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Women Rulers in Europe:
Agency, Practice and the Representation of Political
Powers (XII-XVIII)

Giulia Calvi, ed.

**EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND CIVILIZATION**

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Abstract

New interpretations of state formation processes include gender as a category of historical analysis and tackle notions of royalty and royal power, focusing on regency and women as regents in the process of consolidating and transmitting royal prerogatives. Gendering the process of state formation in Europe entails considering ruling dynasties and families as complex subjects of historical and anthropological research. Wives and widows also exerted formal political roles as ruling consorts and governors during specific phases of their life cycle. The positioning of women in the courts of Europe opens up a complex set of questions connected to the fashioning of their political identities where agnatic and cognatic lines intersect in the long process of state building and legitimation. This WP focuses on a comparative analysis of women's formal political roles and on the specific prerogatives of women's power and rule from the Byzantine Empire to XVIII Europe.

Keywords

women rulers – political powers

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Introduction

Giulia Calvi

Scholarship on dynastic courts in Europe has to date a long standing, interdisciplinary tradition, which was enormously encouraged by the seminal work of Norbert Elias.¹ Integrating court systems into state formation processes, these works have tackled, on a comparative basis and with a main focus on western monarchies from the Renaissance to the French Revolution, the processes of the centralization, representation and distribution of power, the formation of aristocratic and administrative elites, the uses of ceremonial, ritual and etiquette, and the gradual changing of the European public sphere in connection to social, artistic and cultural patronage.

The focus on a dynastic configuration of politics and political culture has challenged XIX century notions of constitutional, administrative and legal history centred on the nation-state. The etymology of the word dynasty derives from the Greek *dunasteia*, i.e. power, and points to the self perpetuation of a closed caste fashioning its identity on the power acquired through networks of alliances. European dynasties, whether of royal, princely and ducal descent, tended to constitute a closed elite, whose main concern was the strengthening and survival of their lineages through internal dynamics regarding the structuring and restructuring of the European balance of power (and of their borders), sometimes defying the emerging state mechanisms. Extremely complex marriage strategies centred on the negotiation, exchange and circulation of young brides constituted the core of political alliances and international relations, often set in motion by claims connected to inherited territorial rights which women brought with them, as part of their dowries, into marriage. Political history has thus gradually aimed to incorporate the study of power - in terms of practice, representation, symbolic production and meaning - at different levels of society, still generally keeping within the dichotomy of a public/male and private/female sphere. Early modern historians have challenged this distinction documenting the political dimensions of the household, of religion and of the gender order of society.² Recently a more gender-inclusive definition of the early modern dynasties has been proposed, in terms of “a network of gendered and related individuals” consisting of all living relatives, agnates as well as cognates, who collectively share the responsibility for the dynasty’s biological as well as political reproduction.³

In light of these developments it is remarkable that the gendering of politics and the gendered experiences of politics have largely remained unexamined. This continued gap can in part be explained by the sustained dominance of a nineteenth century view of a male-governed, political and public sphere and its implicit counterpart: a secondary and private sphere to which women were confined. This framework is in part accountable for the marginal and episodic attention to the gendered dimension of court life and political rule which is still prevalent in historiography.

¹ Adamson, 1999; Asch-Birke, Bertelli, 2002; Duindam, 2003; Bély, 1999; Blanning, 2002; Mulryne-Watanabe-O’KellyShewring, 2004.

² Roper, 1989; Zarri, 2004

³ Wunder, 2002.

On the other hand, a long standing priority given to informal power in research on women and gender has contributed to moving away from the study of elite women and decision-making processes, towards a study of practices and subjectivities which was part and parcel of a widespread rejection of biographical approaches reminiscent of the old “women worthies” tradition.

In the nineties, research on women at the European courts and on the female members of the ruling dynasties has grown rapidly, first and foremost, in medieval history. Collective works, articles and monographs on individual queens in France, Spain and England have brought to light unknown aspects of their political practices and entourages, of their education and literary works, as well as of their jurisdiction over monasteries and religious life. All these findings have confirmed a renewed interest in political history within a broader concern for the powers exercised by women in the religious, familial and political sphere.⁴

Until recently,⁵ the early modern period has remained largely untouched, especially in France where gender as a category of historical analysis is not widely acknowledged to date and where queenship remained on the margins of political history, aimed at state formation through the growth of a national administrative and military apparatus, and focused on male royalty.

In 1999, L. Bély’s monograph, *La société des princes*, introduced a cultural anthropological approach to the study of European dynastic society, albeit with a strong focus on France. The volume’s explicit aim is that of recapturing a history of the kings of France, distant from traditional political history, but emphasizing their “human nature” and the evolution of their relationship with the emergent state mechanism. Bély offers insights into the “royal *apprentissage*” of the Valois and Bourbon royal families and concludes that “the body of the prince was the centre of attention of an entire hierarchy of men and women”. He opens up the daily life of monarchs paying detailed attention to the special education of the royal brides, thus showing the importance of female members in royal families as continuators of family lines and promoters of dynastic interests.

In 2000, Fanny Cosandey’s path breaking monograph, *La reine de France*, situates the central and yet marginal figure of the foreign queen in a juridical and ritual framework. Deprived of rights of succession to the throne and granting, at the same time, the continuity of royal power in the Valois and Bourbon dynasties, the queen is an essential component of sovereignty. Departing from the American “ceremonialist school” whose work on royal ceremonies and ritual has concerned exclusively male rulers, Cosandey’s monograph explores all ceremonial practices and rituals converging on the queen of France. First she reconstructs the institutional and juridical foundations of the Salic law which excluded women from succeeding to sovereignty in France in detail, then she proceeds to analyze the ceremonial construction of the queen, as royal consort through marriage – “*le mariage fait la reine*”- which is the most important act of exchange aimed at establishing political peace between two territories and their ruling dynasties. The exchange of women and goods in traditional monarchical societies responded to a deep seated culture of reciprocity and adolescent princesses were the objects of political transactions sanctioned by marital alliances. Cosandey then takes into consideration the “*sacre de la reine*” which constitutes the core of the ceremony of crowning, royal entries and funerals. Through the changing rituals from the XVI to the XVIII century, the book

⁴ Contamine, 1999; Nelson, 1999; Aurell, 2000; Fuente, 2003

⁵ Lopez, Cordon, 2005.

acknowledges the transformation of the function and representation of the queen. Indeed the “privatisation” of the royal consort, i.e. the loss of all reference to the sacred aura of royalty and her “shrinking”, as it were, to the model of wife and mother, was ultimately accomplished by the guillotine. Cosandey’s concluding remarks sum up the process: “*Au XVI^e siècle, les cérémonies présentent une femme glorieuse dans son unicité, rayonnante de la majesté acquise à son mariage; au XVII^e siècle, la reine s’efface devant un monarque qui accapare toute l’attention, mais reste souveraine jusque dans la régence; au XVIII^e siècle, il ne reste qu’une épouse qui perd à la veille de la Révolution jusqu’au respect dû à son rang*”.⁶

Cosandey’s path breaking work parallels that of U.S. legal historian Sarah Hanley, whose research in the field of legal, institutional and cultural history has tackled notions of royalty and royal power through the lens of gender.⁷ However, while Cosandey’s *La reine de France* focuses on the juridical and institutional language of royalty, acknowledging only the meaning and workings of gender in an indirect way, Hanley gives priority to the category of gender over the dimension of sovereignty and explores juridical language in a wider social context. Moving away from the royal palace and the court system, Hanley enters the courtroom and explores the manifold meanings that women’s rights to rule acquired in XVII century French Parliaments, courtrooms and elite families.⁸

In Italy, a comparative study of Italian early modern ruling dynasties, which takes into consideration their female members, has set the stage for a future exploration of princely female archives, shedding new light on configurations, protagonists and practices of power which had to date been the object of non academic research, local history and historical novels.⁹ Spagnoletti’s *Le dinastie italiane nella prima età moderna* blends political, social and family history focusing his research on the Italian dynastic system in the framework of the European balance of powers. Unequal hypogamic marriages between the dukes and princes (Savoia, Este, Gonzaga, Medici, Farnese) of the small Italian states and the daughters of kings and emperors shed an interesting light on these minor theatres of power where the language of distinction and royal prerogatives often gave wives a higher standing than husbands. Dynastic marriages are analyzed in terms of wider aristocratic family patterns, taking into account the age at marriage of men and women as well as the age differentials among spouses, primogeniture and undivided territorial patrimonies, the circulation of dowries, strategies concerning cadets, endogamy, i.e. marriage among close kin – uncles and nieces -- coupled with a high percentage of unmarried sons and daughters. All of these elements set a close comparison between dynastic and aristocratic family patterns. However the dynastic model distinguished itself for a higher endogamy notwithstanding Church prohibitions. Cadets extended the networks of political clients towards other princely states, as well as large numbers of daughters who consolidated the lineage’s system of alliances. A focus on strategies and familial models does not allow for any expression to individual choices or agency and gender relations are defined in terms of complementarity. Thus women’s roles of temporary authority and power are restricted to regency within a highly controlled and male dominated dynastic hierarchy. Monasteries, where widows, daughters and at times illegitimate kin were enclosed, are highlighted in terms of spaces where women could exercise forms of “counter power”¹⁰ and as sphere of relative female autonomy, as the presence of holy women

⁶ Cosandey, 2000, p. 382.

⁷ Hanley, 1989; Fradenburg, 1992.

⁸ Hanley, 2004.

⁹ Spagnoletti, 2003.

¹⁰ Spagnoletti, 2003, p. 259.

from the lineage contributed to legitimizing local ruling dynasties. Male and female rule over territorial estates, courts and monasteries underlines the importance of connecting spheres of lay and religious power.

In 2002, the anthology *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung der Fruhen Neuzeit* edited by Heide Wunder began to investigate the legal framework within which women could and did exercise authority in early modern Germany. Through an examination of various aspects of the relationship between gender and authority in the ruling dynasties of the German territories, the volume posits the dynasty as the unit of analysis, though women's rule over entire territories is taken into account. Well balanced and functionally complementary roles constructed the ruling couple that "regarded itself as an 'office holding couple', as the father and the mother of the land" – analogous to the position of the master and mistress of the house. Since the exercise of power was legitimated by eminent descent, by view of their rank and their office, female consorts were regarded as authorities and they, in turn, employed the authority invested in them to fulfill the duties inherent in their office.

The role of the female consort figures prominently in another important anthology edited by Clarissa Campbell Orr (2004), *Queenship in Europe 1660-1815* which focuses on eleven different European courts of the High Baroque. The aim of the volume is that of enlarging and enriching the understanding of court systems through a focus on women, especially wives of rulers. "By beginning with the consort," writes Campbell Orr in the introduction, "it is more likely that an understanding of the composition and function of a Court will be arrived at than if the focus rests on the ruler, when it is all too easy for investigation to begin and end with his personality, policy, style of rule, and connection to male ministers."

Monarchy, in the early modern period was a dynastic, family business and courts were polycentric systems where "the ruler's household was one among several which could include a dowager queen, the heir, once he was of age, royal siblings, and a publicly recognized mistress". The larger the dynastic family, the more the centers of power proliferate.

The essays in the anthology look at courts through the lens of queenship. Although reference to individual figures is unavoidable, the intention is to analyze roles and prerogatives covering most geographical areas in Europe, rather than offering biographical accounts within a national framework, in the way of a traditional historiographical narrative. Comparative work is an important feature of this volume, as it is very rare in the field and needs to be pursued. Some individual courts have been researched more than others and even when a court has been well studied only a few individual queens have attracted attention, neglecting the analysis of women's political rule in a more systematic approach, aimed at shedding light on the dynamics of authority and power in a gender perspective.

Whereas the two anthologies differ with regard to their focus on court and dynasty, the dichotomies of formal versus informal power and power versus authority are addressed in relation to gender by several chapters in both volumes.

The focus on informal power and influence has been of great concern to the study of gender and women's history in early modern European societies¹¹ making the manifold indirect ways of exercising political roles through religious patronage, familial connections, ritual practices and rhetoric visible. However, because of their lineage and upbringing, women from princely

¹¹ Ago, 1992; Sanchez, 1998; Kettering, 2002; Harris, 2002

dynasties were political creatures who had been prepared to fulfill important functions of government as consorts, regents and governors as well as that of ruling in their own right. They exercised formal powers connected to their legal status which gave them precise jurisdictions connected to their life cycle: as adolescent brides, wives, mothers and widows, the exercise and prerogatives of power changed. Thus a consort was assigned three principal tasks: she was first a wife who had to support her husband in his duties. Unlike the wives of her subjects, she had little to do with practical household management which was largely entrusted to the senior male courtier. Her second duty was to secure succession by giving birth to healthy sons. Failure to produce male heirs opened the consort to criticism and could harm her standing and influence. Political activities formed the consort's third formal task. The consort assumed a more active role when she was entrusted with exercising princely or royal authority, occasionally when the ruler was still alive, and as regent after her husband's death, and as tutor for a minor son. Though largely neglected in traditional political accounts, female regents were common in early modern European territories with many ruling de facto sole rulers for considerable periods of time. Women regents were often assisted by co-regents and Councils of Ministers and female regency gave rise to a considerable production of political tracts which, while denying women's capacity to rule in terms of a long standing misogynist discourse, gradually introduced new notions empowering women's political leadership.¹²

In short, the fact that women were by no means excluded from political authority and were not only dependent on informal power is attested to by female rulers and regents as well as by wives who shared in the authority of the house. A provisional inventory of women acting as regents for sons, brothers, fathers and daughters, from the IV to the XX century in Europe lists 157 names.¹³ They represent one of the largest international cohorts in the history of Europe,¹⁴ central to the transmission of ruling power in dynastic lineages. In the central centuries of the early modern period, within national monarchies, princely estates and duchies, elite women from foreign dynasties were systematically invested with the right to exercise the highest form of political power - Caterina de' Medici, and Ana de Austria are two of the most outstanding examples.¹⁵

In 2006, Regina Schulte edited *The Body of the Queen: Gender and Rule in the Courtly World (1500-2000)*, an innovative collection of interdisciplinary essays ranging from art history to literary, media and cultural studies in a broad chronological perspective. Quoting Kantorowicz seminal work on the King's two bodies (1953), the focus of the volume is the queen's body and its multifaceted representations, in a gender and post modern cultural perspective. "The queen's body," writes Schulte in the introduction, "becomes a picture-puzzle made up of medieval theological discourses, politically verifiable facts and the projections that have always been trained upon the feminine. From the beginning the body of the queen appears to have been incorporated into a political concept, that of the monarchy". Through the analysis of an impressive variety of sources (funeral sermons, portraits and caricatures, archaeological findings and museum collections, correspondence, film, fashion) the volume situates the cultural representations of royalty within a topography of European modernity and aims at overcoming all dichotomies – political/natural, male/female- showing that "female royal images and biographies break through the dualistic thought structure

¹² Olivan Santaliestra, 2003.

¹³ Guerra Medici, 2005.

¹⁴ Bennassar, 2006.

¹⁵ Bennassar, 2006.

prevalent in historical literature,” Schulte concludes, “I would like to pursue the cycle of various life courses and show, using a few examples, that the political and natural bodies of the queen were inextricably intertwined”.¹⁶ In the volume, R.Schulte has a chapter on the relationship between ruling mothers (Empress Maria Theresa and Queen Victoria) and their daughters (Marie Antoinette and Vicky queen of Prussia). Her aim is to offer an insight into the self perception that the two royal mothers had of their role through the correspondence to their daughters destined to rule. In Schulte’s words: “I would like to work out what the differences were between what they could feel and express about themselves and about their daughters in the context of their times.”¹⁷ Empress Maria Theresa wrote over one hundred letters to Marie Antoinette and this correspondence reveals its full potential as a source for tracing the expression of agency, outlining the subjective perception, experience and resistance to court rituals and etiquette. Queen Victoria’s letters to her daughter Vicky consist of “a gigantic body of letters” which formed the basis “of an exchange whose variety and thematic richness touched on all aspects of their lives.”¹⁸ In sum, “ The two women negotiated their own place in the familial, dynastic and political arena openly and vigorously. Through this consistently spontaneous, at times both nerve racking and pleasurable, and, above all, affectionate communication, the correspondence affords a unique glimpse of the inner workings of the female monarchic experience of politics and representation.”¹⁹

Letters crossing borders and kept in the archives of women rulers constitute a massive and unresearched body of primary source material. Its capacity to refashion the representation and construction of individual identities is well documented in this essay. Letters offer new insights on the gendered experience of rule which no other source can document. As part of the grand archive of ego-documents of early modern Europe, women’s correspondence – both political and familial – can integrate the chronicles, diplomatic reports and court diaries that have widely been used by historians. They allow us to reflect on the uses of power in a gendered perspective, to gain an inner view of the workings of court entourages and on the male personnel – secretaries and ministers – who shared the responsibilities and cooperated with women in governing positions.

Femmes et pouvoir politique. Les princesses d’Europe (XV-XVIII) edited by Isabelle Poutrin and Marie Karine Schaub (2007), is a collection of essays aimed at a French readership and situated at the crossroads of political history and the history of women. Its general scope is that of reintroducing – after decades of social and anthropological research – the history of the elites within a biographical framework. Negative and sexist stereotypes have still to be overcome as :

“la plupart des historiens ne sauraient sérieusement prêter aux reines ou aux régents une vision politique d’ensemble. La conception du pouvoir féminine comme pouvoir d’influence occulte demeure prégnante dans l’historiographie politique, jusqu’à une époque récente. Déterminées par leur fonction reproductrice, les femmes, lorsqu’elles exercent le pouvoir, s’en saisissent comme d’un affaire domestique.”²⁰

¹⁶ Schulte, 2006, p. 3.

¹⁷ Schulte, 2006, p. 157.

¹⁸ Schulte, 2006, p. 172.

¹⁹ Schulte, 2006, p. 181.

²⁰ Poutrin-Schaub, 2007, p. 11.

At the crossroads of public and private practices and notions of government, princely women constitute an essential feature in the European model of political rule, i.e. that of hereditary monarchies. As all the historiography above quoted, this collection of essays promotes and encourages comparative research in three areas of investigation, namely: women's access to power and the forms of its legitimation; representations and derogatory stereotypes; princely and royal women's relations to their entourage – male kin, secretaries, ministers, councilors – avoiding a national perspective, which research on women rulers must overcome. On the whole, this volume aims at adding women to a broader history of political practices and powers in early modern Europe.

In early modern European historical literature and moral discourse on women of royal or princely descent two main arguments recur: piety and devotional practices and physiology and an enduring concern with their bodies. Biographies and eulogies construct hagiographic, devotional portraits emphasizing a one dimensional aspect of women rulers as pious individuals for whom prayer was the only avenue for affecting political change (Sanchez). The religious aspect of the lives of many women in ruling positions (queens, queen consorts, regents, governors) has caused historians to discuss their political influence. This is an outstanding argument in XVIII century anti Medicean historical literature (Galluzzi) which pursues the same tone of moral judgment up to XX century historiography (Diaz). Recent research on the Spanish court under Philip III evaluates in terms of bigotry the political influence of Empress Maria (Sanchez). Physiological essentialism viewed royal and princely women's bodies as sites of weakness both if pregnant or non reproductive, affected by emotional instability and mental deficiency, and as obstacles to political activity and court life (Pieraccini). Although historians have overlooked the political role of women in European dynasties, it was clear to their contemporaries that women had political roles. However, these roles were perceived to be subordinate to those of men. Women in the Habsburg courts were to express their political sentiments only if these were in the service of traditional male hierarchies and in the interest of the court and family they had married into. Ruling women, both as consorts and regents, did not accept their proscribed political roles but often found ways to voice their own opinions. To break political boundaries they also exploited religious patronage and familial concerns, areas in which men tolerated female power. Royal women, because of their lineage and upbringing, were political creatures. Their marriages were politically motivated and served in foreign countries as unofficial diplomatic representatives for their relatives. The moral tracts prepared for them by confessors and moralists did not cause them to accept subordination easily, especially when their lives and training had prepared them to fulfill important official functions. This attitude was particularly true of the Habsburg women such as Margaret of Austria, Charles the V's aunt, or Maria of Hungary, sister of Charles the V, who served as regents and governesses of important territories (Mantini, Sanchez). Positioning women at the centre of court life and in the complex dynamic of state formation encourages one to rethink the ways in which historians have understood the avenues to political power and specifically the ways in which women accessed political power.

Historical research has overwhelmingly focused on the informal political roles of women in the courts of Europe and on their influence on princes and monarchs. Their unofficial roles have been emphasized in the French Valois and Bourbon dynasties where mistresses gained their political importance from having direct access to the intimate life of kings and to their bodies. Physical and spatial closeness to Louis XIV constructed Mme de Maintenon's political influence at Versailles. Influence appears in sources which traditional political history tends to bypass: court chronicles, records of religious foundations, wills, private

correspondence. These documents often provide excellent information about women's use of patronage networks a chief vehicle through which elite women exerted control in the early modern period (Harris, Zarri and Matthews Grieco). While governmental bodies generated reports designed to affirm that decision making was in the hands of a select group of men and that the process functioned through rational governmental organs, observers noted the negotiations often took place in cloistered convents, gardens and summer homes, bedchambers and at lunches and during entertainment (Visceglia, Ago).

The overall evaluation of the formation of political decision making processes in the early modern period is being transformed by taking these informal influences under consideration and by broadening our understanding of political language. When one examines the informal negotiations that have been researched for the Papal court in Rome, the Medici court in Florence, the Habsburg courts in the German territories and in Spain as well as in the Tudor courts of the Elizabethan period, a wider picture emerges, complete with complex diplomatic networks in which royal and princely women figure prominently. This broader picture of court politics and diplomatic networks - which also relied on familial and kin ties - provides a way of studying the political role of women in early modern Europe. This role has to be studied taking into account the overlapping of familial and political concerns, where the intersection of women as mediators and coordinators of extended networks is a central feature of European societies. This political maneuvering through extended familial networks has been studied for Spain where Austrian Habsburg women in the court of Madrid opposed the Duke of Lerma's Mediterranean policy advocating a rapprochement with France, by pushing for the interests of the Austrian Habsburg's in Central Europe and Flanders. This goes to show that royal women could fashion strategies to suit their own needs and interests often using the language of family and devotion. They thus used accepted spheres of female influence to pursue political goals in line with the dynastic strategies of their families of origin.

The historiography that we have examined up to now points to a very recent field of research, which begins to assert itself beyond national boundaries only at the opening of the XXI century. It points to the emergence of a new political history of the European elites through the lens of gender and with a focus on women's language and practices of power. This field of research is still quite experimental and has produced a variety of publications: proceedings, collective volumes, anthologies, articles and very few monographs. Comparative analysis of courts, styles of government, artistic and religious patronage is also a distinguished feature of this growing field of research while there is a declining interest for the old style traditional national biographies. Women rulers can only be studied in a transnational dimension within an interdisciplinary approach – cultural studies, art history, and literature, legal and institutional history. Research on the early modern period dating from 2000 onwards has used a great variety of sources – chronicles, diplomatic reports, court memoirs, portraits, and sometimes letters. While overcoming the “women worthies” approach, the lack of a systematic analysis of women's correspondence has produced an insufficient focus on agency, choice and experience, giving hardly any space to, an “emic” perspective, and therefore to the voices and words of women in ruling positions of power.

Thus, while the courts of princes and kings have been studied from a multiplicity of perspectives, a gendered history of the courtly world has not yet been written. Norbert Elias, while analysing the “*levée de la reine*” as a fetish of prestige, totally overlooked the existence and internal functioning of the “*maison*”, “*casa*” or “*Frauenzimmer*” of the queen – bride, consort, regent, widow – which constituted a separate yet parallel micro-structure of

hierarchy, interdependence and ostentation governed by the women in *ancien régime* courts²¹. Age, gender and status (marriage, motherhood, widowhood) structured the hierarchies of the manifold female courts where issues of rule and expenditure cannot be separated from the life cycle and the wider, cognatic connections of kin. Indeed, continuing ties to one's own family and dynasty of origin while denting nationalist myopia in the study of women rulers and their courts, bring to light practices of political ambivalence and conflicting allegiances.

Courts have been overlooked in their capacity to integrate “migrating” foreign princesses, uprooted from their home and in time progressively isolated from all former connections of family and friends. Female courts have also been neglected as spaces where the young members of aristocratic families were integrated through service, ritual and arranged marriages, into wider local and European networks of alliance.²² The cultural, linguistic, performative, artistic space of female courts thus functioned as a powerful – and empowering – element of political integration in Europe.²³

Economic historians²⁴ are enriching the picture with painstaking analysis of court personnel, expenditures and levels of consumption. In this perspective, the traditional bias which viewed the court system as an arena of moral decadence and parasitism is being gradually revised by focusing on courts, both male and female, as the loci where splendour and ostentation were the means of encouraging and financing innovative technical knowledge, expertise and craftsmanship. Female courts have never been studied in an economic perspective in order to ascertain their patterns and levels of supply, consumption and expenditures, in the perspective of a comparative and gendered evaluation of the maintenance and costs of such courts.

The specific processes of self fashioning required by crossing borders, entering into foreign dynasties and “changing clothes” with the aim of integrating into a foreign dynasty, are key elements in the definition of women's access to power. The process is structured in three working phases:

1. The voyage of the adolescent bride, which entailed the separation from her family, dynastic culture and living environment, was often without return, as she left and would never come back to where she was borne.²⁵ Cultural transfer is a distinguishing feature of this passage, as intense diplomatic negotiations among the two courts prepared the transfer of dowry and property, personnel, material culture and art objects.²⁶ The status of the bride was important in defining the quality and quantity of the transfer itself. Diplomatic negotiations between courts on issues concerning marriage agreements, which comprised financial settlements of various kinds as well as the amount of the dowry to be paid, are well documented in the archives of ruling dynasties throughout Europe. Ministers and diplomatic representatives filed detailed reports, discussing the number of ladies in waiting and household personnel that would go abroad as part of the bride's “house”. A key role in the bride's court was that of her confessor and important negotiations took place in order to allow the transfer of this politically significant member of a religious order. Conflicting hegemonic positions of

²¹ Sanchez, 1998; Nolte, 2000; Campbell Orr, 2004.

²² Calvi, in print.

²³ Schulte, 2006.

²⁴ Aymard-Romani, 1998; Guerzoni, 2006.

²⁵ Zanger, 1997.

²⁶ Marx, 2008 in print.

religious orders in the courts of Europe influenced this decision, often opposing resistance to the arrival of the foreign bride's confessor.²⁷

2. The process of integration was focused around the gradual and negotiated construction of the consort's court as a separate yet parallel sphere where diplomatic and political visits took place, as well as sociability. Letters as well as court diaries, kept by the consort's personal secretaries document this process at length and in great detail. The consort's court in a separate wing of the royal, princely or ducal palace was structured as a gendered space where a highly ritualized sociability took place. One of the key features of the practices was the integration into the court personnel of the young sons and daughters of the local, national and international network of aristocratic families. First born and cadets from this European elite entered the consort's court in order to receive training and education in courtly manners and culture. After a few years, marriages were organized between these cohorts and members of elite families. Thus the court of the consort, symbolically organized as a realm where fictive kin ties organized sociability, was the focus of the consort's assimilation to the dynasty she married into, the integration of the aristocratic elites into the dynasty's strategies of legitimation and consensus, and a broader network of kin and clients in Europe. Correspondence between royal and princely brides with members of aristocratic families are abundant. They often discuss the presentation and entry in court circles of their children. Court diaries describe marriage rituals which took place at the court, where a symbolic substitution of the ruling family in the place of blood relatives of the bride and groom took place (abundant documentation in the Medici archive in Florence).

The consort's role required internal displacement, in a cyclical and ritual notion of time. Trips to homes of local aristocratic families, the seasonal transfer to country residences, to shrines and convents, entailed a circumscribed yet highly ritualized use of space. Entries, processions, visits, hunting parties were part of the consort's obligations towards her subjects and the dynasty. A moving visibility within a framework of migrating courts transformed the image of the consort/the queen into one of visual and physical accessibility. Maternal duties are central to this phase. The birth of one or more male heirs is what turned the bride into the consort or the regent with high political responsibility and formal roles of power.

3. A changing convergence of strong and/or weak powers marks the last phase in the life cycle of women rulers in Europe. Widowhood could entail regency for a minor son, as well as exile, return, flight, or voyages to govern distant territories. Women in the Habsburg dynasties were named governors of the Netherlands (Margaret of Austria) as well as widows from smaller Italian ducal dynasties (Caterina Medici Gonzaga and Violante di Baviera both governors of Siena, see Aurora Savelli's paper). It could also entail entering a cloistered life. These turning points are connected to maturity, maternity, widowhood, old age or lack of integration, political upheavals and, albeit rarely, the breaking up of marriages.

At all stages space was connected to the life cycle. Both shaped the specific prerogatives of power and rule. From the XV century onwards dynastic archives in Europe preserve considerable, and at times, vast amounts of correspondence written by and addressed to women in ruling positions. Letters to and from family and kin, private subjects, members of religious orders as well as cardinals and the pope, diplomats, kings and queens provide us with very substantial primary sources illustrating women's political practices in a European and comparative dimension. Letters sent across borders in the early modern period are

²⁷ Sanchez, 1998.

markers of political language and need a careful and subtle understanding and translation. In these correspondences, political communication used the language of ritual and festivities, of Carnival, hunting and Lent, as well as that of mourning and physical suffering. Participation in such recurrent events created a community of shared meanings, taste and emotions which could be relied upon in moments of need. Women awarded charges, pensions and dowries, sent and received relics, medicaments and recipes, exchanged a great variety of gifts, including art objects, perfumes and fashion, intervened to alleviate marital distress, familial disputes checking on rebellious adolescents and love affairs, as well as discussing religious, political, military, social and cultural events. Words and deeds captured by letters thus offer us a precious point of entry into the ruling practices of a political culture where women occupied specific roles, participating actively in the web of negotiations, mediations and in the distribution of resources. Correspondence constitutes a periodizing marker in research on women in positions of rule. Indeed no such sources are available for the high middle ages in western Europe (see Janet L. Nelson's paper), nor in the Byzantine Empire where, as Judith Herrin writes "Unfortunately, few empresses recorded the ways in which they attained and extended their power. Although most of them must have been literate, their writings have not been preserved" and the autobiography by Anna Komnene "remains an exceptional text".

Space, on the other hand, as a category defining access to power and the fashioning of political identities, was a common feature in a long *durée* comparative analytical perspective. It meant first and foremost the crossing of borders. For centuries women, as brides generally married by proxy experienced the passing across geographical and political boundaries to join their spouse. Indeed a distinguishing feature in the study of early modern female elites is the systematic gendered migration which the marriage exchange produced. Critical theory has stressed the connection between women and transnationalism, emphasizing the "nomadic" quality of women's lives that move between spaces, families, borders. This to date unexplored dimension in the history and structure of female elites sets the stage for a pressing set of questions that point to displacement and migrations as key elements in the subjective experience of women and in the changing of gender and generational relations, family patterns and individual life cycles. Ruling women were the moveable element in the construction of political power and in State formation processes. These moving elites highlight the paradox which situates "foreignness" at the core of the highest form of delegate political power (regency). Only queens ruling in their own right occupied unmovable positions rooted in their own hereditary lands (see Judith Herrin, Janet L. Nelson and Serena Ferente's papers)

The working papers presented here within were discussed in a workshop on Women rulers in Europe (XII-XVIII centuries) at the HEC Department of the EUI in May 2007.

The workshop engaged with a broad comparative European perspective, both chronologically and geographically. Papers investigated the formal political roles of women in the Byzantine Empire (Herrin), the Carolingian Empire (Nelson), the French monarchy (Cosandey), the Habsburg monarchy (Schulte) and in some Italian states (Ferente, Savelli). The main themes that emerged from the discussion were the access to power, the political role of regents, queen consorts and rulers in their own right; the role of political and administrative personnel (secretaries, "*maestri di camera*", eunuchs) the transmission of rulership, power and status from mothers to sons and, more rarely, daughters; the court as a specific area of political negotiation, female agency and rule. Issues of transfer – cultural, material, symbolic - also figured prominently throughout the workshop.

Judith Herrin's paper presents an overview of the rise of women to powerful positions in the Byzantine Empire. The highly visible role of the consort in ritual occasions gave way to the dominant position of the empress mother. "The stress on the legitimate transmission of authority within the dynasty from father to son," she argues, "gave empress mothers great authority". Their duties at the head of the female side of the court established empresses on the same high level as their husbands and their private resources allowed them to manage a circle of servants, courtiers and supporters who undertook their personal business. Among the powers connected to widowhood, Herrin features the construction of family shrines and commemoration of their ancestors sustaining "the history and memory of the family in a physical rather than literary manner".

In contrast to this picture, Janet L. Nelson analyses the "relatively uninstitutionalised, mutable, even improvised, power" which characterised the role of queens in Charlemagne's reign. The lives and political roles of his sister, five wives and unmarried daughters are situated in the process of queenship becoming "a permanent fixture of the political landscape". Yet, in spite of this overall trend, discontinuities prevailed as "their real-life political power was of the personal, informal kind, none the less significant for that, but time-bound, transient".

Serena Ferente focuses her argument on the legitimation of female political authority in its own right in the late middle ages. Situating her research in what has been called an "age of heiresses", she investigates the careers of two Italian rulers, Joanna II queen of Naples and Bianca Maria Visconti duchess of Milan, in order to define the meaning and extent of women's "natural" rights to dominium over other male relatives.

Fanny Cosandey addresses Catherine de Medici's patrimonial succession to shed light on the more general issue of royal territorial acquisitions through the female members of the dynasty. The question she poses is that of understanding "*quels sont les apports féminins, sur quels principes ils sont pensés dans les actes qui organisent la succession (contrat e mariages, testaments etc) et comment ils s'intègrent, ou bien échappent, aux lignages concernés. En d'autres termes, quel rôle peut avoir la reine dans le mécanisme de la transmission, et quel jeu joue-t-elle entre une conception familiale et une appréhension politique de son propre patrimoine?*".

Within an institutional approach to the history of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany and the last Medici rulers, Aurora Savelli researches the political role of female governors of Siena and its territory in the framework of Medicean dynastic rule. Analysing the entry ritual of Violante Beatrice di Baviera as governor of the city in 1713, Savelli reconstructs the complex pattern of local and social alliances that support and empower her rule.

