

Michael Depreter, Jonathan Dumont, Elizabeth L'Estrange, and Samuel Mareel (eds.), *Marie de Bourgogne: Figure, principat et postérité d'une duchesse tardo-médiévale / Mary of Burgundy: 'Persona', Reign, and Legacy of a Late Medieval Duchess*. *Burgundica* 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2021, 475 pp., ISBN 9782503588087).

Mary of Burgundy inherited the extensive domains of her father, Duke Charles the Bold, upon his death in 1477; then in 1482, at only twenty-five years of age, she met her own death in a hunting accident. During these five short years, she faced off against the French King Louis XI, married Archduke Maximilian of Austria, and bore three children. Historians have been left with the puzzle of how to tackle such a brief reign within the star-studded history of late medieval Burgundy and the southern Low Countries.

The solution proposed by this edited collection is to focus less on Mary herself, who appears here only periodically as an actor. Instead, the focus lies on the construction of her authority within its tense political context, on the wider institutional developments and socio-economic currents of this transitional period, and on Mary's commemoration from the moment of her funeral up to the twentieth century. Organized into three sections along these lines, the twenty-four contributions in this volume (ten in English, fourteen in French) aim to redress the historiographical neglect of the last Valois prince of Burgundy in wider conversations about the power of late medieval women, states, and memory. Their combined impact comes especially from an interdisciplinary approach (the editors themselves include two historians and two specialists in visual and literary culture) that opens a wide range of perspectives on this narrow slice of history. These studies examine chronicles and treatises, iconography and architecture, ceremonies and ordinances – a rich source base further highlighted through the inclusion of 66 full-colour images at the back of the volume. The juxtaposition of these diverse pieces of evidence leads not to a definitive picture of Mary or her reign, but to the clear benefits of situating a (potentially) iconic figure within her multifaceted context.

Perhaps because Mary's time was cut so short, the key contributions of these studies to our understanding of women's rulership concern specifically the issue of female succession, and how to frame the power of a young duchess. Women's right to inherit the most consequential principalities were perennially contested across Europe and especially within the French political sphere. Here, we are given both the pro and con (i.e., Burgundian and French) perspectives in the two chapters written respectively by Jonathan Dumont and Élodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, and by Kathleen Daly. They show

how this particular iteration of the debate responded to concerns in a wider political framework: legal or lineal legitimation in the Burgundian context, versus French constructions of the dynastic, feudal, judicial, or affective state. The idea of the ‘natural’ prince that emerges here is deftly picked up by Lisa Demets in her analysis of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*, where it combines with a theme of virginity that runs further through a number of these chapters. Youthful maidenhood could be both an empowering characteristic and a potential vulnerability, but one that in any case strongly shaped the political dialogue surrounding Mary well beyond her court. Indeed, another dimension that adds particular interest to Mary as a case study is the extent to which her authority, tied to the towns of Flanders, was constructed in relation to a distinctively urban context. This relationship is showcased in Olga Karaskova’s discussion of Mary’s joyful entry to Bruges in 1477, but more broadly underpins a ‘bottom-up’ perspective on Mary’s authority that we are not always able to achieve in the study of ruling women.

Mary’s position at the end of her dynasty (and of the independent duchy of Burgundy) has consistently shaped the narrative of her reign as a rupture. Many of the essays, especially in the second part, thus deal explicitly and effectively not only with change but with continuity. Within the inner circles of the court, the ongoing service of councillors (Jean-Marie Cauchies) and the personnel of Mary’s *hôtel* (Valérie Bessey) helps explain the transition of power from an experienced duke to a young duchess. More widely, the importance of situating Mary’s reign as part of the long story of ducal power, rather than as its lapse, can be seen across a range of political, social, cultural, and economic markers, from the management of the Burgundian armies (Michael Depreter) to the activities of Italian merchants (Federica Veratelli). These ties to the past do not undermine, but rather complement, the shifts we also see during this period, either long-term or in response to a given moment. Given that Mary’s reign coincides with the traditional break imposed between the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, these studies clearly demonstrate the advantages of rethinking periodisations on a micro-level as obscuring more than they reveal.

A third strength of this book lies in its attention to Mary’s posthumous identity, which serves as a constructive counterpart to the contemporary construction of Mary’s authority. Together, these portrayals and reactions feed into the growing attention to reputation and remembrance, especially in queenship studies. A pair of chapters on Mary’s position in scholarship from the two branches, so to speak, of the Burgundian legacy – the French (Dominique Le Page) and the Belgian (Gilles Docquier) – offer a particularly fruitful comparison of how her idealisation and her condemnation over the centuries both served primarily to minimize her role in historical narratives. In conjunction with the efforts in the previous section to rethink the position of Mary’s reign in the trajectory of the Burgundian state, we move beyond the

easy binaries of positive or negative reputations to reflect on the contingent and, above all, targeted nature of any such post-facto interpretation.

As the editors and many of the authors themselves remark, these studies are only a starting point, with considerable outstanding research potential. To my mind, there are clear priorities for further work to be done. The relative absence of *acta* as a source in this volume stands out amid the abundance of other materials, but would shed light on the policies (or at least the decisions, an important conceptual distinction pointed out by Jean-Marie Yante) of the prince with regards to diverse political and economic issues. In particular, there needs to be further consideration of Mary and Maximilian as co-rulers. Not only are spousal partnerships a significantly more well-developed area of study than is recognized here, but a willingness to tackle them as a couple may go some way towards mitigating scholarly reluctance to fully engage with this episode of ducal rule (cf. Éric Bousmar and Jelle Haemers on page 404).

These additional pathways reflect the volume's indisputable success in demonstrating the historiographical benefits of taking a closer look at Mary and her reign. The thematic and chronological breadth of the contributions shows how much rides on our handling of the history of princes and their principalities, and the importance of an international scholarly dialogue on these issues. Above all, this book is a timely reminder that integrating the study of women's rule with the study of state-building, and how we interpret both, is vital in cutting across traditional boundaries of study to better assess late medieval political history writ large.

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