



Tracy Chapman Hamilton, *Pleasure and Politics at the Court of France: The Artistic Patronage of Queen Marie of Brabant (1260–1321)* (London: Harvey Miller Publishers, 2019). Print, 323 pp, €125, ISBN: 9781905375684

Review

In the study of medieval art and architecture, women have not generally been included in any large scale. Hamilton's book, therefore, is a welcome addition to the popular field of studies in material culture and more specifically to the field of medieval art history. It is a study focused on a number of literary and artistic objects owned or commissioned by Marie of Brabant, queen consort to Philippe III, the Capetian king of France from 1245 to 1285, with a stated objective of examining how Marie transformed court patronage during her tenure as queen consort and, later, queen dowager. Hamilton demonstrates that Marie was able to 'present herself as a powerful monarch, a beneficent queen, a learned woman, a deserving mother, and a pious daughter' (p. 36) by focusing her patronage of the literary and visual arts in such a way as to direct the iconography embedded in the commissioned objects towards the desired representation of herself and her court. In so doing, she played an influential role in creating a court setting for 'a certain type of secular exchange that revolved around architecture, books, sculpture, music, ceremony, dress, and science' (p. 20); a setting that was all the more vibrant in comparison with its religiously-centred predecessor, the court of Louis IX, father of Philippe III.

Marie is not one of the better-known royal women in medieval France. There does not, to my knowledge, exist any extensive scholarly biographies of her and she is less well-researched than some of her contemporaries, such as Marhaut of Artois and Jeanne of Navarre. This book does not, however, attempt to present a complete biographical account of her; what it does is to mine a rich cache of sources to add to our general understanding of late Capetian French queenship, including literary texts commissioned or owned by the queen, and a variety of sculptural, architectural and glass works assigned to her agency as collector or patron. Studying cultural and

material objects is a vastly interesting way of conducting research into queenly agency and representation. Material possessions can provide valuable insight into the characteristics of individual queenships, and how the queens themselves perceived their own roles in their society and their families, both natal and marital. Hamilton herself acknowledges an additional significance in her study being part of a widening perspective on how to acquire knowledge about a royal person such as Marie of Brabant and, correspondingly, how she operated in her world.

The study can be viewed as thematically organised but with a chronological flavour. The first chapter sets the scene by providing a brief biography of the queen, outlining her general patterns of patronage, placing this study within the general historiographical context and introducing the primary sources that form the backbone of the author's research. Chapter Two uses a variety of sources such as seals, poetry, architectural commissions, and sculptural analysis of tombs through which to give us a sense of the cultural milieu of the world into which Marie was born and grew up with. Marie absorbed the lessons of her youth at the court of her parents, Henri III, duke of Brabant and his wife, Aleyde of Burgundy; her appreciation of the use of ritual and ceremony both for leisure and political service were learnt and honed there. Chapter Three continues this cultural scene-setting at the court of France, focusing on the years after Marie and Philippe were married in 1274, through his death in 1285, and until her death in 1321. It is in this chapter that we begin to see the author analyse in greater detail works such as *Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal*, ms. 3142, a folio miscellany of court verse commissioned by Marie approximately in 1285. By deconstructing images and text within frameworks of symbolism to illuminate the cues that point towards Marie's self-image and interests, Hamilton sheds greater light on the heraldic and compositional vocabulary used by the creators of those works and understood in its contemporary historical context. In doing so, Chapter Three serves as a precursor of the methodology that is used even more extensively in the latter half of the book. The fourth and fifth chapters concentrate specifically on Marie's literary and artistic patronage, respectively, going into close textual, representation, and art analysis of

key manuscript works in Marie of Brabant's library (Chapter Four), and sculpture, architecture, seals, and glass works (Chapter Five). The extensive detail of these two chapters points to the author's specific training in art history and analysis. The study concludes with succinct analysis of funerary commemoration in the Franciscan church of the Cordeliers where Marie was buried and a precis of her influence on other French royal women after her. A particular strength of this book is the way Hamilton strives to always read the texts, manuscripts and artworks within their original context and against the backdrop of established knowledge about Marie of Brabant's background and interests, while maintaining an eye on conventional theoretical frameworks of artistic symbolism.

Overall, this is a beautifully presented book that contains fine attention to detail as well as many wonderful and vivid photos, and illustrations that help bring to life the descriptions and analysis, which would otherwise require much more effort in visualising. The prose is well written, albeit with a few typographical and grammatical mistakes. Marie of Brabant is presented as a cultured noblewoman, one whose patronage was innovative and transformative. Her understanding of the potential power of patronage to create a sphere of influence at the court of late Capetian France and her agency in doing so are amply demonstrated by Hamilton's detailed examinations of key works owned or commissioned by Marie, the thoroughness of the employed methodology being bolstered by extensive notes and references. If there is any criticism to be made, it is that a wider geographical and temporal lens might have been utilised to place Marie in a more complete historiographical context. As it is, it is not easy to envisage where and how Marie was placed among the other royals and nobles of her time, in France, England and in other continental European settings. Nonetheless, this is a fine study that not only sheds light on the atmosphere of material culture propagated by this queen's taste and designs, but also provides us with greater insight into how queens consort might have exercised agency in shaping their image and representation. While its audience may gain more from this book those who are knowledgeable in the area of symbolism in art and sculpture, more general readers

will also find much to interest them in understanding what art and culture had to say about the lives of its patrons and their needs and desires.

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