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Theodore Evergates, *Marie of France: Countess of Champagne, 1145-1198*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019. ix + 180 pp. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. \$69.95 U.S. (cl). ISBN 9780812250770.

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Ted Evergates has been conversant with the extensive charters and administrative registers of Champagne since the days when computers were programmed with punch cards and his magisterial *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne, 1000-1300* contains many rich fruits of his research.^[1] While specialists in medieval France rely on his well-annotated editions of cartularies, including two compiled during the tenure of Countess Blanche and replete with transactions between lay parties,^[2] teachers and a new generation of medieval historians are indebted to his 1993 *Feudal Society in Medieval France: Documents from the County of Champagne*, the first anthology of French records published in English, and his 1997 examination of the “Duby thesis,” “The Feudal Imaginary of Georges Duby.”^[3]

In recent years Evergates has turned to biography, with his 2016 study of Count Henry the Liberal, and, in the book under review, Henry’s wife, Countess Marie of France, who outlived her husband by some seventeen years.^[4] This biographical approach, in Evergates’s skilled hands, is to be welcomed not only by scholars, but also by students at all levels—and indeed by general readers or those whose main interests in women’s and social history lie in other times or places.

Of course, “biographies” of leading twelfth-century people—men or women—cannot be written as they are for those who lived in more modern times. Sources treating subjects’ personal attitudes are rare to non-existent and authors need to provide the historical context necessary for gauging the impact of their subjects’ documented actions. Evergates’s *Marie of France, Countess of Champagne, 1145-1198* thus stands alongside Fredric L. Cheyette’s study of Marie’s older near contemporary from southern France, *Ermengard of Narbonne and the World of the Troubadours*, and this reviewer’s *Adela of Blois, Countess and Lord (c. 1067-1137)*, devoted to the grandmother of Marie’s husband.^[5]

Like Marie, those are two other ruling (vis)countesses whose contributions to regional governance and contemporary politics were eclipsed both by momentous geopolitical shifts in the French realm in the decades after their deaths and the subsequent formal exclusion of women from “the public sphere” for most of the modern period. As a result, most nineteenth- and twentieth-century “scientific” scholars viewed them primarily as trend-setting patrons of leading men of letters. Evergates, building on his portrayal of Marie in his 1999 article “Aristocratic

Women in the County of Champagne,”[6] widens that frame (pp. vii-viii), presenting Marie as “an active and conscientious ruler of a wealthy and powerful northern French principality” who governed Champagne for almost two decades (p. ix).

The choice of a bio-chronological frame has the advantage over a thematic approach in allowing Evergates to depict the countess’s activities in the round. Readers can place specific literary and cultural pursuits in the context of her other interests and pressing obligations—managing her household, maintaining and promoting extended family ties, advancing religious life and personal devotion, developing comital revenues and the regional economy, and exercising jurisdiction or governing—as the countess both travelled across (and occasionally beyond) the county of Champagne and traversed key life stages determined by evolving familial circumstances and ever-changing external political events. And by the end of the story readers have even caught glimpses of a distinct individual, with personal tastes, close friends, heartfelt emotions, and preferences in the literature she most enjoyed and the company she chose to keep.

The chapters, devoted to main phases of Marie’s life, cover uneven numbers of years from her birth in 1145 to King Louis VII and his first wife, Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, to her death and burial in Meaux in 1198, aged 53. The first sets the stage, recounting what little can be known about Marie’s childhood, betrothal, subsequent upbringing in Champagne, and marriage, until she took up residence at Troyes (when about 20) with her husband Henry I the Liberal, a Second Crusade veteran and established count some eighteen years her senior. Although Marie is unlikely to have known any of her royal-born siblings and half-siblings as a child, her adult relations with them—alongside the “in-laws” she acquired at marriage—provided the personal-political nexus or “thick family network” (p. 17) that underlay many of her subsequent activities.[7]

