"Désirant tout, envahissant tout, ne connaissant le prix de rien": Materiality in the Queenship of Isabeau of Bavaria

by

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ABSTRACT

"DÉSIRANT TOUT, ENVAHISSANT TOUT, NE CONNAISSANT LE PRIX DE RIEN": MATERIALITY IN THE QUEENSHIP OF ISABEAU OF BAVARIA

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This thesis revisits the origins of Isabeau of Bavaria's notorious reputation – her 'Black Legend'. Among medievalists, the commonly held opinion regarding Isabeau, Queen Consort of France (1385-1422), is that she was the scorn of contemporary writers. She is charged with a lengthy inventory of sins including profligacy, adultery and treason, among a myriad of other offences. However, by assessing the works of contemporary chroniclers and evaluating the material culture of Isabeau's court, I propose that the foundation of her 'Black Legend' is linked to the problem of greed, over spending and taxation at her court – the only valid charges against the queen. Accordingly, research reveals that Isabeau navigated her queenship by performing expected gender ideology. By actively crafting her iconography modeled after the Virgin Mary using extra-literary devices and through conspicuous consumption, Isabeau was able to compensate for France's lack of political stability and, ultimately, operated as a regnant queen due to the mental disability of Charles VI.

DEDICATION

To mom, who made me strong; and to J.N., who made me stronger.

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It gives me great pleasure to express my sincerest gratitude to those who helped me with this project. First and foremost, I would like to acknowledge the continuous support and guidance of my advisors, Dr. Peter Goddard and Dr. Christine Ekholst. I thank Peter for his patience, his much appreciated philosophical advice, and many kind conversations that encouraged me to keep on writing. As for Christine, who always provided me with invaluable and thorough feedback despite her many responsibilities, I thank her for her constructive criticisms and attention to detail which has made me a better writer. Christine's immense knowledge of gender and medieval queenship was a guiding compass in my own research. I would also like to thank Dr. Sarah Amato, whose lectures on Material Culture in my first year of undergraduate studies inspired me to continue to think with 'things'.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

From the histories of one of the most tumultuous periods of Anglo-French warfare, and factional infighting among the French nobility arises the notorious 'Black Legend' of Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen Consort of France from 1385 to 1422. Historians have often accepted Isabeau's alleged reputation as a debauched, immoral, and treasonous queen despised by contemporary commentators. She has been vilified as insatiably greedy and frivolous due to her exorbitant spending habits, and charged with incest and adultery for her rumoured affair with the king's brother, Louis the Duke of Orléans. She has been accused of failing as a wife to support her mentally disabled husband, King Charles VI, and as a mother, for neglect of her children. Even physical descriptions of the queen have depicted her as repulsive and fat, paralleling the ugliness of her reputation.[1] Deemed politically incompetent for her constantly vacillating alliances Isabeau was, according to some French writers, the queen who always remained an untrustworthy foreigner that sold the French throne to the English by agreeing to the Treaty of Troyes, which disinherited the dauphin in the process.[2]

This negative posthumous reputation was promulgated by nineteenth century historians and writers alike, who used Isabeau's history as inspiration for delightfully scandalous but highly exaggerated stories. For instance, the Marquis de Sade's unpublished *Histoire Secrète d'Isabelle de Bavière* (1813) described the German princess in the following manner: desiring to possess everything but never knowing its price, capable of sacrificing all interests including that of the state for the benefit of her own, and possessing not a single virtue.[3] He claimed that her *cour*

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[1] For example, see Andrew Lang, "The 'Little Queen'" in *the Book of Princes and Princesses* (Longmans, Green, and Co.: New York, 1908) or August Villiers, Compte de L'Isle-Adam (1838-1889), *Nouveau Contes Cruels et Propos d'au-delà* (Lévy: Paris, 19 19).

[2] Marie-Véronique Clin, *Isabeau de Bavière: la reine calomniée* (Perrin: Paris, 1999), p. 18.

[3] Marquis de Sade, *Histoire secrète d'Isabelle de Bavière, reine de France* (Gallimard: Paris, 1953) p. 46-47 – except where indicated, all translations are mine. "Désirant tout, envahissant tout, ne connaissant le prix de rien, ne chérissant véritablement qu'elle, sacrifiant tous les intérêts, même ceux de l'état, au sien proper… [et] possédant enfin tous les vices que ne rachetait aucune vertu."

amoureus – competitions of love poetry and songs among the nobility located at Vincennes – was actually a depraved temple of sexual impurity whose members included theologians, vicars, and chaplains.[4] Such allegations propelled the historical facts of Isabeau's reign into the realm of fantasy, and transformed her image into a symbol of sexual perversity much like the Isabeau depicted in Bertrand de Gélannes' swashbuckling novel series from the mid-twentieth century.[5]

Moreover, the historical studies of August Villiers de L'Isle-Adams (1919) and Henri Martin (c. 1878-90) that heavily criticized the queen's excessive materialism and alleged sexual promiscuity, added weight to these claims. Even in the history books intended for children, Isabeau is not spared from such harsh criticism. In the tale "The Little Queen" (1908), Andrew Lang tells the story of Isabella's marriage to Richard II of England and her mother, Isabeau, is mentioned in the introduction. In the story, Isabeau is a greedy and thoroughly neglectful mother since "it was not to be expected that the queen would give up any of her own pleasures in order to look after her children."[6] Lang suggested that Isabeau's lack of a sense of duty also indicated an inability to manage her household therefore enabling the royal servants to "follow the queen's example," and neglect the children to the point "that the poor little things were half starved and clad in dirty rags."[7] In consequence, the queen was perceived as a "debauched, uncaring wanton…beyond redemption." [8] She is described as reveling in the pleasures of material excess instead of fulfilling her duties as a wife and mother, and was made into a symbol of the vilest evil. It is therefore no wonder that Villiers described Isabeau as "the most dangerous enemy of

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[4] Sade, p. 75.
[5] Bertrand de Gélannes, *La Vie Galante de Isabeau de Bavière: Souveraine Perverse* (Éditions de L'Arabesque, 1955).
[6] Lang, p. 275.
[7] Lang, p. 275.
[8] Rachel Gibbons, "Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France (1385-1422): The Creation of a Historical Villainess" in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 6 (1996), p. 57 (hereafter shortened to "Historical Villainess").

France," even more treacherous than the English with whom France was at war.[9] He accused Isabeau of embezzling money from the royal treasury to bedeck the halls of her private Chateau de Vincennes and, furthermore, stated that the only political aptitude she possessed was in the politics of material pleasures and unknown excesses.[10] Finally, he chastised her not only for her alleged infidelity, but also, for coercing the young maiden Odette of Champdivers to care for and entertain the mentally ill king in her stead, allowing Isabeau the freedom to do as she wished.[11] Apocryphal tales would continue to circulate even as the movement to rehabilitate Isabeau's reputation among historians was well underway in the later twentieth century. In particular, Inès Nollier's 1996 historical novel claimed to present a precise depiction of Isabeau's life "without violating historical accuracy or the psychological truths of the characters [she] observed."[12] But in reality, the text featured tales of sensationalized intrigue with little historical evidence, and especially fetishized the queen's alleged affair with her brother in law, Louis the Duke of Orléans.[13]

Hence, the shift in scholarly attention towards the reassessment of Isabeau's history and image, which occurred in the second half of the twentieth century, was a necessary movement to rectify the numerous historical inaccuracies. Marcel Thibault (1969) was one of the earliest historians to reconsider Isabeau specifically within the context of her time. But Thibault's Isabeau still remained a weak figure, always dependent on the male figures around her. In the late-

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[9] Villiers, pp. 266. "En effet, l'ennemi le plus dangereux et le plus réel du royaume de France, ce n'était pas l'Anglais, qui devait être repoussé plus tard par Jeanne d'Arc, ce n'était pas la ruine du Trésor, ni les armées disséminées, ni les querelles entre les princes, ni la démence du roi!...L'ennemi, c'était la reine de France, une étrangère, Isabeau, fille d'Etienne II, duc de Bavière, femme de Charles VI, et qui avait été nommée régente depuis l'aliénation du roi."

[10] Villiers, pp. 268. "Isabeau de Bavière ne haïssait point l'Anglais; elle traita même avec lui, honteusement, en maintes occasions; sa seule politique était l'amour du plaisir, la soif des excès violents et inconnus."

[11] Villiers, p. 272. "Depuis lors, une sénilité hâtive l'avait accablé; il vivait, un peu hébété, dans son Louvre, en compagnie d'une demoiselle nommée Odette de Champdhiver, qui veillait sur la faiblesse du monarque et cherchait à le distraire, soit en inventant des jeux, — les cartes, par exemple, — soit en le charmant par ses chants et sa bonne grâce. De là, la liberté laissée à la reine."

[12] Inès Nollier, *Isabeau de Baviere: Reine de France* (Éditions du Rocher: 1996), p. 11. "Je me suis appliquée à suivre la vie d'Isabeau de Bavière sans avoir contrevenu à l'exactitude historique ni à la vérité psychologique du personnage que j'ai pris soin de respecter."

[13] Nollier, pp. 85-88.

twentieth century another shift in the scholarship on Isabeau would be marked by Jean Markale's work (1982) that began considering her as a new subject of queenship studies. Markale concluded that Isabeau was in fact a model mediator queen, that is, an effective political arbitrator. In this context Rachel Gibbons (1996) and Tracy Adams (2010) have been able in the past two decades to provide more precise studies on Isabeau. Where Adams attempted to dispel rumours of the queen's affairs by closely assessing primary documents, Gibbons provided interesting insight regarding the queen's expenditures and its relationship to her mediator role.[14] For the most part, the perpetuation of Isabeau's 'Black Legend' in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was the result of scholarship that focused too narrowly on her court intrigues, and failure to consider the other numerous and highly complex issues plaguing France in the late-fourteenth and early-fifteenth-centuries. With this in mind, this study begins with a brief description of Isabeau's economic, cultural, and historical context.

Historical Context

Known as Elisabeth von Wittelsbach in her native Bavaria, Isabeau was born c.1370 to Stephen III, Duke of Bavaria, and Taddea Visconti, eldest daughter of Bernabo Visconti, Duke of Milan. At fifteen Isabeau became Queen of France to an eager and healthy sixteen year old Charles VI, who is recounted by chroniclers Froissart and Pintoin as falling instantly in love with his bride upon viewing her portrait.[15] Charles demanded to marry Isabeau only three days after she was secretly presented to him in Amiens in 1385, a moment often highlighted by historians as the beginning of what should have been a happy marriage and stable monarchy. After all, by the late 1350s the accomplishments of Charles' father had given France the semblance of increased

[14] See Gibbons, "Historical Villainess." See also Tracy Adams, *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria* (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2010) (hereafter shortened to *Life and Afterlife)*.

[15] Michel Pintoin, *Chronique du Regne de Charles VI*, ed. Nathalie Desgrugillers-Billard, trans. M.L. Bellaguet (Clermont-Ferrand: Paleo, 2007), Vol. I, pp. 201 – 202. See also, Jean Froissart, *The Chronicles of Froissart,* trans. Sir John Bourchier, Lord Berners, Vol. 4 (David Nutt: London, 1902), pp. 32-35.

internal stability. Charles V's economic policy changes not only set up the foundations of the *Ancien Regime's* fiscal system, but also enabled more efficient tax collection which raised royal revenues to support the French army. [16] By the end of his reign, it appeared as if Charles the Wise had managed to restore the dignity of the kingdom. Moreover, though the marriage of Isabeau to Charles VI did not bring new income into the kingdom, since Isabeau was wed without a dowry, the marriage nonetheless brought other benefits to France.[17] The French-Bavarian marriage was intended to strengthen the anti-English alliance, and counter England's ties to the powerful House of Luxembourg through Anne of Bohemia, Richard II's first wife.[18] Thus when Isabeau married Charles VI, outwardly France appeared financially restored, internally politically stable, and destined for a bright future.

But in spite of this, France continued to face a multitude of other dilemmas. We must remember that in 1348 the Plague first broke across Europe, devastating the continent and reducing the population by half. It continued to be an ominous and uncontrollable evil that, no doubt, affected the sociological and psychological makeup of the people of France under Isabeau's reign. While struggling to cope with the Plague, which many saw as either a sign of the Devil or the wrath of God, Europe as a whole simultaneously experienced greater moral and spiritual crisis when in 1378 two Popes were installed as head of the Church.[19] In addition agricultural production was reduced due to the disruptions of the war, resulting in adverse effects

[16] Françoise Autrand, *Charles V: le Sage* (Librairie Arthème Fayard: Paris, 1994), pp. 672-73 and 678-79. As a result the financial responsibility to pay for armies normally burdened to the nobility was reduced. Nobles therefore happily rallied to support the king, enabling the French to make steady advances despite shaken morale after English victories at Crecy (1346) and Poitiers (1356).

[17] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* p. 3.

[18] The House of Luxembourg was quite powerful in that it included rulers of Bohemia and the Holy Roman Empire. However, the Wittelsbach House had previously managed to provide two Roman Emperors in the past and could potentially do so in the future. The alliance with the Wittelsbach was thus a political move intended to somewhat balance the European powers.

[19] Jean Markale, *Isabeau de Bavière* (Payot: Paris, 1982), pp. 12-13.

on national wealth in an agrarian society (with ever increasing taxation), precipitating famine and ever more suffering.[20]

Furthermore, since Charles VI inherited the throne at only eleven he remained under the tutelage of his uncles – Philip, Duke of Burgundy, Jean, Duke of Berry, Louis I, Duke of Anjou, and Louis II, Duke of Bourbon – until his majority at fourteen as set forth in the ordinance of 1374.[21] He was unable to dislodge their influence until he was twenty-one and during the decade of the dukes' reign, greed and corruption characterised their rule.[22] The dukes feuded incessantly among themselves for greater political power while plundering the royal treasury, leaving the French monarchy in disarray.[23] Louis of Anjou, for instance, who had aspirations to become king of Naples, embezzled a considerable amount from the royal treasury while he raised new taxes to advance his career.[24] Similarly Philip of Burgundy, who shared primary guardianship of Charles with Louis of Anjou, exercised a lifelong policy of amassing wealth, expanding of territories, and attaining greater political power. When Philip married Margaret de Mal – the wealthiest heiress in Europe – he became in line to inherit the Franche-Comté, Nivernais, Rethel, the Artois and Flanders which, when combined with his own Burgundy, turned him into one of the richest and most powerful princes in all of Europe.[25] The dukes would continue to be major players in the political saga that plagued Charles VI's reign, much like the mental illness that stripped his rule of the stability that his kingdom demanded. It is in this context of international and national crisis that Isabeau became Queen of France to a king who, ostensibly, had all the potential to handle

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[20] Markale, p. 13.
[21] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* p. 10.
[22] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* p. 10.
[23] Autrand, pp. 670-71.
[24] Harry A. Miskimin, *Money, Prices, and Foreign Exchange in Fourteenth-Century France* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1963), pp. 2-3. See also Robin Neillands, *The Hundred Years War* (Routledge: London, 2001), p. 162.
[25] Neillands, p. 162.