Albeit the great diversity of geographical areas, cultural contexts, sources and chronologies under consideration, common themes and clusters emerge and figure prominently – in a rather unsystematic way – throughout the papers. Women's access to power through birth or marriage, which entailed a different position within the logic of spatial exchange, as brides moved across territorial boundaries, while rulers in their own right stayed within their native lands. The exchange of women entailed and represented a patrilinear/patrilocal structuring of the lineage and the marriage alliance was sanctioned by the transfer of moveable goods and/or landed property belonging to brides as their own private patrimony. Female courts as parallel yet separate spaces governed by female ruling elites and endowed with administrative personnel, ladies in waiting and servants. The dimension of such courts varied in time and

tended to diminish, but was always an object of intense diplomatic and political negotiations. The mother-son relationship connected to regency and the transmission of royal power through “foreign” women: cloistered life, kin, familial and political connections to monasteries both in western and eastern Mediterranean Europe.

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Women and the Transmission of Power in Medieval Byzantium

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Even historians who have no interest in or knowledge of the Byzantine Empire know about some women identified as Byzantine: Theodora, the circus entertainer who became the wife of Emperor Justinian in the sixth century; Theophano, who was sent to marry the western Emperor Otto II in the tenth, or Sophia Palaiologina who carried her Byzantine destiny to Russia when she married Ivan III after the Ottoman capture of Constantinople. All three are generally considered to personify certain features of Byzantine culture, and to have influenced the environment in which they lived. It is striking that they are particularly associated with regions outside the imperial capital. Theodora's most famous portrait remains in the church of San Vitale in Ravenna. In contrast, none of her monuments in Constantinople survive, although many are recorded, including a porphyry statue raised by the citizens of the city in her honour.¹ Theophano is represented in western medieval art but is simply not mentioned in contemporary Byzantine sources.² Information about Byzantine women of power and influence who lived in the eastern capital during its long history from A.D. 330-1453 is often concealed in references that either minimize or demonize women (a familiar problem). In this brief contribution I will draw attention to three features of Byzantine society that favoured female authority: structural reasons for the prominence of women at the centre of imperial power; legal justifications for the power of mothers and widows; gendered reasons connected with the existence of eunuchs, who formed a 'third sex'.

Among the distinctive features of Byzantine society, its imperial structure accorded the Emperor and Empress pre-eminent roles at the apex of a clearly demarcated hierarchy. While the male ruler personified imperial power, his wife and consort also had an imperial role, which was particularly noticeable on ceremonial occasions, for instance, when they processed to the cathedral of Hagia Sophia to attend church services. The emperor often inherited supreme power from his father, although rebels could also attain it by military revolt. But empresses were generally recruited from quite different backgrounds: as foreign princesses, imported to secure political alliances, as local beauties selected by young princes, and as representatives of powerful families who were able to place their daughters in this extremely significant position. Regardless of the way that they became empress, the position itself sustained the potential for considerable power, and many who rose to it were able to exploit this.

Unfortunately, few empresses recorded the ways in which they attained and extended their power. Although most of them must have been literate and many were extremely well educated, their writings have not been preserved. Occasionally their concerns are reflected in laws passed during periods when they controlled imperial administration; the two laws enacted by Empress Irene between 797 and 802 provide examples, but these are rare and contain only limited personal information.³ The biography of her father written by Anna Komnene, which is also her autobiography, remains an exceptional text.⁴ And the foundation

¹ Procopius, *Buildings*, I, xi, 8, pp. 88-90; Foss (2002); Brubaker (2004).

² Davids (1995).

³ Burgmann (1981); Herrin (2004).

⁴ Kouma-Peterson (2000).

documents for many imperial monasteries, in which empresses had an interest, usually fail to mention their personal concerns. So the evidence for their patronage, intellectual and theological interests, funerary preferences and so on, have to be identified from writings about them, or from buildings, texts and objects associated with them. In this indirect way it's possible to build up a composite image of the results of empresses' activity, but this is always partial.

Nonetheless, the structure of imperial government provided empresses with certain opportunities.⁵ Within the Great Palace they had their own quarters and were attended by their own servants (frequently eunuchs) who looked after their wardrobe of official costumes, as well as their bedrooms, dining rooms and private possessions. Since each empress had her own income from the landed estates and tax revenues with which she was endowed at her marriage, she also had a personal treasury. From the moment she arrived in the court, whether as a bride from outside the empire, a lady-in-waiting already familiar with ruling circles, or a provincial girl selected to reinforce a political alliance, she was supported by an infrastructure which might allow her to exercise influence as an adult. Using her patronage of particular teachers, theologians, monastic leaders, painters and writers, the empress might create an inner circle of her own advisers. The empress' levée was probably attended by almost as many courtiers as her husband's. While some imperial wives accompanied their husbands on military campaigns, others remained in the capital city where they sometimes had to face down threats of revolt. All shared in the fate of their husbands and could suffer disgrace and exile, or might gain an honourable retirement within the court hierarchy.⁶

One of the first duties of any empress was to provide her husband with a son and heir. Although there was no automatic right of succession, sons of the imperial couple regularly inherited their fathers' powers and the failure to give birth to a male child could be very dangerous for an empress. As the bearers of dynastic ambitions, imperial wives with sons were ensured a respected and powerful position within the court and the ruling circles of the empire. In the late fifth century Ariadne, daughter of Emperor Leo I, became the sole surviving representative of the dynasty which she perpetuated by her choice of husbands (Emperors Zeno and Anastasius).⁷ Similarly, by a process of adoption the family of Emperor Justin I was extended through the sixth century until a coup d'état in 602. The usurper Herakleios (610-41) then laid down a clear strategy to ensure the continuity of his family. When his ambitious widow Empress Martina tried to change it, the Senate of Constantinople arrested her, had her mutilated and banished to Rhodes.⁸

Thereafter dynasties became dominant in Byzantium although rebels never stopped mounting their challenges. Their success was facilitated by the belief that a once a rebel had established himself in the capital by overthrowing the previous ruler, he became the God-given emperor and was crowned by the patriarch as the man to whom all Byzantines owed obedience. Throughout the centuries of Byzantine rule emperors had to guard against coup d'états by ambitious generals, disaffected provincial governors and even their close relations. During the reign of Emperor Theophilos, his step-mother Euphrosyne, who was then in retirement,

⁵ Bensamner (1976); Hill (1997); James (2001); Herrin (2001).

⁶ In 813, for instance, Michael I and his wife Prokopia put on monastic clothing to indicate their capitulation to the rebellion of Leo V; they entered separate monasteries and their sons were castrated, Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronographia*, I, 502.

⁷ James (2001); Herrin (2000).

⁸ Herrin (2001), p.24.

warned him of a plot against his family and he abandoned a military campaign to race back to Constantinople.⁹

Very occasionally a ruler might choose not to have a consort, for example, Basil II who ruled from 976-1025 and never married. But it was normal for emperors to crown their wives (or other female relations) as empresses in order to provide leadership for the female part of the court. Within the notion of a ruling family, women became even more important as the transmitters of imperial blood and dynastic claims. In the middle of the eleventh century when Michael Psellus described the high status bestowed on Theodora, daughter of Constantine VIII, he recognised the particular claims of daughters to represent the continuity of imperial rule. Theodora won over the imperial guard because “there were certain factors that made her influence with them all-powerful: the fact that she had been ‘born in the purple’ her gentle character [and] the sad circumstances of her former life”.¹⁰ She returned from a long period of exile in a monastery to assume imperial power and ruled alone for several months. Psellus continues: “The Empire was hers alone – she inherited it – and she superintended all the affairs of State in person. She was supported in this resolution by her retinue and palace officials, men who from long experience understood imperial policy and knew how the administration of the Empire functioned ... Without the slightest embarrassment she assumed the duties of a man ... she herself appointed her officials, dispensed justice from her throne with due solemnity, exercised her vote in the courts of law, issued decrees sometimes in writing, sometimes by word of mouth.”¹¹ When she realized that she was dying, she elevated an elderly general to the position of emperor by a formal marriage ceremony.

Theodora’s case alerts us to another important feature of the Byzantine court: it established special honours for princesses ‘born in the purple’. The female children of a ruling couple were far less likely to inherit imperial power than their brothers (as Anna Komnene found to her cost), but if they were born in the special chamber identified as ‘purple’ from the coloured marble or silk of its walls, the epithet ‘porphyrogenetos’ endowed them with high status and resources.¹² Emperor Theophilos and his wife had five daughters before their son Michael was born (an older male child had died young). Similarly, Emperor Constantine VII cherished his many daughters who were older than his one son, Romanos. All were given a proper education and established in their own palaces in the capital. Many imperial children of both sexes had marriages arranged for them – and those daughters who remained unmarried often founded a monastery into which they retired. One of the most striking cases of a princess ‘born in the purple’ succeeding to imperial power is Euphrosyne, younger daughter of Constantine VI, who was banished from the court with her mother in 790. She only returned from her monastic exile when a usurper decided to enhance his imperial legitimacy by marrying her. After spending about 25 years in the monastery, Michael II recalled Euphrosyne to the imperial court as his wife and empress, and thus strengthened his right to rule.¹³

A further and highly important feature of Byzantine society was the undisputed role of the capital city of Constantinople, the centre of government and the permanent base of the imperial court. Founded by Constantine the Great as a New Rome, to replace the Old Rome

⁹ Ibid, 175-8.

¹⁰ Psellus, *Chronographia*, 260.

¹¹ Ibid, 261.

¹² Dagron (1994); Herrin (2007), 185-91.

¹³ Herrin (2001), 155-8.

on the Tiber, it gradually became the centre of all administration and higher education. The ecclesiastical see of Constantinople was established as the leading patriarchate, while the city's position at the crossroads of much economic activity ensured the importance of its markets. It acted as a magnet for all with ambitions and skills.¹⁴ Both men and women were attracted to it, whether they sought careers there or were sent by their parents to realize dreams of social advancement and economic prosperity. In contrast to the medieval West, where rulers moved from one centre to another throughout the year, the imperial court never moved from the capital. Its fixed position created a central focus for people not only from the provinces and but also from beyond the imperial frontiers. Within this highly centralized system of administration, the court was the most important source of patronage, the venue where individuals could make impression on the emperor, empress and the chief officers of state.¹⁵

The combination of courtly prominence and the recognised role of the Byzantine empress meant that women who attained this position might be able to exercise great power. In the case of women who married into a ruling family and became wives of emperors, therefore empresses in their own right, this was overt. There were also indirect benefits, for instance, the sisters of Maria of Amnia who followed her to Constantinople and made advantageous marriages.¹⁶ In the ninth century the official title of *zoste patrikia*, was first granted to Theoktiste, mother of Empress Theodora; it created a special honour for mothers of empresses, who wore a particularly belt (*zoste*) and gained the highest patrician rank reserved to women in court hierarchy.¹⁷ It was only rarely bestowed as a singular mark of approval. So the bride of an emperor often brought tremendous privileges to her entire family. And even if her family members did not accompany her to Constantinople (in the case of foreign brides for instance), she might rapidly realize her privileges and attain an independent status. In this respect, Maria/Marta of Alania, who first came to Constantinople as a child hostage for her father's good behaviour and later returned to marry Michael VII Doukas, demonstrated the rich potential of her married status.¹⁸

Both the empress and all the imperial princesses required the support of many ladies-in-waiting, recruited from among the elite of the capital as well as the provinces. In court ceremonies they attended these key figures and accompanied them on all their journeys. When Theophano left Constantinople to marry Otto II, many ladies appropriated dressed went with her; and when Basil II finally sent his sister Anna to marry Vladimir of Kiev, she was similarly accompanied.¹⁹ Although these ladies might be powerless, their position in close contact with the most important female figures gave them considerable potential. Even as servants they appeared at court ceremonies and might well attract the attention of an important courtier. On more than one occasion the emperor himself selected a mistress from among the ladies-in-waiting; Constantine VI chose and eventually married Theodote, Leo VI married Zoe Zaoutze and after her death selected another Zoe 'Karbonopsina' (the black-eyed), who gave birth to his only son, the future Constantine VII, in the purple chamber.

In addition, for over a century (ca 780 – 880) the Byzantine court adopted a method of

¹⁴ El Cheikh (2004); Ciggaar (1996); Herrin (2007), 3-21.

¹⁵ Shevchenko (1979-80).

¹⁶ Rydén (2002), 90-92.

¹⁷ Herrin (2001), 173-4, 232.

¹⁸ Garland and Rapp (2006), 91-123.

¹⁹ Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon*, II, 15, p. 103; Franklin and Shepard (1996), 162-7.

selecting wives for imperial princes which has been characterized as ‘beauty pageant’ or ‘bride show’.²⁰ In literary terms, this derived from the story of the Judgment of Paris, when he had to present a golden apple to the fairest of three goddesses. Whether such contests actually took place in the manner described by ninth century historical and hagiographical sources is not clear. But there is no doubt that relatively unknown young women were recruited in the provinces to become brides of future emperors. A similar system seems to have been used in the Carolingian West, where it avoided the promotion of a powerful family whose male relations would try to exercise influence at court.²¹ In Byzantium also it secured the loyalty and support of a provincial family, rather than enhancing the standing of an already powerful elite group within the capital. And it further consolidated the dreams of innumerable parents living far from Constantinople that *their* daughter might one day marry the prince. I think these bride-show stories should be understood as a mechanism for linking outlying regions to the imperial capital, by tying provincial families into closer loyalty to the ruling family.²² And in the case of Maria of Amnia and Theodora of Paphlagonia it seemed to work.

Even if Irene from Athens was not chosen in this fashion, the alliance between her almost unknown family and Constantine V must have assisted the ruler in some way. He may have wanted to promote a relatively insignificant clan from central Greece – to extend his influence in a region only recently brought under Constantinopolitan control, and to strengthen his contacts and build greater loyalty there. I have argued that this allowed one very powerful woman to take control of the imperial government in the late eighth century, imposing new initiatives such as the reversal of iconoclasm, and the reaction to Charlemagne’s coronation by Pope Leo III and his acclamation as emperor of the Romans.²³ Between 797 and 802 Empress Irene also made serious reinvestment in churches, monasteries and their philanthropic activities, and built her own palace, the church of St Sophia, Thessalonike, the shrine at church of the Life-Giving Source, and so on. I will return to her later.

The second facet of Byzantine society which favoured the prominence of women was the relationship of mother to son. Among ruling circles, this was particularly important since emperors were frequently on campaign and often died in battle, leaving their widows to secure the transmission of power from father to son. If the boy was a minor, the empress had an even more important task as the guarantor of his rights. Widowed empresses therefore had a special function in protecting their sons’ inheritance, and their maternal rights were recognised in law. They often exercised a leading role in the Council of Regency set up to sustain imperial government. In 842, for example, when Emperor Theophilos died, his son Michael was only two years old. The widowed empress Theodora immediately ordered a new gold coin to be struck, which showed her own image on the front and portraits of Michael and his older sister Thekla on the back.²⁴ In this way, she announced the change of ruler and attempted to guarantee her young son’s inheritance. From 842 to 856 she performed the role of Regent, until Michael turned seventeen and was old enough to claim his position as emperor. At that point, Theodora’s own brother exiled her and took over as adviser to his nephew. Nonetheless, for over a decade a widowed empress had protected her son’s claim to rule.

²⁰ Historians are divided as to the reliability of this notion, see Treadgold (1979); Rydén (1985); Vinson (1999, 2004); Herrin (2001), 132-8, 190-1, 222-6.

²¹ De Jong (2004).

²² Herrin (2001), 131-8.

²³ Ibid, 113-29.

²⁴ Ibid, 202, plate 1d.

Whenever an emperor died leaving a young son, however, there was no shortage of adult male relations or established generals or ambitious officials who aspired to take over, justifying their efforts as necessary 'to secure the empire' against foreign invasion. In 919 Romanos I Lekapenos successfully used this argument to remove Zoe Karbonopsina from her position as Regent, and then proceeded to promote his own sons ahead of the young 'porphyrogennetos' Constantine VII.²⁵ Nonetheless, the principle of maternal authority over a young prince, and the mother's natural desire to secure his right to rule, meant that in Byzantium widowed women could exercise genuine power. In the eleventh century Psellos describes how the widowed Empress Eudokia educated her son Michael: "She personally trained him for his future career, and later on allowed him to appoint magistrates and encouraged him to act as a judge.... She commended him, expressed her pride in what he had done, and always she was building up his character, quietly preparing him for the various duties that an emperor has to perform ...".²⁶ Maria/Marta protected her son Constantine Doukas' rights against strong opposition.²⁷ In the fourteenth century Anna of Savoy almost provoked a civil war by supporting her son's right to rule; but John V Palaiologos duly became emperor and ruled for 50 years.²⁸

The most striking example of such female power is perhaps that of Empress Irene: in 769 she was married as a teenager to Leo, the eldest son of Constantine V, and she became empress when he inherited imperial power in 775. After only five years Leo IV died in mysterious circumstances and she asserted her power in the Regency council established for her young son Constantine, then aged nine.²⁹ Even when he reached the age of his majority (he turned sixteen in January 787), she was reluctant to relinquish her position as senior emperor, acclaimed ahead of her son, and eventually he had to expel her from the palace to her own residence 790. This event is associated with the failure of his marriage, which Irene had arranged by a bride show. By repudiating his wife Maria and rapidly marrying one of the ladies in waiting, Theodote, Constantine VI asserted his own authority. But his second marriage was condemned as illegitimate because he had exiled his first wife to a monastery where she lived for many years with her two daughters.

Thus Emperor Constantine VI faced constant opposition from the ecclesiastical authorities, to which the army added its own disquiet at his military failings, some of these appear to have been contrived by Irene's servants. After a short time he was pressured to admit his mother back into the court, where she rapidly insisted on being acclaimed as ruler with him. Their period of joint rule was brief, however, and in 797 she ordered that he should be blinded in order to disqualify him from ruling (the normal Byzantine method of getting rid of claimants to the throne and unsuccessful rebels). She then ruled alone for five years, longer than her husband Leo IV and longer than many ephemeral military emperors who came and went at the beginning of the eighth century. Her overthrow was engineered by the finance minister Nikephoros, who reversed most of her policies and showed a notable reluctance to promote eunuchs to key positions.

The horrific example of a mother ordering the blinding of her own son has led modern

²⁵ Liutprand of Cremona, *Antapodosis (Tit for Tat)*, 3. 26, 35, 37, pp. 81-2, 85-6.

²⁶ Psellus, *Chronographia*, 346.

²⁷ Garland and Rapp, as above.

²⁸ Nicol (1994).

²⁹ Theophanes, I, 444, 449-80; Herrin (2001), 75-8.

historians to condemn Irene as a heartless and power-hungry woman, lacking in maternal concern for her only child. At the time, however, her actions were accepted albeit with some criticism. The chief contemporary historian, the monk Theophanes, whose *Chronographia* was composed in the early ninth century, records the inadequacies of Constantine both as emperor and military leader and Irene's ambitions. As a devout icon venerator, he supported the empress who had ended the official Byzantine policy of iconoclasm in 787. After the blinding, he notes that the sky was darkened for seventeen days (suggesting a long period of very heavy cloud in the middle of summer such as might be expected from a volcanic eruption) which was interpreted as a condemnation of the blinding. And he concludes "In this way, his mother Irene acceded to power".³⁰

Her rule was immediately challenged by "troublemakers" associated with the other sons of Constantine V, half-brothers of her husband Leo IV and therefore uncles of Constantine VI. Another plot was hatched in central Greece but her own relatives put that down and blinded the conspirators.³¹ The main problem of this period was that having removed her son, who was the legitimate heir, she failed to adopt or nominate a successor. Her officials therefore tried to ensure that their own relations would gain the throne after her death. In particular, two of the chief eunuchs competed against each other to win her favour, which caused great instability.³² At the same time, Irene continued her building activity, her negotiations with foreign potentates and imperial rituals in a manner designed to display her own authority. She cannot have been entirely unsuccessful and when the opposition materialized in a coup d'état, Theophanes reports that it was partly provoked by her eunuchs.³³

It is now time to turn to this third aspect of Byzantine civilization, the role of eunuchs in Byzantium and ask if it assisted the prominence of women. The existence of a third sex – neither male nor female – is a common feature of many empires which sustain grand courts (notably medieval Chinese and Islamic centres of power).³⁴ In Byzantium it was elevated to greater prominence by the adoption of a series of court positions reserved for 'beardless men'. These were boys castrated before puberty who retained their childish physical features (lack of body hair, high voices) and who were recruited for special duties associated with the imperial couple, their private quarters, wardrobes and dining rooms, and particular court ceremonies. The leading position of the court major domo was always held by a senior eunuch official (*praipositos*), assisted by other eunuchs (*koubikoularioi*).³⁵ Because it was assumed that they had lost their sexual drive, eunuchs were considered safe with women and because they could not produce children of their own, they were thought to be more loyal and devoted to their employers than other servants. From the moment when imperial brides arrived in the court, they would have been surrounded by these officials, whose unbroken voices, soft skin and long limbs set them apart.

Despite the legal prohibition of castration on imperial territory, by the ninth century even Byzantine families with several sons were arranging to have one castrated in order to send him to Constantinople where he could make a career either at court or in the church.³⁶

³⁰ Theophanes, I, 472 (blinding and accession).

³¹ Ibid. I, 473-4.

³² Ibid, I, 474-5.

³³ Ibid, I, 475-6.

³⁴ Tougher (2002).

³⁵ Ringrose (2003); Herrin (2007), 160-9.

³⁶ Tougher (1997), esp. 178-80.

Eunuchs were admitted to the ranks of the clergy and many became leading monks, bishops and patriarchs. They found positions of trust in nunneries where male attendants were prohibited. Paphlagonia became a centre from which such young men were recruited.³⁷ Following the model of the imperial court, all elite families employed eunuchs to assist the mistress of the house in her work, acting as scribes and carrying personal messages outside the home. Educated eunuchs were often put in charge of teaching the young children and accompanying the older ones to more advanced classes given by established scholars in the city.

Within the court, such beardless men had very dominant positions, organizing imperial ceremonies both inside and outside the Great Palace. The ruling couple were surrounded and protected by them. Some certainly did sustain particular families in prolonged patterns of sound advice and honorable service. Basil the 'nothos' (bastard) was the illegitimate son of Romanos I, castrated to remove any claims he might entertain to imperial inheritance. He survived the operation and served four emperors with intelligent advice from 949 to his disgrace in 985.³⁸ During that long period, he used the wealth he accumulated to commission some of the most striking works of art that survive, for instance the famous Limburg reliquary.

Through their employment in the corridors of power, eunuch courtiers often had access to imperial secrets and could promote specific policies. On occasion, they were reported to exercise too much influence over both emperors and empresses. The question here is whether imperial women relied too greatly on their eunuch officials, as is often implied by the sources. Since male rulers were also attacked for allowing eunuchs to dominate imperial government, this was clearly not an exclusively female problem. It seems more likely that when the eunuch courtiers sensed a weak ruler whom they could manipulate for their own purposes, they did so. But ambitious Byzantine empresses could also use their eunuch servants to advance their own agendas, often with the co-operation of non-eunuch officials of the imperial court. Even in the late Palaiologan period, when the beardless men had lost some of their prominence, they remained an element of the greatly reduced centre of government. And after the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453, they naturally became guardians of the sultan's harem.³⁹

In conclusion, I would argue that particular structures of Byzantine society and the imperial court favoured the rise of women to powerful positions. The stress on the legitimate transmission of authority within the dynasty from father to son gave empress-mothers great authority. Their duties at the head of the female side of the court established empresses on the same high level as their husbands and their private resources allowed them to manage a circle of servants, courtiers and supporters who undertook their personal business. Once widowed, empresses often appeared to withdraw from political affairs into monasteries they had set up, but paradoxically it was often in their retirement that they were able to realize the greatest influence and power. Euphrosyne, for instance, reunited the bones of her estranged parents in a special chapel designed to commemorate their lives.⁴⁰ She thus undid the 'damnatio memoriae' that had been decreed by Empress Irene. Similarly, Anna, the wife of a rebel Artabasdos, maintained her husband's and children's tombs at the monastery of Chora, which

³⁷ Magdalino (1998), Herrin (2001), 107-113.

³⁸ Vlyssidou (2007).

³⁹ Herrin (2007), 169.

⁴⁰ Herrin (2001), 159-62.

became a shrine to this family.⁴¹ As in the medieval West, women were often responsible for the commemoration of their ancestors and paid for annual liturgies in their honour, which sustained the history and memory of the family in a physical rather than literary manner.⁴²

In addition, the respect accorded to mothers in general, the rights widows were granted over their children, and the provision of inheritance for both girls and boys, meant that empresses could sometimes seize power in the name of a minor son. In the seventh century Martina provoked extreme opposition because she tried to alter the will of her husband Herakleios. In the tenth, Empress Zoe Karbonopsina clashed with Patriarch Nikolaos Mystikos over the best way to protect her young son's rights, and lost her position as Regent. But in neither case was the empress mother opposed for attempting to preserve her son's imperial inheritance; her legal right as his guardian was not disputed. In this way, widowed mothers became a force to be reckoned with in Byzantine society, not only at the highest levels, but also among villagers.⁴³ For those with wealth, the patronage of scholars, craftsmen, writers and intellectuals was not merely an accepted social role but was understood as an important focus of courtly activity. Empress Maria/Marta of Alania and several other foreign empresses of the twelfth century maintained a literary circle, while Anna Komnene the 'porphyrogenetos' promoted scholarly learning in philosophy as well as writing her own great history of Alexios I.

In these ways, Byzantine imperial women overcame the medieval assumptions about womanly weakness and realized a manly authority (to use the expressions frequently cited in Byzantine sources). Their initiatives occasionally changed the course of history, by the repeal of iconoclasm, for example, and their accepted participation in government bequeathed models of behaviour which later women could draw on and adapt. In conjunction with the structural support of a highly centralized administration and imperial court, Byzantine women displayed an inventiveness and prominence, which often discomfited male writers. If only their own writings had been preserved to allow us to judge how they conceived of their power!

⁴¹ Herrin (2006), 9-10.

⁴² Van-Houts (1999).

⁴³ Neville (2006).

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Family structures and gendered power in early medieval kingdoms: the case of Charlemagne's mother.

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In the past twenty years or so, the historiography of earlier medieval women has been much debated and substantially revised. The old narratives sometimes contradicted each other. One pictured women's high status in a homogenous Germanic culture holding its own in the new barbarian kingdoms against the secular and ecclesiastical versions of *Romanitas*, while another suggested that that ancient status was crushed. One, looking to the *longue durée*, held that women's position steadily improved through the benevolence of the Church, while another saw ecclesiastical pressures reinforcing patriarchy in another guise, and eventually forcing a *Frauenfrage* that was really a *Herrenfrage*. There was a story about a Golden Age followed by decline, but an alternative record was of inaudibility followed by vociferousness. There was yet another story of radical continuity, a history of oppression that stands still, invisibility and silence prevailing throughout. All these versions of early medieval reality have been offered, stretched, altered. And, truth to tell, there is something useful in all these; for tensions are part of the fabric.¹ Then questions have been asked about much larger stories from which women had been conspicuous by their absence: did women have a transformation of the Roman world?² did women participate in the Carolingian Renaissance?³ did women affect, as well as being affected by, the Gregorian reforms?⁴ did women offer a series of new takes on the ancient Christian ideal of virginity?⁵

¹ The bibliography on all these topics is large, and the references given in succeeding footnotes are no more than representative, though most are rich in further references. Thought-provoking, but very different, starting-points are given by J.W. Scott, 'Gender: a useful category of historical analysis', *American Historical Review* 91 (1986), pp. 1053-75, repr. in her collected papers, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1999), pp. 28-50; J.M. Bennett, "'History that Stands Still': women's work in the European past", *Feminist Studies* 14 (1988), pp. 269-83.

² J.M.H. Smith, 'Did Women Have a Transformation of the Roman World?', in P. Stafford and A.B. Mulder-Bakker eds, *Gendering the Middle Ages*, a special issue of *Gender and History* 12, no. 3 (2000), repr. (Oxford, 2001), pp. 22-41; *eadem*, 'Introduction: gendering the early medieval world', in L. Brubaker and J.M.H. Smith eds, *Gender in the Early Medieval World. East and West, 300-900* (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 1-19.

³ K. Heene, *The Legacy of Paradise: Marriage, Motherhood and Women in Carolingian Edifying Literature* (Frankfurt, 1997); Smith, 'Gender and ideology in the early Middle Ages', *Studies in Church History* 34 (1998), pp. 51-73; J.L. Nelson, 'Dhuoda', in P. Wormald and J.L. Nelson eds, *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 106-20.

⁴ J.-A. McNamara, 'The *Herrenfrage*: the restructuring of the gender system, 1050-1150', in C. Lees ed., *Medieval Masculinities. Regarding Men in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 1994), pp. 3-29; C. Leyser, 'Custom, truth and gender in the Gregorian Reform', *Studies in Church History* 34 (1998), pp. 75-91; R. Swanson, 'Angels Incarnate: Clergy and Masculinity from Gregorian Reform to the Reformation', in D. Hadley ed., *Masculinity in Medieval Europe* (London, 1999), pp. 160-77.

⁵ P. Brown, *The Body and Society. Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (Oxford, 1988); S. Elm, *Virgins of God: the Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 1994); R. McKitterick, *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6th - 9th centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), chs. VII and XIII; J. Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture. Virginity and its Authorizations* (Oxford, 2004); V. Garver, 'Learned women? Liutberga and the instruction of Carolingian women', in Wormald and Nelson eds, *Lay Intellectuals*, pp. 121-38.

Methodologies have been sharpened to match the questions. Approaches to the legal evidence have become warier. Variations in the laws bearing on women and the family – of, for instance, major differences between Frankish and Lombard legal prescriptions about women – have recently been highlighted. According to Lombard law, women were transferred from their father's *Mund* (protection) to their husband's; and they could not defend themselves or their rights in court, but had to have male protectors to speak for them. Frankish law has no equivalent prescriptions, and the assumption, on grounds of alleged common Germanity, that something akin to *Mund* existed in Frankish legal practice, lacks textual support.⁶ *Lex Salica* title 59, clauses 1-5, implies that children of both sexes inherit equal shares in allodial lands and states that if there are no children, then a parent of either sex, or sibling of either sex, inherits; failing those, then the maternal aunt postpones the paternal one. Only in the case of 'Salic land', apparently a special kind of ancestral land, is no share to go to any woman 'but the male sex acquires it, that is, the sons succeed' (clause 6).⁷ This was qualified in the later sixth and seventh centuries: not only could even this special land be given to a daughter in default of sons (and sisters could inherit from a deceased brother), but a father could, by document, make his daughter equal heir with her brothers.⁸ This prescriptive evidence, interpreted against the background of demographic data which shows that female inheritance was, in statistical terms, a common probability, accounts for the large quantities of land which some women possessed.⁹ The alleged existence of two distinct forms of union, lawful marriage, and less formal and un-endowed *Friedelehe*, was always questionable, but has recently been definitively consigned to the category of 'myth', a legal historians' invention.¹⁰ What accounts for the observed differences between the profiles of high-born female partners is not legal status but social status, backed by favour, and the play of high politics.

Evidence of legal practice, in the form of charters, is easier to evaluate.¹¹ Charters have long been the backbone of social history, but the relative frequency of women's appearance in them is now clear.¹² A woman's gift often appears a straightforward sign of individual agency,¹³ though, as with men's charters, kin hover in the background. A couple's gift, or a joint will, may mean what they say: the wife as well as the husband makes the decision.¹⁴ Widowhood, a legally- and religiously-recognised state specific to women, is strongly

⁶ S. Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society: Marriage and the Cloister 500-900* (Philadelphia PA, 1981); R. Mazo Karras, 'The history of marriage and the myth of *Friedelehe*', *Early Medieval Europe* 14 (2006), pp. 119-51, esp. pp. 140-1.

⁷ *Pactus Legis Salicae* c. 59: 6, ed. K.A. Eckhardt, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (hereafter MGH) *Leges* IV. 1 (Hannover, 1962), p. 222.

⁸ *Formulary of Marculf II*, 12, ed. K. Zeumer, *MGH Formulae* (Hannover, 1886), p. 83.

⁹ I. Wood, 'Genealogy defined by women: the case of the Pippinids', in Brubaker and Smith eds., *Gender*, pp. 234-56. *Lex Salica*'s prohibitions against incest probably predated, and seem independent of, Church legislation on the subject.

¹⁰ Karras, 'The history of marriage', as above, n. 6.

¹¹ Exemplary in terms of method is D. Hellmuth, *Frau und Besitz. Zum Handlungsspielraum von Frauen in Alamannien (700-940)* (Sigmaringen, 1998).

¹² P. Stafford, 'La mutation familiale. A suitable case for caution', in J. Hill and M. Swan eds, *The Community, the Family and the Saint: Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 1998), pp. 103-25.

¹³ F. Staab, 'La circulation des biens à l'intérieur de la famille dans la région du Rhin moyen', in F. Bougard and R. Le Jan eds, *Les transferts patrimoniaux en l'Europe occidentale, VIIIe- Xe siècle*, *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Moyen Âge*, 111, ii (1999), pp. 911-31.

¹⁴ C. La Rocca and L. Provero, 'The Dead and their Gifts: the will of Eberhard, count of Friuli, and his wife Gisela, daughter of Louis the Pious', in F. Theuvs and J.L. Nelson eds, *Rituals of Power from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 225-80; cf. below, p. 13, (for Pippin and Bertrada's interest in Prüm).

represented in the donations of women, while an unexpectedly high proportion, roughly one disproportionately often mentioned in cases of dispute, suggesting that however women of the propertied classes might be endowed, their rights as widows were relatively insecure.¹⁵ Women were vessels: they could transmit rights, but those rights were often challenged, as if pertaining to a weaker vessel.

Frankish legal formulae, long a private reserve of legal historians, are now being acknowledged by social historians as offering multiple windows on life.¹⁶ The very existence of collections of these formulae, in formularies, presupposes practice among the landowning classes. Daughters were given *dos*, best translated ‘dower’, a life-interest in lands and movables, by their husbands at marriage. The formulae assign choice to both parties, while also indicating the role of parental consent. Frankish formulae offer no clear evidence for virilocal marriage as a norm (though it may have been very common), and, whatever historians have imagined to be the case with some Germanic *Ur-dos*, do not show, any more than charters do, that in ‘historic times’, Frankish *dos* was in moveables alone.¹⁷ It is certain that the brides of kings moved to live with their husbands, and this sometimes meant that queens were resourced by their natal families only in moveables, and that for these brides, marriage marked a major break in their lives: a one-way journey.¹⁸ The same may not always have been true for high-born women, for it could happen that the families of the bride and groom had at least some of their landed property in the same region.¹⁹ This could occur, perhaps was more likely to occur, in families of the so-called ‘imperial’ aristocracy of the Carolingian period.²⁰

Formulae for divorce constitute *prima facie* evidence of a genuine option for Frankish women down to the ninth century, even though other legal and anecdotal evidence is contradictory.²¹ In the Carolingian period, the Church’s interventions in this area grew, fitfully. But actual cases involving sexual misconduct aroused tremendous debate among laypeople as well as clergy.²²

¹⁵ J.L. Nelson, ‘The wary widow’, in W. Davies and P. Fouracre eds, *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 82-113, repr. in Nelson, *Courts, Elites and Gendered Power* (Aldershot, 2007), ch. II).

