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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. 323 pp. Maps, figures, notes, appendices, bibliography, and index. \$163.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-905375-68-4.

Review by Cynthia J. Brown, University of California, Santa Barbara.

Tracy Hamilton's *Pleasure and Politics at the Court of France*, which enlightens scholars about Marie of Brabant's extensive patronage as it materialized in her manuscript collections, acquired art objects, commissioned works of sculpture and architecture as well as court ceremonials, contributes substantively to the burgeoning research on the engagement of noble women in the formation of medieval and early modern cultural circles. While a number of works on female patronage have appeared in recent years, few, according to Hamilton, concentrate on late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century French history (p. 24). A beautifully produced volume with an impressive 165 figures, most in color and many of which are full-page reproductions, this tome stands as a model of scholarship for its comprehensive scope, lucid prose, thoughtfully structured narrative, insightful artistic and textual analyses, and well-crafted argument. The author's meticulous research is most evident in extensive footnotes with scrupulously cited historical, archival, and scholarly sources that abundantly contextualize her claims, address secondary arguments, or develop ancillary points. Hamilton credits Marie of Brabant with greater cultural power and influence than previous scholars, arguing that she was instrumental in introducing new artistic forms to the French court upon her arrival from Brabant in 1274 to marry King Philippe III, helping to transform the late Capetian French cultural scene from one defined by the religious distinction of Louis IX's court to a more secular dynamic that prevailed throughout the rest of the Middle Ages, thanks in part to a network of female patrons who continued Marie of Brabant's cultural enterprise after her death. Hamilton claims that "the patronage of the women who followed her discloses, in fact, quite the opposite of what earlier scholarship had failed to notice: the women of the royal house did actively contribute to and affect their surroundings....Patronage was an especially effective way for royal women to manipulate and construct both their individual environment and an image of themselves for others; it provided an acceptable and visible method for wealthy women to alter their world within societal limits and norms" (p. 21).

In chapter one, Hamilton introduces and supports this argument with a brief biographical synopsis of Marie de Brabant, whose life was marked by her momentous 1275 French coronation, Pierre de la Broce's groundless accusation that the queen had murdered her two stepsons and her eventual acquittal, the unexpected death of her husband in 1285, and Marie's close friendship with Blanche of France. Here and throughout the book, the famous literary anthology

commissioned by Marie around 1285, Paris, Bibliothèque de l’Arsenal, MS 3142 (hereafter “Arsenal MS 3142”), figures centrally as a key to an understanding of the French queen’s awareness of the past as a means to legitimize the present and her use of courtly space to cast herself as a political and cultural authority.

Chapter two focuses on the cultural politics of Marie’s youth, which set the stage for the French court she would help reshape. Here Hamilton reminds the reader of the sophisticated secular life of the trade-rich duchy into which Marie of Brabant was born. The future French queen’s intellectual aspirations were nurtured in the cultural revival fostered by her father Duke Henri III’s model diplomacy, patronage, family customs and rituals, and promotion of secular music and his own poetry at a court where literature served as a diplomatic and political tool. Her mother Aleyde of Burgundy’s patronage and self-promotion, made visible in her unique image on seals created during her six-year regency as duchess of Brabant, also established a model of female agency. According to Hamilton, Marie also drew inspiration about self-perception and self-promotion from other northern European traditions, especially the secular interests and extravagant celebrations of the courts of Flanders and Artois, personalized through close ties with her aunts, Beatrix of Brabant and Mahaut of Artois. The late thirteenth-century poem *Cléomadès*, which opens Arsenal MS 3142 and was authored by Adenet le Roi, one of Henri III’s protégés, textually praises Marie and many of her family, friends and allies and, in the opening miniature, visually stages some of these notable relationships. A study of Marie’s parents’ tombs underscores the political import of the vision of the Brabantine dynasty, which generated “the power of visualizing and creating genealogies” (p. 76) that came to define Marie’s own cultural strategies in France.

In chapter three, Hamilton returns to the opening miniature of Arsenal MS 3142, closely scrutinizing the staging of relationships in which Marie figures at the center of a Capetian family circle. At her side is her sister-in-law Blanche of France, with whom she co-commissioned Arsenal MS 3142’s first work, Adenet’s *Cléomadès*, thereby promoting French female agency. Marie’s native land is also advertised through the depiction of her nephew, the future duke of Brabant (Jean II), and the minstrel Adenet le Roi, who had accompanied Marie to Paris for her coronation. This manuscript’s literary expansion of romance miscellany is seen to form part of a new aesthetic of secularism, characterized by an increased naturalism and informality and greater intimacy that are visible in the innovative iconography of the opening miniature. While the stunning accumulation of detailed evidence and data pertaining to Marie’s cultural life that Hamilton repeatedly provides here and elsewhere generally supports her argument that the queen’s portrayal and presence as an influential cultural figure were clearly promoted while she was French queen and dowager queen, the agency she attributes to Marie as a manipulator of her own and her ancestral image for political gain is not always convincingly substantiated. Indeed, it is challenging to accurately assess motivation without direct testimony. In the case of the Arsenal MS 3142 miniature, for example, is it really possible to determine the direct role Marie of Brabant might have (or might not have) actually played in its conception, design, and fabrication? In a later footnote, Hamilton does acknowledge this issue when she states: “Although we must be wary of attempting to view ‘reality’ through a culture’s artistic production, I do believe that designers were reacting to their patron’s wishes and in this way images give evidence of self-representation or aspirations” (p. 164n102).