France's internal troubles and lead the realm to greater stability, only to have the rug pulled out from under her.

On August 5th, 1392, Charles experienced his first psychotic episode while in pursuit of Pierre de Creon, the recently disgraced Chamberlain to the King and the Duke of Orléans who was accused of attempting to murder Oliver de Clisson, Constable of France. Charles deemed this crime an attack upon his majesty and resolved to take action; however, Pierre fled and sought asylum at the court of John V of Brittany.[26] Enraged that the duke would protect the criminal, Charles determined to march his army on Brittany. Only a few months prior, however, the king had suffered from a serious illness, likely typhoid which causes inflammation of the brain, and was told he was unfit to make such a journey.[27] Charles' mental disability was likely the result of complications from that earlier illness, which is well chronicled by his official historian Michel Pintoin, present on the journey to Brittany.[28] As the king and his army made their way out of Le Mans, Charles became distressed when a page dropped a lance and caused a loud noise. The king suddenly drew his sword and attacked several men, including his brother Louis. Pintoin records witnesses stating that the king's eyes rolled in his head and that he was delirious.[29] Charles had killed five men and did not recognise his uncles and brothers around him when he was finally subdued.[30] Soon after the king appeared to have recovered in full, but in June 1393 he experienced yet another episode and would suffer mental breakdowns for the remainder of his life.

Of course, Charles' mental illness affected his relationship with Isabeau. Historian R.C. Famiglietti believes Charles may have been schizophrenic with characteristics from multiple

[26] R. C. Famiglietti, *Royal Intrigue: Crisis at the Court of Charles VI, 1392-1420* (AMS Press: New York, 1986), p. 2.
[27] Famiglietti, p. 2.
[28] Famiglietti, p. 2.
[29] Pintoin as cited by Famiglietti, p. 3.
[30] Famiglietti, p. 3.

subsets of the disorder exhibiting incoherent, flat, inappropriate, or silly behaviour.[31] In addition, Charles also suffered from paranoia, hallucinations, and delusions. His erratic behaviour included forgetting who he was, insisting that he was not king, and failure to recognize his wife. As reported by Pintoin, he tried to erase his and the queen's coat of arms as well as their insignia, the intertwined initials E and K.[32] According to several chroniclers the only person he seemed to remember was the Duchess of Orléans whom he called his "'very dear sister.'"[33] He soiled himself and destroyed furniture, and the doors and windows of the Hôtel Saint-Pol had to be boarded up to keep him safely inside when he ran wildly through the corridors claiming he was being pursued. It is likely that Charles was also predisposed to mental problems inherited from his mother's side, whose lineage had a history of mental instability.[34] Charles' mental disability inhibited him from fulfilling his duties as monarch and, as a result, a regency council was established that forced the queen to play a more politically active role.

In 1393 Isabeau was given the authority, supported by clear legal definitions, to act as primary educator of the dauphin, and share guardianship with the dauphin's uncles, Louis of Orléans, Philip of Burgundy, and her brother, Louis of Bavaria. The co-regency was intended to curtail attempts among the dukes to control the dauphin and gain wealth and power, or even usurp the throne. Philip, however, was able to garner greater access to the heir, causing tensions to rise between himself and Louis. [35] In 1403, Isabeau was allocated leadership of this council and made primary mediator between the dukes, but still more internal problems would arise in France. In 1407, Louis of Orléans was assassinated in Paris under order of the new Duke of Burgundy, John

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[31] Famiglietti, p. 5.
[32] Pintoin as cited by Famiglietti, p. 5.
[33] Famiglietti, p. 4.
[34] Famiglietti, pp. 8-9. Charles' mother, Joan of Bourbon, is known to have been mentally unstable and is recorded to have suffered from a nervous breakdown after the birth of her seventh child.
[35] Neillands, pp. 195-196.

the Fearless, who had inherited his father's title in 1404.[36] John openly admitted responsibility of the murder and claimed the assassination was a justifiable act of tyrannicide. In response, the Dukes of Berry, Anjou, and Bourbon swore to avenge Louis; however, they never met John in battle because Louis' death conveniently brought an end to his political and financial aggrandizement, to the advantage of the dukes.[37] When John returned to Paris in 1409, he was welcomed by the dukes, and all was forgiven by the king through the signing of the Peace of Chartres.[38] For a time, it seemed a fragile peace was established between the French dukes.

In May 1418, rebellion broke out in France and Parisians ousted the Armagnacs (supporters of Orléans) by murdering their leader Bernard of Armagnac, the Constable of France. John the Fearless captured Paris and took Isabeau prisoner, although some have argued she willingly allied herself with him as the tides turned. With Charles VI locked in yet another long psychotic episode, and Isabeau taken prisoner by John who was working for the benefit of Burgundy, France was unable to counter Henry V's swift takeover of Rouen in July of 1418. Additionally, at this point the queen had no control over the new Dauphin Charles, since her eldest son, Louis, died in 1415 and next in line, John, died in 1417. While Isabeau was allied with the Burgundians, Charles the Dauphin, later King Charles VII, supported the Armagnacs. Finally in May of 1420, the Treaty of Troyes ceased all hostilities and ceded France to Henry V while disinheriting Charles. The Anglo-French war, however, would resume after both Charles and

[36] Neillands, pp. 195-196.
[37] Neillands, p. 195.
[38] Neillands, p. 196. The Hundred Years' War also continued to be the backdrop to France's internal problems. In October of 1415, the Battle of Agincourt witnessed a severely outnumbered English army emerge victorious against the much larger French forces, obliterating French morale. Although the outcome of the battle did not immediately result in the handover of the French kingdom to England, it nonetheless had critical long term effects. In 1416 the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund of Luxemburg, decided to back Henry V's claims to France mainly due to his fear of the Ottoman Turk's increasing westward expansion, and due to the divisive issue that was the Schism. Further to this, in the winter of 1415-16 John the Fearless offered to support Henry's agenda by promising his neutrality in future altercations between France and England, although he did not accept Henry as King of France.

Henry died in 1422, leaving Charles VII to reclaim France, this time with the Maid of Orléans on his side.

Given the complexities of this historical period and the problematic nature of nineteenth century studies on Isabeau, historians have endeavored to provide more accurate studies on the queen in the past three decades – a task which they have, for the most part, accomplished successfully. Markale, Adams, and Gibbons demonstrated that there is little evidence to support charges of incest and adultery against the queen, though neither may we dismiss them entirely. In addition, it is equally difficult to prove or disprove the claim that Isabeau was an unsupportive wife and bad mother due to the limitations of textual sources. What historians have established is that, although originally unprepared for the cards she was dealt, Isabeau grew into a politically-astute regent. I further argue that Isabeau should be regarded as a regnant rather than consort queen because she possessed greater power and autonomy than is normally afforded to medieval queens. By assessing the works of contemporary chroniclers including Pintoin and Froissart, as well as allegorical sources including the poems of Eustache Deschamps, it becomes clear that the queen's poor reputation derives from pro-Burgundian propaganda as found in *Le Songe Véritable* and *Le Pastoralet*.[39] It is therefore not the subject of this paper to further support Isabeau's rehabilitation.

This thesis explores how Isabeau actively crafted her queenly iconography through ritual performance, conspicuous consumption, and extra-literary devices (material objects like seals, jewelry, and portraits) to shape and control the public's perception of her image, and therefore her political authority. [40] I must make clear, however, that by employing the term the queen's 'public'

[39] "Le Songe Véritable" in *Memoires de la Societe de l'Histoire de Paris XVII* (H. Moranville: Paris, 1890) (hereafter shortened to "Le Songe"), and *Le Pastoralet,* ed. Joel Blanchard, (Presses Universitaires de France: Paris, 1983).
[40] Debra Barrett-Graves, "Introduction: Extra-Literary Emblematics" in *The Emblematic Queen* (Palgrave: New York, 2013), p. 1.

I mean to denote, for the most part, the nobles of her court. There are nuances to keep in mind when I employ the term the queen's 'public': first, there is her immediate and fully literate public who contested her authority, the Princes of the Blood; second, there is her literate and bourgeoisie public; third, there exists her general public, the illiterate masses. Isabeau's enactment of power did not rely, nor was it substantiated by popularity among the French populace. She did not negotiate her position of power with the people; rather, Isabeau's extra-literary devices *reaffirmed* her political authority in opposition to the warring dukes who constantly challenged her authority.

As a female ruler, Isabeau had to effect political change while balancing and conforming to expected 'gender ideology'. In other words, as a woman she could not effect change by overstepping the bounds of her gender and, therefore, had to enact political agency by *performing* her gender to rule successfully. Isabeau balanced gender expectations to enact her political authority under the guise of idealised womanhood and queenship, and by employing an iconography fashioned after Mary, Queen of Heaven – the most exemplary model of intercessory queenship. In examining Isabeau's manipulation of ritual performance, symbolic material objects, and conspicuous consumption, we can conclude that the queen successfully underlined her royal prerogatives as queen, mother (of the dauphin), and regent. In turn, this emphasized her own authority as not only a mediator but also as a regnant queen in practice, if not in title, to allay the political factions that threatened to launch France into civil war.

Chapter 2: Historiography

When considering the historiography of Queen Isabeau, the tone of the cumulative literature appears to move from one set of extreme thinking towards another. At first, nineteenth-century scholars fixated on the queen's faults and ultimately turned her into what Rachel Gibbons has called a 'historical villainess'. With time, scholars moved to rehabilitate Isabeau's historical image, resulting in some overly positive evaluations of the queen, like that of Tracy Adams.[41] The complex nature of Isabeau's history has generated an intricate and often conflicted body of work, in which even physical descriptions of the queen have been contradictory. August Villiers de L'Isle-Adams (1919), for example, described her as having "hair red like burning gold, pale with the complexion of a storm [and] endowed with a languid and fateful beauty [with a] dangerous charm, [and yet] Isabeau still did not refuse to use the resources of balms and philter[s]."[42] Clearly Villiers' portrayal of the queen suggests that although she was remarkably beautiful, she was also vain as she did not refrain from using tricks and perhaps sorcery to enhance her beauty. In spite of Villiers' insistence that she was beautiful, many have chosen to use a line in the *Songe Véritable*, a fiery propaganda piece against the queen written in 1406, which described her as "enveloped by ugly skin," as proof of her ugliness.[43] Consequently, Lévis-Mirepoix stated Isabeau was "without real beauty," and Margaret Wade Labarge described the queen as "a gross figure of a woman suffering from dropsy."[44] Jean Markale has said the unfortunate queen was originally quite pretty but grew "fat, ugly and impotent" in her old age because of her many excesses.[45] But in direct opposition to the overly negative physical descriptions of Isabeau, both Adams and Gibbons have

[41] Similar criticism of Adams' overly positive assessment is noted by Sean Field in "Tracy Adams. *The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria*. *Rethinking Theory*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010", Book Review in *The Medieval Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2011.
[42] August Villiers de L'Isle-Adams, *Trois Portraits de femmes* as cited in Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 56.
[43] "Le Songe," line 2836-37. "Toy, Royne, dame Ysabeau / Envelopée en laide peau."
[44] As cited by Gibbons in "Historical Villainess," p. 55.
[45] Markale, p. 7 and p. 85.

suggested that she was pretty despite being short and brunette rather than the ideal blond of the fifteenth century, and of a less desired darker complexion inherited from her mother's Italian side.[46]

The contradictory descriptions are also apparent in modern artistic renderings. A mixed media miniature figurine of Isabeau by artist George Stuart (c. 1953) depicts a bald and older woman, perhaps in her fifties with tired drooping eyes and wrinkles (Figure 1).[47] Despite the extravagance of her ermine lined and jewel encrusted *houppelande*, one will notice that Stuart's Isabeau is sallow skinned with deep lines around her sagging mouth. She stands tall with feet apart, shoulders back, and her head held high looking straight ahead projecting not only great pride, but also masculine body language. In contrast the wax figure of Isabeau, also portrayed wearing the same outfit in a 1923 press photograph for the California Museum, is a youthful and attractive woman with curly brunette hair (Figure 2).[48] A hand gently rests on her chest and a soft smile upon her lips, her eyes downcast – regal but feminine. Although depicting the same subject, each piece casts Isabeau in a different light suggesting a longstanding historical dispute regarding how she was perceived by the public in general. In any case, it is difficult to say with any certainty exactly what Isabeau truly looked like. But, Charles VI married Isabeau even without a dowry only three days following her first presentation to the king. We can speculate that she may have been attractive enough to win the heart of his majesty.[49]

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[46] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess" p. 57.
[47] George Stuart, *Isabeau of Bavaria (1370-1435)*, (c. 1953) mixed media figurine in the Hernandez-Monsanto Collection, Washington.
[48] Agence de Presse Meurisse, *Isabeau de Bavière*, (c. 1923) photograph of wax figurine in the Musée Californien collection (Légion d'Honneur), Paris.
[49] Although we cannot disregard that Charles may have rushed the marriage due to strategic political motives.

Figure 1: George Stuart, *Isabeau of Bavaria (1370-1435)*, c. 1953.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 2: *Agence de Presse Meurisse, Isabeau de Bavière, c. 1923.*

Regardless, the confusion surrounding Isabeau's physical depiction may stem from a tendency among writers and historians alike who equated her physical beauty with her inner virtue. Among those in the nineteenth and early-twentieth-centuries who turned the queen into a historical villainess, she is generally depicted as remarkably ugly. In contrast, later writers who are sympathetic to the queen, like Adams and Gibbons, believe she must have been beautiful. For those critics who believe in her beauty *and* follow Villiers' description of the smoldering red-headed temptress, such as Henri Martin (1921), Isabeau's beauty was a wicked trait believed to have facilitated her skill of seduction which she used to engage with a lengthy list of lovers.[50] Martin's writings on the history of France repeatedly suggest an affair between Isabeau and John

[50] Villiers, pp. 266-69.

the Fearless, in addition to an alleged long-term affair with the Duke of Orléans.[51] Villiers lists "Le Vidame de Maulle, Louis d'Orléans, Jean sans Peur, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Lourdin de Saligny, le chevalier de Bois-Bourdon, and many others unmentioned, among [those] she loved."[52] Tracy Adams argues that scholars of the nineteenth and early-twentieth-century that support the accusation of promiscuity against Isabeau may have misinterpreted a line in the *Chronicle of Metz* (1438) by Jaique Dex who suggested that the queen had an intimate relationship with Louis for he was "held to be the 'soupet'" – misunderstood as lover – "of the queen and they mistrusted him and the queen very much."[53] However, Adams explains that the word 'soupet' used to characterize the queen and duke's relationship is a hapax. The glossary of the edition of Jaique Dex's chronicle she quotes notes: "soupet, mot douteux, paraît avoir le sens de 'galant, amant'." Adams argues that the word may also be an incorrect rendering of 'soubgez' or 'subject', referencing their social relationship rather than an illicit affair.