¹⁶ B.-M. Tock, ‘L’acte privé en France, VIIe siècle – milieu du Xe siècle’, in Bougard and Le Jan eds, *Les transferts patrimoniaux*, pp. 499-37, esp. pp. 532-3, 536-7; A. Rio, ‘Early medieval Frankish formularies’, unpublished University of London Ph.D. thesis, 2006, revised version forthcoming (Cambridge, 2008).

¹⁷ F. Staab, ‘La *dos* dans les sources du Rhin moyen et des régions voisines’, in F. Bougard, L. Feller, and R. le Jan eds, *Dots et Douaires dans le haut moyen* (Rome 2002), pp. 277-304.

¹⁸ R. Le Jan, ‘D’une cour à l’autre: les voyages des reines de Francie au Xe siècles’, in eadem, *Femmes*, pp. 39-52, at pp. 40-2; cf. S. Joye, ‘La femme et la maîtrise de l’espace’, in P. Depreux, F. Bougard and R. Le Jan eds, *Les élites et leurs espaces* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 189-206.

¹⁹ R. Le Jan, *Famille et pouvoir dans le monde franc (VIIIe-Xe siècle)* (Paris, 1995), pp. 334-9, assembles some bits of evidence in favour of generalised virilocal marriage, but they do not in themselves entirely convince, particularly not for the eighth/ninth centuries, nor do they necessarily mean, as for queens, that a noblewoman moved far away from her natal kin.

²⁰ La Rocca and Provero, ‘The dead and their gifts’.

²¹ Wemple, *Women*, p. 77; Rio trans. with extensive notes and commentary, *The Formularies of Marculf and Angers*, forthcoming (Liverpool, 2008).

²² Orleans II (533) c. 11, is the only Merovingian council to mention divorce: marriages contracted are not to be dissolved on grounds of illness, ed. J. Gaudemet and J. Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens (VIe-VIIe siècles, 2 vols* (Paris, 1989), I, p. 200. Wemple, *Women*, pp. 43, 75 (where no reference is given for the statement that the Merovingian Church permitted divorce in the case of a wife’s adultery). The earliest Carolingian church legislation on the subject is that of the Council of Soissons (744, the year of Pippin’s

High-born daughters had another possible alternative to marriage, if they became, of their own choice or by the choice of their parents and kin, brides of Christ, assigned life-interests in churches and church property.²³ The role of abbess was thus resourced, and could be passed on more or less hereditarily.²⁴ Recent research has shown in what complicated, and often comfortable, ways churches manned by women were enmeshed in family power, and senior kin, elder brothers as well as fathers, and at the highest level, sometimes the king, played important parts in their disposition and management.²⁵ More often in the seventh and eighth centuries than in the sixth, aristocratic abbesses in what would become the Carolingian Empire were credited with holiness, and venerated as saints. In some cases their *Vitae* are near-contemporary and provide rich evidence for these women's lives before as well as after their veiling: for them, consecration did not mean leaving the world of family and royal politics.²⁶ *Vitae* are problematic sources, however, not least because of inbuilt stereotyping, and dating-difficulties. Historians should see here another suitable case for caution.

They need to be cautious, too, with the narrators of barbarian history, chief among them, from the Frankish standpoint, Gregory of Tours. These narratives have been constructively

marriage), c. 9, MGH Concilia aevi Karolini (hereafter MGH Conc.) [742-842], ed. A. Werminghoff (Hannover, 1906), II, p. 35: *marito viventem sua mulier alius non accipiat, nec mulier vivente suo viro alium accipiat, quia maritus muliere sua non debet dimittere excepto causa fornicationis deprehensa*: the latter exception permits the husband to repudiate his wife caught *in flagrante*, and it is not clear that any distinction is intended between repudiation and divorce. The Decree of Verberie (758x768), MGH Capitularia regum Francorum (hereafter MGH Capit.), ed. A. Boretius (Hannover, 1883) I, no. 16, c. 5, permitted a man to repudiate (*dimittere*) a wife who had plotted his death with others, and then, if he wished, to remarry: cf. below, pp. 6-7. The *Admonitio generalis* c. 43, MGH Capit. I, no. 22, p. 56, cited the Council of Carthage, c. 69: *Ut nec uxor a viro dimissa alium accipiat vivente viro suo, nec vir aliam accipiat vivente uxore priore*. In 796, the Council of Friuli (796), MGH Conc. II, no. 21, c. X, pp. 192-3, used different language: *vinculum iugale resolvere causa fornicationis*. Wemple, *Women*, p. 78, writes that Charlemagne here 'unequivocally decreed that adultery could not dissolve the marriage-bond', but the wording just quoted says that adultery does dissolve that bond, despite the ensuing insistence that the impediment to re-marriage remained. In 802, an instruction to *missi*, MGH Capit. I, no. 35, c. 22, p. 103, reverted to the Carthage canon. Theodulf, MGH Capitularia episcoporum (hereafter MGH Capit. episc.), II, c. V, 6, ed. Brommer, MGH Capit. episc. I (Hannover, 1984), pp. 162-3, clearly influenced by insular penitential legislation, says that a husband whose wife commits adultery *dimittat uxorem si voluerit propter fornicationem*, but adds that *si voluerit adulteram sibi reconciliari, licentiam habet*, provided both do penance. Since there is a good deal of evidence that laymen continued to think in terms of a wife's adultery justifying divorce (and even murder), Wemple, *Women*, p. 75, may be premature in hailing 'a social revolution'. For the ninth century, see S. Airlie, 'Private Bodies and the Body Politic in the Divorce Case of Lothar II', *Past and Present* 161 (1998), pp. 3-38; J.L. Nelson, 'England and the Continent in the ninth century IV: Bodies and Minds', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 15 (2005), pp. 1-27, esp. pp. 20-1; and R. Stone, 'Masculinity, Nobility and the Moral Instruction of the Carolingian Lay Elite', unpublished University of London Ph.D. thesis, 2005, esp. pp. 220-60, and now *eadem*, "'Bound from the other side": the limits of power in Carolingian marriage disputes', *Gender and History* 19 (2007), pp. 467-82.

²³ S. Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 163, 238.

²⁴ *Vita Geretrudis prima*, ed. B. Krusch, MGH Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum (hereafter MGH SRM) II, pp. 452-63, trans. P. Fouracre and R.A. Gerberding, *Later Merovingian France. History and Hagiography, 640-720* (Manchester, 1996), pp. 319-26, esp. pp. 324-5 (c. 6); *Virtutes S. Geretrudis*, ed. Krusch, *ibid.*, trans. J.A. McNamara and J. Halborg, *Sainted Women of the Dark Ages* (London, 1992), pp. 229-34, esp. 232-3 (c. 10). Cf. an eighth-century case in the Rhineland, Staab, 'La circulation des biens', pp. 923-4.

²⁵ See R. Le Jan, 'Convents, violence and competition for power in the seventh century', in M. de Jong and F. Theuvs eds, *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 243-69; Wood, 'Genealogy defined'.

²⁶ Le Jan, 'Convents'; Nelson, 'Gendering courts in the early medieval West', in Brubaker and Smith eds, *Gender*, pp. 185-97, esp. pp. 188-90; for the *Vita Leobae*, see Nelson, 'Women at the court of Charlemagne', in J.C. Parsons ed, *Medieval Queenship* (London, 1993), pp. 43-61, repr., Nelson, *The Frankish World 750-900* (London, 1996), pp. 99-132.

deconstructed in recent years, their male authors' personal agendas, including prejudices about gender, exposed, and their representations of women carefully contextualised within the narrative but also in relation to sources outside it, and reappraised.²⁷ Women's roles as commissioners, even occasionally as authors, and audiences, for such narratives, were familiar to later-medievalists, but more recently have received a good deal of attention from historians of the earlier Middle Ages too.²⁸ Such roles have been contextualised more widely still within communications-networks, often involving pleas and intercession, in which women participated actively, and sometimes distinctively: through letters, and poems, and through gossip.

Excessive reliance on Gregory of Tours is one problem in much modern writing on Frankish women at elite level. Another is a tendency to generalise from the earlier to the later Merovingian period, and then contrast this with the Carolingian.²⁹ The position of royal women in the later period needs to be assessed on its own evidence. There are some powerful queens-consort and queens-regent in the seventh century, and their power comes in part from their natal families and inheritances. There is little direct evidence for dower in these cases; but it might be assumed in the case of the foreign-born Balthild.³⁰ In the age of the *fainéant* kings, the powerful women are not royal but aristocratic, especially the women brought by marriage into the Arnulfing/Carolingian family of the mayors of the palace. Begga, mother of Pippin of Herstal, Charlemagne's great-grandfather, survived the downfall and death of her brother Grimoald to bring inherited lands and political influence in the central Meuse valley region to her husband Ansegisel, son of Arnulf.³¹ Plectrude is an even more remarkable case in point. She was apparently one of a sib-set of sisters, all rich in lands in the same region, northwards around Süstern and southwards on the middle Moselle around Echternach. In becoming the wife of Pippin of Herstal (though she had to coexist with a concubine, Alpaïda, whom two contemporary sources call 'wife', it is not certain, or plausible, that polygyny occurred), Plectrude brought into Pippin's hands rich estates between Meuse and Moselle.³² While the sisters and daughters, if there were any, of the later Merovingian kings are ignored

²⁷ W. Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550-800)* (Princeton NJ, 1988), esp. pp. 224, n. 489, 351, 391-3. Especially helpful on Gregory of Tours are the studies of Ian Wood, most recently, 'The Individuality of Gregory of Tours', in K. Mitchell and I. Wood eds, *Gregory of Tours* (Turnhout 2002), pp. 29-46, with further references. Very relevant in the present context is Wood, 'Genealogy defined', in Brubaker and Smith eds, *Gender*, pp. 233-56; and cf. below, p. 14, n. 69.

²⁸ Nelson, 'Gender and genre in women historians of the early Middle Ages', in *eadem*, *The Frankish World*, pp. 183-98; Le Jan, 'Douaires', (noting the limited resources dower brought queens); Wood, 'Genealogy defined'; Y. Hen, 'Gender and patronage in Merovingian Gaul', in Brubaker and Smith eds, *Gender*, pp. 217-33. For Adalperga, duchess of Benevento, patron of Paul the Deacon, see Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 336-40.

²⁹ For a case in point, Hen, 'Gender and patronage', esp. p. 233, suggesting that Carolingian queens were 'pale' beside Merovingian ones. Cf. Wemple, *Women*, pp. 143-8, 165-74, but with some interesting qualifications to the general idea of 'women's waning influence'.

³⁰ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms* (London, 1994), esp. pp. 149, 156, 197-202, 223-4; for Balthild's resources, see her *Vita*, trans. Fouracre and Gerberding, *Late Merovingian France*, pp. 118-32, esp. 121-2 (c. 4, on her doings during her husband's lifetime), and pp. 123-6 (cc. 7-9, on her life as widow and regent after his death). Le Jan, 'Douaires et pouvoirs des reines en France et en Germanie (VIe-Xe siècle)', in *eadem*, *Femmes, pouvoir et société* (Paris, 2001), pp. 68-88, rightly draws attention, at pp. 69-76, to *les aléas de la documentation*.

³¹ This is an inference from, above all, the founding of Nivelles in Brabant by her mother Itta, and her own founding of Andenne near Namur. See P. Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel* (London, 2000), pp. 33-50, for a cool appraisal of the evidence.

³² As regards Alpaïda's marital status, the authors of both the *Liber Historiae Francorum*, and the Continuation of Fredegar's *Chronicle*, who call her *uxor*, wrote in the heyday of Charles Martel, Alpaïda's son: R. Gerberding, *The Rise of the Carolingians and the Liber Historiae Francorum* (Oxford, 1987), p. 117.

in the contemporary narrative sources and charters alike, some of the Arnulfing/Carolingian women, and their wealth, are clearly documented, especially in the charters of the monasteries they founded and patronised. From the eighth century, when charters become more plentiful, more landowning women are recorded and, at least at the highest social level, it is easier to connect this with other evidence.³³

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As a bridge between these historiographical comments and the Carolingian case-study, I will briefly consider two legal cases that raise broader questions of gendered structures, and then offer a rapid survey of royal women in the reign of Charlemagne. The pair of difficult cases involve nameless women of not particularly lofty social rank, that came before assemblies summoned by Charlemagne's father Pippin. These were years when the boy was old enough to learn by example, and which may therefore have helped shape his own thinking. I will hazard a guess that his mother (and the women in the households of the men who judged this case) took an interest in them too. Like lightning revealing for an instant more distant, and deeper, parts of a vast scene, these cases give us glimpses of the context of gendered values, assumptions, and customary arrangements, that framed the lives of Charlemagne and his contemporaries. The first is a rare example of a case explicitly recorded in a legislative decree among the decisions made at a Frankish assembly held at Compiègne in 757: 'A Frankish man (*homo Francus*) received a benefice from his lord (*senior*) and brought in with him a vassal of his own (*suus vassallus*); and afterwards that lord [the *homo francus*] died leaving the vassal there; and after this another man received that benefice, and in order to have a greater hold over that vassal he gave him a/the woman of the benefice [*mulier de ipso beneficio*] as his wife?]; this arrangement remained in place for a while but then the vassal repudiated her, and went back to the kin of his dead lord [*senioris sui mortui* - i.e. the *homo francus* first-mentioned] and received a wife [*uxor*] there [i.e. in the benefice], whom he still has. Decided: the vassal should have her whom he received second.'³⁴ One story here is about the efforts of successive holders of a benefice to strengthen their hold on it, the first, by 'bringing in' a vassal, the second, by retaining the same vassal but also 'giving' him a woman, or possibly 'the woman': perhaps she was the bearer of significant property-rights in or on the benefice. The second benefice-holder failed, however, to break the link 'his' vassal had had with the 'Frankish man' who had first installed him, in other words, failed to exploit his predecessor's death effectively to replace him as lord of the vassal – who now 'went back' to his first lord's kin, abandoning the *mulier de beneficio* and seeking another woman. The fates of the two women form the sub-text: the first, apparently 'given' because of her connection with the property, was put in a dangerous position when the vassal decided to ask the family of 'the dead lord' to give him a different woman. The ensuing dispute was tricky enough to be dealt with at the highest level. Churchmen at this very time were tightening the rules on marital status. The *mulier* must have had a plausible case. Hence, the Frankish assembly in ruling against her, used the legal difference between partner and wife, and lodged the terminology of that difference in the record itself, to justify a benchmark decision.

³³ M. Innes, 'Keeping it in the family: women and aristocratic memory', in E. Van Houts ed., *Medieval Memories: Men, Women and the Past, 700-1300* (London, 2000), pp. 17-35.

³⁴ *Decretum Compendiense*, MGH Capit. I, no. 15, c. 9, p. 38. I follow the MGH editor, A. Boretius, in taking the *senior* mentioned second to be the *homo Francus*: p. 38, n. 1. The technical meaning of the term *homo Francus* does not matter in the present context, but see Nelson, *Charles the Bald* (London, 1992), p. 167). Readers are encouraged to form their own judgement on which makes the best historical sense (both makes equally good grammatical sense).

The ruling delivered in the second case sounds like the outcome of a particular contentious episode considered by an assembly held at Verberie sometime during the last decade of Pippin's reign. It significantly altered a briefly-noted ruling of the 757 assembly on the question of whether remarriage was possible either for émigrés fleeing their enemies in feuds (*propter faidam*) or for their wives. The answer was no in both cases. At Verberie, a similar question elicited a different answer, and gender made the difference. A man had followed his lord 'to whom he could not betray his faith', and gone into another duchy or province 'through unavoidable necessity'. The man's wife was well able to go with her husband, but refused to do so, whether because of love for her own kin (*amor parentum*) in the home province or through love of the property she had there. It was decided that the woman should remain always bound by marriage (*semper innupta*) for the whole time as long as her husband whom she had not followed was alive, hence unable to remarry, but that the husband, who had fled to another place because necessity compelled him to, if he could not abstain, could take another wife, if he submitted to a (relatively light) penance.³⁵ Again this has the ring of a real case. Against the husband's appeal to the overriding obligation of 'faith' to his lord, hence 'unavoidable necessity', the wife's 'love' of her family or property was discounted.

Moving now to the women of Charlemagne's immediate family, I want to say just a little about what is known about them, and about the different relationships involved. Charlemagne's sister, Gisela, born in 757, is in a category of one. She was baptised by Pope Paul in a specially-devised *in absentia* rite,³⁶ so that he could become doubly-bonded with her parents as spiritual co-father.³⁷ She was considered as a possible bride for the young Byzantine co-emperor Leo probably in 767/8, but the political window of opportunity closed. There was discussion, a few years later, of another betrothal, to Adelchis, son of the Lombard King Desiderius and Queen Ansa, but the plan overtaken by the sudden collapse of Charlemagne's Lombard alliance.³⁸ Instead Gisela, still a young girl, was offered, presumably by her brother, as a bride of Christ to the convent of Chelles, which, being royally and richly patronised, gave her an excellent education.³⁹ As abbess through Charlemagne's appointment,⁴⁰ Gisela corresponded with Alcuin, a learned theologian, about the meaning of difficult texts. She received poems from him, and also featured as an admired figure at court in poems written by him and other court scholars. She was Charlemagne's natural choice as guardian of his daughter Rotrude and of part of his relic-collection, and also as custodian of the captured daughter of the deposed Bavarian duke, Tassilo.⁴¹ Gisela sometimes visited

³⁵ MGH Capit. I, no. 16, c. 9, p. 41.

³⁶ For Gisela's short-lived little sisters, see two epitaphs written by Paul the Deacon for their tombs at Metz, MGH Poetae Karolini Aevi I, Paul the Deacon, *Carmina* XX and XXI, pp. 57-8. For Gisela's birth, see *Annales Petaviani* s.a. 757, MGH Scriptorum (hereafter MGH SS) I, ed. G.H. Pertz (Hannover, 1826), p. 11.

³⁷ Pope Paul to King Desiderius, MGH Codex Carolinus, ed. W. Gundlach, MGH Epistolae Merowingici et Karolini Aevi (hereafter MGH Epp.) III, (Berlin, 1892), no. 14, p. 511; Airlie, 'Towards a Carolingian aristocracy', in Becher and Jarnut eds., *Der Dynastiewechsel*, p. 124.

³⁸ Stephen III to Charles and Carloman, Codex Carolinus no. 45, p. 563, in 770, contains a (strongly disapproving) allusion to this proposal.

³⁹ On the Chelles scriptorium, see R. McKitterick, 'Nuns' scriptoria in England and Francia in the eighth century', *Francia* 19 (1989), pp. 1-35, repr. *eadem*, *Books, Scribes and Learning in the Frankish Kingdoms, 6th-9th Centuries* (Aldershot, 1994), ch. VII.

⁴⁰ K.F. Werner, 'Die Nachkommen Karls des Grossen', in Braunfels ed, *Karl der Grosse* IV, p. 431. Gisela may also have been abbess of Argenteuil, near Paris. McKitterick, 'Nuns' scriptoria', p. 19, says Gisela was also abbess of Notre Dame, Soissons, but cites no evidence.

⁴¹ J.-P. Laporte, *Le trésor des saints de Chelles* (Chelles, 1988), pp. 115-50; the relic labels are published in facsimile by H. Atsma and J. Vezin, 'Authentiques de reliques provenant de l'ancien monastère Notre-Dame de

Charlemagne's court, for instance in June 799, when, at Aachen, she made a donation to the monastery of St-Denis, subscribing the document as 'most noble daughter of King Pippin' (there is no abbess-title here), and getting it attested by all three of her nephews, Charlemagne's sons Charles the Younger, Pippin and Louis – which could suggest an eirenic role in family tensions around this time.⁴² Gisela very probably commissioned, and oversaw, the writing of a set of annals offering a distinctive take on political events, and including an interest in Charles the Younger. The annal for 804 records a visit of Charlemagne to Chelles, and says that he was *fretus*, buoyed up, by the conversation he had with his sister, which may well have been, *inter alia*, about plans for a division of the empire that would assign Charles the Younger the lion's share. Einhard, knowledgeable about the latter years of Charlemagne's reign, mentions Charlemagne's fondness for Gisela.⁴³ The evidence adds up to a strong impression that Gisela was an important figure for Charlemagne until her death, probably in 805.⁴⁴

The five successive wives of Charlemagne are unevenly documented but the evidence is cumulatively substantial. Here I shall do no more than pick out some salient points of difference and similarity.⁴⁵ The first, Himiltrude, was chosen for his son by Pippin, the rest he chose himself. Himiltrude was Frankish, and Fastrada was from East Francia, but the other three wives were Lombard, Alaman and Saxon, suggesting a policy of distributing this position between the different peoples that comprised Charlemagne's empire. Himiltrude is not documented as having the title of queen, perhaps through deliberate erasure of memory. Both she and the Lombard wife, whose name may have been Gerperga, were repudiated after a relatively short time (perhaps three years, and barely one year, respectively). These were the first two of Charlemagne's wives: a youthful determination to flout canon law did not disappear with time. The two wives that produced no offspring, Gerperga and Liutgard, are poorly attested compared with the rest. It is not clear that Liutgard was recognised as queen, and this may have been connected with her having no children. The natal family of each of these women shows up variously in the evidence: Himiltrude's noble kindred cannot be securely identified, yet clever detective-work has indicated that they were involved in the revolt of Himiltrude's son:⁴⁶ their desire to be even with the man who spurned their kinswoman could flare again more than twenty years after the divorce. Alliance with Gerperga's family was clearly Charlemagne's motive in marrying her, but because of the

Chelles (VIIe-VIIIe siècles)', in *Chartae Latinae Antiquiores* XVIII (Zurich, 1985, no. 669, pp. 84-108. For Tassilo's daughter at Chelles, see *Annales Nazariani* s.a. 788, in MGH SS I, 44, with supporting evidence in the form of the Psalter probably written at the Bavarian monastery at Mondsee but at Chelles in the late eighth century: McKitterick, *The Carolingians and the Written Word* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 252-5.

⁴² MGH Diplomata Karolinorum (hereafter MGH DD), ed. E. Mühlbacher (Hannover, 1906), I, no. 319, dated 6 June, 799. On this, see Nelson, 'Charlemagne - *pater optimus*?', in P. Godman, J. Jarnut and P. Johanek eds, *Am Vorabend der Kaiserkrönung* (Stuttgart, 2002), pp. 269-81, at p. 279 (repr. in Nelson, *Courts, Elites*, ch. XV).

⁴³ Einhard, *Vita Karoli Magni*, ed. O. Holder-Egger, MGH Scriptores rerum Germanicarum (hereafter MGH SRG) (Hannover, 1911), c. 18, p. 23. For details on the above reconstruction of the sibling relationship, see Nelson, 'Women at the court'; 'Gender and genre', both repr. in *eadem*, *The Frankish World*; and 'Charlemagne - *pater optimus*?'.

⁴⁴ Gisela's death is usually dated to 810, but see Nelson, 'Gender and genre', p. 195, n. 75.

⁴⁵ Rather than overloading footnotes here, I refer readers to the following: P. Riché, C. Heitz and F. Héber-Suffrin eds, *Actes du colloque 'Autour d'Hildegard'* (Paris, 1987); F. Staab, 'Die Königin Fastrada', in R. Bernd ed, *Das Frankfurter Konzil von 794*, 2 vols (Mainz, 1997), I, pp. 183-217; and relevant papers in Nelson, *The Frankish World; Rulers and Ruling Families*; and *Courts, Elites*.

⁴⁶ S. Airlie, 'Narratives of triumph and rituals of submission: Charlemagne's mastering of Bavaria', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6th ser. 9 (1999), pp. 93-119.

divorce and its difficult aftermath, the *damnatio memoriae* in her case was even more complete than in Himiltrude's (even her name has been a mystery). It was not least for this reason that her sisters harboured undying enmity against Charlemagne. Nothing is known of Liutgard's family, beyond their nobility. It seems reasonable to assume a connexion between this marriage and Charlemagne's efforts in the later 790s to absorb Saxony into his empire.

The two wives for whom most evidence survives are Hildegard and Fastrada: that survival is a sign of their success as queens. Hildegard's descent, on her mother's side, from the old Alamannic ducal family was stressed by the biographer of one of her sons, Louis, and was clearly a key factor in Charlemagne's choice, in the dangerous political circumstances of late 771-early 772, following his brother's death and his repudiation of Gerperga. Fastrada's origin east of the Rhine was equally a strong factor in Charlemagne's choice of a new partner after Hildegard's death. Hildegard and Fastrada are both well-documented as having the title 'queen'; both were subjects of liturgical commemoration. Both wielded political influence, at court and beyond. Both had children – Hildegard nine (four sons and five daughters) and Fastrada two (daughters). It is tempting to see the activities of these women between them reflected in the programmatic statement of the queen's role in *The Government of the Palace*, a political treatise written by Charlemagne's cousin Adalard in c. 812. 'The maintenance of the honour and dignity (*honestas*) of the palace and in particular all that was involved in the display of royalty (*ornamentus*), and also the annual gifts of the royal military retinue (apart from food, drink and horses), fell chiefly to the queen, and under her, the chamberlain. It was their task to plan ahead for what would be required so that nothing was lacking when it was needed. The gifts to foreign envoys were the chamberlain's responsibility, unless the king ordered that it was proper that the queen should share that responsibility with him'.⁴⁷ Queenship seemed to have become a permanent fixture of the political landscape. Yet after Liutgard's death in 800, Charlemagne ruled without a queen. How can this circle be squared?

A partial answer, I think, lies in the collective role played by Charlemagne's daughters during the Aachen years. There was something surprising, even shocking, to contemporaries in the fact that Charlemagne's daughters all remained unmarried, and lived all or some of the time with their father at court; two of them, at least, Rotrude and Bertha, had lovers, tolerated by their father, and produced offspring, one of whom had a royal name. The court poetry of the 790s depicts the daughters as ornaments of the palace – beautiful, richly dressed and bedizened with jewels, with large retinues. Bertha attracted special admiration for her likeness to her father. Even more than with the two divorced queens, there has been a *damnatio memoriae* of these women. Only the poetry, and a few letters, hint at their contemporary influence. In no document, or narrative text, does anyone boast of having their favour. Again, the ostentatious clean-up of the palace by Charlemagne's son and successor Louis the Pious made it very unlikely that anyone would preserve the record of any connection with the daughters – until, after Charlemagne's death, one or two of them became respectable in the religious life, as abbesses. Their real-life political power was of the personal, informal kind, none the less significant for that, but time-bound, transient. Such relatively uninstitutionalised, mutable, even improvised, power was in fact characteristic of queens in Charlemagne's reign. This emerges, unsurprisingly, especially clearly in the case of the Ur-Carolingian queen and founding mother, Bertrada, to whom the rest of this paper is devoted.

⁴⁷ *De ordine palatii*, ed. T. Gross and R. Schieffer, MGH Fontes Iuris germanici antiqui (Hannover, 1980), V, (cap. 22), ll. 360-8. For Adalard's authorship of the core of this work, see Nelson, 'Aachen as a place of power', in M. de Jong and F. Theuvs eds, *Topographies of Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Leiden, 2001), pp. 217-41, repr. *eadem*, *Court, Elites*, ch. XIV.

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Bertrada, nicknamed Berta, Charlemagne's mother, and Pippin nicknamed 'the Short', his father, inherited contiguous estates, and hence were almost certainly closely related within some version of the prohibited degrees.⁴⁸ Their marriage in 744 was, among other considerations, a means of reuniting blocs of family property. The evidence is spelled out in a charter of 762 in which the couple later used these estates to endow the monastery of Prüm in the Ardennes, which had been founded by Bertrada's grandmother and namesake and her father Charibert, count of Laon.⁴⁹ In 742, following the death of Pippin's father, Charles Martel, on 22 October 741, the mayoralty of the Frankish regnum was divided between Pippin and his elder brother Carloman, excluding their younger half-brother Grifo who fled to Laon, in Carloman's kingdom, where he was taken prisoner. Perhaps Count Charibert 'played some part in Grifo's capture', or perhaps he changed sides and, soon after, 'forged a new alliance' with Pippin.⁵⁰ Either way it is an attractive possibility that Pippin's marriage to Charibert's daughter was on the cards from 742 onwards.

The couple's future prospects were more than usually uncertain. Charles Martel had ruled the Frankish realm *de facto*, without a Merovingian king, since 737, yet early in 743, another Merovingian, Childeric III, was raised to the kingship, probably by Carloman and Pippin in concert: the two brothers co-operated in battles against Bavarians, Saxons and Aquitanians in 743-4. Until 744, Pippin remained unmarried, quite possibly as the result of an agreement with his brother Carloman, some seven years older than Pippin and already with a son, Drogo, aged perhaps 9. Given that the two mayors continued to co-operate closely in 744-7, it seems to me likely that Pippin's decision to marry was concerted with Carloman as well. At the beginning of March, Pippin, *dux et princeps Francorum*, held an assembly at Soissons, and promulgated decrees on various matters of ecclesiastical law and discipline including divorce.⁵¹ There is no evidence on the exact date of Pippin's wedding to Bertrada, but it is worth suggesting the March assembly as a possible context. For nearly three years after their wedding, Pippin and Bertrada showed no sign of producing offspring. Many years later, Bertrada recalled that anxious time.⁵² By some point in the summer of 747, Bertrada and Pippin knew a child was on the way, but Carloman, when in August he quit secular life and headed for monastic life in Rome, may not have known.⁵³ He left Drogo in Pippin's care. On

⁴⁸ For the nicknames, see *Annales Bertiniani* s.a. 749, ed. G. Waitz, MGH SRG 5 (Hannover, 1883), p. 1, and Notker, *Gesta Karoli Magni* II, 15, ed. H.F. Haefele, MGH SRG 12 (Munich, 1980), p. 79. For prohibited degrees, see Nelson, 'Bertrada', in M. Becher and J. Jarnut eds, *Die Dynastiewechsel von 751* (Paderborn, 2004), pp. 93-108, at p. 97.

⁴⁹ Grant of Pippin and Bertrada to Prüm, MGH DD I, no. 16, pp. 21-5. On this and what follows, see Nelson, 'Bertrada', pp. 96-7, 106-7 (text of 762 charter).

⁵⁰ Fouracre, *The Age of Charles Martel*, p. 167; Airlie, 'Towards a Carolingian aristocracy', in Becher and Jarnut eds, *Dynastiewechsel*, p. 113.

⁵¹ Cf. above, n. 22.

⁵² Cathwulf, Letter to Charlemagne (c. 775), ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Epp. IV (Berlin, 1895), p. 502; see Nelson, 'Bertrada', pp. 97, 107. Fouracre, *Age of Charles Martel*, p. 171, points to a letter of Pope Zacharias to Boniface in 747, Boniface, *Epistolae*, no. 77, ed. M. Tangl, MGH Epp. selectae (Berlin, 1916), pp. 244-6, mentioning a request from Pippin for advice on the canon law of marriage, and suggests that Pippin was sounding out the possibility of divorcing Bertrada. But cf. Nelson, 'Bertrada', p. 103 (in addition to the letters there cited, see also Zacharias' letter to Pippin and the Frankish bishops, Codex Carolinus no. 3 (dated ?747), pp. 479-87, cc. 7, 12).

⁵³ I infer the date of Carloman's departure from a charter, his last, issued at Düren on 15 August, at a large assembly where, so I. Heidrich plausibly suggests, Carloman was given a formal farewell: Heidrich ed, *Die Urkunden der Arnulfinger* (Bad Münstereifel, 2001), no. 16, p. 96; cf. Carloman's charter *ibid.*, no. 15, pp. 92-4,

2 April 748, Bertrada was the mother of a healthy son, whom they named Charles, after his grandfather, already a name to conjure with, a name harking back not to the seventh-century past, as 'Drogo' did, but to very recent, heroic, family history. Thereafter, her status as wife was assured, and her husband's position much enhanced. For them, Drogo now became a potential problem, but their baby son's name already carried claims capable of trumping his.

Pippin now set about a diplomatic offensive, preparatory to ousting the last Merovingian. The effectiveness of these preparations was mirrored in 'very significant manipulation of the record' in after-years, so that 'the years 749 and 750 remain an almost complete historiographical blank in all of the sources'.⁵⁴ One thing we can infer from the following key piece of evidence is that Pippin was intent not just on becoming king himself, but also on Bertrada's becoming queen: 'Envoys were sent to the pope, with the counsel and consent of all the Franks, and once his authoritative response (*auctoritas*) had been received, Pippin, by the election of all the Franks to the seat of the kingdom, with the consecration of bishops and the submission of the lay magnates (*principes*), together with Queen Bertrada, as the order of antiquity requires, was raised to the kingdom.'⁵⁵ For present purposes, three things are worth stressing. First, the context, and outcome, make it inconceivable that Pippin's elevation depended on the pope's reply: the support of the Frankish bishops and aristocrats had already been secured before Pippin's envoys left for Rome, once Carloman's departure had given Pippin the window of opportunity he had been waiting for. Second, the highlighting of Bertrada's elevation alongside her husband was something that the Frankish elite had also authorised. They knew they were installing not just a new king but a new ruling family. Very probably, they, and certainly some of the clergy, were aware that later Visigothic kings had been anointed just beyond the horizon of memory. But – and this was symptomatic of the strong elective element in Visigothic monarchy – there had never been an anointed Visigothic queen. There was no Merovingian precedent for queenly anointing either, despite the Continuator's implied juxtaposition of Bertrada's consecration with 'the order of antiquity'. Pippin wanted and needed Bertrada's status to be asserted loud and clear, as his consort and, by implication the mother of heirs to the kingdom. No usurpation without legitimation. The third point has to do with the source of the key evidence, the Continuation of Fredegar. Like the *Annales regni Francorum*, the Continuation can be termed propaganda in that its story is strongly pro-Carolingian, but unlike the *Annales*, it cannot be discounted as a seriously retrospective, hence myth-tinged, product of Charlemagne's court in the 790s. To my mind, Roger Collins' suggestion that a 'First' Continuator wrote up to and including chapter 33, that is, completed his stint very soon after 751, for presentation to Pippin and Bertrada at the time of their elevation, is very attractive.⁵⁶ But even if you reject that on the grounds that chapter 34's evidence for a break at this point depends only on one manuscript, you may find persuasive a variant argument, that the whole work was completed soon after the date of the last entry, i.e. 768.⁵⁷ I shall return to it in a moment.

issued for the abbot of Stavelot at Wasseiges in the Hesbaye, on 6 June 746 or 747, attested by Drogo 'consenting'.