Chapter two treats Marie’s sixteen years as wife and mother (1165-1181), taking her into her mid-30s and ending with an almost two-year regency while her husband was away on a crusading venture. In addition to giving birth to four children, she managed her dower estates and personal household, sealing her first letters-patent (sealed charters produced by comital staff). Receiving visiting dignitaries and joining various members of her extended families on noteworthy ceremonial occasions, Marie was fully aware of the political ructions arising first from the uprising against Henry II of England orchestrated by her Plantagenet half-brothers backed by her male in-laws, followed by the newly-acceded King Philip II’s (temporary) purge of her Champenois relatives from the French royal court and marriage to a woman earlier twice promised to her elder son. Probably able to read Latin, Marie appears not to have shared her husband’s interest in historical narratives, though it was later in this period that she inspired Chrétien de Troyes’ *Lancelot*. Henry’s impending departure gave Marie a more prominent role in comital affairs (in spite of being pregnant), most notably in the couple’s controversial decision to grant Meaux a communal charter.

Henry the Liberal died about a week after his return to Troyes, leaving Marie a widow and ruling countess who served as regent in various capacities for most of the remaining seventeen years of her life (March 1181-March 1198): the subject of chapters three to five. Her most active years were 1181-1187 (chapter three), when she ruled as regent for her underage elder son, Henry. When he came of age (July 1197) Marie’s attempt, aged 42, to retire to a priory of Fontevraud was cut short after a few months when Count Henry II took the cross for the Third Crusade (chapter four). After he decided to marry and stay in the Latin East, Marie’s rather half-hearted

sharing of comital responsibilities (mostly implementing mandates Henry sent from abroad) became a final period of largely sole rule, capped, after her son's accidental death in 1197, by about six months as regent for Henry II's designated successor, Marie's second son, who was about 18 in a county where the age of succession was 21 (chapter five).

As regent, Marie largely relied on the chancery practices and officials of her husband, though she made her own appointments as personnel retired or died, promoting men from her own personal household (e.g., her chaplain Andreas) alongside "new" men from lesser lineages known to the comital family (e.g., Geoffrey of Villehardouin as marshal). She sealed—with a seal representing her dual identity as daughter of a French king and countess of Troyes—documents issued to record the full array of comital administrative and judicial affairs: confirmations of grants made by her predecessors or other parties, "recognitions" to certify "private transactions made public" (p. 45), settlements she mediated and judgments she rendered in cases heard at the comital court, franchises she granted to urban communities, and homages or other matters arising from feudal tenure.[8]

Interests of her extended family continued to underlie "external affairs," notably the Hainaut betrothals of Marie's two oldest children, though only that of her daughter Marie was realised before her son Henry broke his, adding momentarily to the regional conflicts of the later 1180s that were settled as the combatants prepared for the Third Crusade. After weathering the armed clashes of the opening years of Philip II's reign (when negotiations for Marie's own remarriage came to naught), the countess maintained generally good relations with her royal half-brother, especially when he fought to limit the continental reach of King Henry II. And Marie continued to cultivate personal alongside political relations with her widowed half-sister Margaret (who spent several years with the countess at Troyes between marriages) and her sister-in-law, the dowager Queen Adele, who, like Marie, served as a regent during the Third Crusade, as did Marie's sister Countess Alice of Blois (with whom Marie maintained political relations if not personal contact).

Marie's regency years were also those of her greatest participation in literary affairs. Moving on from his discussion of Marie's rather limited direct connections in the later 1170s to Chrétien de Troyes (who still eludes positive identification), Evergates neatly sketches a contrast between the "courtly love" of Gace Brulé's lyrics and the *De amore* of Andreas Capellanus (most likely Marie's chaplain in the early 1180s) and the *fin amors* (spiritual or sacred love) revealed in *Eructavit*, a dramatic romance adaptation of Psalm 44(45)—a psalm sung at both royal marriages and Christmas. Most likely composed by an unnamed canon of St Etienne in Troyes and performed before the widows Marie, Margaret, and Adele on Christmas 1184 at the convent of Foissy, *Eructavit* honours the daughters of kings and married love even as its celebration of a heavenly marriage becomes a call to religious devotion. The courtly entertainment in which Marie features, the *Tournament of Ladies* (*Li tornois des dames*), was composed by Hugh of Oisy after he added the viscounty of Meaux to his portfolio of honours and became her niece Margaret's second husband in 1186, while the crusader king Richard I dedicated one of his more popular songs (*Ja nuns hons pris*) to his half-sister Marie early in the 1190s. That was about the time that the countess commissioned Evrat, most likely a well-educated canon of St Etienne in Troyes and chancery cleric, to produce a romance translation of *Genesis*, complete with up-to-date commentary, so that she could deepen her religious devotion.