By the mid-twentieth century, historians more sympathetic to Isabeau began to suggest that the accusation of infidelity against the queen was specifically born from the disinheritance of the dauphin, and the surrender of the French throne to English regency established by the Treaty of Troyes. The Treaty itself, signed in 1420, made Henry V regent of France, recognized him and his successors as true heirs to France, and arranged for his marriage to Isabeau's youngest daughter, Catherine. The fact that Isabeau agreed to the Treaty of Troyes initially is quite significant, because by disinheriting her son she subsequently, if unintentionally, admitted to infidelity and to the dauphin's potential illegitimacy. If one of the defining features of medieval womanhood was to be a mother and continue one's husband's bloodline, it follows that upholding

[51] Henri Martin (1810-1883), *Histoire de France depuis 1789 jusqu'à nos jours*, Vol. VI (Furne: Paris, c. 1878-90), p. 31, p. 33.
[52] Villiers, p. 269. "Le vidame de Maulle, Louis d'Orléans, Jean sans Peur, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Lourdin de Saligny, le chevalier de Bois-Bourdon, et quelques autres plus ignorés, furent du nombre de ceux qu'elle aima; chacun d'eux eut une fin sinister."
[53] As quoted in Adams, *Life and Afterlife…,* p. 44-45.

this duty as a faithful wife augmented a woman's honour. It is therefore odd that Isabeau did not struggle more forcefully to save her son from his fate, especially considering the symbolic rhetoric of her iconography which draws heavily on the notion of maternal love and, in turn, would have upheld her reputation. If Charles VII was legitimate and Isabeau defended him, then she would likely be deemed a good woman by commentators. If he was illegitimate but she still defended him, then she, at the very least, would have *appeared* to be a good mother and faithful wife – even if such actions were taken to save her own reputation.

However as Gibbons has argued, "despite popular misinformation about its contents, the Treaty of Troyes is not a source of evidence for [her] affair[s because] it contains no mention of the queen's adultery, and does not declare the dauphin, the future Charles VII, to be illegitimate, a bastard of Louis of Orléans or anyone else."[54] According to Gibbons, the dauphin was only referred to in the last articles which stated:

> Considering the horrific and enormous crimes perpetrated in the said kingdom of France by Charles who calls himself dauphin of Vienne, it is agreed that neither we (Charles VI), nor our said son King Henry, nor our very dear son Philip duke of Burgundy shall negotiate any peace or agreement with the said Charles without the advice and consent of all and each of us three, and of the three Estates of our two kingdom.[55]

The section which Gibbons translates as "Charles who calls himself dauphin of Vienne," is often used to prove that the Treaty legally disinherited him because of previous translations that read "Charles, so called dauphin."[56] Gibbons asserted that in reality, Charles VII was deemed unworthy to receive the throne or any other titles in a personal letter by his father issued on January 17th, 1420, due to his involvement in the assassination of the Duke of Burgundy. In other

[54] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 70.
[55] As translated in "Historical Villainess," p. 70. "Considerez les horribles et enormes crimes et deliz perpetrez oudit Royaume de France par Charles soy disant dauphin de viennois, Il est accorde que nous ne nostre filz le Roy Henry ne aussi nostre treschier filz Phelippe duc de Bourgoigne ne traicterons aucunement de paix ou de concorde avecques l'edit Charles, ne ferons ou ferons traictier se non du conseil et assentement de tous et chascun de nous trois, et des troiz estas des deux Royaumes."
[56] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* xvii.

words, Gibbons believed Charles VII was personally disinherited by his father several months before the Treaty of Troyes was enacted; the treaty itself "only confirmed his outlaw status and recognised the conqueror Henry V as heir to the throne of France."[57] We cannot, therefore, assume that Charles' disinheritance automatically implied his illegitimacy. Gibbons and Adams both argued that if Charles VII had actually been deemed illegitimate by his own mother, then there should be some evidence from chroniclers of the period that mention this issue, but no such record exists. Thus Jean Chartier, the official historian of Charles VII, who reported that the queen fell ill after the English dared to defile her reputation by claiming the dauphin was illegitimate, has usually been employed to counter criticisms regarding her sexual promiscuity.[58]

The question remains: if the dauphin was indeed the legitimate heir to the throne, why did Isabeau fail to defend him? In answer to this question I must stress the fact that Isabeau was positioned in a precarious political situation, and by 1420 France was utterly defeated by the English which left her with no choice. Isabeau's reign was difficult to navigate due to a plethora of internal French problems that made the kingdom's defenses weak. Not only was Isabeau's authority repeatedly challenged by the Duke of Orléans and the Duke of Burgundy despite the many ordinances set out by the king, it was also difficult to mediate the dukes' struggle for greater power while simultaneously safeguarding the dauphin from their potential 'bad' influence. Of course, the queen's agreement to the treaty, delayed response to the events after 1405, and ultimate failure to keep the dauphin under her own influence seems to say otherwise. Due to her slow reaction, it has been argued that in the end the queen was forced to side with Burgundy and had no choice but to abandon her son and save herself, but all in all these are mostly conjecture and speculation. It, therefore, cannot be argued conclusively that Isabeau had multiple affairs, or

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[57] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 70.

[58] Jean Chartier, *Histoire de Charles VII, Roi de France* (Vallet de Viriville Paris: Paris, 1858), pp. 209-210. See also Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 67.

that Charles VII was illegitimate, but neither may the matter be convincingly disproved. Questions regarding Isabeau's loyalty to Charles and to France remain in the current scholarship.

Suspicions concerning Isabeau's loyalties also represent an attitude that was commonly held against foreign brides among medieval nobility. As Fiona Stoertz has explained, the education of elite women was intended to entrench in them a mindset of submission to their husband and his family. [59] Once betrothed – even before marriageable and nubile age – young noble girls were often sent to their future husbands' courts and raised there, wholly immersed in the culture of their future kingdom and at the mercy of their husband's family. Royal in-laws were keen to oversee the education of their future daughters-in-law because families were aware of the great amount of influence that wives could have on their husbands. Rulers, even more so, wished to "limit the influx of foreign ideas into their kingdoms" that was prompted by foreign brides by ensuring that young women were subject to and products of their husband's court.[60] When we note that Isabeau was not even considered a potential match for Charles until she was fourteen, and that she spent her childhood growing up in Bavaria under her father's guidance rather than at her husband's court, we can understand why she may have been seen as a foreigner. Isabeau was not French by birth and her upbringing may have buried her roots deep in Bavaria, making her appear a stranger, and thus, a threat to France. Indeed, when she was brought to France and given to the care of her aunt the Duchess of Brabant, she had to learn the language, was taught French manners, and given French clothes because her own were seen as either too drab for a potential future queen, or perhaps too Bavarian.[61] In short, she had to become French, or at the very least, appear French to be successful as queen and mother of the heir. Originally a princess more or less

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[59] Fiona Harris Stoertz, "Young Women in France and England, 1050-1300" in *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 12 (4), 2001, pp. 25-26.
[60] Stoertz, p. 25.
[61] Jean Froissart, *The Chronicle of Froissart,* trans. Sir John Bourchier, Lord Berners, Vol. 4 (David Nutt: London, 1902), p. 34.

ignored by the French courtiers, Isabeau was molded by the French to become a Queen of France only to have Eustache Deschamps chastise her for pride, vanity, and treason twenty-five years later.[62] Regardless nineteenth and early twentieth-century French writers, like Villiers and Martin, still insisted that Isabeau was perceived by her immediate contemporaries as a foreigner and an enemy of France, despite using sources that were evidently pro-Burgundian propaganda.[63]

Even in Marcel Thibault's 1969 work – one of the earliest attempts to flesh out Isabeau's biography and properly situate her in her historical context – Isabeau is described as remaining loyal to Bavaria rather than France, holding her family's, and particularly her brother's interests at heart.[64] Nonetheless, Thibault's work represented the beginning of a shift with regards to how scholars approached the history of this particular queen. As an attempt to provide a fuller history on Isabeau, Thibault painted the unfortunate rise and decline of a queen who transformed from an intelligent, graceful, and naturally beautiful bride, into an apparently immoral spendthrift whose foremost objective was to advance the interests of the Bavarian house.[65] Thibault described her younger years (1370-1375) as generally peaceful and introduced us to a pleasant young woman who was also clearly quite intelligent. At first, he cited Froissart's positive description of the queen: "she knew Latin well enough to read *The Books of Hours*, *The Lives of the Saints* … but her favorite books were the epic poems in the Bavarian language" particularly the 'Hunting', a poem by the knight Lladainar de Labar who extolled the virtues of women.[66] Thibault also chose to refer to the queen as 'Elisabeth' rather than 'Isabeau' in a conscious effort to reiterate the association of the queen with her patron saint, Elisabeth of Hungary. 'Isabeau', he clarified, was in fact a corruption of 'Elisabeth', originally found in the Burgundian propaganda piece *Le Songe*

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[62] Marcel Thibault, *Isabeau de Baviere, Reine de France: La Jeunesse (1370-1405)* (Perrin et Cie Libraires-Editeurs: Paris, 1903), pp. 62, 70-71.
[63] Villiers, p. 266.
[64] Thibault, p. 315.
[65] Thibault, p. 22, pp. 315-316.
[66] Thibault, p. 24.

Véritable spelled as 'Ysabeau,' and later adopted by both historians and writers.[67] Thibault initially presented Isabeau as a pious figure who frequently went on pilgrimages; but by 1392 (after the king's mental illness had begun) the queen was less inclined towards religious worship and took greater pleasure in material things.[68] Thibault suggested that the commencement of her moral decline and turn to excessive spending coincided with the king's mental illness.[69] In accordance with the majority of scholarship on Isabeau, Thibault was most critical of the queen's excessive spending. For him, the establishment of the queen's separate account further enabled her to amass greater wealth and provided her the opportunity to essentially steal her children's income.[70]

But this assessment of Isabeau is problematic. Despite acknowledging her intelligence in her younger years and noting the independence she gained when the queen's household was established as a separate institution, Thibault ultimately concluded that Isabeau was a thoroughly dependent woman and incompetent ruler. He argued that without a capable husband, Isabeau grew immoral due to a propensity for material things innate to her gender. Consequently her brother, Louis, took advantage of this and manipulated her affections – her natural weakness as a woman – in hopes of receiving gifts, money, and land.[71] Thibault deemed Isabeau a wholly weak figure because she was a woman attempting to fill a man's role. According to Thibault, Isabeau was weak in her faith and weak because of an inclination for material things; weak politically because she was easily manipulated and therefore always vacillating between the Burgundians and Armagnacs; and finally weak, for remaining a stranger to France.

[67] Thibault, p. 65.
[68] Thibault, pp. 206-207.
[69] Thibault, pp. 206-207.
[70] Thibault, pp. 254, 255-256.
[71] Thibault, pp. 206, 319-320, and 370-371.

Scholars since Thibault, however, have become more sympathetic to the queen and view her as a victim of the turmoil of her period – a predecessor of Marie Antoinette. Like Thibault, Jean Verdon (1981) believed Charles' insanity prompted Isabeau to turn to the pleasures of material wealth; however, this did not equate moral decline. For Verdon, Isabeau's increasing cupidity was a way to relieve her of the stresses of an unhappy marriage which she tried to maintain for as long as possible.[72] He argued that Charles' madness was a source of "deep pain for the queen" and "what was particularly distressing, was that she was unable to approach him to show her affection" during his episodes without being rejected by his failure to recognise her.[73] Yet despite these pains, Isabeau continued to uphold her conjugal duties. After all, of her twelve children six were conceived after Charles' first psychotic episode. [74] In contrast to Thibault, Verdon argued that she frequently held processions and public prayers for her husband. On January 19th 1396 in Tournai, a letter was posted in the public square from the queen that ordered the people of Tournai to pray for the health of the king.[75] Isabeau ordered sermons against blasphemy to be given and introduced ordinances to control prostitution and ban Jews from Paris to appease God, all in hopes of curing her husband.[76] Verdon, like Jean Markale, believed Isabeau's piety was actually ceaseless and can be summed up in her daughter Marie: born in 1393, Marie was promised to the religious life from infancy in hopes that God would cure the king's affliction.[77] Verdon's depiction of Isabeau presented her as a much stronger character than Thibault's Isabeau precisely *because* she was a woman and therefore naturally possessed the strength – particularly a female strength – to endure such a problematic marriage. But above all

[72] Jean Verdon, *Isabeau de Bavière* (J. Tallandier: Paris, 1981), p. 94.
[73] Verdon, p. 71. "La douleur de la reine était profonde. Ce qui l'affligeant surtout, c'était de ne pouvoir s'approcher de lui pour lui manifester de l'affection, sans s'en voir repoussée avec ces mots: 'Quelle est cette femme dont la vue m'obsède? Sachez si elle a besoin de quelque chose, et délivrez-moi, comme vous pourrez, de ses persécutions et de ses importunités, afin qu'elle ne s'attache pas ainsi à mes pas.' De toutes les dames, la duchesse d'Orleans etait celle dont la presence."
[74] Verdon, p. 74-75.
[75] Verdon, p. 74.
[76] Verdon, p. 71-72. See also Markale, p. 67.
[77] Verdon p. 70, see also Markale, p. 65.

for Verdon, Isabeau did not deserve the accusations of neglectful wife for she quite successfully fulfilled her primary role as queen and wife by producing twelve children, despite the troubles of Charles' mental illness.[78]

Although Verdon rightly suggested that we consider Isabeau within her primary gender role, that is, as a mother; Jean Markale more effectively considered Isabeau within the context of her period by bringing scholarship on Isabeau into conversation with queenship theories in development in the 1980s. Similar to Verdon, Markale suggested that Isabeau began her career by playing the part of the submissive wife, and without any training in the political game that she would be thrust into. However unlike Verdon, Markale highlighted how over time, Isabeau developed into a highly politically-astute queen. According to Markale, when she first became queen it should be noted that Isabeau did not go on a national tour and her only royal entry was in Paris in 1389. It was particularly important for medieval kings and by extension queens to visit the provinces and connect with their subjects through lavish royal entry ceremonies in much the same way modern politicians would campaign to garner support. Royal entries were spectacles where monarchs "displayed themselves for the public, defining through symbols the relationships between themselves and their subjects."[79] As Jürgen Habermas puts it: "because the medieval public was 'directly connected to the concrete existence of a ruler,' princes [had to represent] their power '*before* the people rather than *for* the people.'"[80] According to Markale, that Isabeau failed to visit the provinces is quite abnormal; however, this was likely due to the belief that her husband's entry had been enough. Consequently, although Isabeau was well received in Paris and won much support from Parisians, this was not the case with the provinces left alienated by this