⁵⁴ R. Collins, 'Pippin III as Mayor of the Palace: the Evidence', in Becher and Jarnut eds, *Der Dynastiewechsel*, pp. 75-91, at p. 87.

⁵⁵ Continuator of Fredegar c. 33, ed. A. Kusternig, *Quellen zur Geschichte des 7. und 8. Jahrhunderts. Die Fortsetzungen der Chroniken des sogenannten Fedegar* (Darmstadt, 1982), p. 298.

⁵⁶ Collins, 'Deception and Misrepresentation in Early Eighth-Century Frankish Historiography. Two Case Studies', in J. Jarnut, U. Nonn and M. Richter eds, *Karl Martell und seiner Zeit* (Sigmaringen, 1994), pp. 227-247, esp. pp. 242-6.

⁵⁷ R. McKitterick, 'The Illusion of Royal Power in the Carolingian Annals', *English Historical Review* 115 (2000), 1-20, revd as 'Kingship and the writing of history', in *eadem*, *History and Memory in the Carolingian*

As for Bertrada herself, it would be an argument from hindsight, in other words, from what's known of her later activities, to suggest that she too pushed for this strengthening of her own position in the family, at court, and in the realm at large. Her agency on this point cannot be proven. But, given that her brother-in-law and her nephew Drogo still lived, potential rivals to her own offspring, there is nothing implausible in that suggestion. She already had produced another Charles, and in 751 she produced another Carloman, her second son. The naming of children, as noted, was always significant. The precise nature of the ritual 'elevation' is not clear cut. 'Consecration' could mean some kind of blessing. But it could also mean anointing with oil and Frankish clergy were engaged in new experiments with such rituals in the mid-eighth century.⁵⁸ If it is accepted on the evidence of the Continuator of Fredegar that Pippin's consecration meant an anointing, then, on the self-same evidence, so did Bertrada's. A crucial point was that bishops were involved: by extending such ritual recognition to the queen, the Frankish Church committed its collective support not just to a new king but to a new dynasty.

Late in 753, Pope Stephen II arrived in Francia. This was an unprecedented papal journey, but Stephen's arrival was expected, because the Frankish court itself had helped set it up.⁵⁹ The new governmental assertiveness and military effectiveness of the Lombard monarchy under kings Ratchis (744-9) and Aistulf (749-56),⁶⁰ culminating in the fall of Byzantine Ravenna to Aistulf in 751, required some rethinking of positions on the part of both Franks and popes. Aistulf himself negotiated with Frankish envoys to permit Stephen's journey, rejecting the option of closing the alpine passes. Pippin and Bertrada and their sons had come south from the Rhineland to Thionville, where they spent Christmas, when they heard that Stephen and his entourage had crossed the alps.⁶¹ Both papal and Frankish sources mention the high-profile role assigned to Bertrada's son Charles, who was sent out '100 miles' to meet the pope, in effect to receive him into the Frankish realm (the Franks, like the Lombards, knew about the symbolic significance of frontiers), and then escort him to Ponthion to meet his parents on 6 January.⁶² There were negotiations, for the aristocracy had to be won over to the idea of

World (Cambridge, 2004), pp. 133-55, at pp. 138-40; R. Collins, 'The "Reviser" Revisited: another look at the alternative version of the *Annales regni Francorum*', in A.C. Murray ed, *After Rome's Fall: Narrators and Sources of Early Medieval History. Essays presented to Walter Goffart* (Toronto, 1998), pp. 191-213.

⁵⁸ A. Angenendt, 'Das geistliche Bündnis der Päpste mit den Karolingern (754-796)', *Historisches Jahrbuch* 100 (1980), 1-94.

⁵⁹ *Vita Stephani II*, cc. 15, 18, 22-3, 26, *Le Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, revd edn C. Vogel, 3 vols (Paris, 1955-7), I, pp. 445-7.

⁶⁰ W. Pohl, 'Das Papsttum und die Langobarden', in Becher and Jarnut eds, *Der Dynastiewechsel*, pp. 145-61, at pp. 149-50.

⁶¹ *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 753, MS D1 (Vienna 473), ed. F. Kurze, MGH SRG (Hannover, 1895), p. 10, says the king spent Christmas at Thionville.

⁶² *Vita Stephani III*, c. 25, p. 446, says '100 [Roman] miles', so, c. 95 modern miles, or c. 150 km: approx. the distance from Thionville to the frontier of Burgundy. The Continuator of Fredegar c. 36, p. 300, confirms the journeys but gives no distance(s). The pope left Pavia on 15 November and got to St-Maurice, some 200 km. north-westward via the Mons Jovis (Great St-Bernard) Pass, on an unknown date. The distance from St-Maurice north-westwards to Ponthion is some 230 km. (rather further from St-Maurice to Thionville, c.260 km.). Moving south-south-westwards from Thionville, Charles and his retinue could have intersected with the pope near Langres, at the Burgundian frontier. For Pippin and the rest of the family, the distance from Thionville to Ponthion is c. 150 km.

Italian intervention.⁶³ Early in 754, at St-Denis where Stephen and his retinue were being lodged, Pippin and Bertrada and their sons, Charles and Carloman, were again consecrated, this time by the pope, very clearly reinforcing the new legitimacy conferred on this royal descent-line, as well as creating bonds of spiritual co-parenthood between the pope and both Pippin, as compater, and Bertrada, as commater.⁶⁴ This spiritual relationship was to extend to Stephen's successors, ex officio. It has to be admitted that the case for Bertrada's anointing is not clear-cut: the rhetorical fizz of one papal letter was not mirrored in the cooler prose of the papal biographer, who mentioned the anointings of Pippin and his sons, but was silent on the queen's. The negative evidence of that silence does not make a compelling argument against, though. The papacy was a notoriously conservative institution, and it is not hard to understand the reticence of the papal entourage in face of yet another flagrant innovation. There was no Old Testament warrant for a queen's anointing, nor any modern one either (later Visigothic queens are in general very poorly documented). Yet if ever there was a historic moment for papal daring, this was it. When it came to sounding a mighty paean for the new Frankish dynasty, Stephen II pulled out all the stops. In so doing, he served not only what he perceived as the papacy's interests, but those of Pippin and Bertrada too. Stephen understood that there would be no intervention without comprehensive legitimation for the new ruling family. Here was a meeting of minds.

But just as Frankish aristocrats were not all enthused by the prospect of an Italian adventure, so not all churchmen were persuaded that the novelty of a queenly anointing was warranted. That is why, with the single exception (to which I return) of the Continuator of Fredegar, eighth-century writers were slow to endorse by mentioning it the use of unction for Bertrada. Hence the faux-technical phrasing of the *Clausula de unctione Pippini regis* on that subject ('confirmed by grace with the seven-fold blessing of the Holy Spirit') constitutes to my mind one of the strongest reasons against believing that that text really belongs to its *soi-disant* date of 767. On Bertrada, the *Clausula* protests too much. In a sense, the construction of queenship involved as much suspension of disbelief as did the illusion of royal power.

Nevertheless, Bertrada had power that was real. Before Easter (14 April) 754, Pippin's brother Carloman, now a monk, had returned to Francia too, at Aistulf's instigation, according to Pope Stephen's biographer, to make a last attempt to dissuade Pippin from intervening directly in Lombardy,⁶⁵ which was precisely what, at an Easter assembly at Quierzy, Pippin committed himself and the Franks to doing. This presaged the end for Carloman, whose sons disappeared from the record at just this point. When in high summer, a Frankish army moved south in the pope's wake, with Carloman in tow, Bertrada went with it, whether because Pippin already planned some imposing ceremonial occasion at Pavia involving the pair of them in underwriting the Lombard king's concessions to the pope, or because he felt his position bolstered by the queen's presence. In the event, Bertrada did not leave Francia this

⁶³ The evidence of Einhard, *Vita Karoli* c. 6, p. 8, is late, but I take seriously, not least because it cuts so sharply against the grain of medieval and modern assumptions that the Franks were inherently aggressive, his comment that Pippin had difficulty in winning the Franks' endorsement for a campaign against the Lombards.

⁶⁴ Codex Carolinus no. 11 (757), p. 505. In this letter to Pippin, Pope Stephen recalled the consecrations of his sons, *cum christianissima eorum matre, excellentissima regina dulcissimaque coniuge, fidele Dei, spiritali nostra commatre*. See Nelson, 'Bertrada', 102, 108. Cf. Codex Carolinus no. 8 (756), p. 496, where Stephen implies that Pippin's *dulcissima coniunx, excellentissima regina et spiritalis nostra commater*, is more enthusiastic than her husband about delivering on promises given in Francia. In this and other wake-up calls, e.g. Codex Carolinus no. 10, p. 502, addressed to Pippin and his sons and *cunctus exercitus Francorum*, the pope's rhetorical chastising is reserved for the military men who are not coming to 'save' their spiritual mother, the Roman Church. Codex Carolinus no. 11, by contrast, expresses elation at the Franks' devotion to St Peter.

⁶⁵ *Vita Stephani II*, c. 30, *Liber Pontificalis* I, p. 449.

time, for Pippin fell ill at Vienne, and she stayed behind with him until his death on 17 August. Whatever her role, as nurse or gaoler, Bertrada clearly had her husband's complete confidence.⁶⁶

Bertrada's activity as queen is seldom recorded in any major narrative or annalistic source (though the more significant on the rare occasions when it is). One or two snippets of evidence seem indicative, however. Gervold, future abbot of St-Wandrille, according to the hagiographer of that monastery, was taken as a boy by his noble parents to the palace, trained there as a cleric and later served as one of Bertrada's chaplains. 'Thanks to her, he was granted the see of Evreux by the lord king Charles.'⁶⁷ The Life of Charlemagne's cousin Adalard, future author of *The Government of the Palace*, also describes him as a 'young tyro' at the palace, and implies that these young men were bound, apparently by oath, to loyal service to the queen.⁶⁸ Her own eldest son's debut in public life (so far as is known) was an assembly at Trigorium near Coblenz on 13 August 762 where Pippin and Bertrada together (not, pace the MGH editor, Pippin alone) gave lands to Prüm 'from properties in our ownership', and confirmed earlier gifts. The grant was subscribed by Pippin and by *coniux mea* Bertrada, and attested by both Charles and Carloman, 9 bishops, and 12 counts.⁶⁹

Later in the 760s, Bertrada's profile became markedly higher, as diplomacy began to rival war for the authors' attention. Fortunately, the two main narrative sources complement each other: the *Annales Regni Francorum*, but not the Continuator of Fredegar, reports the Council of Gentilly near Paris in 767, where envoys were received from Constantinople and from Rome, and Bertrada presumably was involved in organising their reception, and in discussing the possible marriage of her daughter Gisela with Leo IV, the young son of the Emperor Constantine V.⁷⁰ Perhaps more than Pippin, Bertrada, contemplating the prospect of her only daughter's one-way journey, understood the high stakes involved in what then seemed a likely dynastic link with Byzantium.

The Continuator gives a much fuller account of the latter part of that year than does the author of the *Annales regni Francorum*, including details about Bertrada's presence:

[The king], having summoned the whole army of the Franks, with his Queen Bertrada crossed the Loire confidently [*fiducialiter*] and reached Bourges, and ordered a palace to be built there. He commanded that the Mayfield [i.e. the big summer assembly] be held there, as was customary; and when he had taken counsel with his great men [*proceres*], he left the above-mentioned Queen Bertrada with the rest of the Franks and his faithful counts at Bourges. But the above-mentioned king with the rest of the Franks and his leading men [*optimates*] set off to pursue Waifar [duke of the

⁶⁶ *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 755, recte 754, p. 12.

⁶⁷ *Gesta sanctorum patrum Fontanellensis Coenobii*, eds. J. Lohier and J. Laporte (Rouen, 1936), XII, i, p. 86.

⁶⁸ *Vita Adalardi* c. 7, PL 120, col. 1511.

⁶⁹ MGH DD I, DD Pippini Regis no. 16, pp. 21-5. Note that the date is very close to the Feast of the Annunciation, and Prüm had Marian relics. Bertrada had also been mentioned as receiving monastic commemoration along with her husband in DD Pippini no. 3 (752), pp. 5-6.

⁷⁰ *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 767, p. 24, reports Gentilly, unmentioned by the Continuator. For the Byzantine marriage proposal, see Stephen III, Codex Carolinus no. 45 (770), p. 562. Much new light is thrown by M. McCormick, 'Textes, images et iconoclasme dans le cadre des relations entre Byzance et l'Occident carolingien', in *Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo, Settimane di studio del Centro italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 41 (Spoleto, 1994), pp. 95-162, at pp. 113-31; and *idem*, 'Pippin III, the Embassy of Caliph al Mansur, and the Mediterranean World', in Becher and Jarnut, *Der Dynastiewechsel*, pp. 221-41, at p. 221.

Aquitanians]. Since the above-mentioned king in his hunt for Waifar could not find him, for it was now winter, returned with all his forces to Bourges where he had left the above-mentioned Queen Bertrada.⁷¹

This chapter needs to be read against the background of the preceding seven years (covered by the Continuator in chapters 41-8). These describe increasingly violent conflict for rule over Aquitaine, an increasingly determined (*semper in se ipso robustior*) and angry Pippin, and increasingly fierce Frankish reprisals culminating in a huge *razzia* in 766.⁷² By fielding Bertrada at Bourges in 767, Pippin not only acknowledged her new prominence at court, but signalled a new turn in the campaign for rulership over Aquitaine. While ‘the whole army’ was sent back to winter in Burgundy, the king and queen wintered together at the new palace at Bourges, by implication guarded only by their military household, with bishops and priests to counsel them in what’s plausibly been suggested as the task of crafting a programme for the conciliation and government of Aquitaine, with the rights of churches foregrounded.⁷³ They celebrated Christmas and Epiphany *venerabiliter*: with due ecclesiastical ceremony.

In 768, the pattern was further elaborated, in ways illuminated by the Continuator and the author of the *Annales regni Francorum* between them. Pippin captured Waifar’s uncle Remistagnus and his wife, whom he sent to Bourges for trial and, in the uncle’s case, execution.⁷⁴ He also captured not Waifar himself, but Waifar’s mother, sister and nieces, who were held prisoner at Saintes.⁷⁵ Aquitanian resistance was collapsing comprehensively and Pippin received benignly (*benigniter*) those who came to him. Meanwhile Bertrada went from Bourges to Orleans and travelled by boat down the Loire to reach Champtoceaux, a fortified place on the south bank of the Loire some 35 km upstream from Nantes. Pippin interrupted his hunting-down of Waifar in the Perigord to ‘come to his queen at Champtoceaux’, in time for Easter. There, they received envoys from the Caliph bearing gifts, and gave their gifts in return. The problem of feeding a high-status Muslim deputation would no doubt have engaged the attention of the queen, as would the preparation of the Franks’ diplomatic gifts.⁷⁶ Bertrada, like Pippin, would have been glad that the sending of Frankish envoys to Baghdad in 764 had borne fruit. Close engagement with Aquitanian affairs had shown the Frankish court the importance of the frontier with Al-Andalus. Bertrada, like Pippin, would have been aware that the establishment of a fugitive branch of the Umayyad dynasty in Al-Andalus had made the new Abbasid caliph in Baghdad keen to talk peace and friendship with the Franks. Bertrada, perhaps more than Pippin, understood a queen’s potential as peace-maker. In 767-8, when embassies from, first Constantinople, then Baghdad reached the Frankish court, the Frankish queen entered on a crash course in the diplomacy of the Mediterranean world. This enlargement of the queen’s political vision proved timely.

⁷¹ Continuator of Fredegar c. 49, p. 318.

⁷² The story is told by the Continuator of Fredegar cc. 41-7, pp. 308-16, covering 760-3, and c. 48, p. 318, on 766, with a two-year relative respite (764-5); cf. *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 760-6. Bourges featured intermittently as the Franks’ centre of operations south of the Loire, Continuator of Fredegar cc. 41-3, 46-7, pp. 308-10, 314-6.

⁷³ On Pippin’s Aquitanian Capitulary, see McCormick, ‘Pippin III, the Embassy of Caliph al Mansur and the Mediterranean World’, pp. 229-30.

⁷⁴ Continuator of Fredegar c. 51, pp. 320-2.

⁷⁵ *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 768, p. 26. The capture of Waifar’s women is, curiously, not mentioned in the Continuator.

⁷⁶ McCormick, ‘Pippin III’, p. 236, notes that pork was the staple of the Frankish elite.

From Champtoceaux, Pippin returned to Saintes, with Bertrada. He left her there *cum familia*, that is, with the court.⁷⁷ Presumably, the queen was also responsible for while he finally saw to Waifar's disposal, engineering his murder by his own followers.⁷⁸ He then returned to Saintes, *ubi Bertrada regina resedebat, cum magno triumpho et victoria*.⁷⁹ The staging of conquest was a heavily gendered affair. It needed a queen at the sedes as well as a king returning there victorious. One thing that greatly enhanced the triumphal atmosphere was the presence of Waifar's women. The captured mother, sister and nieces of Waifar constituted prime tokens of Frankish victory, and it is easy to imagine that they were paraded at Saintes before the Frankish king and queen.

And then, still at Saintes, Pippin fell ill, and within weeks was dying. At this point, the Continuator of Fredegar mentions Charles for the first time since 754, his brother Carloman for the first time ever. The *Annales regni Francorum* mentions Charles, 'the first-born', fighting with his father in Aquitaine in 761. The Prum charter of 762 was attested by the two sons. There are no further mentions in the narrative sources, until, suddenly, the brothers are at their dying father's side at St-Denis, along with their mother, in September 768. In the years 767-8, the contrast with Bertrada is striking, especially where the Continuator is concerned. The inference that that author had a special interest in Bertrada in these years, or may even have intended to present his work to her, seems plausible – but, equally plausible, that Bertrada acquired a new standing in the closing year or two of her husband's lifetime.

From all this, Bertrada's role in the early years of her sons' reigns extended seamlessly. Whereas no pope had sent a letter to her personally before this, but only sent flattering messages in letters to Pippin and/or their sons, Stephen III addressed Bertrada and Charles (in that order) in a letter of 770.⁸⁰ Such a form of double-address implies both high honour for Bertrada and that she was residing with her elder son. The pope addressed her as *deo sacrata*, which implies that she formally took a widow's veil after September 768, hence acquiring a formal religious status that carried considerable esteem.⁸¹ Her sons, Charles and Carloman, became kings on the same day and, by their father's arrangements succeeded to two equal kingdoms, dividing Francia between them. The brothers seem never to have been on good terms.⁸² Already in 769, they were in dispute over the inheritance to Aquitaine, Charles claiming that it had been left to him, Carloman that they had equal shares in that province. When in 768 or 769 Charles called his first-born Pippin, Carloman in 770 gave his first-born the same name. Pope Stephen III was anxious about fraternal rivalry, relieved when he thought he had succeeded in stifling it: his letters to each of the brothers show the extent of their competing for power and influence in Rome. In c.775, Cathwulf, a probably Anglo-Saxon scholar seeking Charles' favour, wrote to congratulate the king on the eight 'peculiar

⁷⁷ See J.F. Niermeyer, *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden 1997), s.v. 'familia', senses 2, 6 and 7; the meaning in the Continuator's elite-vernacular Latin suggests the intimacy of the court, and contrasts with that of *familia regalis* in *De ordine palatii* c. 23, p. 76, l. 381 (there, a more formal and, in Carolingian documents more normal, meaning of peasant dependents).

⁷⁸ Continuator of Fredegar cc. 51-2, pp. 320-3.

⁷⁹ Continuator of Fredegar c. 52, 192, p. 322-3; cf. *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 768, p. 26.

⁸⁰ Codex Carolinus no. 46, p. 564.

⁸¹ Nelson, 'The wary widow', esp. pp. 90-4.

⁸² The evidence is laid out with compelling clarity by J. Jarnut, 'Ein Bruderkampf und seine Folgen: die Krise des Frankenreiches (768-771)', in G. Jenal and S. Haarländer eds, *Herrschaft, Kirche, Kultur. Beiträge zur Geschichte des Mittelalters. Festschrift für F. Prinz* (Stuttgart, 1993), pp. 165-76; cf. also Nelson, 'Making a Difference in Eighth-Century Politics: the Daughters of Desiderius', in A.C. Murray ed, *After Rome's Fall*, pp. 171-90, at pp. 180-2 (repr. eadem, *Courts, Elites*, chapter X).

blessings' bestowed on him by God: Blessing 1 was 'that you were conceived by God's response to your parents' special prayers, especially your mother's'; Blessing 2 was 'that you are the firstborn; Blessing 3 was 'that God preserved you from the plots of your brother'; Blessing 5 was, 'and this not the least sign of divine favour, that God carried him away from this kingdom to the other one and exalted you over the whole kingdom without any spilling of blood'.⁸³

In 770, Bertrada travelled to visit Carloman at his palace of Seltz in Alsace 'for the cause of peace', before going on to Bavaria en route for Italy 'where she achieved her purpose in going'.⁸⁴ That purpose is not spelled out in the *Annales regni Francorum*, but one author of more nearly contemporary annals says that 'Berta was Italy on account of the daughter of King Desiderius [of the Lombards]', while another adds that 'Bertrada brought Desiderius's daughter back to Francia'.⁸⁵ The more nearly-contemporary authors connect the visit with Desiderius' returning of disputed 'cities' in Italy to 'St. Peter', that is, the pope. Bertrada's visit to Seltz may have been a genuine attempt to conciliate her sons. Her visit to Bavaria was certainly directed towards closer ties with Duke Tassilo, a first cousin of Bertrada's sons and a potential threat to either or both. Tassilo's wife was another of Desiderius's daughters, and the ducal couple were on good terms with the Lombard king. A third daughter of Desiderius was the wife of the Duke Arichis of Benevento. Eighth-century relations between Franks and Lombards had generally been good until Pippin, stirred by the grievances of Pope Stephen II against Lombard acquisitiveness, had campaigned in Italy in the 750s, and his successor Paul I had battered Pippin with letters denouncing Lombard aggression against 'St. Peter's rights'. Hence Charles' decision to seek a Lombard bride was something unexpected, and certainly a diplomatic coup. Bertrada may well have been the framer of the policy, and she was certainly the key figure in effecting it, and squaring Pope Stephen III at the same time: a spectacular case of womanly agency.⁸⁶

Barely a year later, the marriage, and the alliance between Charles and Desiderius, were at an end. Charles repudiated his Lombard wife in order to marry someone who promised more political support north of the Alps, and specifically east of the Rhine, namely Hildegard. The death of Carloman on 4 December 771 had thrown all existing schemes into the melting-pot. The Lombard wife suffered a *damnatio memoriae* so severe that even the woman's name is unrecorded in any surviving text. The repercussions of Charles' action were far-reaching: great political instability in the short run, a new political configuration in the longer run. Though not the sole cause of the Frankish conquest of Italy, Charles' dishonouring of Desiderius's daughter and Desiderius' ensuing hostility were crucial links in the chain of events. What of Bertrada? She in her own way suffered a *damnatio memoriae*: Einhard says in his *Vita Karoli* that 'the one issue on which trouble ever arose between Charles and his mother was the divorce of King Desiderius's daughter, whom (Einhard repeats) he married at her urging'.⁸⁷

⁸³ Cathwulf's letter to Charles, ed. E. Dümmler, MGH Epp. IV (Berlin, 1895), p. 502.

⁸⁴ *Annales regni Francorum* s.a. 770, ed. Kurze, p. 30. Here and in the *Annales Petaviani*, the queen is called 'Berta'.

⁸⁵ *Annales Petaviani* s.a. 770, p. 13 ; *Annales Mosellani* s.a. 770, ed. C. Lappenberg, MGH SS XVI (Hannover, 1859), p. 496.

⁸⁶ Einhard, *Vita Karoli* c. 18, p. 22, says that Charles married the Lombard bride 'at the urging of his mother'.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* Einhard was writing over fifty years after the event, probably in the later 820s. But it is easier to credit his uniquely explicit account of the whole affair than to think of why he should have misrepresented it (he clearly did not invent it). Like one or two other elements in Einhard's description of Charlemagne's private life,

Bertrada may have been under a cloud in 772 and for some time afterwards. Yet Einhard himself says in general terms that Charlemagne ‘treated her with the greatest respect’; also that ‘she spent her old age in great honour with him’, and that ‘she died not long after [her daughter-in-law Hildegard’s] death [in 783], but had lived long enough to have seen three grandsons and the same number of granddaughters in her son’s house’. Einhard adds: ‘Charles saw to it that she was buried with great honour in St-Denis, the same church where his father lay’.⁸⁸ When in 802 Charles prescribed the form of the oath to be sworn to him by all his faithful men everywhere, he identified himself as ‘son of King Pippin and Queen Bertrada’.⁸⁹ His sister Gisela also, who was probably responsible for ensuring her mother’s liturgical commemoration at Chelles, identified herself in her grant to St-Denis as ‘most noble daughter of King Pippin and Queen Bertrada’.⁹⁰

There is no simple answer to the question of how far social and ideological structures allowed royal women access to power in Charlemagne’s remarkably eventful reign. Just as Pippin’s reign has to be appreciated as model and motor of much of what characterised his son’s, so Bertrada’s marital and queenly career sets the scene for Carolingian queenship, while raising doubts about whether that institutional-sounding abstract noun is *le mot juste*. Bertrada’s life in some ways demonstrates the gender-specific significance of the life-cycle, yet does not fit entirely easily into that model. It was not only as a widow, for instance, that she had agency. Charlemagne presided over no ‘social revolution’ in marital norms, let alone gender relations: the royal family, in some ways a beacon for others, was also in Charlemagne’s case the exception that proved the rule. It isn’t only because they are exceptionally well-documented that Charlemagne’s own sexual conduct and views of others’ conduct, seem exceptional. Family structures shaped, constrained, and enabled royal women as they did royal men. Within those structures, internal tensions and conflicts between men, within and across generations, were what most affected these lives. In the end, personal traits and personal relationships, within highly contingent circumstances that included windows of opportunity, do more than structures to explain the lived experiences, from joy or triumph to humiliation or disaster, of royal women in the reign of Charlemagne.⁹¹

notably his revelations about Charlemagne’s relationship with his daughters, it is part of an attempt to present his subject warts and all.

⁸⁸ Einhard, *Vita Karoli* c. 18, p. 23.

⁸⁹ MGH Capit. I, no. 34, p. 101.

⁹⁰ Above, p. 7.

⁹¹ I should like to express my warm thanks to Giulia Calvi for inviting me to the inspirational workshop at EU Florence, to Megan Metters for unfailing editorial efficiency and help, and to Serena Ferente, Susan Reynolds and Alice Rio, for collegial support and advice.

Naturales dominae: Female political authority in the Late Middle Ages

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Most medieval and early modern queens were foreigners, hence suspect. Queens experienced a radical version of the ordinary wife's position, the ambiguous status of one who throughout her life belongs to more than one family – her father's, her husband's and her children's – and has more than one identity. The timeless theme of the menacing 'foreignness' of the queen, like that of the king's 'wicked advisors', had such good currency in medieval and early modern Europe that it must have fulfilled important, if not perhaps structural, political needs.¹ It certainly contributed to the precariousness of women's political legitimacy. As it is well known, it also became the justification for one of the most debated pieces of legislation of medieval Europe, the so-called Salic Law.

[B]y falling into the feminine line it [the crown] can come into the power of a foreigner, a pernicious and dangerous thing, since a ruler from a foreign nation is of a different rearing and condition, of different customs, different language, and a different way of life from the men of the lands he comes to rule. He ordinarily, therefore, wishes to advance those of his nation, to grant them the most important authority in the handling of affairs, and to prefer them to honors and profits.²

The Savoyard jurist Claude De Seyssel wrote the above around 1515. The authenticity of the Salic Law was at the time disputed, and the dispute threatened to challenge the custom barring women from succession to the French crown. De Seyssel, who may have had his own doubts about the law's authenticity, shifted the focus from the problem of forgery to the wisdom of the law. He invoked the inherent 'foreignness' of the female line to the «nation», mindful as he was of the successive crises created within the realm of France in the past one and a half centuries by the claims of English kings.³

¹ The literature on medieval and early modern queenship is now an ocean, but on the theme of Jezebel and the 'evil foreign queen' see the pioneering essay by Janet Nelson, 'Queens as Jezebels: the careers of Brunhild and Balthild in Merovingian history', in Derek Baker (ed.), *Medieval Women. Essays dedicated and presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill*, (Oxford, 1978), pp. 31-78; now also in Janet Nelson, *Politics and Ritual in Early Medieval Europe* (London, 1986), pp. 1-48.

² Claude de Seyssel, *The Monarchy of France*, trans. J. H. Hexter, ed. Donald Kelley (New Haven, 1981), p. 48. «Car, tombant en ligne féminine, elle vient en main et pouvoir d'homme d'étrange nation, qui est chose pernicieuse et dangereuse : pourtant que celui qui vient de telle nation étrange est d'autre nourriture et condition et a autres moeurs, autre langage et autre façon de vivre que ceux du pays où il vient dominer. Et si veut communément avancer ceux de sa nation et leur bailler la plus grande et principale autorité au maniemment des affaires ; et davantage les préférer aux honneurs et profits».

³ There is a vast literature now on the Salic Law. See Ralph E. Giesey, "The Juristic Basis of Dynastic Right to the French Throne," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s., 51, no. 5 (1961): 3-47; Philippe Contamine, " 'Le royaume de France ne peut tomber en fille': Fondement, formulation et implication d'une théorie politique à la fin du Moyen Age," *Perspectives médiévales* 13 (1987): 67-81; Contamine, " 'Le royaume de France ne peut tomber en fille': Une théorie politique à la fin du Moyen Age," in *Institutionen und Geschichte: Theoretische Aspekte undmittelalterliche Befunde*, ed. Gert Melville (Cologne, 1992), 187-207; Jacques Krynen, *L'empire du roi: Idées et croyances politiques en France, XIIIe-XVe siècles* (Paris, 1993), 125-35; and Fanny Cosandey, *La reine de France: Symbole et pouvoir, XVe-XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 2000), 19-54. Sarah Hanley and Craig Taylor have in the last decade or so engaged in a fruitful debate about the gendered value of the Salic Law, with Hanley arguing that the forged law consecrated the marginalization of women from public authority, whereas Taylor sees it as primarily motivated by anti-English propaganda and in fact replacing

In the last two decades the debates surrounding French and English royal successions in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the whirlwind of polemical literature they generated have increasingly attracted scholars interested in the intersections between political history, the history of the state and women's/gender history.⁴ Despite an indisputable growth, the meeting of gender history and the political history of the last centuries of the Middle Ages is just beginning to define truly common research grounds as successfully as gender and social history or gender and religious history have done.⁵ The study of queenship is one of the obvious points of contact and has attracted an extraordinary amount of scholarship, but recent and indeed not-at-all-recent works focussing on the problem of women's property have shown that a gendered analysis of themes like citizenship or inheritance not only contributes important elements to the understanding of women's political agency but also directly addresses the supposed master narrative of the origins of 'modern' states in Europe.⁶

The problem of women's changing roles and opportunities within more or less developed state systems is as old as "the Woman Question" and August Bebel's 1879 *Woman under*

misogynistic arguments based on women's inferiority. Of Sarah Hanley see "Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place" and "The Fraudulent Salic Law" in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Montreuil *Changing Identities in Early Modern France*, ed. Michael Wolfe (Durham, NC, 1997), 78-94; and for the place of the Salic Law in her long term legal and gender perspective "The Family, the State, and the Law in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Ideology of Male Right versus an Early Theory of Natural Rights," *The Journal of Modern History* 78:2 (2006), 289-332. Of Craig Taylor see "The Salic Law and the Valois Succession to the French Crown," *French History* 15, no. 4 (2001): 358-77; and the more recent "The Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defense of Women in the Late Middle Ages," *French Historical Studies*, 29 (2006), 543-564.

⁴ In addition to the works cited in the note above on French successions see the equally vast scholarship available on gender and the implications of the succession of the Tudors Mary I and Elizabeth I in England: Paula Scalingi, "The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516-1607," *The Historian* 41, 1, (November 1978): 59-75; Constance Jordan, "Feminism and the Humanists: The Case of Sir Thomas Elyot's Defence of Good Women," *Renaissance Quarterly* 36, 2 (Summer 1983): 181-201; and "Women's Rule in Sixteenth Century British Political Thought," *Renaissance Quarterly* 40, 3 (Autumn 1987): 421-51; Patricia Ann-Lee, "A Body e Politique to Gouverne: Aylmer, Knox and the Debate on Queenship," *The Historian* 52 (February, 1990): 242-61; Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King* (Philadelphia, 1994); Judith Richards, "To Promote a Woman to Beare Rule": Talking of Queens in Mid-Tudor England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28,1 (1997): 100-21 and "Mary Tudor as 'Sole Quene'? Gendering Tudor Monarchy," *Historical Journal* 40, 1 (1997): 895-924; Anne McLaren, 'The quest for a king: Gender, marriage and succession in Elizabethan England', *Journal of British Studies*, vol 41 (2002), pp. 259-290.

⁵ See the Introduction and the survey essays by Bellavitis, Kirshner, Zarri and Rusconi collected in Giulia Calvi (ed.), *Innesti. Donne e genere nella storia sociale*, Rome 2004.

⁶ Literature on citizenship, inheritance and gender has predictably focussed on Flemish and German cities and the cities of northern and central Italy: see Martha Howell "Citizenship and Gender: Women's Political Status in Northern Medieval Cities", Mary Erlar and Maryanne Kowaleski (ed) *Women & power in the middle ages*, London 1988, 37-60; Law, Family, and Women: Toward a Legal Anthropology of Renaissance Italy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991; Maria Teresa Guerra Medici, *L'aria di città. Donne e diritti nel Comune medievale*, Naples 1996; Chojnacki, Stanley. "Daughters and Oligarchs: Gender and the Early Renaissance State." In *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*. Ed. Judith C. Brown & Robert C. Davis. New York: Longman, 1998, pp. 63-86; Ellen E. Kittell and Kurt Queller, "Whether man or woman": Gender Inclusivity in the Town Ordinances of Medieval Douai, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30.1 (2000) 63-100; Anna Bellavitis, *Identité, mariage, mobilité sociale. Citoyennes et citoyens à Venise au XVIe siècle*, Rome: École Française de Rome, 2001; Julius Kirshner, « Women married elsewhere. Gender and Citizenship in Italy,» in Anne Jacobsen Schutte, Thomas Kuehn, Silvana Seidel Menchi (eds.), *Time, Space and Women's Lives in Early Modern Europe (Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies LVII)*, Kirksville 2001, 117-149. For a recent review of the literature see Julius Kirshner, "Cittadinanza come genere nelle città-stato del Medioevo e del Rinascimento", in Giulia Calvi (ed.), *Innesti. Donne e genere nella storia sociale*, Rome 2004, 21-38.