Her son's death, just after that of her twice-widowed half-sister Margaret, hit Marie hard and she finally satisfied her desire to end her days as a Fontevrist nun at Fontaines-les-Nonnes (outside Meaux) where she died on March 1198, aged 53, shortly after having taken the veil. Evergates's final chapter serves more as an epilogue than general conclusions though there can be no doubt that Marie fulfilled her duty "to preserve the principality [of Champagne] and its institutions intact and to assure the continuity of the [comital] lineage" (p. 95). He passes in review the range of overlapping and contrasting representations of countess Marie in literary and devotional works, administrative records, pictorial images, musical laments and even liturgical actions, perhaps best encapsulated in the words of the canon Evrart: "Well did she protect and govern the land / letting nothing slip from her hand, / she was gracious, wise, valiant, and courageous" (p. 95).

Three features are particularly noteworthy in Evergates's account of countess Marie. First, he lets the sources speak for themselves in frequent quotations and revealing summaries. That is most significant for Marie's and her son Henry II's little known letters-patent and other documentary records, many of which remain unpublished or untranslated.^[9] Not only do they abound in information about comital governance, but they are a trove of telling details that evoke the rich textures of Marie's world. Nonetheless, readers could benefit from some brief comments about most of the numerous chroniclers (e.g., dates when they were writing, any noteworthy regional or political slant) whose narratives he regularly adduces as evidence for events. Such guidance would be especially helpful when chroniclers express strong views—favourable or unfavourable—on persons involved or, indeed, when they disagree with each other (or with other sources), situations in which Evergates, after presenting the evidence, usually leaves it to his readers to resolve any inconsistencies for themselves.

Secondly, Evergates carefully analyses (as much in the notes as in the main text) the evidence available to establish the identity of the authors of the diverse literary texts linked to Marie and their relations with the countess. He then states his considered view in the cases where one option appears more plausible than the other possibilities he has deftly laid out. Not all readers will agree with him in every case, but, again, they can readily judge the evidence (or consult the scholars he cites) for themselves.

And thirdly, Evergates's mastery of documentary materials, combined with comments in the better known literary sources, allows readers to glimpse the countess as an individual within the lived environment and material culture that provided the backdrop to court life, whether in Troyes (the plans reproduced on pp. 13-14 are revealing), at other comital residences (e.g., in Meaux and Provins), at the courts of neighbouring princes, or at any favoured religious establishment that lay somewhere in between. Such sources mention, even when they don't fully describe, events from musical entertainments to funeral laments, Christmas liturgies to religious processions, the bustle of fairs and rushing of mill races to destructive town fires that enlivened Marie's aural and visual worlds. Evergates's readers also catch sight, *inter alia*, of a stone bridge built to replace one in wood, the *chantiers* of rising Gothic cathedrals, collections of manuscript books, an illuminated gospel book with a presentation portrait of the young Henry II, a garnet ring Marie used to compensate monks for the excesses of some of her knights, gifts of chalices she gave in thanks for hospitality, and sumptuously enamelled tombs. Those may strike some readers as random details, but for a period from which very few objects or buildings survive as Marie would have known them they are gems indeed.

In addition, it is through such sources that readers see how Marie sought out the company of her half-sister Margaret and her sister-in-law the dowager Queen Adele, as well as developing close relationships with trusted officials and confidants such as her personal escort Nevel of Aulnay, Abbot Joscelin of Notre-Dame La Charmoye, and Prioress Edna of Fontaines. They allow Evergates to show Marie's penchant for supporting religious women, and not only those at newer communities such as the priories of Fontevraud and the Paraclete. She also invested in secular canons, notably alongside her husband in support for St-Etienne in Troyes and, in the 1190s, in the construction of Notre-Dame-du-Val in Provins whose canons might possibly have copied books for the countess, among others. And her patronage of literary texts appears to have tilted towards works of spiritual formation over verse romances.