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[78] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," pp. 59-60.
[79] Tracy Adams and Glenn Rechtschaffen, "The Reputation of the Queen and Public Opinion: The Case of Isabeau of Bavaria" in *Medieval Feminist Forum* 47, no. 1 (2011), p.9.
[80] Jürgen Habermas, Sara Lennox, and Frank Lennox, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article (1964)," in *New German Critique* 3 (1974) as quoted in Adams, Rechtschaffen, p. 9 – my italics.

foreign queen.[81] Markale therefore reduced Isabeau's role as queen in her youth to mere adornment by calling her the "Queen of Parties and Games," since the festivities she brought was a great distraction for the people of Paris from their sufferings.[82]

But as Markale also highlighted, while the king's political power increasingly weakened due to his mental instability, in contrast, Isabeau's political authority increased. Knowing his uncles' inclination to take advantage of a weak king, in 1393 Charles chose Isabeau to be regent and co-guardian of the dauphin shared between Louis of Orléans, Philip of Burgundy, and her brother, Louis of Bavaria.[83] Later in the ordinance of 1403, Isabeau was appointed primary guardian of the dauphin responsible for his education and welfare until his age of majority, and made the primary mediator between the quarreling Dukes of Orléans and Burgundy. Such an appointment was especially important because physical custody of the dauphin enabled one to influence his decisions in one's favour and augment one's own political authority.[84] As Markale succinctly stated, "Isabeau [essentially] replaced the king during his 'absences'."[85] Therefore, unlike Thibault who saw Isabeau begin her career as an insignificant princess turned scandalous queen and rendered impotent in her old age, Markale instead saw the trajectory of her career in a much more positive light. He emphasized her growth from a naïve teenager, unprepared for the political arena, into a powerful monarch and praised the queen's ability to adapt and become an essential political figure – 'the president of the council'. Most historians from the 1980s agreed with Markale's assessment; however, I believe he may have overstated the queen's political influence by failing to explore how gender boundaries may have further increased or limited her capabilities. While Markale may have started by situating her in a 'phallocratic' system and

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[81] Markale, p. 18.
[82] Ibid, p. 18.
[83] Ibid, pp. 81-82.
[84] Ibid, p. 82.
[85] Ibid, p. 82. "Et comme la garde et la tutelle des enfants royaux étaient confiées à Isabeau de Bavière, c'est donc elle qui gouvernerait au nom du roi sacré et qui supporterait 'le faix du royaume'."

highlighted her significance as a political mediator, he did not fully investigate the gender and social significance of Isabeau as a mediating queen, wife, and mother.

Most scholarship until the 1980s relegated the political and historical significance of queens merely to supportive roles, always in relation to kingly authority.[86] As a push unfolded in the late eighties to rethink women's history and use feminist theories and gender as a new category of analysis, scholars soon turned their attention to queenship studies. John Carmi Parsons (1993) helped facilitate the conversation on female rulers by asking scholars to reconsider the how medieval queens exercised power. According to Parsons, one avenue by which queens and noble women obtained greater power, despite confinement within the highly patriarchal medieval sociopolitical system, was to become wives and mothers. Parsons argued that "matrimonial politics afford[ed noblewomen] opportunities to claim power and to achieve some degree of self-realization," particularly if they successfully fulfilled their duties to produce heirs.[87] Mothers, moreover, understood the perils of childbirth that young women faced upon marriage, and interceded in negotiations to ensure the safety of their daughters.[88] Certainly, marriage negotiations of daughters could be an arena where queens and noble mothers asserted authority by "cross[ing the] limits between the unofficial sphere to which popular expectations and royal ritual directed them, and the magisterial sphere in which their husband functioned."[89] Parsons also argued that mothers played a central role in educating daughters to become diplomatic brides and act as the lynch-pins of political alliances. Putting aside modern feminist and romantic ideals regarding marriage, and bearing in mind that brides brought with them new income in the form of

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[86] John Carmi Parsons, "Mothers, Daughters, Marriage, Power: Some Plantagenet Evidence, 1150-1500" in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1993), pp. 1-2.
[87] Parsons, p. 65.
[88] Parsons, p. 63. This was exemplified by the case of Eleanor, eldest surviving daughter of Edward I of England and Eleanor of Castile, who was set to marry Alfonso III of Aragon in 1282. Eleanor would have only been thirteen at the time which, according to canon law, was marriageable age; however, her mother and grandmother pressured the king to postpone the marriage by two years so she would be more physically able to bear children safely.
[89] Parsons, p. 75.

a dowry (which could constitute money, treasure, and land to her husband's kingdom),we can conclude that the value of noble daughters was socially, politically, and economically significant to families of the social elite. Consequently, the birth of daughters – who would in turn become mothers and arbitrators of new alliances – among nobility and royalty was not necessarily as unwanted as often assumed.

Of course, as mothers queens more obviously exercised political power because they were essential to the continuation of the royal bloodline, and due to this, were primed to take up the appointment of regent as well.[90] Blanche of Castile (1223-1252), who was twice regent for her son Louis IX (1226-34, and 1248-52) , is often highlighted as an ideal example of a regent queen who received the authority to raise armies, arrange marriages, and manage the international political situation left to her by Louis VIII. For all intents and purposes she truly "imposed herself as sovereign of the realm," and is remembered by contemporaries and admired by historians as a chaste widow who saved her son's kingdom.[91]

But as André Poulet (1993) specified, queens were installed as regents because they were seen as "the least of many evils;" that is to say, better than regencies carried out by ambitious male relatives who posed as usurping threats to the throne.[92] Poulet believed that the matrimonial bond and emotional ties that "united the queen to her son" ultimately privileged her position of regent. But still, few queens exercised the same level of agency as Blanche of Castile because checks and balances remained in place to curb the queens' potential tyranny. Firstly, though

[90] Amalie Fößel, "The Political Traditions of Female Rulership in Medieval Europe" in *the Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. Judith M. Bennett, Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford University Press: New York, 2013), pp. 75-77. Although there are examples of exceptional queens who ruled in their own right, such as Mary of Hungary (1371-1395) and Margaret of Norway in Scotland (1286-1290), most of these cases are primarily found in southwestern European kingdoms. Even then, they are infrequent and highly dependent upon the specific socio-political circumstances of the succession.
[91] André Poulet, "Capetian Women and the Regency: The Genesis of a Vocation" in *Medieval Queenship*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1993), p. 110.
[92] Poulet, p. 110.

regent queens could be assigned as primary guardians and tutors of their sons, regencies were generally collegial in nature with several Princes of the Blood acting as co-guardians and together forming a governing council.[93] Secondly, in their widowhood regent queens were prohibited from remarriage at least during their son's minority, as this could complicate the royal succession. Theoretically the feminine ideal of chaste widow and loving mother made it possible to trust regency to queens since as widows, women were expected to be honest, and as mothers, to have their sons' best interests at heart. However, queens whose husbands' were still living were distrusted because of what Poulet called the "contradictory theological image of femininity that opposed Mary to Eve."[94] If queens generally became regents only after they were widowed – although on occasion queens acted as regents while their husbands were absent – then we can appreciate Isabeau's unique situation and understand why she was perceived as distrusted. After all, she ruled as regent while her husband was still alive even if incapacitated by his mental illness. However, while Blanche of Castile was celebrated for her successful regencies, Isabeau was chastised for hers and accused of being indolent and indecisive, even though both queens employed a public image of tremendous piety.

As Parsons (1993) has pointed out, queenly piety was a major element of power, because as religious patrons queens could form important alliances with leaders of the religious community in an age of strong religiosity.[95] Just as the image of majesty and power in medieval Europe necessitated constant public display through symbolic forms and performances, so too the quality of queenly piety was displayed through public prayer and pilgrimages.[96] Such rituals carried both political and spiritual undertones that highlighted the queen's powerful connection to

[93] Poulet, p. 111.
[94] Poulet, p. 111.
[95] John Carmi Parsons, "Piety, power and the reputations of two thirteenth-century English Queens" in *Queens, Regents and Potentates*, ed. Theresa M. Vann, (Academia Press: Cambridge, 1993) p. 107 (hereafter shortened to "Piety").
[96] Parsons, "Piety", p. 110-111.

God, king, and country. Additionally by giving charity, particularly alms to the poor, queens could also publicly demonstrate their piety, virtue and humility – feminine ideals once again measured to the example of Mary, Queen of Heaven. This was also true for Isabeau who established an iconography modeled after Mary, a subject that will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

With regards to the subject of queenly iconography, Annette Dixon's (2002) collection of essays on female rulers from the sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century has demonstrated how visual images were a key way in which female rulers asserted their right to rule. Highly stylized and allegorical state portraits functioned as propaganda to represent women rulers as capable and legitimate leaders. The display of power through clothing, material wealth, and portraiture by female rulers in particular was a form of self-fashioning and identity creation. Portraits of women rulers especially focused spectator attention on the face and head of the subject which symbolised reason – the defining feature of masculine control – and thus symbolically asserted the power of female rulers.[97] For example, the state portrait of Elizabeth I (c.1559) in her ermine lined robe, holding the royal sceptre in one hand and the Sovereign's Orb in the other drips with symbolic royal authority. But these objects, along with the high contrast of the dark blue backdrop actually frame and centre her head as the foci of spectator attention, asserting her ability to rule like any male ruler – with reason. Yet, the necessity of these portraits simultaneously points to the prevalent anxiety regarding female agency in the medieval and early modern period. Female rulers had to simultaneously perform idealised femininity and assert masculine authority to rule successfully, a double standard which Theresa Earenfight (2007) has recently tackled.

Earenfight proposed that scholars consider queenship as a stable institution, without defining female rule against kingship. She suggested that it is too often assumed that a ruler must

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[97] Annette Dixon, *Women Who Ruled: Queens, Goddesses, Amazons in Renaissance and Baroque Art* (Merrell Publishers: New York, 2002), pp. 98-99.

be male which undervalues the role of medieval queens even though time and time again we see examples of consort queens who ruled as if they were regnant queens, much like Isabeau. Instead of conceiving female rule as either extraordinary or ad hoc, Earenfight urged scholars to think of queens as an essential part of monarchy as a whole. [98] By expanding the definition of 'monarch' and 'sovereign' she suggested that "monarchical power [is] multiple in its sources… and variable in its practices."[99] In other words, she asserted that Princes can "just as easily be women as men" and presents the example of María of Castile, Queen of Aragon, who ruled, as she put it, like a Lieutenant General for her husband Alfonso V. [100] As Earenfight argued, María's lengthy rule and extensive powers exemplified the potential for queen consorts to rule nearly as powerfully as their husbands, especially when we note that María did not have any children and therefore failed in her primary duty as queen. Earenfight's proposal challenged conventional theories on queenship and presented an interesting way of understanding monarchy, namely, as a highly dynamic partnership between king and queen that was always in a state of flux and requiring constant re-definition. Fundamentally, Earenfight suggested that queens can be seen as having the potential to rule like kings, but such an assertion may be somewhat exaggerated considering the highly patriarchal and gendered sociopolitical system in which medieval queens lived which limited much of their agency as well as their perceived authority.

In any event and returning to Isabeau, by 1996 scholarship concerning Isabeau began to be united with queenship theories to focus on more specific elements of her reign. Since it has been suggested that the charge of promiscuity against Isabeau may have roots in the accusation that she was a bad mother and terrible spendthrift, Rachel Gibbons' work has offered in-depth analysis of

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[98] Theresa Earenfight, "Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of Monarchy in Late Medieval Europe" in *Gender & History*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2007), p. 7.
[99] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 3.
[100] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 3.

Isabeau's account books to reconsider such allegations. Inspired by Dyan Elliott's concept regarding the use of dress as "outward reflection of inner piety," Gibbons explained that medieval female dress directly reflected upon male prestige. Thus the properly dressed wife, and in this case queen, is like a (social) mannequin – an object vested with meaning to reassert the honour of her husband and king.[101] Charles' condition left Isabeau in a precarious but unique situation that granted her greater independence over her household and expenditures. Isabeau was given a completely separate financial administration, the household of the queen, in 1393. In 1409 this household was replaced by a personal treasury which was set up to centralize her income through a singular self-administered institution which collected and managed its own revenues directly from the source, without depending on the royal bureaucracy and was not subject to regular review.[102] The treasury brought immensely augmented sums into the queen's control: in May 1393 her income totaled only 10,000 *francs* but is recorded to have increased to 48,000 *francs* in 1401 and finally, increased again to 53,000 *francs* the year after to take care of the queen's household expenses.[103] Her large income and highly independent treasury administered by financial ministers, also appointed by the queen, and in combination with France's overall unstable economic situation in the late fourteenth century were likely the chief reasons that fueled many, if not all, criticisms regarding Isabeau's extreme greed, prompting Markale to declare her a hoarder.[104] But, we should keep in mind that the cause of Isabeau's increased independence as well as these changes in financial administration was a direct consequence of the king's mental illness. Charles' instability made Isabeau politically and economically vulnerable and, therefore, changes were put in place to safeguard the queen and her royal children in the event of the king's

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[101] Rachel Gibbons, "The Queen as 'social mannequin': Consumerism and expenditure at the Court of Isabeau of Bavaria, 1393–1422" in *Journal of Medieval History*, Vol. 26, No. 4 (2000), p. 372 (hereafter shortened to "'Social mannequin'".

[102] Gibbons, p. 375.

[103] Gibbons, p. 381.

[104] Markale, p.76. "Mais elle n'oubliera pas pour autant sa manie de thésauriser."

death. Disregarding her extraordinary circumstances, many scholars remained suspicious of this German princess.