Socialism.⁷ Did women gain or lose from the development of more elaborate state structures? Nineteenth-century socialists thought of course that the state, as an organization aimed at preserving the power of the propertied, was not good news for «civilized» women, particularly if compared to their remote matriarchal ancestors. For politics and property go together, insisted Engels, and the family is an expression of property arrangements.⁸

Feminist historians resumed the debate in the 1960s and 1970s utilizing some of its older elements. «Power through the family» is an effective, if a little undetermined, phrase popularized by the well-known essay by Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, first published in 1973 in *Feminist Studies* and then reprinted in 1988. McNamara and Wemple suggested in their essay that women had better chances of holding political power in the early middle ages and prior to *circa* the twelfth century, because women exercised power chiefly, if not exclusively, through the family and families were in that distant period more powerful.⁹

As McNamara has recently pointed out, the core thesis of their article owed much to the presupposition that a real shift occurred in the eleventh-twelfth centuries, towards a more pervasive, codified and rigid legal culture, which was at the same time the context and the product of the rise of states in Europe. McNamara has also acknowledged that the works of Georges Duby and David Herlihy on the transformation of the European family, which identified a movement towards a stronger notion of patrilinearity and lineage, reinforced their ideas about the worsening place of women in Western European society. «It seems clear to me that women were disadvantaged by the development of more centralized states, a more hierarchical church, and an urban society based on the money economy».¹⁰ McNamara's point was in many respects the same made by Joan Kelly in her 1977 "Did women have a Renaissance?": «The state, early capitalism, and the social relations formed by them impinged on the lives of Renaissance women in different ways ... but as a group, especially among the classes that dominated Italian urban life, women experienced a contraction of social and personal options».¹¹

Both positions were part of a general attempt by feminist thought to make sense of the trajectory of women in history. Their strength lay in that they showed how women's history could oppose a counter-narrative of decline to the master narrative of progress then dominant in historiography. Since then, historians of women have felt increasingly uncomfortable with such an idea, for women's necessary yet elusive golden age could not be found, the last shadow of the mythical age of matriarchy pursued by nineteenth-century feminists and some

⁷ On socialist debates on women and state forms see the comparative review essay by Irene Silverblatt, 'Women in states', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 17 (1988), pp. 427-460.

⁸ «The form of family corresponding to civilization and coming to definite supremacy with it is monogamy, the domination of the man over the woman, and the single family as the economic unit of society. The central link in civilized society is the state, which in all typical periods is without exception the state of the ruling class, and in all cases continues to be essentially a machine for holding down the oppressed, exploited class.»: Friedrich Engels, *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), with an introduction and notes by Eleanor Burke Leacock, New York 1972, 235.

⁹ Jo Ann McNamara and Suzanne Wemple, "The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe: 500-1100," *Feminist Studies*, 1 (1973), 126-41; also in *Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Erler and Maryanne Kowalewski (Athens, Georgia, 1988), 83-101.

¹⁰ Jo Ann McNamara, 'Women and power through the family revisited', in Mary Erler and Marianne Kowalewski, *Gendering the Master Narrative. Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca 2003, pp. 17-30, p. 22.

¹¹ "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koonz, and Susan Stuard, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977, pp. 137-74, p. 138.

twentieth-century archaeologists. Judith Bennett, a late medievalist, has famously and controversially proposed the paradigm of a 'history that stands still', where amidst apparently momentous changes the condition of women *vis à vis* men in reality stays the same, especially when one looks at basic indicators such as work conditions. «The particular constraints and boundaries» may vary, but the background is one of continuity.¹²

Although even Judith Bennett, initially at least, seemed to limit her argument to the period after the twelfth century, in fact the nature and extent of eleventh- and twelfth-century transformations or 'mutations' are also the object of a fierce debate, in which the history of women and the family are one of the major issues.¹³ Even though the specifics of the two debates are very different, whether one looks at the twelfth century or at the Renaissance the value of traditional chronological watersheds has proved particularly controversial among historians of women and gender.

In addition to this, McNamara's and Kelly's 'decline' narrative becomes less convincing once the history of the state has undergone a thorough revision. If a steady and progressive growth of central governments and bureaucracies, including ecclesiastical, and of the monetary economy is visible between the twelfth and the early fourteenth centuries, the situation after roughly 1350 looks quite different. Historians have pointed to the fact that perhaps the strongest master narrative in political history, the story of the 'origins of the state', is by no means a tale of linear progression.¹⁴

Indeed the late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries are dominated, everywhere in Europe, by instability. Popes, emperors, dynasties and republican regimes do not last; the growth of 'bureaucracies' as exemplified by the ever increasing production of written sources can be discontinuous. The late fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries were an era of plague, internal conflicts and bastard feudalism, which can neither be easily interpreted as the 'decline' of entities such as 'France', or 'republican liberty', nor as the Hegelian 'stern reluctant working' towards a higher and stronger form of political organization. Those decades were all about political experiment and competition, often a furious competition, among claimants to political authority, in which all possible sources of legitimacy, old and new, were mobilized, but virtually no one, not even the pope or the emperor, could be sure of possessing them all. Such a competition proved as creative as it was destructive.

It is within this context that one should understand the later Middle Ages as an 'age of

¹² Judith M. Bennett, "History that Stands Still": Women's work in the European past', *Feminist Studies*, 14 (1988), 269-84; see also the polemical exchange between Bridget Hill, 'Women's History: A Study In Change, Continuity Or Standing Still?' and Judith Bennett, 'Women's history: a study in continuity and change', in *Women's History Review*, 2 (1993), 5-22 and 173-184.

¹³ A summary of the established ideas about an eleventh-century 'mutation' with regard to women and the family, and a sceptical counterargument can be gained from Pauline Stafford, 'La mutation familiale: A Suitable Case for Caution' in J. Hill and M. Swan (eds), *The Community, The Family and the Saint. Patterns of Power in Early Medieval Europe* (Turnhout, 1998) p. 103-26.

¹⁴ The suggestions of Bernard Guénée preannounced what would happen in the 1970s, "Y a-t-il un Etat des XIVe et XVe siècles?", *Annales Economies, Sociétés, Civilisations* 26 (March-April 1971), 399-406 (the title of the article echoing Federico Chabod's 1956 *Y-a-t-il un Etat de la Renaissance?*). The historiographical debate on Italy has been particularly heated and theoretically complex, partly also because of the critical participation of microhistorians. See the papers collected in *The Origins of the State in Italy, 1300-1600*, ed. Julius Kirshner, Chicago, 1996, and particularly Giorgio Chittolini, "The 'Private,' the 'Public,' the State." 34-61; and Anthony Molho, *The State and Public Finance: A Hypothesis Based on the History of Late Medieval Florence*, 97-135.

heiresses'.¹⁵ A large number of women inheriting large and small *dominia* from their natal family were put at the centre of public attention and political debate. A remarkable proportion of these European female lords went on to become rulers of their domains during at least a portion of their life, helped by a biological fate that precociously removed from the scene their brothers and husbands. In fact, even if royal succession cannot be assumed to straightforwardly represent general trends, it seems significant that the period between the mid-fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries in Europe included an unprecedented number of queens regnant (as opposed to queens regents or consorts), after more than a century of uninterrupted male royal lineages. Some of them are better known than others, but Joanna I and Joanna II of Naples, Margaret I of Denmark, Mary I and Jadwiga I of Hungary-Poland, Isabel I of Castile, Mary I and Elizabeth I of England were all reigning in their own right.¹⁶

The pervasiveness and ambiguity of lordship in late medieval discourses and practices of state-building has attracted some of the best European political historiography.¹⁷ 'Bastard feudalism' is the label used by historians of late medieval England (whether or not there ever was a 'legitimate feudalism'), but a similar phenomenon has been identified in what is possibly the least classically 'feudal' of European political spaces, Italy. The meaning of lordship (*signoria* in Italian), its private/public political features and its relations with higher authorities have occupied historians of late medieval Italy for the last four decades. Because of Italy's privileged position in the historiography on the Renaissance as «a primal scene, both the exception and the rule, of modern politics», it is only mildly surprising that recent historiography on state-building in Italy, with its stress on the blurred boundaries between private and public political authority, has managed to earn itself an entirely uncalled-for postmodernist aura.¹⁸

If indeed late medieval/Renaissance Italy was an ideal laboratory of political legitimacy, it is somewhat disappointing that the question of women's rule – which goes straight to the heart of the problem of legitimacy – has taken so long to become the object of scholarly attention. It is certainly not because of lack of sources, since late medieval Italy fully deserves the reputation of a uniquely well documented time and space.

The careers of two Italian rulers, Joanna II queen of Naples and Bianca Maria Visconti duchess of Milan, are excellent illustrations of the insights that women's history can bring to the study of late medieval political authority and the interactions between the state and its competitors. Both women's political careers have failed to attract substantial historical

¹⁵ See the work, based on quantitative analysis, of Michel Nassiet, *Parenté, noblesse et états dynastiques. XVe-XVIe siècles*, (Paris 2000)

¹⁶ Armin Wolf, 'Reigning Queens in Medieval Europe: When, Where, and Why', in John Carmi Parsons (ed.), *Medieval Queenship*, New York 1993, 169-188, provides a list and the genealogical tables of all late medieval regnant queens.

¹⁷ Otto Brunner's *Land und Herrschaft. Grundfragen der territorialen Verfassungsgeschichte Österreichs im Mittelalter* (Wien, 1959), translated into Italian in 1983 and into English in 1992, has marked now three generations of late medieval historians. In the Italian context the concept of *signoria* carries a particular complexity, because the name designated urban 'despots', lords of lands, and the supreme office of government in communal constitutions: for a good recent survey see the essays collected in Federica Cengarle, Giorgio Chittolini, Gian Maria Varanini (eds.), *Poteri signorili e feudali nelle campagne dell'Italia settentrionale fra Tre e Quattrocento: fondamenti di legittimità e forme di esercizio. Atti del Convegno di studi* (Milano, 11-12 aprile 2003), Florence 2005.

¹⁸ Randolph Starn, 'A postmodern Renaissance?', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 60.1 (2007) 1-24, p. 13.

research in the last fifty years. On the other hand, they have both inspired a striking number of biographies by unprofessional historians and novelists (a state of affairs that will not overly surprise historians of famous women).¹⁹

Even a cursory look at their historiographical reputation can reveal the gender stereotypes at play, for Joanna and Bianca Maria were styled as opposite but recognizable ideals of female authority. Here is how Sabadino degli Arienti, the polite author of a collection of famous women's lives in the style of Boccaccio (*Gynevera de le clare donne*, 1492), usefully summarizes Joanna's and Bianca Maria's life stories as they were remembered a few decades after their deaths.²⁰

During her reign, following her immodest nature, [Joanna II] devoted much of her time to libidinous embraces, which decency forbids me to recount; because of such wickedness, if it wasn't that I think that some of her deeds should not remain unknown, I would have omitted her very name, lest I offend the minds of all modest and decent women and illustrious queens.

«Semiramis, wicked queen of Babylon» was the model – a relatively popular one after Boccaccio. Conflated with anecdotes about another queen Joanna, the actual Joanna II would contribute to the posterior and immensely popular image of the lustful, light-hearted (*lieta*), and murderous queen, whose unbridled erotic passion leads to disaster, a Neapolitan variation on the theme of the 'absurdity' and 'monstrosity' of female rule.²¹

Strikingly different is Bianca Maria's story, and not only because Sabadino was dedicating his work to Bianca's niece, Ginevra Sforza. «Sole child of the magnanimous Filippo, third duke of Milan, through her marriage, virtue, conduct, her illustrious deeds, beauty, modesty and

¹⁹ Apart from an astonishing amount of folk anecdotes and some really terrible English poetry ('The love prayer of Giovanna II Queen of Naples' by Henry Charles Lingham, *The Litany of Love and other Poems*, Melbourne 1900), Joanna II inspired a detailed scholarly biography by Nunzio Faraglia, *Storia della regina Giovanna II D'Angiò*, Lanciano 1904, beside some essays by Gennaro Maria Monti, *Nuovi Studi Angioini*, Trani 1937, pp. 353-435; and a section of Emile Léonard, *Les Angevins de Naples*, Paris 1954. Bianca Maria was the object of two biographies, both by unprofessional women historians, who worked on primary sources: Winifred Terni De Gregory, *Bianca Maria Visconti duchessa di Milano*, Bergamo 1940, and Lila Jahn, *Bianca Maria duchessa di Milano*, Milano 1941. Half a dozen derivative and quite repetitive biographies of both Joanna II and Bianca Maria have appeared in the second half of the twentieth century.

²⁰ On the Bolognese Sabadino degli Arienti (1445-1510) and his three works dedicated to women patrons see now Stephen Kolsky, *The Ghost of Boccaccio. Writings on Famous Women in Renaissance Italy*, Turnhout 2005, 63-109.

²¹ Giovanni Sabadino degli Arienti, *Gynevera de la clare donne*, a cura di Corrado Ricci e A. Bacchi della Lega, Bologna 1968 (fac-simile reproduction of the first edition, Bologna 1887), ch. 9 'De Zoanna Secunda Duchessa de Austria': «Et regnando, come costume de sua inpudica natura, fu molto dedita a li libidinosi abbracciamenti, quali per honestà a me narrare non lice; per la quale sceleragine certo se non fusse che alcuni suoi facti de memoria degni non me pare sotto scilenzio passare, non che quilli, ma pur el suo unico nome scripto haverèi, per tema non offendere li animi de le pudiche et oneste donne et de le illustre regine». Sabadino calls Joanna 'duchess of Austria', but this is not aimed at contesting her title of queen; Joanna was known as the 'duchessa d'Osterlich' before becoming the queen because of her previous marriage to William duke of Austria. On the monstrosity of Joanna's rule cf. the chronicler Andrea de Redusiis of Treviso: «Ipsa vero regina, seu quondam alia, sola Regno Apuliae dominatur, quod absurdum est, et monstro Aegyptiaco simillimum ab omnibus fastidendum. Non propter me dico, qui tam procul absum, sed propter Regni fastidium», in Andrea de Redusiis de Quero, *Chronicon tarvisinum ab anno MCCCLXVIII usque ad annum MCCCXXVIII*, in Ludovico Muratori (ed.), *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, vol. XIX (Milan, 1731), 822.

piety, she has given her excellent lineage immortal glory and benign reputation». ²² Besides her wifely and motherly qualities (her loyalty to an unfaithful but talented husband, her many children), Bianca Maria's «virtue» (courage, firmness) and her «counsel» are invariably the object of praise in several fifteenth-century historical and panegyric texts; Sabadino even calls her «sanctissima», emphasizing her devotion to Mary Queen of Heaven. Like a perfect Roman matron (Lavinia wife of Aeneas, for example) Bianca is a reassuring and entirely positive model of female authority.

Both images, of course, are hyperbolic; Sabadino's highly stereotypical characterization was there to counter the disturbing/ludicrous nature of a pantheon of powerful women, but not even this, more or less obliged, typecasting can completely elide how intriguing both Joanna and Bianca Maria were.

Joanna, or Giovanna, II of Anjou-Durazzo (1373-1435), queen of Naples (1414-1435), succeeded her brother Ladislas when she was already forty-one years old and a childless widow. The fact that she had no political experience and was unlikely to produce an heir does not seem to have bothered the Neapolitans and the barons of the kingdom, nor for that matter historians. ²³ Yet this most unusual of successions happened peacefully, in a realm that had been recently torn apart by civil wars, since the pious Anjous were a dynasty with many offshoots, and many potential claimants to the throne.

Joanna II's brother Ladislas, king of Naples and Hungary, had died suddenly, his army decimated by the plague under the walls of Florence, in 1414. Joanna's succession was certainly more acceptable by virtue of the precedent set by her aunt Joanna I, grand-daughter of Robert the Wise, queen of Naples from 1343 to 1382. Although at the time of her accession to the throne Joanna had a favourite – a younger Neapolitan called Pandolfello Alogo – her unmarried status constituted a problem and, whether reluctantly or not, Joanna accepted to evaluate several candidate husbands. The final choice, not so much hers as that of her Council, fell on James of Bourbon, count de la Marche, himself a distant relative but with no claims to the Neapolitan throne and the reputation of a perfect knight. They celebrated the marriage in Naples on 10 August 1415 and the Queen publicly invited her subjects to call James king.

If one follows the so-called *Diurnali del Duca di Monteleone*, a chronicle in vernacular penned, at least in part, during Joanna's reign by one or more authors close to the court, the inevitable threat presented by a king consort became immediately apparent.

Only a couple of months had passed, but «King James had by then the lordship, for he had put most castles of the kingdom in the hands of his Frenchmen», he had Joanna's favourite executed, most of her advisors imprisoned or removed from office, and «began to keep the

²² Sabadino degli Arienti, *Gynevera*, chapter 24 'De Biancha Maria Vesconte duchessa de Milano quarta': « Per giungere italice splendore al titolo de l'altissime donne, recordaremo Biancha Maria, unica figliuola del magnanimo Filippo Vesconte, duca terzo de Milano, la quale per copula matrimoniale, per virtute de animo, per costumi, per opere illustre, beleze, honestate et religione, ha dato a la sua preclara styrpe immortal gloria et benigna fama.».

²³ Although even Sabadino noticed that she «magnanimously took hold of the kingdom, and without any opposition made herself queen» («ella come magnanima tolse il regno, et senza contradizione se fece regina»).

Queen as his servant (*infantesca*) and did everything as it pleased him».²⁴

Confined in the castle, guarded by a French soldier, Joanna was prevented from meeting her subjects. Several delegations of Neapolitan aristocrats asked in vain to see her; a conspiracy to kill James was organized but failed. It was recounted that the leader of the conspiracy, Giulio Cesare da Capua, when asked by King James about the punishment deserved by those who try to kill their lord (*lo suo signiore*), had answered: «You are not my lord, because I have my lady (*la donna mia*), you are only her husband and I never swore allegiance to you».²⁵

The attempts to liberate Joanna from her confinement in the castle finally succeeded, and in a temptingly novelistic way. Invited to a marriage celebration, «she obtained to go and attend the dinner in the garden of a Florentine, near the market; there it was decided that she would not return to the castle and, once the Queen had finished to eat, the clamour arose in the market ‘Long live Milady the Queen!’ and there and then the whole of Naples was in arms, and the Queen, seeing that she was strong said: ‘Signori, by God do not abandon me, don’t let my husband treat me like this!’».²⁶

Some men of the Caracciolo family, their ‘friends’, and a large following of people accompanied Joanna to the Episcopal palace, where she spent the night and organized her counterattack, starting with the control of some urban fortresses. A couple of months later «the Queen had rearranged her court and council with Italians, expelling all the Frenchmen», put her husband under siege in the Castel dell’Ovo and defeated his armed guard. Eventually James resolved to leave Naples.²⁷

Joanna went on to govern alone («free, married and without husband» as Sabadino would put it) surrounded by several male and female advisors, barons, *condottieri*, churchmen, jurists, and closely assisted by her new favourite, Giovanni ‘Sergianni’ Caracciolo. In 1419 she secured the coronation from Martin V – the pope being the overlord of the Kingdom – after having sent an army to help him to regain control of Rome.

The lack of a designated successor, however, created a void that many were eager to fill. She addressed the problem of the succession in the same way of her predecessors: she adopted an heir. Her first choice was Alfonso V Trastamara, already king of Aragon and Sicily *di là dal Faro*, a powerful ally who would «help and defend her», or so she hoped. When Alfonso took residence in Naples, however, bringing with him a large retinue of ambitious Catalans, the

²⁴ *Diurnali del Duca di Monteleone*, ed. by M. Manfredi, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (2nd edition), 21.5 (1958), pp. 90-91: «et modo Re Jacobo horamai la signoria perché aveva la più parte deli castelli de lo Reame in mano de Fraciosi»; another manuscript the *Diurnali* (a copy in which the language and the syntax had been normalized) was published by Nunzio Faraglia in 1895.

²⁵ One of the typical dialogues that the court’s ‘maestro de casa’ Loise de Rosa (*Ricordi*, edited by Vittorio Formentin, Salerno 1999) inserts in his memoirs: «Dicite, signiure, chi volesse ammaczare lo suo signiore, che doverria patire?» ‘Vui lo dicite per me , vuy no mme site signiore, ca aio la donna mia, tu li sy marito et non ve aio may jurato umaio.»

²⁶ *Diurnali*, p. 93: «La Regina trattò de gire a mangiare la sera à lo mercato ad un giardino de uno fiorentino et la fo determinato che la Regina non tornasse più in lo castello et mangiato che ebbe la Regina così fo lo romore in mezo lo mercato dicendo viva madamma la Regina et lla all’hora tutta Napoli armata, et la Regina vedendose forte dixè Signori per dio no me abbandonate, ne fatime trattare così da mio marito». When the *Diurnali* mention ‘tutta Napoli’, they refer to the members of the Sedili, the organs of urban government in Neapolitan neighbourhoods.

²⁷ *Ibidem*: «Et mo’ la Regina have adirczata tutta sua corte et Consiglio de Italiani, cacciando tutti li Francisi».

mood changed. When he tried to imprison her again, Joanna repudiated him and adopted instead Louis of Anjou, of a cadet branch of the Anjous of Provence, who commanded the loyalty of the Angevin party in the kingdom. Louis proved more helpful and amenable than Alfonso, leading the Neapolitan fleet against the Aragonese and accepting to live in Calabria away from the queen, quietly awaiting his turn.

By the end of the queen's life in 1435, of all the men that had surrounded and occasionally tried to 'tyrannize' her, only Alfonso still had a slim chance to succeed (and succeed he did but after seven years of war). James de la Marche was in exile and would soon become a Franciscan («he was the one who was king, and then was prince, and then was count and then was nothing at all», the major-domo Loise de Rosa commented in his much sharper Neapolitan vernacular).²⁸ Both the formidable condottieri Sforza and Braccio da Montone had died on the battlefield and Louis of Anjou had succumbed to malaria. Dead also was the once all-powerful favourite and Grand Senechal Sergianni Caracciolo, victim of a court conspiracy known to the queen.



Figure 1. Andrea and Matteo Nofri of Florence and others, Monument to Ladislav of Durazzo, 1414-1428, Naples, San Giovanni a Carbonara (detail of the statues of Ladislav and Joanna sitting between Fides and Caritas).

Besides the sepulchre that she commissioned for her brother Ladislav (Figure 1), a grand late-gothic monument celebrating her own regal authority as much as her brother's, the most durable legacy of Joanna's reign was a piece of legislation concerning female succession to fiefs in the kingdom.

Another of our laws should be abolished. This is the law that in feudal successions favours the daughter of the firstborn against his brothers. This law dictated by the passions and loves of a

²⁸ Loise de Rosa, *Ricordi*: «Chisto fo chillo ca fo re e po' fo prencipe e po' fo conte e po' non fo niente, ca se fe' frate e fece bona fine, servo de Dio».

lustful queen, this law that transfers the goods of a house into another and impoverishes a brother to enrich a foreigner, this is the law that caused the ruin of your author's family, and bears its name. This is the *Prammatica Filangeria*.²⁹

The jurist Gaetano Filangieri wrote these lines in his enormously successful *The Science of Legislation*, published in 1780, republished several times in Italian and translated into all major European languages. A man of the Enlightenment, a reformer of the Church, a supporter of free trade and of a rational and humane judicial system, Filangieri was intolerant of any 'medieval' legal relic, but clearly the lustful queen Joanna and her *prammatica* evoked some deeply personal resentment.

Joanna issued the *prammatica de feudis* on 19 January 1418³⁰ as her final pronouncement over a case brought to the court by a woman, Caterina Filangieri, the wife of Joanna's favourite and Grand Senechal Sergianni Caracciolo. Caterina claimed the right to her paternal inheritance as the last surviving child of Giacomo Antonio Filangieri, against the pretensions of her paternal uncle Filippo and her cousin Matteo. The inheritance included the county of Avellino and a large collection of fiefs. The *prammatica*, later nicknamed *Filangeria*, provided the definitive and royally sanctioned interpretation of the constitution *de feudis* of Frederick II's *Constitutiones regni Siciliae*. It stated that in fiefs falling under Frankish law (as opposed to those under Lombard law) the sister inheriting from her brother took precedence over her father's male relatives, provided that she had not already received a portion of her brother's patrimony as dowry – in Caterina's case the dowry of 800 ounces of gold had been promised by her father but never paid.³¹

The *prammatica* has been regarded as the most blatant sign of Joanna's submissiveness to her Grand Senechal's private interests and, by implication, her lascivious and manipulable nature. Undoubtedly Sergianni Caracciolo benefited from the new law, for through his wife he planned to elevate his own house to the level of the great baronial lineages of the kingdom. This reading of the sentence, however, presupposes that the women involved in the dispute had no interests of their own – something that Gaetano Filangieri and most subsequent writers took for granted.

In fact the *prammatica* allowed Caterina Filangieri, not her husband, to become the Countess of Avellino, and the *domina* of a substantial number of lands; the integrity of the family's possessions had been already the object of a family dispute between Caterina's brothers and

²⁹ Gaetano Filangieri, *La scienza della legislazione e gli opuscoli scelti*, I, Livorno 1826, p. 221: «Un'altra legge converrebbe abolire presso di noi. Questa legge è quella che preferisce nella successione dei feudi la figlia del primogenito ai suoi fratelli. Questa legge dettata dalla passione e dall'amore di una voluttuosa regina, questa legge che traporta i beni di una casa in un'altra, e che impoverisce un fratello per arricchire un estraneo, questa legge è quella che ha cagionato la rovina della famiglia dell'autore e che ne porta il nome. Questa è la *Prammatica Filangeria*.»

³⁰ Alessio De Sariis, *Codice delle leggi del Regno di Napoli*, VI, 'De' Baroni e de' Feudi e della Ragione feudale', Naples 1795, pp. 41-42: «Eapropter tenore presentium et de nostra certa scientia et cum deliberatione nostri Consilii ac proprio motu gratia generalis legis condendae et interpretandae dictae constitutionis (ut de successione in § et coniugatae et dotatae) declaramus ac interpretamus dictam constitutionem 'ut de successione' intelligi et interpretari debere secundum veram opinionem quod in viventibus iure Francorum tunc soror excluditur a successione fratris quando ipsa soror fuerit maritata de bonis fratris de cuius successione agitur, alias non excluditur; In viventibus autem iure Langobardorum sufficit si fuerit maritata et dotata a communi patre vel a fratre dummodo habuerit dotes de paragio».

³¹ On Caterina Filangieri see Erasmo Ricca, *Discorso genealogico della famiglia Filangieri*, Naples 1863, 267-287; and Berardo Candia Gonzaga, *La Casa Filangieri*, Naples 1887, 115-123.

their uncles, represented respectively by Caterina's mother Francesca Sanfromondo and Caterina's grandmother Giovannella Minutolo, who had both been guardians of Caterina's brothers and father, respectively, for several difficult years.³² There is no reason to doubt that Caterina had her own interest in her family's patrimony, and a strong sense of family identity. Whereas Sergianni was buried in the urban Caracciolo chapel of San Giovanni a Carbonara in Naples, just behind the effigies of Ladislav and Joanna, for her own mausoleum Caterina, who outlived him, chose the twelfth-century monastery of Montevergine, perched on the mountains of her paternal lands.

Another element has surprisingly failed to attract historical consideration. The succession of Joanna to the throne of Naples had itself followed the same line later privileged in the *prammatica*, for the rights of her first cousin on her father's side, Leonardo of Durazzo, son of the youngest male child of King Charles III, who lived at the Portuguese court, were all but forgotten – one would search in vain for Leonardo's name in the Neapolitan chronicles. In fact one would also search in vain for a mention of the *prammatica* itself in contemporary chronicles – the law certainly did not provoke a scandal, and the queen had backed her interpretation with the opinion of a college of eminent jurists.

Rather than «altering the order of feudal succession», as the enlightened Filangieri lamented, the *prammatica de feudis* put in writing a practice that was perhaps contentious but certainly not aberrant.³³ The *prammatica* reveals assumptions about the boundaries of the family that diverged from strict patrilinearity; these were perhaps foreign to a jurist and baron like Filangieri in 1780, but not to his fifteenth-century ancestors.

A slightly younger contemporary of Joanna II, Filippo Maria Visconti, Duke of Milan from 1412 to 1447, shared a surprising number of characteristics with the Neapolitan queen, considering that, as one of the prototypical Italian despots of the Renaissance he stands at the opposite historiographical pole from the 'feeble and lustful' queen. Lustful he was too, mercurial and occasionally cruel, but this of course did not prevent him from being celebrated as a second founder of the Duchy of Milan. Like Joanna, Filippo Maria succeeded his brother, and like Joanna he did not have any offspring from his legitimate consorts. At his death in 1447, Filippo Maria left behind only a natural daughter from his favourite Agnese Del Maino, Bianca Maria (1425-1468), whom he had married to the military star of the time, the *condottiero* Francesco Sforza.

Bianca Maria, legitimated by her father in 1429, spent most of her adolescence with her mother Agnese in the castle of Abbiategrasso. She grew up not only as the daughter of the Duke of Milan, but also as a member of the Milanese urban aristocracy, since Agnese's family, the Del Maino, were one of Milan's most prominent clans. Both Bianca's paternal and maternal family identities proved essential in the convulsive three years between the death of Filippo Maria Visconti in August 1447 and the solemn ducal investiture of Francesco Sforza

³²See the documents summarized in Berardo Candia Gonzaga, *La Casa Filangieri*, pp. 115-120.

³³Female succession to fiefs in Italian jurisprudence was controversial but contemplated in a variety of contexts, even to the detriment of males' rights (in the case of 'maternal fiefs' or 'feminine fiefs'): see Cristina Danusso, 'La Donna e i feudi: Uno sguardo alla prassi successoria dell'Italia settentrionale fra Tre e Quattrocento', *Rivista di storia del diritto italiano*, 65 (1992), pp. 181-239; and Maria Teresa Guerra Medici, 'La successione delle figlie nel feudo. Il feudo materno e l'*opinio Baldi*', in C. Frova, M.G. Nico Ottaviani and S.Zucchini, *VI Centenario della morte di Baldo degli Ubaldi. 1400-2000*, Perugia 2005, pp. 263-288.

in March 1450.

The day after the death of the last Visconti the Milanese proclaimed the return of Milan to liberty and restored a version of the communal constitution, which they called *Ambrosiana Libertas*. Francesco and Bianca Maria were at the time travelling to Lombardy and the Milanese developments took them by surprise. No testament of Filippo Maria could be found; it is only too fitting that Filippo Maria had died in an *après moi le déluge* mood, deliberately leaving the field wide open to the ambitions of several claimants.³⁴

Bianca Maria's role in securing her husband's succession to the duchy is generally acknowledged as one of many factors at play, and not the decisive one. In some way historical interpretation still resonates with the echo of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century assessments of Francesco Sforza's career from soldier to prince as the epitome of the power of *virtù* and *fortuna* in Renaissance politics. Machiavelli consecrated Francesco Sforza as one of the rare modern *principi nuovi* that had succeeded in the most arduous task of both acquiring a state and maintaining it, «Francesco, by proper means and with great ability, from being a private person rose to be Duke of Milan, and that which he had acquired with a thousand anxieties he kept with little trouble».³⁵

Of course it would have irremediably spoiled his *exemplum* if Machiavelli had considered the political value of Francesco's marriage to Bianca Maria; but again Machiavelli generally ignored marriage as a political instrument. Even if we accept that Francesco was a 'new' prince, his wife certainly was not. Machiavelli did not overlook the fact that Francesco Sforza conquered Milan in 1450 with *«favori intrinseci»*, that is with the support of a faction, «I must not fail to warn a prince, who by means of secret favours has acquired a new state, that he must well consider the motives which induced those to favour him who did so».³⁶ Of such 'favours' so crucial for Francesco's victory, Bianca Maria was the single most important motive.

As it is well known, Francesco Sforza initially contented himself with the title of Captain General of the Milanese and fought with his own mercenary army for the republic he ultimately wished to subdue, until with a literal *volte-face* he turned against the Milanese Republic and put Milan under siege.

Francesco directly owed to Bianca Maria the control of the only two important cities-cum-districts of the duchy on which he could count throughout the war: Cremona, which was Bianca Maria's dowry and stayed loyal to the duchess, and Pavia, the rendition of which was negotiated in person by Bianca Maria's mother, Agnese Del Maino, who had her own political contacts there. More importantly, fragmentary but trustworthy references in sources

³⁴ On the problem of the succession to Filippo Maria Visconti see Daniele Giampietro, 'La pretesa donazione di Filippo Maria Visconti a Francesco Sforza', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, 3 (1876), 639-651; Fabio Cusin, 'L'impero e la successione degli Sforza ai Visconti', *Archivio Storico Lombardo*, Nuova Serie, 1 (1936), 3-116.

³⁵ *The Prince*, ch. 7 'Concerning New Principalities Which Are Acquired Either By The Arms Of Others Or By Good Fortune': «Francesco, per li debiti mezzi e con una gran virtù, di privato diventò duca di Milano; e quello che con mille affanni aveva acquistato, con poca fatica mantenne». On Sforza propaganda and historiography see Gary Ianziti, *Humanistic Historiography under the Sforzas: Politics and Propaganda in Fifteenth-Century Milan*, Oxford 1988.

³⁶ *The Prince*, ch. 21 'On fortresses': «E, poiché la materia lo ricerca, non voglio lasciare indietro ricordare a' principi, che hanno preso uno stato di nuovo mediante e favori intrinseci di quello, che considerino bene qual cagione abbi mosso quelli che lo hanno favorito, a favorirlo».

of the early 1450s hint at the role of Bianca Maria, both as a Visconti and as a Del Maino, in catalysing the allegiance of the Ghibellines in Milan, the very group that manoeuvred city assemblies in the early months of 1450, presenting Francesco Sforza's lordship as the only option to the extenuated but enraged Milanese.³⁷

Bianca Maria proved again essential in keeping things calm in the winter of 1460-61, when Francesco fell seriously ill and disgruntlement could have turned into armed revolt. One of the most prominent political enemies of the Sforza regime, the *condottiero* Jacopo Piccinino, who also had his 'internal favours' within the duchy, manifested a specific kind of allegiance to the duchess: «I would have never moved against the state of Milady, who sent me a message that I should remember my father's loyalty to her father and that she wanted to hold me in the same love and grace in which the revered memory of her father held my own quondam father».³⁸

Well aware of the precariousness of his position, Francesco Sforza sought to accumulate as many tokens of legitimacy for his rule as possible. His chancery fabricated a false testament by Filippo Maria Visconti, a half-hearted chicanery that was never seriously exploited; in accepting the Milanese '*capitoli*' of submission, which ratified the transfer of lordship, Francesco made sure that the document legally configured an investiture based on popular consent; envoys were sent to the Emperor pleading for the vicariate, in vain, and he entered a number of leagues with other Italian regimes – the most famous of which was the Italian League – mutually recognizing each other.