Finally, Evergates's finely honed examination of Marie's life as countess of Champagne exemplifies three key trends in the study of aristocratic women's lives that, since the 1990s, have gradually become mainstream. First--above and beyond the mere visibility of widows in aristocratic society--is the fundamental importance of women's dower estates as sources of income to support their household expenses and numerous cultural, religious and political undertakings, in addition to providing refuge in times of strained relations or open conflict. Although historians like Evergates might refer to dower/dowry affairs as "personal matters," (pp. 22-23), women's management of such properties--often with an eye to maintaining or increasing revenues derived from them--frequently made them protectors of ecclesiastical estates and entailed powers of jurisdiction and command (i.e., banal powers in Duby's sense) over lands and persons, both men and women, from fief-holding knights to urban merchants and peasant tenants alike. Even early in her married years Marie had merchants of St.-Denis seized for evading tolls included in her dower and justified her actions in a letter to the king (her father!), to whom the monks had complained. Later, as countess, she intervened to safeguard the dower properties of other women, most notably, assisting in the negotiations that resulted in Henry II of England compensating her half-sister Margaret with cash payments after he had seized the dower lands of his son's young widow.

Second is the importance of aristocratic women's family ties to the social and political standing of their princely husbands and the children they brought into the world. Women played key roles in fostering such links by visiting or receiving family members and attending--or refusing to attend--events like weddings, funerals, consecrations, coronations, or simply the festivities on seasonal holy days (e.g., Christmas or Easter, when lords frequently held major courts). They were also active both in negotiating the marriages of their children and in memorialising their husbands and families, whether through the commissioning of historical narratives (though apparently not Marie!) or increasingly ornamented and sculptural tombs that could commemorate the kin as well as the person of the deceased.

Although Henry the Liberal organised the construction of his own tomb, Marie, who could see it from the balcony of the comital apartments overlooking the interior of St-Etienne, commissioned inscriptions for it and insisted that the canons acquire new copes for the feast of their patron saint in order to honour their founder. And it may well have been conversations with her sister-in-law that inspired Adele of Champagne to commission an effigy tomb for Louis VII. The tomb of Marie's second son, Count Thibaut III, was commissioned by his wife, Countess Blanche of Navarre, and included a statuette of Marie alongside his other closest relations displayed so as to justify his collateral succession to Champagne. [10] While many of those affairs might be deemed "private" from a modern perspective (p. 23), they had a public face and many

such “behind the scenes” activities—which could include diplomacy undertaken at festive gatherings—were essential for forging and maintaining political alliances, even if most oral exchanges between parties have evaporated in the mists of time.

Third, aristocratic wives and mothers, whatever their personal proclivities, had to be ready to govern because they were expected to do so when circumstances demanded, most often by serving as regents for absent husbands or underage sons. Marie might have done so with growing reluctance as she aged and yearned for a religious life, especially after her first-born son decided to remain in the East, but she proficiently discharged her duties. The counts of Champagne (along with their close relatives, the counts of Blois) were far from the only aristocratic family to produce crusaders in several successive generations over the 200 years of crusading to the Holy Land (1096-1291) and who thus repeatedly had to rely on women ruling. The obvious corollary is that literary and related cultural pursuits were only one sphere of endeavour among the many activities that occupied the time and energy of aristocratic women—even when they were “holding court.”

In sum, Evergates’s crisply elegant *Marie of France* is readily accessible to—and should be read by—everyone captivated by the rich and multi-faceted life of the regional aristocratic elite in France’s vibrant twelfth century, in this instance viewed from the perspective of a countess. It will especially appeal to those interested in women’s lived experiences, literary history, and princely lordship in an age of urban and economic growth, religious and intellectual revival, emerging vernacular (romance) literatures, political institution-building, and Holy Land crusading, all fuelled by an explosion in writing to which women as well as men contributed.