It may well have been Isabeau's 'foreignness', however, an issue that is commented upon in almost all the works surveyed in this paper, that ultimately hindered French scholars from beginning the process of reassessing her history. Indeed, her foreignness and criticisms are not unlike Marie Antoinette's who was also German, also castigated for her irresponsible spending during a period of national crisis and therefore, and also held under suspicion as a pseudo-spy.[105] But the difference between Isabeau and Marie Antoinette is that the latter was turned into a tragic victim of the Revolution by early Romantics and royalists; that is to say, she was a symbol of the humiliated aristocracy ironically redeemed by the guillotine that turned her into a martyr. According to Gibbons, Isabeau was not provided the same kindness largely because she was neither "saint [n]or heroine, and her determination to keep her own head above water in the turbulence of her husband's insanity, in a civil war in which her last son ended up on a different side, amid the conquest of France and its surrender to a foreign king, gives her the appearance of anything but a victim."[106] Gibbons has also pointed out that in the end, it was largely uncritical scholarship that relied heavily on problematic sources which led to the 'creation of a historical villainess' in Isabeau of Bavaria. For Gibbons, the rise of Isabeau's 'Black Legend' had much to do with the 'problem of historical reputation,' that is, its potential to distort historical truth.[107] Margaret Wade Labarge's work, as cited by Gibbons, has argued that it is generally "'safer and more emotionally satisfying to blame all the trouble on the foreign women rather than take sides

[105] Marie-Veronique Clin, *Isabeau de Bavière: la reine calomniée* (Perrin: Paris, 1999), introductory note by Régine Pernoud, pp. 18-19.
[106] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p.73.
[107] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 55.

among internal factions that often manipulated the queens as their puppets.'"[108] She points to Margaret of Anjou as another maligned queen who garnered a regrettable reputation from fifteenth-century Yorkist propaganda, which then survived through Shakespeare's work and remained with public consciousness until the study of queens became a major subject of scholarly attention in the 1980s, and her reputation was restored.[109]

Expanding on this concept, János M. Bak has argued that the "scapegoat" is actually a major function of medieval queens.[110] For Bak, "queens were usually foreigners," because it was considered beneath a king's majesty to marry someone within the kingdom – essentially a subject – who, moreover, could bring a rival family advantageously closer to the throne. Foreign queens alleviated this problem but, in turn, became the target of national distrust since "charging 'foreigners' with harming the country's interests was as old [a belief] as the emergence of more or less 'national' monarchies."[111] In short, queens who were publicly visible and powerful, but also foreign, were easily made into scapegoats of national problems.[112] Isabeau, on the other hand, did not receive the same level of attention from scholars and moreover, French history has a tendency of "never [being] charitable towards its queens."[113] Indeed, French writers have often accused queens that preceded Marie-Antoinette as having "exerted a malign foreign influence on the kingdom." [114] Queens who were more independent from their husbands or sons were usually "portrayed as perpetrator[s] of heinous crimes against the people of France."[115]

[108] Margaret Wade Labarge as cited by Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 72.
[109] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 72.
[110] János M. Bak, "Queens as Scapegoats" in *Queens and Queenship in Medieval Europe*, ed. Anne J. Duggan (Boydell Press: Suffolk, 2002), p. 223.
[111] Bak, p. 228.
[112] Bak, p. 228.
[113] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 72.
[114] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 73.
[115] Gibbons, "Historical Villainess," p. 73.

More recently, Tracy Adams (2010) has endeavoured to reassess Isabeau's contemporary sources, particularly chronicles, to determine whether or not there is substantial evidence to confirm Isabeau's affairs, and to develop a more accurate understanding of the fifteenth century's social elite's opinion regarding Isabeau in contrast to the "modern perception that Isabeau was unpopular among her contemporaries."[116] Adams concluded that because there appears to be no text other than Burgundian propaganda which explicitly discussed the queen's sexual promiscuity, at least none that survive today, it is most likely that these allegations were untrue. But as previously remarked, although there is no evidence to prove such claims there is equally little evidence to disprove them. Adams and Rechtshaffen note,

> Of the many chroniclers of her time, only one, the monk of St. Denis, the Burgundian-leaning Michel Pintoin, reports any complaints about Isabeau and he does so only in his entry for the year 1405, when he notes on four occasions that wise men murmured that the king's brother, Duke Louis of Orleans, and the queen were mismanaging the realm.[117]

Citing Pierre Nora's theory of *lieux de mémoire* as the foundational concept guiding her analysis of Isabeau's historical past, Adams explains: when cultures become further removed from their immediate pasts, their history and identity gradually ceases to be grounded in *milieux de mémoire* or "'genuine collective memory.'"[118] Instead it is increasingly deduced from *lieux de mémoire* or "'constructed memories' which [is] fabricate[d]."[119] Adams argued that this concept delineates how Isabeau's unfortunate posthumous reputation is so at variance with her positive iconography during her lifetime. Unable to pity or praise her with ease, Adams asserted that writers have transformed her into a historical villainess and left the work of undoing this image for historians of the latter half of the twentieth century.

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[116] Adams, Rechtschaffen, p. 5.
[117] Adams, Rechtshaffen, p. 6.
[118] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* p. 38.
[119] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* p. 38.

Most scholars now agree that many of the scandalous accusations launched against Isabeau were originally established by unreliable Burgundian propagandistic sources including the allegorical poem entitled *Le Pastoralet* (c.1422-1425). In *Le Pastoralet* a number of shepherds and shepherdesses who symbolize significant figures at the French court gather to celebrate a festival in honour of Venus. But the two main characters, Belligère (Isabeau) and Tristifer (Louis, Duke of Orléans) engage in an illicit affair right under the nose of the extremely naïve Florentine, Maistre de Pourpris (Charles VI). Tristifer is consumed by his lust for Belligère and attempts to kill Florentine after the affair is discovered. The author condemns the Duke of Orléans' character as a lusty, murderous and traitorous brother and casts Isabeau as the unfaithful wife, spurring rumours of Isabeau's alleged real life infidelity. Despite the sensationalizing of their relationship, most historians agree that *Le Pastoralet* was Burgundian propaganda intended to mar the queen's reputation while glorifying John the Fearless. The single known manuscript of the poem belonged to Phillip the Good of Burgundy, son of John the Fearless, and was inventoried in his library in 1467 (although Joel Blanchard puts the date of original publication in 1422-25 – around the time of Charles VI's death).[120]

According to Famiglietti, if Isabeau indeed engaged in multiple illicit affairs in her prime, then surely these accusations would have appeared in the scandal-laden *Chronicles of Tramecourt* (1420) written around the same time as *Le Pastoralet*, but there is no mention of the affair.[121] According to both Famiglietti and Adams, publicly-circulating rumours about the queen's sexual promiscuity only really surfaced after 1429 – no earlier than six years before her death – and

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[120] Famiglietti, p. 45.

[121] Famiglietti, p. 44. I was unable to track down and examine the *Chronicles of Tramecourt* to verify Famiglietti's claim. In her notes, Anne Curry explains that the anonymously written chronicle is virtually a truncated version of Monstrelet's chronicles and that it was not compiled until the late 1450s, quite some time after Isabeau's death in 1435. See notes in *The Battle of Agincourt: Sources and Interpretations* (Boydel Press: Woodbridge, 2000), p. 136.

likely because of Joan of Arc's sudden victories against the English beginning in that year.[122] The French victories at the Siege of Orléans, no doubt, threatened English claims to the French throne and prompted the circulation of slanders that not only marked Isabeau as sexually promiscuous, but resultantly also deemed Charles VII as illegitimate.

From this survey of sources, we can conclude that the lengthy body of work on Queen Isabeau has done much to positively and negatively define and redefine the queen's posthumous reputation. She was no doubt vilified in the nineteenth and early twentieth century only to have this problematic image rectified by twentieth-century historians, and finally more accurately drawn out by modern historians of gender and queenship. But in the larger context of studies on queens, Isabeau has received little attention. Despite her high profile and reign during one of the most well-known and studied wars in European history, she is a relatively unknown queen in most popular histories. In efforts to garner increased popular interest in this queen, and expanding on the current scholarship, the next chapter of this study will elaborate on the subject of intercessory queenship in medieval France, and investigate Isabeau's self-made public iconography through an analysis of extra-literary devices.

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[122] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* p. 42.

Chapter 3: Queenly Intercession through Extra-Literary Devices

Inherent in this discussion regarding Isabeau's negative posthumous reputation is the precarious and gendered role of the queen in late-medieval France. As wife of the king and mother to the heir, queens were in a position of great power; but as women, they also had to remain within the confines of strictly assigned gender roles. As Judith Bennett has pointed out, much historical scholarship on medieval women has been informed by idealized expectations of feminine behaviour as reinforced by male medieval writers. Medieval women are often examined within the 'pit or pedestal' dichotomy; that is, envisioned as "ideally pure" or "terribly evil".[123] In the highly patriarchal medieval world, social standards directed and expected women to adhere to proper gender roles as passive and submissive wives, mothers, and daughters – always obedient to their male heads of household. Prescriptive works by the likes of Juan Luis Vives additionally dictated virginity, chastity, and fertility as the ideal virtues that women should strive to actualize in themselves by following the Virgin Mary's example. But for wives and queens alike, these instructions were highly contradictory. After all, though Mary was expounded as the most exemplary model of womanhood, her embodiment of virginity and motherhood was also highly paradoxical as the latter is intrinsically sexual. In the same manner, women were expected to exhibit virginity while simultaneously remain sexually active to fulfill their duties as wives and mothers.

On the other end of the spectrum, women were also viewed as highly sexual temptresses that required male control. The Book of Genesis, after all, presented Eve – who first sinned by disobeying God and damned mankind – as the root of female insubordination, necessitating patriarchal rule. Even medical tracts from antiquity by Aristotle and Galen, which remained

[123] Judith Bennett, "Queens, Whores and Maidens: Women in Chaucer's England" in Hayes Robinson Lecture Series No. 6, Royal Holloway, University of London: Egham, 2002), p. 7.

authoritative during the Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance, rendered women naturally defective, requiring male surveillance. These ideals, on the one hand prescribed by religious men, and on the other by men of medicine, problematically lead us towards inaccurate and obscured depictions of medieval women's lives.

So far in this study, it is evident that scholarship on Isabeau up to the second half of the twentieth century has thrown her reputation into the 'pit' and painted her as a 'terribly evil' queen. But such representations could not be further from the contemporary public image that the queen actively fostered, and modeled after the Virgin Mary. By evaluating Isabeau's royal entry into Paris in 1389 as recorded by Pintoin (1389) and Froissart (1389-1400), in combination with visual sources including her royal seal, and Isabeau's New Years gift to the king, the *Goldene Rössl*, it becomes clear that Isabeau created a public image of the ideal queen, virgin wife, and chaste mother by performing her gender. Isabeau's public image directly associated her with the Madonna to underscore her intercessory role as regent queen, while magnifying her political importance as mother to the dauphin. In so doing Isabeau, firstly, enveloped herself in an aura of divinity to invite reverence and compliance from her public; and secondly, asserted her prerogatives as a ruler without out stepping gender boundaries to maintain the façade of political stability despite the disorder in France.

But before fully discussing how Isabeau facilitated her role as the mediating or interceding queen through public representation, we must first define the 'intercessory role' of women in medieval Europe. The general consensus among historians is that medieval society was highly patriarchal and phallocratic and therefore limited the social, legal, and political mobility of women regardless of class. However, marital status had a considerable effect on the lives of medieval women, enabling more or less social mobility. Despite the rigid social paradigm medieval women

could exercise agency as wives by influencing the decisions of their husbands. The normative life course for the majority of medieval European women –particularly the social elite– was marriage, although we do know that some could live their whole lives as single women.[124] Nonetheless, by manoeuvring within the confines of the social structure, stressing the significance of their familial roles as mothers, and performing expected feminine behaviour – characteristics like submissiveness, deference, mercy, compassion, and piety– wives could effect change, even if only indirectly.

Lois Huneycutt (1995) and Paul Strohm (1995) proposed that the same model of female intercession can be applied to medieval queenship. Lois Huneycutt's essay on queenly intercession expanded on what she referred to as the 'Esther topos'. According to Huneycutt prior to the Gregorian reform era, after which Mary became more popular, it was the biblical Queen Esther who was the typified 'intercessory' queen that served as a "role model for medieval queens."[125] As the story goes, Esther was a Hebrew girl who was chosen to be the wife of King Ahasuerus and made Queen of the Persians, but concealed her Jewish identity at the counsel of her uncle Mordecai.[126] One day her uncle overheard a plot by the king's counselor, Haman, who intended to eradicate the Hebrew race because Mordecai insulted him. Esther unveiled Haman's plot and appealed to the king to save her people by revealing her identity and in the end, Haman was executed.[127] Huneycutt asserts that the Esther story in fact afforded a number of "lessons" for queens to follow and "provided a justification for the lavish lifestyle of royalty and the aristocracy in that it sanctioned worldly splendor as long as it was used in the proper manner."[128] She explains

[124] See Cordelia Beattie, *Medieval Single Women*, or Kim M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens.* See also Laurel Amtower and Dorothea Kehler, *The Single Woman in Medieval and Early Modern England*.
[125] Lois Huneycutt, "Intercession and the High-Medieval Queen: The Esther Topos" in *Power of the Weak: Studies on Medieval Women*, ed. Jennifer Carpenter and Sally-Beth MacLean (University of Illinois Press: Chicago, 1995), p. 127.
[126] Huneycutt, p. 127.
[127] Huneycutt, p. 127.
[128] Huneycutt, p. 130.

that the narrative "emphasizes the weakness that eventually became the source of [Esther's] power." [129] The Esther story was exemplification of active female authority through piety and prudence – highly feminine qualities.

Bennett underscores Huneycutt's arguments by stating that "the defining function" of late medieval queens was to play the role of judicious advisor to the king.[130] Anne of Bohemia, Queen consort of England, for example failed to fulfill all the primary roles of the queen: after twelve years of marriage she failed to produce an heir, did not bring a dowry and besides, could hardly speak English. But she was nonetheless remembered as a good queen because of her ability to *appear* to perform expected feminine behaviour.[131] Bennett points to several recorded moments throughout Anne's life as examples of the queen exercising intercession: in 1381 Anne successful begged for the mercy of some rebels who revolted the year before. Then in 1384, she threw herself on her knees in front of King Richard to plead mercy for John of Northampton. Finally in 1392, she successfully entreated Richard to restore the liberties of London which he had removed, and dramatically ended her petitioning by publicly prostrating herself before the enthroned king in Westminister Hall.[132] Anne was celebrated by the English and remembered as Anne the Good and Wise, largely due to her ability to arbitrate between the king and his subjects and achieve positive change in their favour.

Drawing from the examples of earthly queens like Anne of Bohemia and biblical queens like Esther, Strohm described medieval queenly power as *petitionary* and *intercessory* in nature. In other words, firstly, medieval queens were typically unable to initiate change or redress in their own right and could only do so through the men that held active power around them, namely their

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[129] Huneycutt, p. 128.
[130] Bennett, p. 12 – author's italics.
[131] Bennett, p. 13 and p. 15.
[132] Bennett, p. 13, and Paul Strohm, "Queens as Intercessors" in *Hochon's Arrow: the Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1992) p. 108-109.

husbands. Secondly, queenly intercession was characteristically remedial since objectives were "limited to the modification of a previously determined male resolve."[133] Queenly intercession was a way in which women could enact power and was acceptable in patriarchal and phallocratic medieval Europe because it, incidentally, highlighted the masculine and active power of kings. As women, queens were expected to exhibit the gentle and tender qualities of their sex and use their femininity as a tool to mitigate the often severe decisions of their husbands. As Strohm puts it, queens could shape change by "cast[ing] aside the trappings of dignity and rank in order to stake a domestically grounded claim" and by staging the symbolic imagery of their female charm to sway the decisions of kings.[134] In short, kings ruled and queens ruled indirectly, or so the majority of scholarship has led us to believe.

