biography (2016) of Blanche of Castile (r. 1223-1226; d. 1252) for the first half of the century. A strong new study of Queen Marguerite of Provence (r. 1234-1270; d. 1295), wife of Louis IX, to improve on that by Gérard Sivery (1987), would provide a link between the two and be a very welcome addition to the scholarship.

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