Students and general readers can easily read the 101 note-free pages of Marie’s life story, helped by maps, a genealogical chart, and an outline chronology alongside tables of Marie’s court officers, regional bishops, and Andreas Capellanus’s appearances as witness for the countess. Specialists, whatever their quibbles with Evergates’s views at some points, will spend more time poring over the forty pages of single-spaced, ‘small-print’ notes that are a mine of original-language quotations, summaries of scholarly debates, and background information on minor players. (However, their frustration at having to consult endnotes rather than footnotes will only grow when they discover the use of “short forms” even when works are first cited, meaning that they must keep at least three fingers in place in order to track down references while trying to read and take notes.)

With the publication of *Marie* completing his diptych devoted to the comital couple who governed Champagne for the second half of the twelfth century, Evergates can indeed take credit for demonstrating that “Henry the Liberal’s crowning achievement was to create the county of Champagne as a dynamic, prosperous state [while] Marie’s was to preserve it in the face of several existential threats” (p. ix).

NOTES

[1] Theodore Evergates, *The Aristocracy in the County of Champagne, 1100-1300* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007); note also Theodore Evergates, “The Aristocracy of Champagne in the Mid-Thirteenth Century: A Quantitative Description,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5:1 (1974): 1-18.

[2] Theodore Evergates and Giles Constable, eds., *The Cartulary and Charters of Notre-Dame of Homblières* (Cambridge, Mass: The Medieval Academy of America, 1990); Theodore Evergates, ed., *Littere Baronum: The Earliest Cartulary of the Counts of Champagne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Theodore Evergates, ed., *The Cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press for the Medieval Academy of America, 2010).

[3] Theodore Evergates, ed. and trans., *Feudal Society in Medieval France Documents from the County of Champagne* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993); Theodore Evergates, "The Feudal Imaginary of Georges Duby," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27 (1997): 641-660.

[4] Theodore Evergates, *Henry the Liberal, Count of Champagne, 1127-1181* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016).

[5] Fredric L. Cheyette, *Ermengard of Narbonne and the World of the Troubadours* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001); Kimberly A. LoPrete, *Adela of Blois, Countess and Lord (c.1067-1137)* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007).

[6] In Theodore Evergates, ed., *Aristocratic Women in Medieval France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 74-110 and 207-220.

[7] Marie's younger full sister, Alice, became countess of Blois and Marie's sister-in-law when she married Henry I's brother Thibaut V, count of Blois and royal seneschal (while Alice's daughter Margaret--Marie's niece--became viscountess of Meaux in 1186 and eventually heiress-countess of Blois). Another Margaret, Marie's half-sister by her father (Louis VII) and his second wife (Queen Constance), first married Henry the Young King of England; Henry, like his brothers Richard I and Geoffrey of Brittany, was Marie's half-brother by her mother (Eleanor). King Philip II Augustus was also Marie's half-brother, though by her father and his third wife, Queen Adele of Champagne, who--as Count Henry's sister--became Marie's sister-in-law of almost the same age (Adele and Marie were born within three years of each other and possibly in the same year). Of Marie's other sisters-in-law, she seems to have known Agnes, who became Countess of Bar-le-Duc, best. Marie interacted with all three of her brothers-in-law, Thibaut V of Blois, Stephen, Count of Sancerre, and--most extensively--with William "White Hands," bishop of Chartres and archbishop in turn of Sens and Reims, a key player both in extended family affairs and at the French royal court. Yet Marie seems not to have personally met with her mother after Eleanor's second marriage, except perhaps when the widowed queen passed through Champagne in 1193.

[8] Marie's seal has survived in an impression from 1192; the inscription reads "Daughter of the King of the Franks, Countess of Troyes" (pp. vii, 19; "count of Troyes" was the formal title adopted by the predecessors of those who, from the thirteenth century, did homage to the king for the County of Champagne and Brie [p. 92]). Her son Henry did not seal documents--or even have a seal made--until he succeeded his father at 21.

[9] Significantly, Evergates had access to the *acta* of Marie and Henry II in John F. Benton, ed., "Recueil des actes des comtes de Champagne, 1152-97," unpublished typescript, 1988.

[10] Marie's own effigy tomb in Meaux Cathedral was incorporated into the liturgy centuries before it was destroyed by Huguenots and her death was lamented in a *planctus* composed by Philip the Chancellor of Notre-Dame of Paris.

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