When we turn to examine Isabeau's reign, at first glance the practice of queenly intercession is not obvious. Since Isabeau was legally regent during Charles 'absences', she ruled France more directly than Anne of Bohemia did England. This was atypical for medieval queens who generally ruled through their husbands.[135] Few moments of Isabeau publicly prostrating before Charles and performing femininity are chronicled like those of Anne before Richard. In fact, the chronicler Pintoin records that the bourgeois of Paris actually praised Isabeau for her strong and firm show of royal power through martial pomp against John, the Duke of Burgundy in 1405. John was inciting rebellion among the Parisian bourgeoisie by questioning the loyalty of the queen and the other dukes to the king by suggesting that they were taking advantage of his majesty during his psychotic episodes.[136] Seeing this as a direct attack against her royal person, Isabeau returned to Paris from Melun with a display of arms much larger than the duke's, along

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[133] Strohm, p. 95.
[134] Strohm, p. 95.
[135] See Parsons, "Piety, Power and the Reputations…", or Theresa Earenfight's *Queenship in Medieval Europe* (Palgrave, 2013).
[136] Pintoin, Vol. 4, p. 169.

with a massive procession of three thousand armed men. Carried in a golden litter, surrounded by knights and squires, Isabeau had in her company the Dukes of Berry, Brittany, and Bourbon, the Count of Alençon, the Constable of France, as well as the principal officers of the king's house. To quell potential rebellion, she also ordered all nobles to stay in the city and behave peacefully on pain of death.[137] Thus in contrast to Anne, Isabeau actively exercised her prerogatives as a ruler and displayed power not unlike a king without necessitating the permission of Charles who, as Pintoin notes, was experiencing a psychotic episode at the time.[138] Interestingly, when we consider this rather masculine exhibition of power along with the many condemnations flung at the queen by nineteenth-century writers, we can uncover no criticisms by contemporary or modern writers against the queen for "warmongering or overstepping the bounds of her office."[139]

Unlike the many disparagements over Marguerite of Anjou, who was similarly granted greater authority due to Henry VI's mental disability; Isabeau was commended and compared to Blanche of Castile who was regent twice for her son, Louis IX. The lack of contemporary criticism against Isabeau's active political involvement is likely due to the queen's ability to sustain a public image that paralleled her with the Virgin Mary, the ideal intercessory queen, wife, and mother. Through displays of royal authority such as her entry to Paris, and through what Debra Barrett-Graves calls extra-literary emblematics (material objects like portraits, seals, jewelry, and monuments), Isabeau ostensibly appeared to behave according to expected ideals of femininity in the public eye and rule indirectly, but was still able to effect change directly.[140]

The notion that Isabeau was expected to address the concerns of the French public by taking up a mediating role between the French people and their king is further supported by a

[137] Pintoin, Vol. 4, pp. 169-170. "Par son ordre, un héraut publia à son de trompe qu'il leur était enjoint sous peine de mort, de respecter les propriétés et ne pa séjourner dans les compagnes, de rester tous à la ville… "
[138] Pintoin, Vol. 4, p. 169.
[139] Adams, *Life and Afterlife,* xix.
[140] Debra Barrett-Graves, p. 1.

remark by Pintoin regarding Isabeau's coronation ceremony. According to the official historian, the people of Paris presented the queen a tapestry spun from gold cloth in hopes that she would endeavour on their behalf to lower taxes.[141] Although the taxes were raised when Charles left Paris to tour the country, Pintoin clearly stated that the Parisians hoped Isabeau would come to their aid and mediate their concerns to the king:

> In the first three days, to testify their joy, the citizens of Paris presented the queen with a table covered with an expensive cloth of gold... They hoped that the arrival of the Queen would bring an opportunity for the people to lower taxes. They were disappointed.[142]

Nonetheless, that Isabeau visited the Basilica of St. Denis to consult the annals on the traditions of French coronations suggests that she was aware of her need to appear as the quintessential ideal of queenship to her public at a defining moment in her career.[143] This awareness of her public image is quite evident in the allegorical rhetoric of Isabeau's royal entry as narrated by Pintoin (1389) and Froissart (1389-1400).

According to both chroniclers, the queen's entry was extravagant with no expenses spared. Parisian roads were covered with ornate carpets made of silk and camlet, while windows of houses were decorated with elaborate tapestries "as though such cloths should cost nothing."[144] Fountains were rigged to flow with milk, wine or holy water, while numerous allegorical performances entertained the queen as she progressed to the Basilica of St. Denis.[145] Hundreds of spectators lined the streets to watch Isabeau enter Paris, carried upon a golden litter while wearing

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[141] Pintoin, Vol. 2, p. 83.

[142] Pintoin, Vol. 2, p. 83. "Dans les trois premiers jours, les bourgeois de Paris, pour témoigner leur joie, firent présent à la reine d'une table couverte d'un tapis de drap d'or et toute charges de vaiselle d'or… Ils espéraient que l'occasion de l'arrivée de la reine ou de ses couches prochaines, on remettrait au peuple une partie des impôts. Leur attente fut trompé."

[143] Pintoin, Vol. 4, pp. 81.

[144] Froissart, Vol. 4, pp. 277-278.

[145] Jean Juvenal des Ursins. *Histoire de Charles VI* (ed. Michaud and Poujoulet, Paris 1836), pp. 365. See also Pintoin, Vol. 2, pp. 81-82, and Froissart, Vol. 4, pp. 275-87.

a silk *houppelande* embroidered with gold *fleur de lis.* Accompanied by an entourage of lords and ladies, all also dressed in expensive clothes and richly adorned with jewels, Isabeau made her way through the streets which were lined with the Parisian bourgeois totalling twelve hundred, all on horseback and wearing suits of green and crimson baldachin cloth.[146] Flags bearing the queen's new coat of arms – the Bavarian array of lozenges in argent and azure impaled side by side with the coat of arms of the House of Valois, a field of gold *fleur-de-lis* against an azure backdrop – flew from heraldic trumpets as depicted in the miniatures of Froissart's illuminated manuscripts, announcing the union of France and Bavaria (Figure 3).

Figure 3: *Queen Isobel as she enters the city of Paris, c. 1470-72.*

[146] Juvenal, p. 275.

The entry was splendid and befitting of a queen, but one moment in the procession detailed by both Juvenal and Froissart underlined the symbolic connection between Isabeau as the earthly Queen of France and Mary, Queen of Heaven. When Isabeau reached an arched gateway embellished with a starry sky filled with children dancing and singing around a figure of God enthroned to symbolise the Gates of Paradise, two men dressed as angels were hoisted high above her head bearing a jewel encrusted crown.[147] As Isabeau passed through the gate, the angels were slowly lowered to place the crown upon her head as they declared "Dame, as you be [sic] enclosed between the *fleur-de-lis*, so you be [sic] Queen of the realm of France."[148] In this allegorical performance intended for public viewing, Isabeau clearly played the part of Mary being crowned Queen of Heaven and welcomed into Paradise, just as she was welcomed into Paris, directly linking her own triptych role as wife, mother, and queen to that of the Virgin's. By comparing herself to the Virgin, Isabeau also highlighted her own virginity and thus, her purity and righteousness – qualities which lend weight to female authority.

This scene likely resonated quite clearly with Isabeau's spectators given that similar representations of Mary's coronation were prevalent in medieval and early modern art and architecture. One of the earliest known depictions of the coronation of the virgin is found in the Caen stone from Reading Abbey in England c. 1130 (Figure 4).[149] In France, the tympanum of the *Coronation of the Virgin* (Figure 5) of the northern entrance of the Chartres Cathedral in bas-relief, which dates c. 1205-1215, features the crowned virgin seated next to Christ enthroned, crowned, and holding a book underneath an archway flanked by two angels, while two other angels float above their heads with burning incense. A similar version of the Chartres tympanum is found at

[147] Froissart, Vol. 4, p. 276-78. See also Juvenal, p. 365.
[148] Froissart, Vol. 4, p. 278.
[149] T.A Heslop, "The English Origins of the Coronation of the Virgin," in *The Burlington* Magazine, Vol. 147, No. 1233, (2005), p. 791.

the Reims Cathedral on the west façade, c. 1260, but in place of two angels floating above Mary and Christ is a radiating sun (Figure 6).

Figure 4: *Coronation of the Virgin, c. 1130.*

Figure 5: *Coronation of the Virgin, Chartres Cathedral, c.1205-1215.*

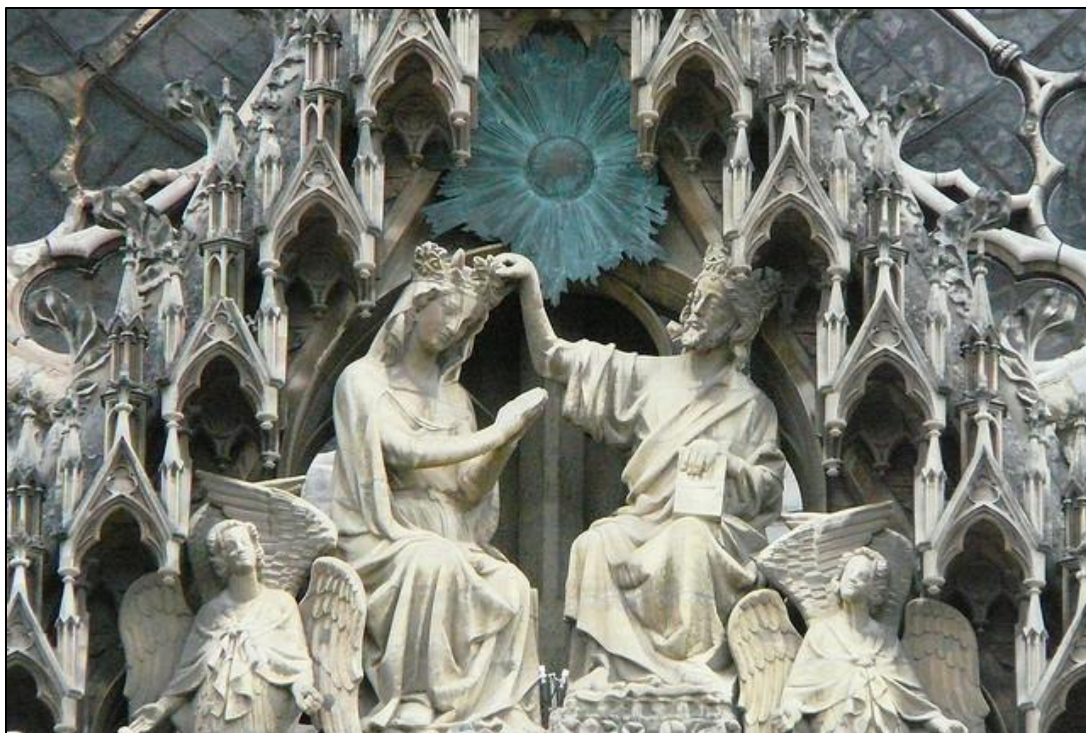

Figure 6: *Coronation of the Virgin, Reims Cathedral, c. 1260.*

The scene exists usually in one of the following compositions: "(1) Mary already crowned [and] enthroned next to Christ (normally to his right, or viewer's left, side);… (2) Mary, enthroned beside Christ, is crowned by one or two angels; (3) Mary, seated beside or kneeling before Christ, with her hands clasped in prayer at her breast, is crowned by him; (4) Mary is crowned by God the Father or (5) by the Holy Trinity, in the presence of angels and saints. The latter two images became popular in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, whereas the majority of examples from the earlier Gothic period depict either Christ or angels placing a crown on Mary's head."[150] Mary's coronation, which continued to be a popular artistic subject in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, seems the most plausible allegorical reference from whence Isabeau's performance through the archway is derived. As Mikhail Vladimirovitch Alpatov explains:

[150] Leslie Ross, *Medieval Art: A Topical Dictionary*, (Greenwood Press: Westport, 1995), p. 54.

> Allegory transforms the phenomenon into a concept and the concept into an image, but in such a way that the concept is always delineated with precision, entirely embraced by the image whence it may be extrapolated…Its mission is to show and render evident and conclusive that which has taken the form of a concept thanks to logical reflection. Allegory tends towards precision, towards a definite, unambiguous image.[151]

Thus, for Isabeau to perform physically and publicly this scene during her entry, which celebrated her own coronation, was for her to assert the concept of herself as mediator between the French people and their king – an earthly counterpoint to the Queen of Heaven who mediated between humankind and Christ.

The metaphorical idea of Mary's queenship as both consort and queen mother stems from the notion that Christ holds the title of 'King of Heaven'.[152] As Pope Pius XII made explicit in his encyclical *Ad Caeli Reginam*, "the most Blessed Virgin Mary is to be called Queen, not only by reason of her divine maternity, but also because by the will of God she has had an outstanding part in the work of our eternal salvation."[153] James M. Egan explains the metaphor in the following: Mary was consort but did not "function to produce an heir to the throne, for it was occupied by an eternal King." [154] Rather, in a spiritual sense, she conceived and gave birth to all the people of the kingdom and "communicat[ed] to them, in her own way, the royal blood of divine grace, making them all a kingly people."[155] Parsons similarly argued that "Marian cult might well secrete human conception and pregnancy, too, and as a queen was the most eminent and visible of women, the construction of her maternity as chiefly nurturing or intercessory could also impart an asexual maternal imagery to society."[156] In other words, Mary was positioned in a divinely intercessory

[151] Mikail Vladimirovitch Alpatov, "Allegory and Symbolism in Italian Renaissance Painting" in *Diogenes*, Vol. 19, No. 76 (1971), pp. 2-4.
[152] James M. Egan, "The Unique Character of Mary's Queenship," in *Speculative Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (1962), p. 293.
[153] As quoted by Egan, p. 299.
[154] Egan, p. 298.
[155] Egan, p. 298.
[156] John Carmi Parsons, "The Pregnant Queen as Counsellor and the Medieval Construction of Motherhood" in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons (Garland Publishing Inc.: New York, 1996), p. 55.

role and thus given the title of Mediatrix, entailing the belief that the blessings of her son can also be sought through her the intermediate link between the spiritual and earthly realm.