His marriage to Bianca Maria, however, remained one of Francesco's most important legal assets since the very beginning of his rule, for the two were invested together as Duke and Duchess of Milan. This explains why in 1463, when Francesco became lord of Genoa, Bianca Maria was not only explicitly mentioned in all the official documents, but asked to separately ratify her acceptance of the *capitoli* of submission with the Genoese.³⁹ Such a preoccupation did not arise solely from a general uncertainty about the legal nature of such transfers of sovereignty. Francesco was a 'new prince' also in Genoa, but the Genoese partly understood his lordship over their state as a continuation of the previous lordships of the kings of France and Filippo Maria Visconti. For Genoa too Francesco accumulated various titles of lordship, to which Bianca Maria was always associated, including a feudal investiture from the King of France and a written *instrumentum fidelitatis* signed by dozens of Genoese officials.

The events following Francesco Sforza's death in 1466 confirm both the very real nature of Bianca Maria's political authority and her awareness of it. Her firstborn Galeazzo Maria was in France when the news of his father's death reached him. Bianca Maria presided over the delicate moment of transition firmly and successfully; Galeazzo Maria arrived safely in Milan and no serious commotion was registered in the duchy. The two years of co-rule with Galeazzo, between 1466 and 1468, however, proved very difficult. Bianca Maria saw herself as duchess in her own right, not simply as a regent for Galeazzo Maria. The extent of her

³⁷ See my *Gli ultimi Guelfi. Passioni e identità politiche nell'Italia del secondo Quattrocento*, PhD thesis, European University Institute, Florence 2007, 32-94.

³⁸ For the context and the quote see Serena Ferente, *La sfortuna di Jacopo Piccinino. Storia dei bracceschi in Italia (1423-1465)*, Florence 2005, pp. 129-132: «Io non haveria mai facto contra lo stato de Madonna, la quale mandò a mi a dirme che io me volesse ricordare della fede paterna verso el patre, perché ella volea haverme in quello amore et gratia ch'el duca Filippo suo patre de recolenda memoria ebbe el quondam capitano mio patre»

³⁹ All the final documents sanctioning the transfer of *dominium* are published in Jean Dumont, *Corps Universel Diplomatique des Droits des Gens*, III, Amsterdam 1726, 305-315.

networks within the state apparatus became evident as soon as Galeazzo began to replace his mother's men with his own in several crucial councils and offices. Then the young duke famously imposed to the chancery the omission of his mother's name from the intitulations of official documents – except those referring to Genoa, which was at the time very unstable. Bianca Maria in response withdrew to her dotal city, Cremona, separated it from the duchy, and entertained parallel diplomatic contacts with Venice and the King of Naples.⁴⁰

Bianca Maria's death in 1468, after a long illness, brought all tensions to an end, at a stage in which the conflict with her firstborn was not irreparably public and could be covered up by a lavish funeral and a speech in good Latin. The clashes between Bianca and Galeazzo, documented by hundreds of letters, deserve a much more detailed analysis than I could hope to offer here. The basic points of contention, however, are known. Galeazzo's marriage with the Mantuan princess Dorotea Gonzaga, whom he rejected in favour of a wife of royal blood, Bonne of Savoy; the removal of some of Bianca Maria's most trusted advisors drawn from the Milanese urban aristocracy (including some of Bianca's maternal uncles); Galeazzo's generally 'egoistic' and 'ungenerous' conduct towards his brothers. These few elements suggest two different visions of statecraft: a European marriage alliance instead of an Italian one, advisors personally loyal to the prince instead of officials representing local elites, solitary rule instead of clan solidarity. Galeazzo Maria was perhaps a proto-absolutist prince, but his assassination at the hands of three young Milanese aristocrats in 1476 is hardly a proof of success.

On the contrary, whether it was a matter of womanly virtue, as later writers put it, or of what Machiavelli would call *natural affection*, the loyalty shown to Bianca Maria by subjects and enemies in the worst possible moments of crisis was itself the stuff of political legitimacy. Even if Francesco, like all 'foreign' princes, did inject a large number of his own 'foreign' men into the offices of the duchy, the active presence of Bianca Maria and her own networks prevented the discontent based on anti-foreign prejudice to translate into full-scale revolts. Precisely this crucial balance had been absent during the years of Joanna II's co-rule with her husband James of Bourbon.

It is not necessary to be a socialist to agree that in the Middle Ages property and politics went together. In fact property and political authority were one and the same: *dominium*. It was then in matters of transmission of property that women's political rights were shaped and challenged, whether in dynastic or communal constitutions.

A baron of the Kingdom of Naples was once reproached for shaming his family by refusing to obey «Queen Joanna, [his] natural *domina* (*donna naturale*)».⁴¹ The idea of a *dominium naturale*, and therefore of a *naturalis domina* increasingly underpinned the debates around both women's property rights and their fitness for rule. Joanna's and Bianca Maria's *dominia* were legitimate because they were natural and conformed to the 'nation' they governed. This

⁴⁰ See Franca Leverotti, 'Governare a modo e stillo de' Signori'. *Osservazioni in margine all'amministrazione della giustizia al tempo di Galeazzo Maria Sforza duca di Milano (1466-1476)*, Florence 1994, pp. 10-31.

⁴¹ *Diurnali*, p. 16: «[suo zio Raimondo Del Balzo] li disse più e più parole anpollose, dicendo maladetto da Dio foste tu nato per fare brigogna à tale casa quale è la nostra, per certo non si naturale di casa De Bauço, considerando à tanta crudelitate, quanto in te ha regnata et regna ad non volere obedire la Regina Joanna Donna naturale... et come malvaso huomo sei appellato traditore che veni contro la Donna tua, et da quest'ora innante non te appellare de casa De Bauzo.»

was of course the same argument that Claude De Seyssel used in praising the wisdom of women's exclusion by Salic Law.

Many late medieval heiresses are famous as tragic figures, prey of ruthless male relatives, relegated in the corners of the palace, removed from contact with their subjects. Anne of Bretagne and Juana 'the Mad' of Castile are two such princesses, whose suffering and humiliations were romantic but also very political. Anne and Juana in fact commanded a special and durable kind of loyalty, a *natural* allegiance that came to them from being the heirs of a ruling family. Their right to rule did not depend on a temporary and more or less ancillary position, as was the case with consorts or regents; the intrinsic vulnerability of a woman in power did not mean, in their cases, that their competitors could easily marginalize them. Anne's efforts, as queen consort of two kings of France and hereditary Duchess of Brittany, all went in the direction of keeping the duchy separated from the French kingdom; still today this nourishes her popular myth in Breton identity. Juana 'the Mad', daughter of Isabel queen of Castile – who again, by designating Juana as her heir instead of her husband Ferdinand, kept Castile separate from Aragon – despite long years of isolation and her well-known *locura*, in 1520 was sought after by the Comuneros rebels against her son Charles V; and Juana has had a different but equally strong success in Spanish pop culture.⁴²

The concept of a natural *dominium* refers, more or less tightly, to an idea of natural law. In her encompassing book on Renaissance feminist thought, Constance Jordan has argued that «there were very few ways to interpret contemporary concepts of natural law that were not prejudicial to woman»⁴³ but, as is often the case, it turns out that things were more complex than that. The concept of natural law was defined and redefined for centuries in several discursive communities (theologians, jurists, medics, Spiritual Franciscans, papalist, conciliarists and so on), which as we know shared the words but not necessarily their meaning.

The idea of a *dominium naturale* reveals typically late medieval concerns, for natural law was one of a small group of competing discourses of political legitimation. Theologians debating the origin of *dominium* in Christian and Aristotelian terms more often than not ended up imagining a form of primitive communism, while thirteenth-century canonists could affirm on the contrary that inheritance itself was granted by natural law, inasmuch as blood relations and the family were natural.⁴⁴ It was overwhelmingly by virtue of the latter, widely believed, principle of *naturale dominium* that a woman in a position of political authority in the late middle ages and in the early modern times could be accepted as the legitimate ruler.⁴⁵

Most people of course considered the inferiority of women an equally natural fact, which meant that women's natural rights to *dominium* were a residual kind of rights and applied

⁴² See the recent biography of Anne – who, to my knowledge, has not attracted the attention of gender historians – by George Minois, *Anne de Bretagne*, Paris 1999. On Juana's political agency see Bethany Aram, 'Juana "the Mad's" Signature: The Problem of Invoking Royal Authority, 1505-1507', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 2. (Summer, 1998), pp. 331-358.

⁴³ Constance Jordan, *Renaissance Feminism. Literary Texts and Political Models*, Ithaca 1990, p. 66.

⁴⁴ See Charles Reid, *Power over the Body, Equality in the Family. Rights and domestic relations in medieval Canon Law*, pp. 169-174.

⁴⁵ Thomas Kuehn, *Law, Family and Women. Toward a legal anthropology of Renaissance Italy*, Chicago 1991, pp. 238-258, has argued that women litigants in Florence could resort to the same ideology of the *honor familiae* that justified agnatic legal arrangements and therefore in some cases «emphasis on the agnatic line could have the effect of favouring women on that line over males in collateral lines» (p. 256).

only when fathers and brothers were out of the picture.⁴⁶ The cases of Joanna II and Bianca Maria Visconti, however, seem to indicate that blood and inheritance were ‘natural’ enough to enable some women to claim precedence over other male relatives, including their legitimate or adopted sons. Ultimately, their rights were natural because many – and not only university masters – believed that they were; this kind of consensus, in a period and in an area in which consensus over legitimate rule was difficult to obtain, was a precious thing indeed. The fact that it was often connected to ideas of ‘nation’ and local identity (and that indeed some late medieval heiresses did become national or regional heroines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) appears perhaps paradoxical to the reader of De Seyssel’s notes on the Salic Law or Filangieri’s on the *Prammatica de feudis*.

It could be that nature, moreover – not just any discourse but the cruel and deathly nature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – was the genuine origin of female political authority, as it seems that the new demographic profile of Europe worked slightly to women’s advantage, increasing the number of propertied women, heiresses and ‘*naturales dominae*’.⁴⁷

So the menacing ‘foreignness’ of the consort was not always gendered feminine. There was no male equivalent of Jezebel and cases of foreign male consorts were not exceedingly frequent, but they were frequent enough to allow us to identify the distrust and hatred they generated. Joanna’s *prammatica*, going in the opposite direction from Salic Law, or Bianca Maria’s ideas and style in the government of the duchy suggest that these women were well aware of the foundations of their right to *dominium* and capable of administering the political consensus that this earned them.

What ultimately matters, of course, is whether a relatively large (or, from another perspective, relatively small) group of women rulers means anything at all for women’s history in general, and it is difficult indeed not to be struck (or wearied) by the continuities of gender, in this like in other topics. Few disagreements among historians are more important than those about the relative weight of change and continuity, but neither continuity nor change is ever the whole story. For example the fortune of the new literary sub-genre inspired by Boccaccio’s *On Famous Womens*, whatever the secretly misogynistic strategies of male authors, cannot be seen in isolation from the increasingly common reality of female rule in late medieval Europe. Boccaccio produced the founding text for Joanna I of Naples (who was also the only ‘modern’ woman featuring in the collection) and Christine de Pizan wrote her response to Boccaccio, *The Book of the City of the Ladies*, in a court ruled by Queen Isabeau of Bavaria. The growing importance of courts in European politics is only part of the historical context of a literature that many scholars now bravely label proto-feminist; equally crucial is that the vast majority of fifteenth-century works belonging to this genre were composed for women publicly in a position of political authority. The soldier poet Antonio da Cornazzano was

⁴⁶ Ian MacLean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman. A study in the fortunes of scholasticism and medical science in European intellectual life*, Cambridge 1980, is an invaluable survey.

⁴⁷ Jeremy Goldberg has argued this for women workers in late medieval York (*Women, Work and Lifecycle in a Medieval Economy: Women in York and Yorkshire, c. 1300-1520*, Oxford 1992); Michel Nassiet came to similar conclusions looking at the aristocracy of the broad French area in *Parenté, noblesse et états dynastiques*. Whereas it is evident that the Black Death inaugurated another demographic regime in Europe, the aggregated effects on women as a group are understandably a much more controversial issue: for a robustly sceptical view see Samuel Cohn, "Women and Work in Renaissance Italy," in Judith C. Brown and Robert C. Davis, eds. *Gender and Society in Renaissance Italy*, London and New York 1998, 107-126.

preparing his own collection of famous women's lives for Bianca Maria Visconti when she died.⁴⁸

Seen in combination, the small brigade of (often annoyingly conservative) female rulers and the growing number of (often annoyingly conservative) books on famous women in fourteenth- to sixteenth-century Europe could have a fundamental value beyond that of fashioning a modest first historical pantheon of women worthies. History was increasingly functioning as a powerful source of political justification for everyone, both through the creation of precedents and the unveiling of the sheer variety of human experience. Nature and history, however, were not necessarily incompatible sources of justification, with nature working against women – in fact most of the time both worked against women. They could also both work in their favour.

⁴⁸ The unfinished 'De mulieribus admirandis' (1466-68) by Antonio da Cornazzano is the earlier example of the genre in Italian vernacula, and the only one in verses. It is still unpublished: the manuscript is in the Biblioteca Estense of Modena, Italiani, J, 6, 21.

Quelques réflexions sur les transmissions royales maternelles : La succession de Catherine de Médicis

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Toutes les monarchies européennes se sont constituées par accumulation d'héritage, les apports maternels venant s'ajouter aux biens paternels. Si la partie la plus visible de la composition patrimoniale, et en cela bien souvent la seule retenue, concerne la transmission masculine (le royaume, constitué du pouvoir et du domaine royal), l'accroissement territorial se fait pourtant, le plus souvent, par les femmes. L'importation, via les épouses, de droits, de pratiques et de biens venus d'ailleurs est un aspect non négligeable des constructions lignagères, y compris dans des dynasties qui, comme pour la France, excluent totalement les filles de la succession au trône. Dans la mesure où ce sont les femmes qui circulent, ce sont elles, aussi, qui favorisent les transferts de biens. L'inflexion patrilinéaire de règle dans l'ensemble des monarchies d'Europe, attribuant prioritairement le trône aux garçons, n'empêche donc pas la participation des femmes; elle contribue même, au contraire, à leur conférer à cet égard un rôle majeur. Cette contribution des princesses au renforcement dynastique se joue d'ailleurs à deux niveaux. Écartées au profit des mâles, les filles peuvent cependant devenir héritières lorsqu'elles n'ont pas de concurrent masculin, cette situation étant loin d'être exceptionnelle au regard de la démographie d'Ancien Régime.¹ Par ailleurs, la composition des lignages prend en compte les apports des père et mère dans la transmission du capital réalisée au niveau de l'héritier: les dynasties se conçoivent en effet dans la perspective du double héritage qui, concentré sur l'aîné de génération en génération, accroît un capital constitué de biens comme aussi, éléments importants de la transmission, de droits susceptibles d'être valorisés dans des configurations successorales propices.

Il s'agit ici de comprendre quels sont ces apports féminins, sur quels principes ils sont pensés dans les actes qui organisent la succession (contrat de mariage, testaments, etc.) et comment ils s'intègrent, ou bien échappent, aux lignages concernés. En d'autres termes, quel rôle peut avoir la reine dans les mécanismes de la transmission, et quel jeu joue-t-elle entre une conception familiale et une appréhension politique de son propre patrimoine?

Dans le fonctionnement monarchique de la France d'Ancien Régime, il convient de distinguer la puissance souveraine, qui revient au roi seul, de la puissance dynastique constituée d'un patrimoine complexe porté par les hommes et les femmes appartenant au lignage. Or bien souvent la confusion de ces deux niveaux conduit à avaliser une totale exclusion féminine des rouages de la royauté, ce que conforte la loi salique ou encore la disparition des noms et armes de la reine à la génération suivante. Pourtant, le recours que constituent les femmes (épouses, mères) dans les situations d'incapacité du roi, en période de régence en particulier, mais pas seulement, repose précisément sur leur aptitude à représenter la souveraineté, sur leur intégration, donc, à la dynastie dont elles sont partie prenantes par leur mariage.² Sans cette intégration, les apports dotaux et patrimoniaux ne pourraient être absorbés par la

¹ C'est toute la question des filles sans frère traitée par Michel NASSIET, *Parenté, noblesse et Etats dynastiques, XVe-XVIIe siècles*, Paris, Presses de l'EHESS, 2000, en particulier 2^e partie, chapitre IV.

² Fanny COSANDEY, *La reine de France, symbole et pouvoir*, Paris, Gallimard, 2000.

couronne. Il s'avère ainsi nécessaire de considérer ensemble les règles de dévolution du trône qui déterminent le fonctionnement monarchique et les politiques mises en œuvre pour assurer l'entrée définitive des biens de la reine dans le domaine royal, afin d'analyser la position royale féminine en termes de complémentarité dans une dynamique dynastique où le patrimoine comme la fonction des reines conditionnent la continuité. L'étude du règlement successoral de Catherine de Médicis éclaire sur la façon dont une reine de France pense son patrimoine et son lignage, comme elle informe aussi sur les stratégies développées par la couronne pour capter un héritage toujours susceptible de lui échapper.³

Principes d'inaliénabilité et de séparation des biens dans la couronne de France

« Toutes nos loix, toutes nos ordonnances confirmées par la coustume et Usance, declarent le Domaine de la Couronne sacré (c'est a dire hors du commerce des hommes) » affirme Girard, procureur général en la chambre des comptes, au début du XVII^e siècle.⁴ Un peu plus tard, l'avocat général Omer Talon précise: « parce que la Couronne, qui est toute ronde, ne reçoit jamais de section ni de démembrement ». ⁵ La monarchie, structurée par les lois fondamentales, est organisée de telle sorte que tout va à la couronne sans que rien ne puisse en sortir, si l'on suit ces théoriciens du pouvoir. Ainsi la loi salique permet-elle, finalement, d' « attache[r] la Couronne dans la France avec des clouds de diamans ». ⁶ Les apanages sont réservés aux fils de France, à l'exclusion des filles qui sont dotées en argent et renoncent à la succession de leurs parents, la dot constituant leur part d'héritage.⁷ Les biens maternels ne concernent donc pas les filles, du moins tant qu'il y a des garçons, comme le rapporte encore Girard parlant du mariage d'Elisabeth de France avec Philippe II d'Espagne. Pourvue à ses noces de 400 000 écus, la princesse abandonne « tous droicts paternels et maternels les droicts paternels n'estoient rien d'autant que son pere ne posseddoit que du Domaine de la couronne et pour le regard de ceulx de Catherine de Medicis sa mere au moien des substitution par son Contract de Mariage ny pouvoit rien pretendre au moins qu'apres le deceds de son frere qui estoient lors quatre vivants dont il y a eu trois Roys de suite [...], si apres le deceds de ses freres y pouvoit pretendre nonbstant les Renontiations c'est une autre question ». ⁸

Autre conséquence du principe d'inaliénabilité, le roi, héritier du domaine, est une personne publique.⁹ « La bource du Roi est celle du peuple », rappelle Du Tillet en 1578¹⁰ ; ce que Lefevre de la Planche résume en ces termes deux siècles après: « la loi de l'Etat est tellement

³ Les analyses présentées ici issues d'un dossier en chantier et doivent être considérées comme un travail d'étape.

⁴ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mss NAF. 7419, fol. 1.

⁵ Plaidoyé d'Omer Talon extrait des registres du Parlement, publié dans Jean DU FRESNE, Gervais ALLIOT, Henry LE GRAS et Edme PEPINGUE, *Journal des principales audiences du Parlement*, t. I, Paris, 1652, p. 320-336.

⁶ François de FERMINEAU, *Traicté des droicts de la monarchie, maison, Etat et Couronne de france*, Nismes, F. Martel, 1636, p. 26.

⁷ Françoise BARRY, *Les droits de la reine sous la Monarchie Française jusqu'en 1789*, Paris, éd. Donat-Montchrestien, 1932; Monique VALTAT, *Les contrats de mariage dans la famille royale en France au XVII^e siècle*, Paris, Picard, 1953.

⁸ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mss Fr. 18575, Fol. 5.

⁹ Emile CHENON, *Histoire générale du droit français public et privé des origines à 1815*, Paris, Sirey, 1926-1929, vol. II, p. 335-345; Gabriel LAPOINTE, *Histoire des institutions et des faits sociaux*, Paris, Montchrestien, édition de 1963, p. 384-389.

¹⁰ Jean DU TILLET, *Mémoires et Recherches*, Rouen, 1578, p. 138.

jalouse de tout ce qui peut séparer la personne privée du prince d'avec la personne publique, dont elle revêtit celui qui monte sur le trône [...] qu'elle ne reconnoit aucune possession, aucune propriété privée » au souverain.¹¹ Dans cette perspective, le régime de non-communauté des biens s'impose dans les contrats de mariage royaux. Non seulement une distinction est clairement établie entre les propres de la reine et le domaine de la couronne dont le roi a l'usufruit à titre d'héritier exclusif, mais il ne peut y avoir d'acquêt au cours de la vie conjugale.¹² L'épouse royale conserve ses biens; elle se comporte à cet égard comme une personne privée. Le bénéfice économique des alliances en est fragilisé d'autant, car il est conditionné par la présence de fils et la renonciation des filles.¹³ Faute d'enfant, les reines veuves reprennent leur dot; elles ou les héritiers d'un premier lit.¹⁴ Eléonore du Portugal transmet ainsi ses deniers dotaux à sa fille, l'infante du Portugal.

En revanche, en présence de garçons, le système paraît bien ordonné. Tandis que l'aîné recueille la succession, les princes cadets sont pourvus de terres en apanages, portions du domaine titrées qui marquent leur appartenance au trône de France. Les apanages étant attribués aux mâles en transmission masculine, ils sont destinés à revenir à la couronne, soit par extinction de la branche, soit par avènement de cette lignée au trône de France. Mariés sous le régime de la communauté, ces cadets absorbent plus facilement les héritages féminins qui, soumis ensuite aux règles de succession propres à l'apanage, ne sortent plus de la dynastie capétienne. Il est vrai que les biens des mères servent souvent à doter les cadets des princes du sang, mais cela ne fait que retarder leur intégration. Les modalités de transmission des biens des époux, dans le contrat de mariage d'Henri d'Orléans et de Catherine de Médicis, s'inscrivent tout à fait dans cette perspective. Il y est précisé que l'aîné des fils « aura la succession et hérédité paternelle et maternelle », à la réserve toutefois de la légitime dévolue à chacun des cadets. Les filles, pour leur part, doivent être dotées et mariées à hauteur de leur rang. Si l'aîné des fils se trouve sans héritier, les biens doivent revenir au frère le plus proche, et ainsi « par ordre successif toujours, et par droict de primogeniture ». Seule l'absence de mâle permet aux filles de se partager la succession, à l'exception de l'apanage qui retourne naturellement au domaine.¹⁵ Le fonctionnement de la monarchie française repose donc sur

¹¹ LEFEVRE DE LA PLANCHE, *Traité du domaine*, Paris, 1764-1765, livre XII, Chapitre III.

¹² Sur toute cette question, cf. Françoise BARRY, *Les droits de la reine...*, *op. cit.*

¹³ Totalemment exclues de la succession paternelle, les filles ne le sont pas forcément de la succession maternelle, sauf à être dotée et reconnaître ainsi toucher en avance d'hoirie leur part d'héritage. La renonciation qu'elles signent alors les détachent des droits et biens dont leurs mères peuvent être investies. Le mariage des filles de France ouvre ainsi la voie à une stricte transmission masculine de la succession maternelle.

¹⁴ Monique VALTAT, *Les contrats de mariage...*, *op.cit.* p. 98 et suiv.

¹⁵ Contrat de mariage d'Henri II et Catherine de Médicis du 27 octobre 1533, publié en latin par l'Abbé Casimir CHEVALIER, *Archives royales de Chenonceau. Debtes et créanciers de la Royne mere*, Paris, 1862, et en français, d'après le manuscrit de la Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Fr. 20 176, fol. 65, par Hector de LA FERRIERE, Gustave BAGUENAUT DE PUCHESSE, éd., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1880-1943, t. X, p. 478-484. Le texte dit précisément ceci : « Le premier filz qui sortira de ce maryage futur, pourveu qu'il soit apte aux armes et habile pour faire la guerre et qu'il ne soit point astraint à la prestrise, il heritera et aura la succession et heredité paternelle et maternelle, à la maniere, façon et forme qui sera escript cy-après, avec ceste condition toutesfois qu'il baillera et deslivra la legitime partye d'iceulx biens à ung chacuns de ses aultres freres restans ; mais, quant aux seurs, qu'il sera tenu aussy de les nourrir et colloquer à maryage, ainsy qu'il appartient, et les assigner de douaire, tant selon le nombre qu'elles seront, que aussy selon l'abondance et richesse des biens et abondance des meubles de l'heredité. Les premiers enfans qui seront legitimement sortis de ce present maryage estans destituez et privez d'enfans masles, sorty[s] legitimement dudict maryage, le frere plus prochain, après celluy qui n'aura pas eu d'enfans masle, succedera à l'heredité, pourveu qu'il ne soit point astraint par aucun lien ecclesiasticque et qu'il ne soit point inepte et inhabile aux armes : consequenment par ordre mort, l'aultre prendra les biens par ordre successif, tousjours et par droict de primogeniture ; gardé que, s'il advient qu'il n'y ait aultres enfans masles et que l'heredité de succession tombe et

une organisation familiale selon laquelle les garçons restent et font souche, les filles sortent et quittent le lignage en se mariant hors du royaume, et les reines entrent et s'intègrent à la dynastie régnante tout en conservant, par leurs noms et armoiries notamment, la trace de leurs origines.

La royauté est ainsi en mesure de maintenir l'intégralité du domaine royal. La propagande monarchique, relayée par la prose des juristes, présente ainsi un modèle particulièrement performant : la loi salique, propre à la France, confère à la couronne une position de force dans le jeu des alliances dynastiques, car les terres sont incapables de sortir, mais peuvent toujours entrer dans la composition du patrimoine royal. De fait, la dotation des fils en apanage entretient un vivier d'héritiers sans que les filles, dotées en argent, n'amputent le domaine. La mystique du sang, et la célébration de la lignée capétienne placée en position d'exception, est servie par un fonctionnement dynastico-politique qui maintient la famille royale dans une structure autonome alimentée par les deniers de la couronne. A cela s'ajoute le traitement accordé à la reine de France, devenue française par mariage, attachée à la famille royale par sa maternité, et tout entière consacrée à son nouveau royaume.¹⁶ Chaque membre de la famille capétienne contribue à renforcer la toute puissance royale, les princes par leur capacité à succéder, que justifie leur grandeur naturelle, les reines par le capital de dignité qui alimente le sang de France, et jusqu'aux filles qui fortifient par de belles alliances la politique étrangère du royaume.¹⁷ Cependant, une telle organisation dynastique, focalisée sur la transmission masculine, n'est pas sans faiblesse car elle entrave l'intégration du patrimoine royal féminin. Non-dit du principe d'inaliénabilité, l'absence de communauté entre époux qui en découle laisse, plus qu'ailleurs, la reine maîtresse de ses biens. Cela accroît d'autant la difficulté à obtenir l'héritage féminin.

Si, dans une configuration idéale que les propagandistes présentent comme la conséquence même de ce modèle parfait, la reine transmet tous ses biens à son fils (héritier du trône par ailleurs) et accroît, par son apport, les biens de la couronne, dans les faits cette modalité de la dévolution se présente rarement, car elle suppose une figure démographique marquée par la naissance d'un seul fils, voire d'un fils unique, pour éviter la division de l'héritage entre tous les enfants. Mené sur le long terme, le raisonnement paraît en revanche plus solide, et il faut considérer plusieurs générations pour comprendre l'ensemble du fonctionnement monarchique : même lorsque le roi ne reçoit rien directement de sa mère, il hérite de droits potentiels qui peuvent un jour être revendiqués, comme autant de profits à réaliser plus tard. Inscrits dans la profondeur du lignage, présents dans la mémoire familiale, ces droits se transmettent de père en fils jusqu'à ce qu'une situation dynastique favorable autorise leur activation. Le processus d'accumulation s'opère ainsi essentiellement sur des droits à succession, que le royaume de France peut toujours recueillir, mais dont il ne peut être dessaisi. Les historiens n'ont peut-être pas été assez attentifs à cet aspect du patrimoine qui contribue à la puissance d'une monarchie mais reste dans l'ombre et n'apparaît donc pas dans

advienne aux filles, que les filles partent et divisent les biens entre soy esgallement, fors et excepté icelle portion ou apanage qui sera sortye et provenue de la coronne et patrimoine des roys de France, lequel apanage [ou domaine] sera restitué et rendu d'où il estoit sorty et venu, selon la coustume et loy des François » (citation p. 481-482).

¹⁶ Fanny COSANDEY, *La reine de France...*, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Voir les commentaires de Scipion DUPLEIX à propos de la naissance d'Elizabeth de France par exemple, dans son *Histoire de Henry le Grand*, Paris, Claude Sonnius, 1632, p. 485.

le règlement des successions. Ce sont pourtant par les droits, bien plus que par un tracé géographique, que se marquent, pendant longtemps, les frontières du royaume.¹⁸

Dans l'histoire monarchique française, en particulier à l'époque moderne marquée par la disparition des grandes héritières féodales, l'apport des épouses et mères de roi se mesure donc moins à des biens qu'à une aptitude à transmettre des droits, c'est-à-dire à leurs espérances patrimoniales. La faveur portée à l'aînée des princesses dans les choix matrimoniaux en est une des manifestations. La difficulté réside dans l'ancrage de ces droits, puisqu'il s'agit chaque fois de parvenir à reporter ce potentiel successoral sur le fils. L'exemple de Catherine de Médicis montre que rien n'est joué d'avance, et que la monarchie, très attentive au devenir de la succession, développe pour s'en assurer un trésor d'ingéniosité juridique, depuis le contrat matrimonial jusqu'au règlement final, deux générations plus tard.

La succession de Catherine de Médicis

A ne considérer que les apports dotaux inscrits dans le contrat de mariage, Catherine de Médicis ne semble pas représenter une alliance très prestigieuse. Orpheline de bonne heure, la fille de Laurent de Médicis et de Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne¹⁹ apporte dans la corbeille de mariée 100 000 écus d'or, auxquels s'ajoutent 30 000 écus en échange de ses droits sur l'héritage de son père (cédés au pape Clément VII²⁰), les revenus du comté d'Auvergne qu'elle tient de sa mère, ainsi que des bijoux estimés à 27 900 écus d'or.²¹ A la même époque, les filles de France mariées à des souverains étrangers sont généralement dotées à hauteur de 400 000 écus, mais est vrai que la princesse de Toscane épouse alors un cadet. Pour modeste que soit sa dot, Catherine n'est pas si démunie: fille unique du duc d'Urbin, elle conserve des espérances sur les biens italiens, la renonciation signée à ses noces n'étant jamais une exclusion absolue. L'alliance d'un fils de France avec cette héritière florentine participe des ambitions italiennes de François Ier.²² Mieux pourvue que ne le laisse apparaître la composition de la dot, la jeune mariée se trouve cependant rapidement dans une position fragile, tant à cause de sa stérilité, dans les dix premières années de sa vie conjugale, que par le faible apport dotal qui, seul, contribue par ses revenus à alimenter les finances du royaume.²³ Par ailleurs, François Ier, déçu dans ses projets italiens par la mort prématurée de

¹⁸ Daniel NORDMAN, *Frontières de France. De l'espace au territoire, XVIe-XIXe siècles*, Paris, Gallimard, 1998.

¹⁹ Sur les origines de cette maison, et les biens que Madeleine transmet à sa fille, on peut voir Jean-Hyppolite MARIEJOL, *Catherine de Médicis (1519-1589)*, Paris, Hachette, 1920, chapitre I.

²⁰ A l'exclusion du duché d'Urbin, dont la possession est reconnue à Catherine, même s'il se trouve alors occupé par Francesco Maria della Rovere. Voir le contrat de mariage, et les analyses de Lucien ROMIER, *Les origines politiques des Guerres de Religion*, Paris, Perrin, 1913, t. I, p. 13.

²¹ Sur la dot de Catherine de Médicis, ses droits et sa succession, cf. la thèse de Chantal Turbide, qui expose très clairement l'ensemble de cette question: Chantal TURBIDE, *Les collections artistiques de Catherine de Médicis*, Thèse de doctorat de l'université d'Aix-Marseille I, sous la direction de Martine Vasselin, soutenue le 1^{er} juillet 2002. Je remercie l'auteur de m'avoir communiqué un exemplaire de son travail.

²² Les articles secrets, rédigés lors des premières négociations du mariage, deux ans auparavant, révèlent clairement la politique italienne que sert cette alliance. Cf. Hector de LA FERRIERE, Gustave BAGUENAUT DE PUCHESSE, éd., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1880-1943, t. X, p. 484-485. La célébration des noces par les poètes de cour ne laissent d'ailleurs aucun doute sur le succès de cette alliance, telles ces strophes de Jean Peletier: « Pren-la pour royne et avec nous t'allie/Affin que soit de France et d'Italie/Un seul royaume, une royne et un roy ». Jean PELETIER, *Œuvres poetiques*, éd. Vascosan, 1547, cité par Lucien ROMIER, *Les origines politiques...*, op. cit., t. I, p. 13.

²³ Cf. Françoise BARRY, *Les droits de la reine...*, op. cit.

Clément VII, se plaint d'avoir eu « la fille toute nue ».²⁴ L'opération matrimoniale pouvait paraître décevante. Un demi-siècle plus tard, la situation de la reine mère est tout autre. Car au regard de la succession, l'apport de la princesse s'avère beaucoup plus important. Seulement, il s'agit de ses propres, et le régime matrimonial ne laisse au roi aucune participation à ce patrimoine. Considérée comme une personne privée quant à la gestion de ses propres, la reine en dispose à sa guise. Le testament de Catherine de Médicis en témoigne; il reflète ce faisant toute la difficulté, pour la couronne de France, à accaparer les biens royaux féminins, comme il révèle, aussi, la conception que la souveraine se fait de la continuité lignagère et dynastique.