Whatever her precise role in such decision-making, Marie’s authoritative presence was unquestionably on display in this manuscript miniature and other venues, such as her 1275

coronation, the first held at the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris. Hamilton ingeniously associates Guillaume de Nangis' record of that ceremony with Adenet's literary account of Berthe's coronation in his *Berte aus grans piés*. In a "merging of the ideal historical court of Arthur with the brilliant present-day court of France" (p. 103), Marie of Brabant reenacted the role of Guinevere at the famous Le Hem tournament in 1278, standing out at yet another court festival. She is shown to be equally productive and influential during her widowhood through the collaborative female networks formed with wealthy wives and widows such as Blanche of France, Mahaut of Artois, and Jeanne of Navarre and Champagne and her involvement in the marital matches of her children. Marie was a central force in the French-English treaty that resulted in her daughter Marguerite's marriage to Edward I in 1299 and in negotiations for the marriage of her grandson Philippe of Evreux to Jeanne of France.

Hamilton's inquiry into Marie of Brabant's socio-political situation effectively sets the stage for her analysis of the books, objects, and monuments that resulted from the queen's extensive patronage. In chapter four, she seeks to reconstruct Marie's library, which housed some of the most important manuscripts of the period, assessing the extent to which Marie was or might be considered to be the commissioner, dedicatee, or owner of certain works, while having access to other writings in the royal library (such as the *Grandes chroniques de France* or Gilles de Rome's *De regimine principum*); a full list of such works and categories is helpfully provided in Appendix I.[1] These carefully scrutinized codices range from vernacular miscellanies, verse anthologies, and romances to calendars, treatises, and chronicles to chansonniers, breviaries, and other religious works. As a virtual microcosm of the general composition of Marie's library and of the new cultural spirit she introduced to the French court, Arsenal MS 3142 is further scrutinized for its historical, fictional, and moralistic texts and artistic innovations (independent miniatures as headers, adoption of cutting-edge colors, use of hundreds of images, strong text-image associations), with insightful parallels drawn between Marie's reality and many of the manuscript's fictional characters and events. Marie's support and encouragement of new authors, styles, and subjects, initiated by the Brabantine artists she brought with her to France, generated a merging of two cultures through a gradual shift at the French court from religious manuscript production to a growing appeal of the secular narratives of vernacular works in addition to moral and didactic texts.

Chapter five explores Marie's promotion of her natal and marital associations through commissions that often drew attention to her Carolingian ancestry owing to her Brabantine heritage, as evidenced in relevant genealogical histories, during her coronation ceremony, in the dual-lineage image on her seals and through commissions of books, art objects and monuments. Many of the works in the Arsenal MS 3142 miscellany are located in a Merovingian or Carolingian past (e. g., Adenet's *Cléomadès*, *Berte aus grans piés*, *Enfances Ogier*, *Beuves de Commarhis* and Bodel's *Chanson des Saisnes*) and heraldry and portraits painted therein remind the reader of Marie's genealogical networks. Similar heraldic associations characterize the famous Châsse of Saint Gertrude at Nivelles, a late thirteenth-century reliquary whose commission, design, and genealogical program, Hamilton argues, point to Marie's patronage, given that Gertrude was the patron saint of Brabantine dukes as well as the French queen's ancestor and the fact that Marie supported religious institutions in the town of Nivelles. In a more public context, the French queen was centrally positioned with a display of French-Brabant and imperial heraldry in new colored glass added to the ducal chapel windows at the site of Marie's parents' tombs in Louvain. Glass programs in church chapels in Reims and Mantes created during her widowhood also displayed her Brabant-French arms, with a focus this time

on Marie's immediate family and her own place in French royal history, highlighted by innovations such as the adoption of stained-glass inscriptions and the use of the sacred and private space of chapels within large churches. Also notable was the geographical continuity of Marie's foundations, similar to those of her royal female associates, along the route she likely traveled from Brabant to Paris in 1274.

Marie's impact on later generations through her funerary commemorations and the collection patterns of her successors is the focus of chapter six. Even in death at the age of sixty, her natal-marital profile and noteworthy female networks were manifest through her burial in a virtual necropolis of royal women (with pre-deceased cousins Blanche of France and Jeanne of Navarre and Champagne) at the Cordeliers' church in Paris, surrounded by friends and relatives whom she had outlived, while her heart was buried with her husband's in the church of the Jacobins, which also harked back to the Dominican site of her parents' tombs in Louvain. Hamilton demonstrates that the new norm for royal female patronage set by Marie was embraced by her successors, in particular her granddaughter and last Capetian queen, Jeanne of Evreux, and it even extended to King Charles V, whose extensive book collection contained manuscripts from at least four previous queens, including those of Marie of Brabant, thereby linking his Valois kingship to his Capetian past.

Scholars and specialists of medieval art history, history, literature and culture, feminist studies and history of the book will discover many other treasures in this admirably researched volume.

#### NOTE

[1] Given the difficulties scholars have traditionally encountered in reconstituting the libraries of medieval women, it is not surprising that Hamilton's reconstruction of Marie of Brabant's library entailed a certain amount of speculation about commissions and ownership. While at times during her discussion she shifts from the suggestion that Marie was the likely patron of a certain manuscript to complete acceptance of this claim, the author does make it clear in Appendix I which works she has "assigned" to Marie's agency.

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