Isabeau's iconography of divinely anointed intercessory queenship was re-affirmed once again c. 1385-1405 when her royal seal was struck. The seal itself does not survive; however; an imprint of the round seal on red wax does and is now a part of the Auguste de Bastard d'Estang collection (Figure 7). Isabeau's name and title encircles the border of the seal which features a barbed quatrefoil inlayed with four angelic figures presenting the queen's rhombus shaped coat of arms. With Isabeau having just married Charles, been made queen in 1385, and officially crowned in 1389, it seems appropriate that the seal emphasises the unification of Bavaria and France and in connection, her marital status – wife to the king of France. Like all women of the Middle Ages, Isabeau's social and marital status as wife and then as mother provided her with "access to formal official political authority."[157] By emphasizing her marital status in her seal, Isabeau asserted her royal authority by also emphasizing her intimate physical connection to the king. As Earenfight argues, "A queen's proximity to the king determined her ability to do almost anything [for] she was a nexus between him and others…symboliz[ing] the possibility of social cohesion." [158]

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[157] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 240.
[158] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 240.

Source gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque nationale de France

Figure 7: Impression of seal on red wax, c. 1389-1405.

Figure 8: Fragment of the seal of Isabeau of Bavaria, c. 1409.

In 1409 however, Isabeau commissioned a more complex seal (Figure 8) which features the queen centred, standing, and adorned in all the regalia of a queen: crown, sceptre, and mantle. In the fashion of the seals of French queens and noblewomen that came before her, like those of Blanche of Navarre, Joan II of Navarre, and Blanche of Artois, Isabeau is portrayed with her left

hand resting upon her chest while her right hand wields a sceptre, a long standing symbol of royal authority.[159] Set beneath an intricate stonework element and framed by a rose window, four angels present the queen – perhaps an allusion to the Four Evangelists, St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke, and St. John. Two are situated above her head, and each hold up what is presumably the royal mantle patterned with the queen's coat of arms. I postulate that the queen's body language in the seal also intentionally evokes the likeness of Mary, often represented standing holding a stem of lilies in one hand, which symbolises virginity and chastity, while her other hand rests on her chest or points to the Immaculate Heart.

It is clear that Isabeau's later seal not only echoed the divine imagery originally exhibited at her royal entry, but also intentionally and more clearly defined Isabeau as the crowned Queen of France demanding allegiance and obedience of all those who saw it, specifically the members of the royal household. That her seals are round in shape is particularly significant, because most seals belonging to women were almond shaped resembling the *mandorla,* the halo or aureola which surrounds depictions of Mary, and connotes feminine power. The seal of men, however, were generally round in shape and the differences in the shape of seals allude to the gendered differences of their authority. Therefore, for Isabeau to possess a round seal was to assert her agency: her ability to actively rule, like a king. The complexity of the 1409 seal directly reflects the queen's growing political authority which was increased through numerous ordinances between 1392 and 1407. Given that the seals of medieval monarchs were generally commissioned by themselves and during their lifetime, as art historian Kathleen Nolan (2009) has explained, then the preserved impressions of these seals should be seen as "extension[s] of their individual

[159] The effigy of Isabeau lying next to Charles VI holds a similar sceptre at the Abbey of St. Denis.

identity."[160] In other words, the imprint of Isabeau's seals should be read as a prime example of the way in which the queen intended her public, specifically the warring Princes of the Blood, to perceive of her. We will return to the subject of precisely why Isabeau endeavoured to model her public representations after the Virgin Mary, but first I want to explore a final piece of evidence that contributes to the last element of Isabeau's iconography – motherhood.

[160] Kathleen Nolan, *Queens in Stone and Silver: The Creation of a Visual Imagery of Queenship in Capetian France* (Palgrave: New York, 2009), pp. 12 and 90.

Figure 9: *Goldene Rössl* tabernacle, c. 1400.

In 1400 Isabeau commissioned an unknown artist to create the *Goldene Rössl* (Golden Horse) tabernacle (Figure 9), one of the few surviving *étrennes* or gifts from the Valois court in the early fifteenth century. While it now resides in the Abbey of Altötting in Bavaria, Isabeau originally gifted the *Goldene Rössl* to her husband on New Year's Day in 1405. [161] The piece is exquisitely extravagant and masterfully-crafted, likely "appreciated as a goldsmith's tour de force [in its] combin[ation of] gold, silver, and silver-gilt."[162] Brigitte Buettner points out that the goldsmith commissioned must have been greatly skilled since he employed the then new and intricate technique called *émail en ronde bosse,* which involved coating the figurines with "a layer of enamel of differing degrees of translucency, ranging from opaque white to a transparent and costly red."[163] The golden tabernacle features the enthroned Madonna with the Baby Jesus in her right arm and a book in her other, centred on a raised terrace. The exceptionally elaborate trelliswork that frames Mary is decorated with winding golden ivy, and encrusted with large cut rubies, sapphires, and pearls.

But I now draw your attention to the four angelic figures that surround the Madonna and child. Three saints, John the Evangelist, John the Baptist, and Catherine, kneel at her feet presenting her with gifts. Peculiarly childlike in their depiction, they may be an allusion to the children Isabeau had already had by the year the piece was commissioned.[164] No doubt, the choice to exhibit the Madonna and Child surrounded by childlike saints in a piece intended, firstly, as a gift to the king, and secondly, to be presented publicly and therefore seen by the members of the court, clearly linked Isabeau to the role of mother of the dauphin in the same way Mary was

[161] Brigitte Buettner, "Past Presents: New Year's Gifts at the Valois Courts, ca. 1400", in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 83, No. 4 (2001), pp. 605-607. Although it was pawned later in the year to Isabeau's brother, Louis, as a wedding gift for marrying Anne of Burgundy and as part of payment for his annual income.
[162] Buettner, p. 607.
[163] Buettner, p. 607.
[164] Buettner p. 607. Buettner says that Willibald Sauerländer has suggested that the three saints may allude to "two" children Isabeau had up to this point; however, my research indicates that Isabeau had already had nine children (two of whom died before 1400) by the time the piece was commissioned.

mother of Christ. If this symbolic connection to Isabeau was not obvious, then surely it can be further clarified by the two angels who hover in the archway above the Madonna and appear to be lowering a crown upon her head – once again echoing the imagery of the coronation of the virgin detailed in Isabeau's seal, and performed at her royal entry.

The imagery differs slightly from the previous references to feature explicitly Mary's maternity and, in turn, emphasize Isabeau's successful motherhood and piety. For Isabeau to emphasize her motherliness was for her to stake her claim as regent through the natural right and love of a mother. Again, the argument commonly put forth in favour of female regency is that by "virtue of her [legal] incapacity to ascend the throne," queens were excellent choices for regents.[165] It was assumed that the maternal and emotional bonds natural to women that linked royal mothers to their sons would assure that queen-mothers educate and guide their sons towards success. As good women, queen-mothers were expected to protect their sons from the harm or bad influence of ambitious and greedy male relatives, even 'fall on their own swords' as it were to save their sons, and safeguard the kingdom. As Elizabeth McCartney has explained, "the queen's importance as a mother assured her a privileged role in guiding the welfare of her children and, on occasion, the government of the realm."[166] The metaphor could be further extended to encompass all the subjects of the kingdom made children to the queen who stages her own political motherhood. Thus, female regency for queen-mothers was indeed a royal prerogative which Isabeau underscored through the allusion to the Madonna and Child in the *Goldene Rössl* to legitimize her claims to political authority.

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[165] Tracy Adams, "Female Regency" in *French Historical Studies* Vol. 37, No. 1 (2014), p. 3.
[166] McCartney, Elizabeth. "The King's Mother and Royal Prerogative in Early-Sixteenth-Century France" in *Medieval Queenship,* pp. 122-123

Certainly Charles VI was aware of these arguments in support of female regency given his personal experience with his uncles who acted as regents during his minority and wrought financial havoc on the kingdom. In the ordinance of January 1392 when Charles first established his co-regency that included Isabeau, specified as "the Queen, mother of our Subjects", his brother, Louis of Orléans, his brother in law Louis of Bavaria, and his uncle, Philip of Burgundy, (whose authority were, at the time, quite evenly balanced), the king actually recounted the tale of how the sixth century Frankish Queen Fredegund held the four-month-old Prince Chilperic in her arms while addressing her public and "inspired the nobility to win a great victory."[167] The same tale was reiterated in his father's ordinance of 1374 when he set out the regency for Charles VI. In January 1393, a new ordinance explicitly acknowledged Isabeau's maternal authority, and by extension her right to act as regent, by declaring the following: "according to written and natural reason, the mother has greater and more tender love for her children, and has a soft heart and more care to guard and nourish [her children more] lovingly, than anyone else, even if they are next of kin, and for this must be preferred to any other."[168] The ordinance goes on to claim that mothers are the nearest influence to provide wise council to their children as well as good, true and loyal love.[169]

The series of ordinances that Charles enacted between 1392 and 1409 provided Isabeau with increasing political authority during his 'absences', but as Adams has pointed out, "in their elaboration and reelaboration [sic] of roles, they bear the traces of attempts by Charles VI's

[167] Adams, "Female Regency" p.7. See also *Ordonnances des rois de France de la troisième race Contenant les ordonnances de Charles VI données depuis le commencement de l'année 1383, jusqu'à la fin de l'année 1394,* ed. Denis-François Secousse (L'Imprimerie Royale: Paris, 1745), Vol. 7, pp. 530-538. "La Royne, mere de noz diz Enfans," quote on p. 531.

[168] *Ordonnance*, Vol. 7, pp. 530. "Selon raison escrite et naturelle, la mère a greigneur & plus tender amour à ses enfans, & a le cuer plus doulz et plus soigneux de les garder & nourrir amoureusement, que quelconque autre personne, tant leur soit prochaine de linage, et quant à ce doit ester preferée à touz autres."

[169] *Ordonnance,* Vol. 7, pp. 530. "Aussi que de raison d'honneste, Dames doivent estre acompaignées conseilliées des plus prochains parens d'elles de leurs enfans, qui soient saiges puissans, les ayment de bonne, vraye & loyal amour…pour le bien, proufit ou seurté évidens de noz Enfans Royaume."

brother, Louis, Duke of Orléans, and by his uncle, Philip, Duke of Burgundy (and by Philip's son, Jean sans Peur, after Philip's death) to manipulate the king to their advantage."[170]

In January 1393 the king amended the 1392 ordinance by strengthening Louis of Orléans' authority, who relied on the new ordinance to assert his right to rule in place of the king during his 'absences'. The amended ordinance specifically dictated that his "very-cherished and very-loved brother, Louis, Duke of Orléans…have governance, safe-guard and defend [the French] kingdom, until our Son enters his fourteenth year."[171] The new designation caused tensions to mount between Louis and Philip nearing the point of open war. Isabeau's skills of intercession were put to the test at this point since, as Adams tells us, the princes of the realm actually appealed to Isabeau "several times to intervene between the parties in the interests of peace."[172]

Consequently, Charles looked to provide Isabeau with the legal support to act as official mediator between the warring dukes. On July 1402, two years after Isabeau's new seal was struck Isabeau was made primary mediator between Louis and Philip as well as regent of the kingdom.[173] The ordinance states: "the queen, which already by our other letters we give power, authority, and *especially* power to appease all debates, discourse, [and] discussions" in the regency council, "will see *both* to the appeasing of our uncle of Burgundy and our brother of Orléans *and* to the management of finances and other difficulties of the realm."[174] Isabeau's intercessory role, established in the symbolic imagery of her iconography, became legally supported by the 1402

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[170] Adams, "Female Regency," p. 3.
[171] *Ordonnances,* Vol. 7, p. 535. "Nostre très-chier et très-amé Frere, *Loys Duc d'Orliens*… ait le gouvernement, Garde & defense de nostre Royaume, jusques à ce que nostredit ainsné Filz soit entré oudit quatorziesme an de son aage."
[172] Adams, "Female Regency," p. 10, as translated and quoted by Adams. "Regni principles videntes intestina hec odia amborum ducum nimis esse periculos… ducem Biturie et reginam reiterates vicibus oraverunt, ut pro bono pacis medios se constituerent inter partes."
[173] Adams, "Female Regency," p. 9.
[174] Douët-d'Arcq, *Choix de pieces*, ed. Vve de J. Renouard (Société de l'histoire de France : Paris, 1863-64) Vol. 1, p. 240-241. "La Royne, à laquelle desjà par noz autres lettres nous avons donné povoir, auctorité et mandement especial de pourveoir à l'apaisement de tous les débas, descors, dissencions." And Douët-d'Arcq as cited and translated by Adams in "Female Regency," p.11. "Elle pourverra bien, tan à l'apaisement de nozdiz oncle de Bourgoingne et frère d'Orléans, comme au gouvernement de nozdictes finances et aux autres grans besoingnes de nostredit royaume," my italics.

ordinance. Only a few months later, however, another ordinance restated and clarified Isabeau's authority as mediator. Adams argues that this "need to reiterate suggests that one or the other of the disputing parties resisted her authority," but in 1403, another ordinance ultimately assigned Isabeau as Charles's "substitute on the royal council". [175] By 1405 when Isabeau presented the *Goldene Rössl,* a gift that once again asserted her authority, Isabeau was leader of the co-regency and ruling in Charles' stead.

But female rule in France was a particularly prickly subject considering the Salic Law, a legal code written c. 476-496 that was amended and renewed between 1409 and 1414 to justify the exclusion of women from royal succession.[176] Craig Taylor (2006) has explained that the misogynistic language of the Salic Law was significant in shaping general attitudes toward women and especially French queenship.[177] Thus even though Isabeau could in no way inherit the French throne, her regency was nonetheless repeatedly contested by the Dukes of Burgundy and Orléans. But the reality was that "the queen's role as regent inevitably involved her in public affairs and thus compromised the theoretical distinction between the private and public spheres that was so central to the position adopted by French intellectuals" arguing against female rule.[178] Accordingly, although earlier in Charles' rule (c. 1406), scholars like Jean of Montreuil used the Salic Law to dispute Isabeau's regency, by 1413 Montreuil and others, like Juvenal, cited the same law to defend the French crown against the Plantagenet claim to the throne.[179] The state of affairs in France in the early fifteenth century that left Isabeau a powerful regent was a "visible

[175] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 10.
[176] Craig Taylor, "The Salic Law, French Queenship, and the Defence of Women in the Late Middle Ages" in *French Historical Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2006), p. 543. See also "The Salic Law and the Valois Succession to the French Crown" in *French History,* Vol. 15, No. 4 (2001), or Ralph E. Giesey, "The Juristic Basis of Dynastic Right to the French Throne," in *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society,* Vol. 51, No. 5 (1961). Another source that deals with the gendered aspect of the Salic Law is Sarah Hanley, "Identity Politics and Rulership in France: Female Political Place and the Fraudulent Salic Law in Christine de Pizan and Jean de Montreuil," in *Changing Identities in Early Modern France,* ed. Michael Wolfe (Durham: 1997).
[177] Taylor, p. 544.
[178] Taylor, p. 557. Taylor also notes that Christine de Pizan's *Cité des Dames* or *Book of the City of Ladies* directly addressed Montreuil's work and argued against the logic of the Salic Law. I discuss this subject in more detail in the next chapter.
[179] Taylor, pp. 558-559.

contradiction to the [concept of] male domination of public power." [180] But the fact that Charles repeatedly asserted Isabeau's authority in his ordinances indicates that in practice, female rule was integral to late medieval monarchy and perhaps also, that the king may have truly believed in her ruling capabilities. Given the autonomy permitted to her, it may have been that Charles perceived Isabeau as a ruling partner. In this light, and again, due to her extraordinary political powers, we should begin to view Isabeau as a regnant queen rather than merely queen consort.