Il convient ici de signaler la situation familiale particulière d'Henri II et de Catherine de Médicis. Les époux royaux ont eu quatre fils et trois filles parvenus à l'âge adulte. Largement pourvus d'héritiers quand ils marient leurs filles, ils dotent dignement les princesses en spécifiant, par une clause insérée dans le contrat de mariage, la renonciation à l'héritage paternel et maternel au profit des mâles. La transmission des biens de Catherine semble assurée à la couronne par la pléthore de garçon. Mais à la mort de la reine mère, en janvier 1589, il ne reste qu'un fils vivant, sans postérité, et la stérilité de la reine Louise laisse peu d'espoir de descendance. L'héritier du trône serait alors Henri de Navarre, marié à Marguerite de Valois,²⁵ lui-même sans enfant de cette union. La couronne, dans cette perspective, est destinée à une autre dynastie, celle des Bourbons. Du sang de Catherine et d'Henri II, il n'y a plus guère que les filles ou leurs enfants, ainsi qu'un fils illégitime de Charles IX, seul descendant mâle mais incapable de succéder au trône pour cause de bâtardise.

Il y a là une dissociation entre les intérêts dynastiques des Valois, sur le point de s'éteindre, et les intérêts politiques de la couronne, encore représentés par Henri III, et très probablement perpétués par la branche des Bourbons. Dans son testament, Catherine de Médicis tient compte de toutes ces considérations; l'organisation de sa succession en témoigne. Outre des dons multiples aux gens de sa maison, la reine cède à Christine de Lorraine, sa petite-fille,²⁶ « pour l'avoir nourrie comme sa propre fille », « tous et chacuns biens, droicts, noms, raisons et actions qu'elle a et lui appartient [...] en Italie, ensemble des droits qu'elle peut prétendre au duché d'Urbain ».²⁷ A la reine Louise²⁸, elle remet sa terre et seigneurie de Chenonceaux. Au grand prieur de France, Charles, fils bâtard de Charles IX, elle confie ses biens maternels en Auvergne. Et au roi son fils, elle accorde le reste de ses biens, essentiellement des dettes, tout en l'instituant son unique héritier,²⁹ afin, précise-t-elle, « qu'ils lui soient propres comme à une personne privée sans qu'ils puissent être dictés unis et annexés à la couronne de France ».³⁰

La reine ne cède donc rien à la couronne, et s'attache à ce que rien ne tombe dans l'escarcelle de la couronne. En revanche, elle répartit ses biens français et italiens de telle sorte qu'ils restent dans le giron familial de son sang. Marguerite de France, sans descendance, n'obtient

²⁴ Jean-Hyppolite MARIEJOL, *Catherine de Médicis (1519-1589)*, Paris, Hachette, 1920, p. 28.

²⁵ Dernière fille d'Henri II et de Catherine de Médicis.

²⁶ Née en 1565, elle est la fille de Claude de France et du duc de Lorraine.

²⁷ Testament de Catherine de Médicis. Il circule énormément de copies de ce document. Il a été reproduit dans Abbé Casimir CHEVALIER, *Archives royales, op. cit.*, ou encore dans Hector de LA FERRIERE, Gustave BAGUENAUT DE PUCHESSE, éd., *Lettres de Catherine de Médicis*, Paris, Imprimerie Nationale, 1880-1943, t. IX, p. 494-498.

²⁸ Épouse du roi Henri III le dernier fils vivant de Catherine de Médicis.

²⁹ Cela signifie qu'il est apte à recueillir les legs de ceux qui ne peuvent entrer en possession de leur part.

³⁰ Testament de Catherine de Médicis.

rien; Christine de Lorraine promise au grand-duc de Toscane reçoit les biens italiens; Charles, écarté de la couronne, est investi des domaines français; son fils dernier survivant n'est héritier qu'à titre privé. La couronne, promise à un autre lignage, est soigneusement tenue à l'écart d'une succession dévolue à la descendance directe de la reine, dans une conception strictement familiale et lignagère du patrimoine. Ce faisant, non seulement Catherine divise son héritage et annule ce que le mariage de ses parents avait constitué, mais elle s'applique également à reconstituer les lignées paternelle et maternelle, celle de Madeleine de la Tour d'Auvergne par Charles de Valois, celle de Laurent de Médicis par Christine de Lorraine, fiancée à Ferdinand de Médicis. Par ailleurs, elle valorise, par cette opération, des droits qu'elle n'a pu réellement obtenir (ces droits qu'elle peut prétendre, comme le précise le testament), et réalise un capital resté une potentialité.

De fait, la situation de ses biens en Italie est loin d'être simple. Un bref rappel historique donne la mesure de cette complexité. En procès avec Marguerite, duchesse de Parme,³¹ pour récupérer l'héritage paternel, la reine refuse, en 1560, un projet de transaction car elle réclame la pleine propriété de ses biens-fonds en Toscane et à Rome. En 1582 le pape, par l'intermédiaire du tribunal de la Rote, donne raison à Catherine, mais à la mort de Marguerite, en 1586, la décision de justice n'est toujours pas exécutée. Le grand-duc de Toscane François de Médicis s'approprie alors les biens de Catherine et les transmet à son frère Ferdinand. La reine mère ne parvient donc pas à entrer en possession de son héritage florentin.³² Mais, en négociant le mariage de sa petite-fille Christine avec Ferdinand, elle garnit la corbeille de mariée de ces droits italiens, qui lui reviennent sans qu'elle puisse en disposer. Elle offre ainsi, par cette alliance, de renoncer à toutes les prétentions qu'elle pouvait avoir sur les biens des Médicis. Avant de mourir, elle « fait cession de ses droits sur les biens de la Toscane et de Rome, et passé pour dot en faveur de la jeune Princesse, deux cens mille écus auxquels ils avoient été évalués. Outre cela, elle lui laissoit par testament la moitié de son palais et du mobilier qui s'y trouvoit. Elle y joignoit encore les droits qu'elle avoit sur le duché d'Urbin, et dont elle pouvoit disposer par dernière volonté, en vertu de l'investiture que Léon X en avoit accordé à Laurent de Médicis son père ».³³

Catherine de Médicis, par ses dispositions testamentaires, fait coup double en opérant un tour de passe-passe de droits qui lui échappent mais dont elle peut se targuer. C'est une façon habile de réaliser son héritage, et donne la mesure de l'importance des droits, obtenus finalement à la génération suivante, et capables de constituer une part essentielle d'une dot prestigieuse. C'est aussi l'occasion, pour une Médicis, de renforcer le prestige d'une maison dont elle est issue en réintégrant le patrimoine de Laurent par le truchement d'une alliance avec une princesse considérée comme fille de France. Ultime héritière de la branche aînée, elle restitue à la branche cadette ce qui lui fait défaut en termes de légitimité. Elle-même épouse d'un cadet, Catherine élève la dynastie des Médicis au niveau de puissance capable de disputer aux monarchies européennes une enfant de France. La qualité et l'importance de la

³¹ Veuve d'Alexandre de Médicis, elle épouse en secondes noces le duc de Parme Octave Farnèse, mais conserve l'héritage de son premier mari.

³² Sur cette question, voir la synthèse présentée par Chantal TURBIDE, *Les collections...*, *op. cit.*, chapitre II.

³³ Riguccio GALLUZZI, *Histoire du Grand Duché de Toscane sous le gouvernement des Médicis*, t. V, Paris, 1772, p. 27-28. Non compris dans la renonciation qu'elle signa en faveur du pape Clément VII, le duché d'Urbin ne cessa d'être revendiqué par Catherine; elle en conserva toujours le titre, sans pouvoir en jouir jusqu'à ce qu'elle le cède à sa petite fille Lorraine. Et Galluzzi de conclure: « Ce fut donc ainsi que passèrent à Christine, et de son chef aux fils du Grand-Duc Ferdinand, les prétentions qu'elle avoit sur le duché d'Urbin ; prétentions qui, négligées, on n'étant pas soutenues par les armes, sont restées sans force et sans vigueur, dans les occasions même les plus favorables de les faire valoir » (p. 30).

dot de Christine de Lorraine la place davantage au rang de princesse royale que de duchesse de Lorraine. D'ailleurs, encore en 1590, lorsque le grand-duc charge Gondi de réclamer à Henri IV les sommes assignées par Henri III au paiement de la dot, il est précisé que c'est « à titre de fille de France »,³⁴ et en cela imputé à la couronne. Par ce bouclage d'alliance, les Florentins profitent de l'ascension de Catherine, d'autant que la glorification des Médicis passe traditionnellement par l'exaltation des ancêtres dont les plus prestigieux viennent en ligne féminine.³⁵

Si Catherine entreprend de refonder la dynastie des Médicis par la reconstitution de l'héritage, elle entend également rétablir la lignée maternelle des La Tour d'Auvergne en cédant ses biens auvergnats au seul de ses descendants capable d'indépendance vis-à-vis de la couronne. Charles d'Angoulême prend alors les noms et titres de comte d'Auvergne et fait ainsi revivre une tige autrement disparue. En dehors des considérations affectives invoquées pour justifier un tel choix, la stratégie patrimoniale de la reine mère consiste à dégager son héritage du domaine royal et éviter ainsi qu'il ne tombe dans l'anonymat des biens de la couronne, lui faisant perdre du même coup toute identité lignagère. C'est d'ailleurs dans ce même objectif que Catherine précise que le roi lui-même n'est son légataire qu'à titre privé. Le soin que la reine mère accorda aux affaires du royaume, comme régente et comme mère, répondant ainsi aux devoirs de son statut royal, ne rejoint donc pas les préoccupations de sujette soucieuse de préserver son héritage et de perpétuer son lignage. Le testament de Catherine exprime une dissociation entre les enjeux politiques et les intérêts particuliers d'une épouse royale. Consciente de cela, la monarchie a œuvré, tout au long de l'existence de la souveraine, à s'attacher cet héritage; elle y parvient finalement, en s'appuyant une fois de plus sur les filles, vecteurs de droits et atouts essentiels dans les stratégies successorales.

La révision des différents contrats de mariage joue bien souvent en défaveur de la couronne mais autorise aussi une marge de manœuvre politique qui profite des brèches juridiques ouvertes à cette occasion. Il faut près de 80 ans au trône pour s'approprier, sinon la totalité, au moins la partie française de la succession de Catherine. Tout commence avec le contrat de mariage signé le 27 octobre 1533 entre la princesse de Toscane et le duc d'Orléans, Henri de Valois. Conformément au droit matrimonial royal français, les époux sont unis sous le régime de la communauté, et les clauses concernant la transmission favorisent l'aîné et sa descendance mâle.³⁶ A l'avènement d'Henri II, la règle de non-communauté s'imposant, le contrat est automatiquement modifié: « A ce qui a été dict quil ny a communauté entre le Roy et la Royne est tellement vray que sil y avoit stipulation au contraire dans le contract de mariage d'entre le Roy et la Royne elle seroit nulle et abusive comme contraire a la coutume et usance de france bien davantage sy un fils de france mesme puisné se mariant y avoit communauté entreux par leur contract de mariage venant a la Couronne ladict communauté cesseroit ».³⁷ La reine est seule maîtresse de ses propres. Concernant les enfants du couple, les mariages des filles de France donnent chaque fois lieu à la signature d'une clause de renonciation. C'est encore le cas pour Marguerite de Valois, la dernière à convoler, qui reçoit en dot 300 000 écus d'or en avance d'hoirie et en échange d'une renonciation à la succession de ses père et mère. Lorsque, à sa mort, Catherine dispose de ses biens, elle les répartit parmi

³⁴ Riguccio GALLUZZI, *Histoire du Grand Duché de Toscane, op. cit., p. 81.*

³⁵ Caroline CALLARD, « La fabrication de la dynastie médicéenne », Jean Boutier, Sandro Landi, Olivier Rouchon (dirs), *Florence et la Toscane, XIVe-XIXe siècles. Les dynamiques d'un Etat italien*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004, p. 381-398.

³⁶ Cf. note 15.

³⁷ Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mss Fr. 18575, fol.5, *Traité de Girard sur les dots et douaires.*

ceux qui peuvent faire souche. Écartée, Marguerite conteste.³⁸ En 1599, l'annulation du mariage de Marguerite et d'Henri IV permet de remettre en cause la clause de renonciation. La princesse revendique alors l'héritage français de sa mère et intente, dans les premières années du XVII^e siècle, un procès contre son neveu Charles, par ailleurs accusé de trahison. Le 10 mai 1606, Marguerite de Valois, sans descendance, fait don de tous ses biens au Dauphin Louis, en ne se réservant que l'usufruit de ses domaines, et elle obtient, deux mois et demi plus tard, le 30 mai 1606, gain de cause dans son procès: le comté d'Auvergne lui est attribué; l'arrêt est confirmé et rendu exécutoire le 17 juin 1606. Héritier de la reine Marguerite, qui lui a abandonné jusqu'à l'usufruit de ses terres d'Auvergne en échange d'une confortable pension dès 1609, Louis XIII réunit ces biens au domaine en devenant roi de France.

Finalement, la couronne obtient les possessions françaises de celle qui fut duchesse d'Urbin, comtesse d'Auvergne et reine de France. Mais le travail fut long et l'issue incertaine. Le mariage de Marguerite de Valois, dernière des filles vivante d'Henri II et de Catherine de Médicis, dans la maison de France, a largement favorisé la conclusion, heureuse pour la monarchie, de la succession. Mais l'alliance italienne n'a pas répondu aux attentes de François I^{er} qui, de ce point de vue, a effectivement eu « la fille toute nue ». Prudente, Catherine a fait en sorte de ne pas raviver les ambitions politiques du royaume de France sur la péninsule, évitant de reproduire le précédent, lourd de conséquence, du mariage de Valentine Visconti avec Louis d'Orléans. Si les devoirs d'État de la reine mère ne rejoignent pas les intérêts lignagers de la princesse de Toscane, la stratégie successorale adoptée peut apparaître, aussi, comme une sage décision politique.

Conclusion

Les lois fondamentales assurent certes une transmission totale du patrimoine capétien, mais elle rendent dans le même temps plus incertaine l'acquisition des biens féminins, pourtant le plus sûr moyen d'accroître le domaine royal. En laissant la reine maîtresse de ses biens, en la désolidarisant des biens de la couronne, le système monarchique maintient, sur le plan lignager, la concurrence entre deux conceptions patrimoniales, l'une au service du trône et l'autre au service des personnes privées. Les efforts de la monarchie pour intégrer symboliquement la reine à la dynastie régnante est un moyen de contrer le déficit institué par la règle d'inaliénabilité. Les modalités de représentations, fondées très largement sur le cérémonial, offrent l'image d'une épouse et mère assimilée à la famille royale au point que la transmission des qualités lignagères passe naturellement au fils, roi, et donc à la couronne que la souveraine contribue ainsi à enrichir. Cet aspect de la question n'est pas négligeable; la puissance dynastique procède de fait d'un capital symbolique que vient étayer un capital économique. L'un ne va pas sans l'autre, les manipulations généalogiques de la famille Médicis pour profiter d'une lignée prestigieuse en sont l'illustration.³⁹

³⁸ Voir par exemple les arguments avancés dans : Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Mss NAF 1049, fol. 93 et suiv.

³⁹ Voir à ce sujet, parmi bien d'autres, l'ouvrage de P. de Boissat, dont le titre lui-même est évocateur: Pierre de BOISSAT, *Le brillant de la royne, ou les vies des hommes illustres du nom de Medicis, contenant plusieurs exemples, accidens, discours et sentences remarquables en fait d'ambition et de division civiles, et de la varieté de Fortune, et de l'inquietude de l'Etat populaire et aristocratique. Avec une memorable suite, continuation et felicité des seigneurs et princes genereux, et signalez en toutes vertus en une seule famille*, Lyon, P. Bernard, 1613.

Mais si, pour être définitivement acquis par domaine de la couronne, les patrimoines féminins doivent être transmis aux mâles, la circulation des biens ne peut, pour autant, faire abstraction des lignées féminines. L'enchevêtrement juridique de la succession Médicis révèle le rôle des femmes dans la redistribution patrimoniale, parfois à plusieurs générations d'écart. Il est alors impératif de penser toutes les dynasties en considérant la participation des filles autant que celle des garçons, quand bien même ces dynasties puissent paraître patrilinéaires. Cette évidence, qu'il n'est pas inutile de rappeler, appelle une autre remarque : les constitutions lignagères et patrimoniales méritent un examen à long terme trop souvent faussé par l'apparence d'une transmission masculine directe du nom et des titres. C'est une arrière-petite-fille de Laurent de Médicis, et exclusivement en ligne féminine, qui rapporte les droits de son aïeul dans le giron florentin et permet la reconstitution du patrimoine; c'est une arrière-petite-fille du comte d'Auvergne, là encore en stricte ligne féminine, qui intègre le comté d'Auvergne à la couronne. Ainsi, la visibilité donnée à la transmission patrimoniale, par le principe d'inaliénabilité d'une part et par la renonciation à héritage dans le contrat de mariage d'autre part, leurre dans la mesure où elle efface la contribution des princesses. Pour la couronne, la succession strictement masculine, supposant une transmission directe du nom et du patrimoine, ne donne à voir que les rôles masculins. Le comté d'Auvergne fait bien partie du domaine mais ce n'est pas grâce à la reine mère. Et les biens italiens échappent aux Capétiens, alors qu'ils appartiennent à la même succession.

Deux temporalités répondent finalement à deux formes d'héritage. Le gain immédiat, direct, d'une alliance prestigieuse repose sur les qualités dynastiques d'une princesse qui transmet à son fils et communique à la couronne le capital symbolique dont elle est investie à sa naissance. En revanche, les biens propres et les droits dont la reine, personne privée, est détentrice par son lignage, et qu'elle transmet à sa descendance, ne se mesure qu'à long voire très long terme. C'est en regardant, aussi, du côté des filles et en insistant sur le rôle essentiel qu'elles jouent dans la circulation des patrimoines que peuvent se comprendre les stratégies matrimoniales, cet instrument de la politique étrangère qui reste, jusqu'à la fin de l'Ancien Régime, une affaire de famille.

Une femme, Gouverneur de Sienne, dans la crise dynastique médicéenne : l'entrée de Violante Béatrice de Bavière Médicis à Sienne le 12 avril 1717

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Après la défaite de la République de Sienne face aux armées alliées des Médicis et des Espagnol en 1555, après le siège qui causa la décimation de la population (la faisant passer de 23.000 habitants en 1540 à environ 10.200 hab. en 1556), la ville de Sienne et son territoire bénéficièrent d'un statut juridique et institutionnel doté d'une large autonomie, à l'intérieur même de l'État médicéen.¹ Ces faits sont probablement peu connus. C'est pourquoi il convient de se concentrer en priorité sur ce contexte institutionnel pour comprendre l'objet principal de cette contribution, à savoir quel fut l'impact de la nomination d'une Princesse Médicis au gouvernement de la ville sur la société locale siennoise. Plus largement, le cas de Violante Béatrice de Bavière Médicis oblige à s'interroger sur la fonction réelle du gouvernement des femmes de maison Médicis à l'intérieur des équilibres de la lignée.²

L'État de Sienne à l'intérieur des équilibres politiques médicéens

La guerre de Sienne ne s'achève qu'en 1559 avec la chute de Montalcino, ville qui avait accueilli un grand nombre d'exilés de la République de Sienne, soutenue par les armées françaises. Entre temps, en 1557, Philippe II d'Espagne avait inféodé la cité et son territoire à Côme I de Médicis, tout en conservant quelques ports - Orbetello, Talamone, Port'Ercole, Monte Argentario et Santo Stefano - dans ses domaines.

À cette époque, l'État médicéen est partagé en deux: au Nord, le «Stato Vecchio» qui dépend du contrôle des magistrats fixés à Florence et qui représente la partie la plus ancienne du domaine florentin ; au Sud, le domaine siennoise, appelé « Stato Nuovo », qui est le plus récent. Deux zones échappent à cette juridiction siennoise: l'État des *Presidi* et le Principat de Piombino.

Par une loi datant de 1561, Côme I réforme le *Stato Nuovo*³ et instaure de nouvelles magistratures réservées à des non Siennois. Dans le même temps, un grand nombre d'organes politiques et institutionnels de la période républicaine restent aux mains de l'oligarchie locale. L'aristocratie siennoise conserve donc le monopole des charges publiques jusqu'à la mise en place d'une réforme voulue par le grand-duc Pierre Léopold d'Habsburg-Lorraine en 1786.⁴

¹ D. Marrara, "L'autonomia dello Stato di Siena nell'età del principato mediceo", *Rassegna di politica e di storia*, XI (1965), pp. 1-10.

² Les femmes de la famille Médicis ont fait l'objet d'un colloque important organisé par Alessandra Contini et Riccardo Spinelli (6-8 octobre 2005, Florence, Archivio di Stato), en cours de publication. La figure de Violante de Bavière Médicis a été au cœur des trois communications de Giulia Calvi, de Marina D'Amelia, et la mienne.

³ "Reformatione del governo della Città, e Stato di Siena [1561]", in *Legislazione toscana pubblicata e illustrata da Lorenzo Cantini*, IV, Florence, Stamperia Albizziniana, 1802, pp. 116 et suivantes. Cf. E. Fasano Guarini, "Le istituzioni di Siena e del suo Stato nel Ducato Mediceo", in L. Rombai (dir.), *I Medici e lo Stato senese 1555-1609: storia e territorio*, Rome, De Luca, 1980, pp. 49-62.

⁴ Je me permets de renvoyer à A. Savelli, "Un confronto politico tra Firenze e Siena: la riforma delle magistrature senesi in età leopoldina (1772-1786)", *Ricerche storiche*, XXV (1995), n. 1, pp. 61-109.

Durant l'ancien régime, l'État de Sienne possédait un statut juridique distinct de celui de l'État de Florence. Les magistratures locales revendiquaient leur autonomie par rapport à celles de Florence, arguant du fait que l'État de Sienne se trouvait dans une relation de dépendance « personnelle » et féodale avec les Grands Ducs. Ainsi, un décret promulgué par Florence ne pouvait être validé à Sienne que s'il était approuvé par la magistrature locale adéquate. Lorsqu'en 1569 Côme obtint le titre de grand-duc,⁵ Scipione Ammirato, un historien protégé des Médicis, écrivit que « le fait de rassembler sous le titre de grand-duc hé de Toscane l'État de Florence et de Sienne n'avait d'autre fin que d'assurer pour l'éternité que ces deux états ne se seraient plus jamais séparés, comme cela était advenu pour le Royaume de Naples ». ⁶ En réalité, la domination médicéenne sur l'État siennois continua à apparaître comme potentiellement réversible,⁷ et la question allait se reposer tout particulièrement au début du XVIII^e siècle quand l'extinction de la famille Médicis sembla imminente.

Parmi les offices nouvellement institués en 1561 et réservés à des non Siennois celui de Gouverneur, représentant du Duc et dépendant directement de celui-ci, était sans doute le plus important. Il s'agissait d'une charge à durée indéterminée, dont les prérogatives étaient régulièrement redéfinies.

La deuxième moitié du XVI^e siècle marque une période d'opposition entre les Gouverneurs de Sienne et les magistratures nobiliaires pour contrôler l'accès à la noblesse.⁸ Le conflit fut de courte durée et le XVII^e siècle s'ouvre sur un équilibre très avantageux pour l'oligarchie locale, puisqu'elle indiquait elle-même au grand-duc les candidats proposés aux magistratures réservées aux candidats locaux. Jusqu'à l'arrivée de Pierre Léopold de Habsbourg-Lorraine en 1765, ce système politique est tout à fait stable.

Il est important de souligner combien la noblesse tire son statut de la cité elle-même. Ainsi, on est noble parce qu'on a exercé la magistrature civique la plus importante (le *Concistoro* dans notre cas). Dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle, un noble siennois explique ainsi les différences: alors que la noblesse absolue revenait à des monarques ou à des petits seigneurs (libres ou subordonnés à des princes de rang supérieur), la noblesse « conditionnée » était une

⁵ Mais il faut garder présent à l'esprit que le terme de grand-duché signifiant l'ensemble des dominations médicéennes, fut utilisé seulement à partir de 1737 avec l'arrivée de la dynastie lorraine. Sur ce sujet, on se reportera aux nombreuses contributions de Marcello Verga, et plus précisément "Un Principato regionale. Gli Stati medicei nell'età barocca", in M. Bevilacqua, G.C. Romby (dir.), *Atlante del Barocco in Italia. Firenze e il Granducato. Province di Grosseto, Livorno, Pisa, Pistoia, Prato, Siena*, Rome, De Luca, 2007, p. 54.

⁶ E. Fasano Guarini (dir.), *Storia della civiltà toscana. III. Il principato mediceo*, Florence, Le Monnier, 2003, dont la préface contient la citation de Scipione Ammirato ici traduite; « (...) l'unire sotto titolo di Granduca di Toscana lo Stato di Firenze e di Siena non era altro che assicurare in eterno, come del Regno di Napoli era avvenuto, che quelli Stati non si avessero giammai più a smembrare ».

⁷ Voir les observations de Luca Mannori qui, en commentant la promotion de Côme et de François de Médicis au statut de Grands Ducs en 1569, écrit que « (...) i Granduchi mantennero del tutto distinto il loro dominio sul Senese – a carattere incontestabilmente feudale, e dunque potenzialmente reversibile – da quello fiorentino, nel fondato timore che ogni contaminazione avrebbe indebolito il loro potere. Sicché i due Stati continuarono a reggersi in autonomia reciproca e ad essere accomunati solo dall'occasionale subordinazione ad uno stesso signore » ; « (...) les Grands Ducs ont maintenu bien distinct le domaine siennois – incontestablement féodal, et donc potentiellement réversible – et le domaine florentin, dans la crainte bien fondée que toute contamination aurait affaibli leur pouvoir. Pour cette raison, les deux États continuèrent à se gouverner de manière autonome l'un par rapport à l'autre et ne furent associés que lors de subordinations occasionnelles à un même seigneur » (*Il Sovrano tutore. Pluralismo istituzionale e accentramento amministrativo nel Principato dei Medici, secc. XVI-XVIII*, Milan, Giuffrè, 1994, p. 79).

⁸ Cf. D. Marrara, *Riseduti e nobiltà: profilo storico-istituzionale di un'oligarchia toscana nei secoli XVI-XVIII*, Pise, Pacini, 1976 (et plus précisément le chapitre III).

disposition provenant des familles et transmise à l'individu, le rendant apte à exercer les fonctions politiques de la patrie.⁹ Il ajoutait ensuite que cette patrie devait être une cité, car la magistrature exercée dans des lieux non nobles ne conférait pas la noblesse.¹⁰

Plusieurs aspects concernant la noblesse siennoise sont désormais bien connus, notamment sa capacité de maintenir sa mainmise sur le territoire du *Stato Nuovo*, qui ne fut pas ralentie pendant la période médicéenne, après que différentes zones lui aient été inféodées. De même, la crise démographique qui affecte l'État entre le XVI^e et le XVII^e siècles,¹¹ a été bien étudiée tout comme certaines pratiques sociales comme l'endogamie, ou celles à travers lesquelles ce groupe social, très différencié économiquement, cherchait à répondre au risque d'extinction:¹² l'adoption, par exemple, permettait aux familles la survivance du nom.¹³ On sait, enfin, que cette oligarchie ne répond pas au manque d'hommes par une ouverture sur des groupes sociaux extérieurs; bien au contraire, elle resserre les mailles du filet, en limitant de manière drastique la possibilité de nouvelles admissions et en maintenant un contrôle puissant sur les magistratures civiques.¹⁴

En somme, la noblesse siennoise apparaît comme un groupe compact, culturellement soudé, dont la force dérive également des liens très étroits avec Rome et la Papauté.¹⁵ L'aristocratie siennoise regarde en direction de Rome, alors que les rapports avec Florence, qui est enfin parvenue à dompter les ambitions de la vieille République, se font de plus en plus complexes. Un ambassadeur vénitien décrit cette complexité et propose une clé d'interprétation fort utile: quelques années après la chute de la République, il écrit que les Siennois n'auraient jamais accepté d'être soumis aux Florentins; ils acceptaient, toutefois, d'être dominés par la famille des Médicis, dans la mesure où ils n'avaient jamais eu avec elle d'inimitié, et puisque la ville de Florence lui était également soumise.¹⁶ Dans le discours public des magistrats siennois, ce dédoublement entre la ville de Florence et la famille des Médicis – qui signifie, sur le plan juridique, lien personnel et revendication d'un rapport direct avec le grand-duc – se trouve constamment réaffirmé afin de défendre un certain nombre de privilèges.

⁹ Par « patrie » l'auteur entend ici la ville natale.

¹⁰ D. Marrara, *Riseduti e nobiltà*, op. cit., pp. 101-102.

¹¹ G.R.F. Baker, "Nobiltà in declino: il caso di Siena sotto i Medici e gli Asburgo-Lorena", *Rivista storica italiana*, LXXXIV (1972), n. 4, pp. 584-616.

¹² T. Detti, C. Pazzagli, "Le famiglie nobili senesi fra Settecento e Ottocento", *Bollettino di demografia storica*, 1994, n. 21, pp. 45-64.

¹³ Voir le cas de la famille Sansedoni étudiée par Laura Vigni, "La famiglia Sansedoni dal Cinquecento all'estinzione", in F. Gabbriellini (dir.), *Palazzo Sansedoni*, Sienne, Fondation Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 2004, pp. 57-87.

¹⁴ Cf. D. Marrara, *Riseduti e nobiltà*, op. cit., et M. Ascheri (dir.), *I Libri dei Leoni. La nobiltà di Siena in età medicea (1557-1737)*, Sienne, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 1996, où l'on se reportera plus particulièrement aux contributions de Mario Ascheri et d'Oscar Di Simpicio.

¹⁵ R. Ago, *Carriere e clientele nella Roma barocca*, Rome-Bari, Laterza, 1990.

¹⁶ « (...) dicono ora che non potriano tollerare, né tollerarieno mai, d'esser sottoposti a' fiorentini; ma che, con la casa de' Medici non avendo mai avuto inimicizia, sopportano d'essere da quella governati, poiché a quella vedono medesimamente sottoposti i fiorentini »; « (...) il disent maintenant qu'ils ne pourront tolérer, ni ne toléreront jamais, d'être soumis aux Florentins ; mais que n'ayant jamais eu d'inimitié avec la famille des Médicis, ils supportent d'être gouvernés par eux, puisque à eux viennent également soumis les Florentins »; *Relazioni degli ambasciatori veneti al Senato*, éditées par A. Segarizzi, III: *Firenze*, première partie, Bari, Laterza, 1916, p. 132.

Catherine de Médicis Gonzague, Gouverneur de Sienne (1627-1629)

La nomination du premier Gouverneur provenant de la famille Médicis advient au début du XVII^e siècle, durant la phase de stabilité, lorsque la famille des Médicis renonce à mettre en œuvre une vraie réforme des équilibres sociaux locaux. En 1627, Catherine de Médicis inaugure ainsi la tradition des gouverneurs médicéens, tradition qui ne s'interrompra qu'avec l'extinction de la dynastie.

Veuve, depuis octobre 1626, de Duc de Mantoue Ferdinand de Gonzague mort sans descendance, dans la capitale la princesse s'était trouvée dans une situation critique. Vincent II, le frère de Ferdinand, lui aussi dépourvu de descendance, était devenu le nouveau Duc. Mais on sait que la France et l'Espagne revendiquaient la succession. Les Français soutenaient le duc de Nevers, alors que les Espagnols appuyaient le fils naturel de feu Ferdinand de Gonzague, défendant la légitimité de la filiation et portant ainsi un grave préjudice à la veuve. Une fois que les démarches pour la restitution de la dot furent achevées, Catherine envoya à Florence son propre émissaire. Sa mère, Christine de Lorraine, joua alors un rôle déterminant dans les tractations qui permirent le retour de sa fille à Florence.¹⁷ En mai, l'envoyé médicéen partit à son tour pour Mantoue. Le Prince Laurent pria sa sœur de l'écouter attentivement « et de lui accorder toute sa confiance dans le commerce qu'il lui exposera, et qui me touche infiniment ainsi que toute la famille ». ¹⁸ Quelques temps plus tard, le grand-duc allait pouvoir se réjouir avec elle d'avoir « promptement résolu de revenir dans sa famille, pour sa consolation et pour la nôtre, et tout particulièrement celle de Madame sa Mère, mon aïeule ». ¹⁹

Dès que l'affaire de la place de sa fille dans le grand-duché est résolue, sa mère, peut librement lui décrire en détail les avantages de son nouveau statut de Gouverneur de l'État de Sienne :

¹⁷ Cf. les jugements des contemporains sur Christine de Lorraine cités dans I. Pagliai, "Luci ed ombre di un personaggio: le lettere di Cristina di Lorena sul «negozio» di Urbino", in G. Zarri (dir.), *Per lettera. La scrittura epistolare femminile tra archivio e tipografia*, Rome, Viella, 1999, pp. 441 et suivantes. On se reportera également, dans les Archives d'État de Florence (ASFi), *Mediceo del Principato*, 6110, cc. 285-286, à la lettre de Christine à sa fille, en date du 25 mars 1627: « Circa poi alla vostra venuta qui potete immaginarvi che gusto, et che contento sarebbe il mio, poiché verreste nella vostra propria casa dove non vi mancherebbero tutte quelle carezze che potessi desiderare. Ma perché Monsignor Arcivescovo di Pisa ci ha detto che fatto Pasqua volete mandar qui l'Abate di Santa Barbera, che è persona prudente e accorta, aspetteremo la sua venuta, la quale ci par molto necessaria, et sentito che havremo lui, non mancheremo di conferir seco mille particolari, che non convengono metterli in carta, et assicuratevi pure che havremo sempre il pensiero a tutto quello che sarà vostro bene e nostro servizio » ; « Vous pouvez vous imaginer combien votre venue ici me comblerait, puisque vous reviendriez dans votre propre maison où ne vous manqueraient aucune des caresses que vous pouvez désirer. Mais puisque Monseigneur l'Archevêque de Pise nous a dit que après Pâques vous voulez envoyer ici l'abbé de Santa Barbera, qui est une personne prudente et avisé, nous attendrons sa venue qui nous semble très nécessaire, et après l'avoir écouté, nous parlerons avec lui d'un certain nombre de détails qu'il serait imprudent de confier au papier ; soyez bien sûre que nous aurons toujours à cœur de faire votre bien et notre avantage ».

¹⁸ « (...) et di portargli anche intera credenza nel negozio che le esporrà, il quale preme infinitamente a me et a tutta questa Casa » : ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 6108, c. 656, lettre de Don Lorenzo de Medicis en date du 6 mai 1627.

¹⁹ « (...) prontamente risoluto di tornarsene in questa sua Casa, per consolazione sua et nostra, et di Madama sua Madre, et mia Ava in particolare » : *ivi*, c. 659, lettre du 4 juin 1627.

Son Altesse Madame ma Fille très Aimée. (...) je pense que vous pourrez trouver une entière consolation et vous résoudre à revenir vivre dans la famille où vous êtes née, puisqu'il ne plût pas à Dieu que vous finîtes vos jours dans l'autre. Il faut donc se préparer au départ, puisque nous avons décidé que Monsieur le Cardinal se mette en chemin à ce sujet (...) et les satisfactions ne vous manqueront pas non plus par la suite si vous m'accordez toute votre confiance, parce que le grand-duc et l'Archiduchesse vous aiment tendrement ; et dans le Gouvernement de Sienne, vous serez révéérée, et aurez moyen de plaire à Dieu comme aux hommes ; je crois savoir que l'air de notre pays vous conviendra mieux que celui de Lombardie (...) Si bien que vous pouvez vous préparer à revenir avec joie, puisque, alors que Votre Altesse est là-bas contrainte d'obéir à l'intérieur mais aussi à l'extérieur du monastère, à Sienne, elle sera obéie de tous (...).²⁰

Le gouvernement de Sienne représente pour Catherine une attribution correspondant à son état, comme le démontrent les paroles de sa mère: ce n'est ni la première ni la dernière fois que l'office sera engagé en faveur des femmes de la maison Médicis. La première fut précisément Christine de Lorraine qui, en 1609, avait reçu en héritage de son mari Ferdinand « un gouvernement libre et absolu » sur les *Capitanati* de Montepulciano et de Pietrasanta.²¹ Côme II avait suivi l'exemple, laissant à sa femme, Marie-Madeleine d'Autriche, le gouvernement de Colle di Val d'Elsa et de San Miniato.²²

En ce qui concerne le cas siennois, le poste de gouverneur semble résoudre plusieurs problèmes à la fois : celui d'une relation difficile de la dynastie avec les pouvoirs locaux, celui d'une crise de prestige de l'office lui-même – en déclin, comme le souligne Marrara, à cause de l'état de conflictualité permanente avec les magistratures nobiliaires – celui enfin des demandes pressantes et répétées en provenance de la cité, souhaitant une présence plus régulière du grand-duc auquel seul elle entend faire référence. Il est sûr que Sienne interprète comme un privilège la présence, au poste de Gouverneur, d'un prince de sang: la ville y voit une forme de reconnaissance de la dignité de l'État Siennois et de son oligarchie;²³ car dans

²⁰ « Serenissima Signora mia figlia amatissima. (...) io penso ch'ella potrà prendere intera consolazione e tanto più conformarsi nella resolutione di tornare a vivere nella Casa dove è nata, poichè non è piaciuto a Dio ch'Ella habbia a finire i suoi giorni in cotesta. Preparisi dunque alla partenza, perché habbiamo disegnato che il Sr Cardinale s'incammini per costà (...) et non le mancheranno sodisfazioni anche nel resto col concorso però della sua confidenza, perché il Granduca et l'Arciduchessa l'amano teneramente; et nel Governo di Siena ella sarà reverita, et haverà modo di meritare appresso a Dio, et appresso agli huomini, et le piacerà più l'aria nostra che cotesta di Lombardia (...) Sì che dispongasi pur sempre più a venire allegramente, considerando, che se mentre VA è costì sta obligata a obedire et dentro et fuori del Monasterio, a Siena sarà ella obbedita da tutti (...) » : ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 6110, c. 296, lettre de Christine de Lorraine en date du 6 juin 1627.

²¹ R. Galluzzi, *Istoria del Granducato di Toscana sotto il Governo della Casa Medici*, tome 5, Florence, Cambiagi, 1781: tome III, livre V, chapitre XII, p. 256.

²² *Ivi*, tome III, livre VI, chapitre VI, p. 394. Voir également sur cet aspect M. Verga, "Un Principato regionale", *op. cit.*, p. 60, pour qui la concession des gouvernements prouve l'importance « (...) che il matrimonio con queste due principesse aveva significato per i due granduchi medicei – rilevanza che la concessione del governo di questi due importanti territori segnalava in modo aperto – ma anche del ruolo politico che adesso le principesse avevano acquisito negli equilibri del potere mediceo » ; « (...) que le mariage avec ces deux princesses avait signifié pour les deux Grands Ducs – importance que la concession du gouvernement de ces deux remarquables territoires signalait de manière claire et nette – mais également le rôle politique que les princesses avaient désormais acquis dans l'équilibre des pouvoirs médicéens ».

²³ Le grand-duc à la Gouverneur Catherine, lettre du 12 juillet 1627: « Del salvo arrivo di VA in Siena io ero stato avvisato pienamente [...] vedendo quanto ella stava occupata in ricevere et gradire le dimostrazioni della grande allegrezza che ne ha fatta cotesta Città, la quale ha ben potuto conoscere l'amore che tutti noi le portiamo poi che habbiamo voluto che sia governata da una Principessa del nostro sangue » ; « Je fus pleinement informé de l'arrivée de VA à Sienne [...] voyant combien elle était occupée à recevoir et jouir des manifestations de

la vie politique et administrative quotidienne, l'absence d'un Gouverneur privait la ville d'un canal de médiation d'autant plus efficace qu'était haute la dignité de celui qui en détenait le poste.

De toute évidence, le fait d'avoir une cour à Sienne répondait également à un équilibre interne à la famille des Médicis. Le veuvage de Catherine (qui meurt en 1629 dans l'exercice de sa charge) imposait à ceux qui dirigeaient alors la destinée du grand-duché – les régentes Christine de Lorraine et Marie-Madeleine d'Autriche – de lui trouver une situation.

Violante Béatrice de Bavière Médicis, Gouverneur de Sienne

On retrouve cette préoccupation des équilibres familiaux dans les circonstances de la nomination de Violante Béatrice de Bavière Médicis. En 1688, Violante avait épousé le fils de Côme III, le prince Ferdinand de Médicis, dont elle resta veuve en 1713. Trois ans plus tard, la sœur du défunt Ferdinand, Anne Marie Louise de Médicis, devint également veuve²⁴. En avril 1717, Violante se rend à Sienne alors qu'Anne Marie Louise rentre à Florence en octobre de la même année: cet écart de quelques mois à peine suggère plusieurs éléments d'informations. D'une part, il semble que Côme III voulait maintenir Violante dans le grand-duché, en raison de ses liens forts qu'elle entretenait avec les cours d'Europe ainsi que de son prestige personnel; mais il semble également qu'il souhaitait éviter la multiplication des princesses de sang à la cour.²⁵

Comme ce fut déjà le cas en 1627 avec Catherine, duchesse de Mantoue, la concession de l'office de gouverneur intervint pour compenser une fragilité de statut de la veuve du Prince Ferdinand, que le retour à la cour de Anne Marie Louise aurait rendu dramatiquement évident. Il est également fort probable que Côme III ait bénéficié de suggestions "opportunes" sur les destinées de sa bru, de la part de Siennois exerçant une charge à Florence et fort attentifs aux intérêts de leur patrie comme à la défense de ses prérogatives (puisque c'est ainsi que le poste de gouverneur était désormais perçu).

Pour la famille des Médicis, il s'agissait d'un moment très délicat. La préoccupation majeure de Côme était d'éviter l'extinction de la famille, mais il lui fallait également mettre le grand-duché à l'abri des appétits des potentats européens. Les mariages des deux mâles de la famille étaient inféconds: stérile le couple Ferdinand-Violante, stérile le couple formé par Jean

grande allégresse de la part de cette Cité, qui a pu se rendre compte de tout l'amour que nous lui portons, puisque nous avons voulu qu'elle soit gouvernée par une Princesse de sang » (ASFi, *Mediceo del Principato*, 6108, c. 662).

²⁴ Sa personnalité a fait récemment l'objet d'une importante révision historiographique : S. Casciu (dir.), *La principessa saggia. L'eredità di Anna Maria Luisa de' Medici Elettrice Palatina*, Catalogue d'exposition (Florence, 2006-2007), Livourne, Sillabe, 2006, à l'intérieur duquel, pour les thèmes qui nous occupent ici, on se reportera à la contribution de M. Verga, "Strategie dinastiche e mito cittadino: l'Elettrice Palatina e Firenze", pp. 24-29.

²⁵ « La presenza dell'Elettrice alla Corte di Toscana doveva alterare le convenienze della Principessa Violante, la quale aveva perciò dichiarato di volere ritornare in Baviera. Per conciliare queste differenze il G. Duca gli aveva accordato il Governo di Siena, e ciò somministrandoli un giusto pretesto per allontanarsi dalla Corte gli dava ancora luogo a cedere con dignità all'Elettrice »; « La présence de l'Electrice à la Cour de Toscane devait altérer les intérêts de la Princesse Violante, qui avait pourtant déclaré vouloir retourner en Bavière. Pour concilier ces divergences, le grand-duc lui avait accordé le poste de Gouverneur de Sienne, et ceci, tout en lui procurant un juste prétexte pour s'éloigner de la cour, lui donnait encore la possibilité de céder avec dignité à l'Electrice » (R. Galluzzi, *Istoria del Granducato di Toscana, op. cit.*, tome V, livre I, chap. II, p. 43). On se reportera également à G. Conti, *Firenze dai Medici ai Lorena*, Florence, Giunti, 1993 (anastatique de l'édition Firenze, Bemporad, 1909), pp. 726-727.

Gaston (un autre fils du grand-duc, qui allait succéder à Côme en 1723) et Anne Marie Françoise de Saxe. La crise internationale qui s'ouvre en 1701 avec la mort du roi d'Espagne, rendait donc on ne peut plus incertaine la destinée du grand-duché et, par voie de conséquence, celle de l'État de Sienne. Puisqu'en 1557 le *Stato Nuovo* avait été attribué à Côme en concession féodale, il aurait pu, avec la fin prévisible de la lignée des Médicis, retrouver sa pleine autonomie politique. Contrairement à ce qu'avait soutenu Scipione Ammirato, le titre de grand-duc que le pape avait donné à Côme I en 1569 ne semblait pas suffire à annuler la situation de départ: l'État de Sienne, justement parce qu'il s'agissait d'une concession féodale de l'Empereur, devait lui revenir. Depuis 1703, le refus du grand-duc de reconnaître Charles III héritier de la couronne d'Espagne, avait provoqué entre l'Empereur et ses conseillers une discussion qui portait sur les droits de Côme III sur le fief siennois, puisqu'il était entendu qu'à la mort de Charles II, l'État de Sienne devait retourner à l'Empire.²⁶ En 1706 l'Empereur intima au grand-duc de reconnaître Charles III et de recevoir de celui-ci l'investiture de l'État de Sienne.²⁷ De même, le projet du grand-duc de restaurer la République de Florence entra en conflit avec les différents statuts juridiques des deux États, « détail » qui n'échappait pas même à ceux qui regardaient avec bienveillance les projets du Grand-duc.²⁸

Si, en 1713, l'Empereur obtint la reconnaissance des ports du territoire siennois, le traité entre l'Espagne et l'Angleterre comprenait un article resté secret qui assurait à l'Espagne la domination sur Sienne, et en déclarait l'union perpétuelle avec Florence. La question était cependant loin d'être résolue. La même année, le 30 octobre 1713, le Prince héritier Ferdinand mourut et, en novembre, le Sénat de Florence disposait de la succession en faveur de l'Électrice Anne Marie Louise, une fois que la lignée masculine se serait éteinte. Cela ouvrit une longue querelle entre les ministres impériaux et la cour toscane, qui attribuait à Côme le droit de disposer librement de ses États ; l'épisode est bien connu. En 1716, pour en garantir l'union, le grand-duc entreprenait des tractations avec la maison d'Este²⁹, mais on sait que les choses en allèrent autrement et que les puissances européennes destinèrent à la succession François Etienne de Lorraine, grand-duc à partir de 1737, année de la mort de Jean Gaston.

Cette incertitude politique pouvait soit entraîner des tensions, soit susciter un nouveau dynamisme des acteurs locaux. C'est dans un tel contexte, par exemple, qu'un noble siennois avait élaboré en 1715 un projet sur la cité qui avait entre autres buts de renforcer l'autonomie du *Stato Nuovo*, justement après l'extinction de la dynastie médicéenne. L'auteur s'y préoccupait en particulier d'obtenir la restitution de certaines terres et d'éclaircir le statut des

²⁶ R. Galluzzi, *Istoria del Granducato di Toscana, op. cit.*, tome IV, livre VIII, chap. VIII, p. 359.

²⁷ *Ivi*, tome IV, livre VIII, chap. IX, p. 369.

²⁸ Quand le Marquis Rinuccini fut envoyé en Hollande pour trouver un consensus, telle fut la réaction du Grand Pensionnaire: « Considerò che il Dominio di Firenze come libero e indipendente non esigea particolari riguardi, e che qualunque atto solenne che si fosse fatto per renderli la libertà sarebbe stato garantito dalli Stati con tutto l'impegno; ma non così potea farsi dello Stato di Siena, e di quei Feudi dei quali la Casa Medici prendeva l'investitura, poichè per rapporto ai medesimi erano da considerarsi i diritti dei parenti più prossimi del G. Duca, e l'inevitabile necessità del consenso Imperiale per il loro passaggio »; « Il considérait que le domaine de Florence étant libre et indépendant n'exigeait pas de considération particulière, et que tout acte solennel exécuté pour lui rendre la liberté serait garanti et respecté par les Etats ; mais il ne pouvait en être ainsi de l'Etat de Sienne, comme de tous les fiefs inféodés à la famille Médicis, puisque on devait tenir compte des parents les plus proches au grand-duc, étant nécessaire d'avoir l'accord impérial pour leur passage » (*ivi*, tome IV, livre VIII, chap. IX, pp. 385-386).

²⁹ *Ivi*, tome V, livre I, chap. II, pp. 41 et suivantes.

certaines autres. Il n'excluait pas non plus un changement de régime, ce qui le conduisait à envisager un élargissement des couches dirigeantes locales.³⁰

C'est seulement dans ce contexte que l'on peut comprendre pourquoi l'entrée, en avril 1717, de Violante Béatrice de Bavière Médicis comme Gouverneur de la cité et de l'État de Sienne, représente un événement capital pour la société siennoise. Dans les circonstances politiques et institutionnelles présentes, où la destinée de l'État de Sienne n'apparaissait pas du tout clairement définie, la nomination d'un Gouverneur si prestigieux pouvait représenter pour l'aristocratie siennoise une opportunité riche de sens, préfigurant peut-être même, une fois éteinte la famille Médicis, une solution de la question siennoise en phase avec les attentes locales.

L'arrivée de Violante se présente donc comme un événement complexe, mêlant différents acteurs sociaux, qui revendiquent tous un espace et un rôle de prestige: la *Governatrice* elle-même, face au grand-duc, son beau-père, et aux pouvoirs locaux; l'aristocratie de Sienne qui voit se réaffirmer en cette occasion le prestige de la cité; enfin, des groupes populaires à base territoriale qui, en une période où les règles de la vie sociale étaient fortement ritualisées, trouvent là une occasion de grande visibilité.

L'importance que les pouvoirs locaux attribuent à la nomination de Violante apparaît tout particulièrement dans la recherche et la mise en place d'un cérémonial grandiose. La magistrature chargée des cérémonies lance une enquête sur la façon dont les précédentes entrées des Gouverneurs s'étaient déroulées. Mais les documents révèlent des cérémonies qui semblent désormais bien insuffisantes puisque, par le passé, les manifestations d'allégresse s'étaient limitées à l'envoi de délégations de nobles aux frontières de l'État. Il semble désormais indispensable de mettre en scène un « pacte » qui lie le destin de la ville et de son État à celui de la princesse: la cérémonie doit apparaître comme un événement impliquant plusieurs acteurs sociaux, et pas seulement l'aristocratie. Pour la première fois en une telle occasion, des groupes populaires, à savoir le « *Contrade* », prennent part à la cérémonie.

Que sont donc les *Contrade* ? Jusque dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle, les dix-sept *Contrade* de la ville de Sienne, encore très vivaces de nos jours,³¹ n'étaient que des groupes territoriaux (*universitates habitatorum*), actifs sur la scène festive de la cité, mais dont les dynamiques internes restaient peu structurées. Dans le courant du XVII^e siècle, certaines *Contrade* se dotent progressivement de statuts et entreprennent également la constitution d'églises. Leur organisation s'inspirait de celle des confréries de laïques: au sommet, le Prieur détenait le pouvoir de convoquer le Conseil des habitants de la *Contrada*, assisté dans sa tâche par un Vicaire et de deux Conseillers. Le Camerlingue, lui, s'occupait de la gestion économique et administrative, mais son autonomie restait limitée. Deux ou trois nobles

³⁰ C'est le projet d'Alcibiade Lucarini Bellanti, *Parere per la Città e Stato di Siena* [1715], manuscrit conservé à la Bibliothèque Communale de Sienne (Ms. A. IV.18, cc. 2r.-17v.) publié par A. Zappelli, *Alcibiade Bellanti Lucarini (1645-1724). Le vicende familiari, la presenza nell'Ordine di Santo Stefano e il pensiero politico di un nobile senese*, Pise, ETS, 2002, pp. 146-158.

³¹ Leurs noms, stables à partir de la moitié du XVI^e siècle, sont les suivants: *Aquila* (Aigle), *Bruco* (Ver), *Chiocciola* (Escargot), *Civetta* (Chouette), *Drago* (Dragon), *Giraffa* (Girafe), *Istrice* (Hérisson), *Leocorno* (Licorne), *Lupa* (Louve), *Nicchio* (Coquille), *Oca* (Oie), *Onda* (Onde), *Pantera* (Panthère), *Selva* (Forêt), *Tartuca* (Tortue), *Torre* (Tour), *Valdimontone* (Mouton). Une tentative de classification intéressante des emblèmes des *contrade* est proposée par G. Mazzini, "Il microcosmo araldico contradaio: una proposta di classificazione (secolo XVI)", in A. Savelli, L. Vigni (dir.), *Uomini e contrade di Siena. Memoria e vita di una tradizione cittadina*, Sienne, Comune di Siena, 2004, pp. 253-263.

Protecteurs (*Protettori*) développaient une action de patronage, faisant le lien entre le groupe territorial et les magistratures laïques ou l'autorité religieuse.³²

On ne saurait comprendre la reconnaissance que les *Contrade* obtiennent en 1717 pour leur rôle joué dans les cérémonies sans tenir compte de la façon dont elles avaient réussi à émerger dans l'associationnisme urbain. Entre la fin du XVI^e et le début du XVII^e siècle, s'affirment non seulement les nouveaux besoins rituels de l'oligarchie locale, mais également la façon dont les habitants de la cité n'appartenant pas aux *Contrade* montrent quand même une forme d'adhésion et de reconnaissance de ces groupes territoriaux. Les *Contrade* avaient, en fait, une intense activité religieuse et dans leurs églises se déroulait une liturgie capable d'attirer la population. Venait ensuite la participation régulière au « *Palio* » du 2 juillet (Visitation). Cette course de chevaux, institutionnalisée vers le milieu du XVII^e siècle, était financée par la noblesse locale et courue dans le périmètre de la *Piazza del Campo*, la place la plus importante de la ville où le *Palazzo del Pubblico* faisait face aux palais d'importantes familles de l'aristocratie siennoise. Au début du XVIII^e siècle, le *Palio* représentait pour les *Contrade* un événement auquel on se faisait un honneur de participer.

Les rituels liés à la victoire du *Palio*, ou à d'autres moments de la vie des *Contrade*, faisaient que la population dans son ensemble reconnaissait dans les *Contrade* une présence vitale pour la cité. Cette présence fut renforcée après 1701, lorsqu'une des *Contrade* demanda à la magistrature de pouvoir courir un second *Palio* le 16 août, comme manifestation d'allégresse pour la victoire qu'elle avait obtenue le 2 juillet précédent. Instaurée à cette occasion, cette pratique devint rapidement une habitude. Le fait d'être protagonistes de l'activité festive assurait aux *Contrade* un assentiment qui dépassait le cercle de ses adhérents et des participants aux conseils: le *Palio* était un spectacle apprécié, qui convenait au goût populaires mais pas seulement, puisque les archives privées de nombreux aristocrates en gardent des traces, enregistrant ainsi très précisément les victoires de chaque *Contrada* au *Palio*.

Le soir du 12 avril 1717, Violante fit donc son entrée en Ville. Un nombre considérable de témoignages racontent cette célébration : on la retrouve ainsi dans les trois textes inédits des Siennois Giovanni Antonio Pecci,³³ Giuseppe Maria Torrenti³⁴ et Antonio Bernardino

³² Pour un approfondissement, je me permets de renvoyer à certaines de mes contributions : “*Una distinta divisione in più squadre del popolo sanese: le contrade di Siena in età moderna*”, in G. Delille, A. Savelli (dir.), *Essere popolo. Prerogative e rituali d'appartenenza nelle città italiane d'antico regime, Ricerche storiche*, XXXII (2002), nn. 2-3, pp. 281-327; “*Case e contrade in età moderna*”, in F. Benfante, A. Savelli (dir.), *Proprietari e inquilini, Quaderni storici*, n. 113, 2003, pp. 345-362 ; “*Un esempio di patronage. Nobili protettori e popolo delle contrade di Siena (Siena, XVII-XVIII secolo)*”, in E. Pellegrini (dir.), *Giovanni Antonio Pecci. Un accademico senese nella società e nella cultura del XVIII secolo*, Sienna, Accademia degli Intronati, 2004, pp. 287-313. Une bibliographie extensive sur les *Contrade* se trouve dans M.A. Ceppari Ridolfi, M. Ciampolini, P. Turrini (dir.), *L'immagine del Palio. Storia cultura e rappresentazione del rito di Siena*, Sienna, Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 2001.

³³ G.A. Pecci, *Relazione dell'ingresso, e feste, rappresentate nella Città di Siena in onore della Serenissima Gran Principessa Violante Beatrice di Baviera negli'anni MDCCXVII* (Bibliothèque Moreniana de Florence, *Fond Pecci*, 50, n. 4, cc. 68-111).

³⁴ *Veridico ragguaglio della Solenne Entrata fatta in Siena dalla Reale Altezza della Ser.ma Gran Principessa di Toscana Violante di Baviera, Sua Governatrice, li 12 aprile 1717 e Feste susseguentemente celebrate, Descritto da Giuseppe M.a Torrenti, nell'Accademia de Rozzi detto lo Scelto*, reproduction en fac-simile et transcription du manuscrit conservé à la Bibliothèque du Victoria & Albert Museum, avec la préface de R. Bianchi Bandinelli, Roma, Editions de l'Elefanti, 1973.

Fancelli,³⁵ dans la *Lettre d'un prêtre siennois* imprimée à Padoue en 1717,³⁶ et dans deux opuscules publiés à Florence en 1717.³⁷ Enfin, Girolamo Gigli propose un autre compte rendu de la scène dans son *Diario Sanese* édité en 1723.³⁸

L'accueil aux frontières de l'État restait une prérogative des nobles siennois; mais on avait demandé à chaque *contrada* de placer devant la porte par laquelle devait entrer la Gouvernatrice, quinze hommes portant épée, ainsi qu'une torche éclairant leurs drapeaux respectifs. Ils devaient, en signe d'hommage, être précédés par le tambour.³⁹ On allait retrouver ces mêmes hommes pour accompagner la princesse sur la place publique où ils devaient arriver par un chemin plus court.

Le pacte qui lie la Princesse avec Sienne trouve une représentation adéquate dans l'apparat mis en place pour l'occasion. Il se caractérise par un savant dosage entre les emblèmes de la tradition municipale et ceux de la famille de Bavière et de Médicis. Les symboles municipaux sont présents dans les colonnes blanches et noires qui entourent la place (l'écu noir et blanc appelé «Balzana» est l'emblème de la ville), ainsi que dans l'alternance, sur le tympan de la colonnade, de la *Balzana* et de l'autre emblème civique, la louve qui allaite les jumeaux⁴⁰ (le mythe qui veut que la ville de Sienne ait été fondée par Aschio et Senio, les neveux de Romulus est élaboré au XIV^e siècle).

Le *Palio* couru en l'honneur de Violante le 2 juillet 1717, à la présence de Côme III, souligne encore plus explicitement la dimension municipale. On peut en décrire les moments-clés à partir d'un témoignage de l'époque.⁴¹ Sur l'ordre du Maître du Champ – un noble siennois – les *Contrade* se disposent en bon ordre pour faire leur entrée sur la *Piazza del Campo*. Dans le même temps, un groupe de jeunes nobles à cheval se rassemble devant le palais où siège la *Governatrice* pour lui faire escorte. L'entrée sur la place des cavaliers et des carrosses marque le début du spectacle. Après deux tours de place, la Princesse, le grand-duc, les dames et les chevaliers de la cour, prennent place sur une estrade dont la hauteur et la largeur dépasse toutes les autres: ils assistent donc au défilé puis au *Palio* jouissant d'une visibilité totale sur tous les angles de la place, symbole de leur suprématie politique par rapport à la ville. Le Maître du Champ, après que Leurs Altesses Royales aient donné l'ordre de départ, fait son

³⁵ Archives municipales de Sienne (Archivio Storico del Comune di Siena = ACSi), *Balia. Festeggiamenti*, 10, [6]: *Onoranze per il solenne ingresso della Serenissima Violante di Baviera Gran Principessa di Toscana in questa città di Siena seguito la sera del 12 aprile 1717*.

³⁶ *Lettera di Sacerdote Sanese, che scrive ad altro Sacerdote Fiorentino suo Amico, dandoli distinto, e minuto ragguaglio del Solennissimo Ingresso fatto in Siena da Madama Reale la Serenissima Violante Beatrice di Baviera Gran Principessa di Toscana destinata dall'A.R. del Gran Duca Cosimo III Governatrice della Città, e Stato di Siena*, Padoue, 1717.

³⁷ *Relazione sopra l'ingresso in Siena fattosi dall'Altezza Reale la Serenissima Violante Gran Principessa di Toscana nella sera del dì 12 Aprile 1717 in occasione del Possesso presosi dalla medesima Sereniss. Real Principessa, del Governo di quella suddetta Città, e Stato*, Florence, Anton Maria Albizzini, 1717; *Entrata dell'Altezza Reale della Serenissima Violante Gran Principessa di Toscana nuova Governatrice della Città e dello Stato di Siena seguita il dì 12 aprile 1717*, Florence, Piero Matini, 1717.

³⁸ G. Gigli, *Diario sanese. In cui si veggono alla giornata tutti gli avvenimenti più ragguardevoli spettanti sì allo spirituale, sì al temporale della Città, e Stato di Siena; con la notizia di molte nobili famiglie di essa, delle quali è caduto in acconcio il parlarne*, 2 voll., Lucques, Leonardo Venturini, 1723; 2^a ed., 3 voll., Sienne, Tip. dell'Ancora, 1854: I, pp. 136-140.

³⁹ ACSi, *Balia. Festeggiamenti*, 9, c. 257.

⁴⁰ *Entrata dell'Altezza Reale della Serenissima Violante*, op. cit.

⁴¹ G.A. Pecci, *Relazione dell'ingresso, e feste*, op. cit.

entrée à cheval, vêtu d'un habit de velours brodé d'or et boutonné de diamants. La bride, la selle et le harnachement du destrier sont à l'avenant.

Que les *Contrade* aient équipé six chars représente un autre signe de l'importance de l'événement. Les hommes de la *Contrada* de la Tortue distribuent à la cour des madrigaux, dont l'un chante les louanges de Violante, décrite comme une lumière qui répand sur Sienne un nouveau soleil et en éloigne les plus tristes moments. La *Contrada* de l'Onde met en scène une chevauchée dont les protagonistes représentent l'Allemagne, la France, l'Espagne et l'Italie par leurs fleuves principaux. On entend signifier par là les « qualités particulières » de la *Governatrice*: dans l'Allemagne natale, la Famille de Bavière avait atteint les plus hauts postes, élevée jusqu'à la dignité impériale; la France et l'Espagne apparaissaient pour dire les liens de sang étroits que Violante entretenait avec les rois de ces pays. L'Italie, représentée par le Pô, suggérait la proximité avec la Maison de Savoie, alors que le Tevere faisait allusion à l'estime du Saint Siège. L'Arno, naturellement, évoquait son époux, le Prince Ferdinand, alors que l'Arbia symbolisait la ville de Sienne qui reconnaissait la grande fortune de son arrivée.⁴²

Aucun élément n'échappe à la mise en scène. Dans les formules se fait jour l'idée d'un nouveau départ pour le *Stato Nuovo*. Cette espérance est alimentée par les réseaux parentaux et relationnels de la *Governatrice*, dont la position dans le paysage politique italien et européen se répercute sur la position même de l'État de Sienne, représenté non seulement sur un autre plan que l'État de Florence, mais surtout à un niveau de dignité égal aux autres États italiens et européens. Il est clair ici que les ambitions et les attentes de l'oligarchie locale se calent sur le prestige et les ambitions de la Princesse elle-même.

L'organisation du *Palio* du 2 juillet 1717 couru en l'honneur de la *Governatrice* ne fut pas exempte de conflits, en raison des lourdes tâches qui incombèrent aux *Contrade*, chacune étant contrainte d'arriver sur la place avec soixante personnes ou d'équiper un char d'apparat. Les nobles Protecteurs avaient été priés d'intervenir dans les conseils des habitants pour garantir leur alignement sur les consignes. Ce qui survint dans la *Contrada* de la Tortue est significatif des attentes qui animaient l'aristocratie siennoise à cette époque. Les Protecteurs se présentèrent au conseil et demandèrent que soit communiquée et justifiée à l'avance toute impossibilité éventuelle d'assumer la charge de Capitaine (celui qui conduisait le groupe de la *Contrada* sur la place). Mais le Capitaine de la *Contrada* démissionna (nous ne savons pas la raison) et les nobles, offensés, quittèrent le conseil qui fut interrompu.⁴³ La *Contrada* de la Licorne, elle, en raison de sa faible population, ne fut pas en mesure de réunir le nombre d'hommes exigé, et fut interdite de *Palio* pour dix ans.⁴⁴

Conclusion

Il semble que le gouvernement de Violante fut une déception, au moins pour certains membres de l'oligarchie dirigeante, qui regrettèrent principalement son éloignement physique (elle vivait à Florence la plupart de l'année). Les fortes attentes se soldent ainsi par une amère conclusion, dans les notes de Giovanni Antonio Pecci, un autre noble siennois. À la date du

⁴² *Veridico ragguaglio della Solenne Entrata*, op. cit., pp. 34 et suivantes.

⁴³ Archives de la *Contrada* de la Tortue (Tartuca), *Deliberazioni 1701-1735*, conseil du 3 mai 1717.

⁴⁴ ACSi, *Balia. Festeggiamenti*, 9, c. 291, 15 avril 1717.

30 mai 1731, il rapporte ainsi qu'on avait reçu de Florence l'annonce de la mort de la *Governatrice*, mais il prétend que personne à Sienne ne l'aurait regrettée.⁴⁵

Le jugement de Pecci est beaucoup trop sévère. On a, à juste titre, insisté sur la double appartenance des femmes de cour, partagées entre les logiques et les traditions de leur lignée d'origine et celles de leur nouvelle famille.⁴⁶ Violante eut la tâche ingrate de concilier trois logiques distinctes: celle de sa famille d'origine, celle de la Maison acquise par mariage et celle d'un État dont les rapports avec Florence n'étaient pas simples, caractérisés par une négociation exténuante. Violante parvint à maintenir un brillant équilibre entre ces composantes et sut se faire l'interprète attentive des intérêts siennois. À ce titre, un passage de sa correspondance est tout à fait frappant, puisqu'elle repousse certaines procédures qui diminuaient les privilèges de Sienne, les estimant en conséquence indignes de son propre statut. Quand elle le jugeait nécessaire, elle soutenait activement les députations siennoises à Florence.⁴⁷

Violante, nous l'avons vu, ne fut pas la première femme Gouverneur de Sienne (de 1717 à 1731). Il y eut le précédent important de Catherine de Médicis Gonzague, Gouverneur de 1627 à 1629. Entre Catherine et Violante s'insère une série de gouverneurs, tous des hommes et des cadets de la famille régnante. Un point commun réunit pourtant les deux princesses, éloignées dans le temps: toutes deux, au moment de leur nomination, sont veuves, Catherine depuis un an, Violante depuis trois ans. Pour toutes les deux cependant, une situation de faiblesse identitaire – le statut de veuvage – se transforme en une reconnaissance politique. Pourquoi? Qui pèse le plus, les intérêts siennois et la situation locale ou les équilibres et les logiques internes à la famille Médicis? De ce point de vue spécifique, autant pour Catherine que pour Violante, les conclusions restent à préciser, même si le second paramètre semble d'ores et déjà prépondérant. Car les contextes dans lesquels interviennent ces deux nominations sont de toute façon totalement différents. Pour Catherine, le début du XVII^e siècle se caractérise par une stabilité politique et sociale; pour Violante, le début du XVIII^e siècle est dominé au contraire par une grande inquiétude et des incertitudes politiques quant au devenir du grand-duché.

Dans une telle situation, Violante apportait à Sienne la force et le prestige d'une lignée d'origine avec laquelle elle maintenait des liens très forts, ainsi qu'un capital de relations parentales et sociales qui dynamisèrent la vie de la cité, en lui donnant, dans le tourbillon des arrivées et des départs des têtes couronnées de toute l'Europe, l'illusion de tenir encore son avenir entre ses mains.

⁴⁵ G. A. Pecci, P. Pecci, *Giornale sanese (1715-1794)*, édité par E. Innocenti, G. Mazzoni, Sienne, Il Leccio, 2000, à la date indiquée.

⁴⁶ Voir l'introduction d'Alessandra Contini aux actes du colloque cité en note 3.

⁴⁷ Cf. N. Di Paola, *Il Comune di Siena e il governo mediceo al tempo di Violante di Baviera (1717-1731)*, Mémoire de Maîtrise, Université de Sienne, 2000-2001, sous la direction de M. Ascheri. Par exemple, dans la lettre du 27 juin 1718 adressée au Secrétaire d'Etat: « (...) mi sembra non solo irragionevole, ma contraria al mio stesso decoro l'introduzione di novità sì pregiudiziale ai privilegj dello Stato, in tempo appunto che io ne tengo il Governo, mi trovo in obbligo di sostenergli, e fargli valere non solo per la giustizia, ma anche per mia propria reputazione »: « (...) me semble non seulement déraisonnable, mais contraire à mon propre decorum l'introduction de nouveautés qui soient préjudiciables aux privilèges de l'Etat, dans la période dont j'en ai le gouvernement; je suis donc obligée à soutenir ces privileges en toute justice et pour ma propre réputation » (p. 76).