In support of this concept of monarchical partners, Theresa Earenfight (2007) has recently argued for the expansion of the definition of monarchy as we currently understand it. She believes that the medieval terminology used to define monarchy was "sufficiently fluid to admit the possibility of rule by either a man or a woman, suggesting that the simple designation of 'king' or 'queen' or 'prince' did not automatically or necessarily define what he or she could do."[181] Traditional scholarship has been inclined to separate spheres of power by gender (public political, religious, or military power are often seen as male spheres), problematically undercutting the contribution of queens to the institution of monarchy.[182] Earenfight challenges the notion that most historians view "the ruling queen as exceptional and queenship as distinct from monarchy" by asserting that queenship was *integral* to monarchy by virtue of their function to step in, and rule in place of the king when necessary.[183] In short, Earenfight believes monarchy should not be comprehended as rule by a sole male ruler but rather as a type of 'corporate entity' where queens and kings were partners. The case of Charles VI and Isabeau supports Earenfight's arguments.

When we consider Isabeau's extra-literary emblems as a series of visual intertextualisation – (1) the gendered performance and divine crowning of Isabeau at her royal entry; (2) the queen's

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[180] Taylor, pp. 563-564.
[181] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 2.
[182] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," pp. 3 and 8.
[183] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 8.

royal seals; (3) and finally, the gifting of the *Goldene Rössl* to Charles VI – the themes of intercessory queenship, marital union, and motherhood are clearly highlighted. However, obvious social tensions underlay Isabeau's rule since contemporaries expected her, as a woman, to be "obedient, deferential, and dependent," but as "a good politician to be commanding, aggressive, and independent."[184] To rule successfully, she was forced to balance such expectations by enacting political agency under the guise of her performance of idealised 'gender ideology'. Isabeau underlined her conformity to normative and expected gender behaviour to appeal to her immediate public who were, in fact, the nobles and officials of the court who competed for the favour of the king. In combination with the ordinances that provided her with legally sanctioned authority to reign as regent, Isabeau repeatedly employed the allegory of the coronation of the virgin, and drew on the themes of the majesty of queenship, marital union, and motherhood to promote and defend her political prerogatives. Expanding on the subject of Isabeau's use of the material to enact authority, the next chapter will move to explore a final way in which the queen manifested her power: conspicuous consumption.

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[184] Katherine Crawford, *Perilous Performances: Gender and Regency in Early Modern France* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2004), p. 56. See also Elaine Kruse, "The Virgin and the Widow: The Political Finesse of Elizabeth I and Catherine de' Medici" in *Queens and Power in Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Carole Levin and Robert Bucholz (University of Nebraska Press: Lincoln, 2009).

Chapter 4: The Power of Consumption

In examining Isabeau's exploitation of extra-literary devices, the significance of materiality in the late medieval world comes to the fore. The material objects of Isabeau's design functioned as mechanisms for the reproduction of social meanings. We might imagine that each time the queen sent a letter of mediation to one of the warring dukes sealed by the image of herself as the Queen of Heaven, the queen's majesty and royal authority were literally pressed onto the parchment through the wax. Isabeau's extravagant *houppelande* which she is often depicted wearing and is said to have worn at her royal entry, exuded the majesty of royalty and likely elicited adoration from the Parisian crowds. The 'right dress' was not merely a fashion statement; after all, it was a political instrument, a show of status and power through material wealth. Scholars like anthropologist Michael Rowlands (2011) have emphasized the equal recognition of the material world's significance as "a medium through which people [come] to know and understand themselves, a means of creation and self-creation [wherein] consciousness of the 'thing' [is] a fundamental part of [the] social being."[185] 'Objects' or material objects mattered in the pre-modern world and as a consequence, so too did conspicuous consumption among the social elite.

Having detailed how Isabeau manipulated the symbolic power of material objects, we can also argue that a consumer culture was already in development by Isabeau's reign, who consumed as means of compensating for France's lack of political stability. Isabeau's conspicuous consumption included spending on highly visible and obviously expensive objects including jewelry, clothing and even pets. But her conspicuous consumption is also apparent in her patronage of the arts and gift-giving. Monarchs, especially those in straightened political

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[185] As discussed by Christopher Tilley, "Materializing Identities: An Introduction" in *Journal of Material Culture,* Vol. 16 (4), 2011, p. 348.

circumstances like Isabeau, were intensely aware of the power of consumption to endorse their own authority.

Contemporary criticisms against the queen's penchant for reckless spending and materialism, however, arose as a result of Isabeau's *over* spending. Of all the accusations launched against the queen – debauchery, adultery, parental negligence, and even treason – the most common, and I would argue most compelling charge, is the problem of profligacy. Studies on Isabeau dating from the nineteenth century up to the present have all commented upon the queen's materialism and extravagant spending, a problem magnified by France's political and economic troubles. Even the relatively neutral Gibbons has said of Isabeau's spending habits: "condemnation of Isabeau for visible extravagance in a period of national crisis and deepening poverty is not a charge that it is totally possible to defend her against, because the statistics and itemisation of her accounts show it to be true."[186]

Interestingly, most, if not all, criticisms regarding the queen's overspending originate from pro-Burgundian contemporary sources like *Le Song Véritable*. These commentators were the most severe in their criticisms. After all, literary and anonymous sources were more at liberty to be explicit as well as creative in expressing their disapproval on excessive court spending. In *Le Songe Véritable*, the anonymous author identified only as the Parisian recounts the conversation between several allegorical figures, Patience, Fortune, Damnation, Suffering, Poverty and Everyone (or the People). In this piece, these figures comment on the contemporary political and financial situation of France. The reputation of the king and queen are attacked, and the main subject of irritation is greed among the nobility, but especially among the queen's financial ministers. The Parisian begins by lamenting that under Charles and Isabeau's reign, France

[186] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 393.

became a poor kingdom, ruled by a poor and incompetent king.[187] The king's nobles and ministers appeased him, but always possessed ulterior motives of self and financial aggrandizement.[188] The author claims that the king is king only in title for the kingdom was in fact controlled by others, namely Isabeau who is specified in line 1033 and criticized for "doing and taking whatever [money] she wants" without caring of the consequences.[189] Calling the queen a spendthrift, he plainly accused her of stealing from the royal coffers and siphoning money and jewels sealed in leather boxes back to her brother, Louis, and father, Stephen, in Bavaria.[190]

Immediately we are made aware of the author's distrust of Isabeau due to her foreignness. If we consider the Parisian a representative of a sentiment widely held in the city, then perhaps suspicion of foreign queens may indeed have been a particularly French predilection.[191] In an exasperated tone, he bewails the extravagance of Isabeau's palace (likely the Chateau de Vincennes) listing the over abundant number of extravagant rooms, galleries, and fireplaces and chimneys.[192] Isabeau wasted so much of the kingdom's wealth that Fortune regretted making her the queen of France: "I planted good fortune and good reputation in the king's garden, but in a short time this changed [because] the *evil* queen claimed his gold."[193] Of course, the author's complaints regarding the lavishness of Isabeau's palace are somewhat unfair since display of

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[187] *Le Songe,* Lines 35-70.
[188] *Le Songe,* Lines 35-70.
[189] *Le Songe*, Lines 1033-1050. "Quant est aussi de la Royne / Tout son penser, tout son attaine / Est d'en prendre ce qu'elle en peut / Maiz non pas tant comme elle vault / Toutesfoiz en elle eu foison / Par plusieurs foiz oultre raison / Qu'on ne soit qu'il est devenu / Fors qu'en dit souvent et menu / Vostre compaigne Renommée / Que en repost et en celée / Elle a envoie à son père / En son pais, ou à son frère / Ou l'a despendu folement / Sans aviser quant ne comment / Ou qu'il convient qu'il soit encore / En coffres de cuir ou de cor / Ou mucié en autre manière / Qui en mon mirour point n'apere."
[190] *Le Songe*, Lines 1033-1050.
[191] Suggested by Margaret Wade Labarge and János M. Bak.
[192] *Le Songe*, Lines 1093-1104. "Quelle sale, quelle chapelle! / Quelle cuisine! Qu'elle est belle! / Que de belles chambres à tas! / Quelx galeries, quelx galatas! / Quelx portes, et quelx cheminées! / Quel façon de chambres aisées! / Quelle despence et quelx celiers! / Quelles caves et quelx garniers! / Comme est richement tout tendus/De bons tapis tous estandus. / De couvertures et de sarges / Et de bancquiers bons, longs et larges!"
[193] *Le Songe,* Lines 1723-1738. "'De la Royne dont parlés / Elle en a eu par long et lez / Nature l'en bailla un peu / Quant elle vint paier son true / Puis je la mis sy en l'avance / Que je la fis Royne de France / Et en son jardin j'ay planté / De tous mes biens à grant planté / Et ly fais bon renom avoir / Maiz pour ce que mist mon avoir / En maies eures et tourna,Mon yre encontre elle torna / Si que en mains d'une année / Fu Royne mal clamée / Et le sera d'or en avan t /Tant que ma roe yra tournant.'"

power through wealth was acceptable and expected behaviour for someone of her station. If rank, power, and prestige were expressed through material wealth and in a period where people were acutely aware of social status, then displays of wealth were always reaffirmation of status and power. As queen, and moreover as a practicing regnant queen, Isabeau was well in her right to have her palace as "richly adorned" as was required of her social status.[194] *Le Songe Véritable*, however, must be read as pro-Burgundian propaganda because it was originally written for the Duke of Burgundy.[195] Indeed, it is clear that some contemporaries blamed the queen for many of France's financial woes. But this was because it was easy to accuse Isabeau of being a spendthrift since she was both a woman and a foreigner who held such a significant position in the co-regency, and who could easily take advantage of a completely incapacitated king.

Another literary source that alludes to Isabeau's overspending was the poetry of Eustache Deschamps. In his ballads, Deschamps asks all married men, from kings to noblemen and peasants, for their thoughts on how to manage their wives for a successful marriage.[196] Sarcastically, he tells us that successful marriages require gold cloth, silk sheets, fine gold and of course money.[197] He then lists gold camisoles encrusted with precious stones and pearls, fine dresses of every colour from azure to scarlet with sleeves 'jammed' with ermine fur all as necessary components of a fine marriage since husbands had to satiate the pomp and vanities of their wives.[198] Mockingly, he goes on to prescribe the necessary luxuries of noble homes and palaces and the demand for sumptuous feasts featuring hard cheeses, lots of small sweet treats, and diverse spices as all part of the conspicuous consumption of a married man.[199] Deschamps'

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[194] *Le Songe,* Lines 1080 – 1102.

[195] *Le Songe*, notes, p. 2. Although, according to the note, after Louis of Burgundy's death in 1410 another manuscript was made and this time dedicated to John of Berry.

[196] Eustache Deschamps, *Oeuvres Completes* (Paris, 1878) Vol. 9, p. 40.

[197] Deschamps, Vol. 9, p. 41.

[198] Deschamps, Vol. 9, p. 41.

[199] Deschamps, Vol. 9, p. 41.

comparison of marriage to male servitude, excessive list of expensive goods, and complaint that women enjoy wearing crowns in their hair suggests that the contemporary understanding that women were more inclined to materialism existed during Isabeau's time.[200] The common argument was that women, naturally lacking reason, were unable to control their passions and thus overspent, always at the expense of their husbands. While no evidence suggests that Deschamps' ballads were directly concerned with Isabeau's overspending, the fact that he satirizes the materialism of women indicates that public concerns about overspending at the French courts existed.

Contemporary chroniclers, on the other hand, were generally neutral and completely unconcerned on the matter, or discussed it only in passing. Jean Juvenal de Ursins records an incident in 1405 when a man burst into the church (presumably the Basilica de Saint Denis) while the queen was attending mass along with the Duke of Orléans and publically accused her of excessive spending. The man "began to blaspheme the queen in his presence, speaking of the abuses made against the people, and her excessive spending, as people spoke in various ways."[201] He adds that the queen was quite upset but nothing too serious appears to have happened to the man.[202] But Ursin is the only contemporary chronicler who records this account. Pintoin, similarly, reproached Isabeau alongside Louis of Orléans for overspending using what he termed 'borrowed money' from the royal treasury for material vanities, and for neglecting their royal duties.[203] However, Pintoin is more concerned with the problem of high taxation. He emphasized

[200] Deschamps, Vol. 9, p. 45.
[201] Juvenal, p. 426. "La reyne en un jour de feste voulut ouyr un sermon, et y eut un bien notable homme, lequel à ce faire fut commis. Lequel commença à blasmer la reyne en sa présence, en parlant des exactions qu'on faisoit sur le peuple, et des excessifs estais qu'elle et ses femmes avoient et tenoient , et comme le people en parloit en diverses manières, etque c'estoit mal fait, dont la reyne fut très-mal contente."
[202] Juvenal, p. 426.
[203] Pintoin as cited and translated by Gibbons in "Historical Villainess," p. 63. "On leur reprochait encore, entre autres actes de tyrannie, d'insulter à la misère publique en faisant grande chère aux dépens d'autrui; ils enlevaient les vivres sans les payer, et quand on en demandait le prix, les pourvoyeurs de la maison royale regardaient cette réclamation comme un crime. Indifférents

that the French people were "not content with normal taxation," a source of displeasure which they voiced publically, because a general tax was imposed in 1405 – a pivotal year in the queen's career when she received more autonomy from the king in his October ordinance.[204] But this appears to have been the full extent of both Ursin and Pintoin's complaints on overspending, and besides, the severity of their criticisms pales in comparison to those found in *Le Songe Véritable*.

In fact, other contemporary chroniclers, like Froissart and the somewhat later Chartier, do not express any extreme sense of irritation regarding the issue of court spending at all. Chartier did not discuss this matter and instead chose to underscore Charles VII's legitimacy by emphasizing Isabeau's morality. He called Isabeau a "very powerful and most Christian queen" whose reputation was marred by pro-Burgundian and English voices in attempts to undermine her authority which consequently drove her to an early grave.[205] Chartier stated that Henry V "pretended" that "Charles, Dauphin of Vienne, was not legitimate and therefore unable to succeed to the crown of France." [206] Learning of this, "the queen became heartbroken" and died as a result of the slurs against her reputation.[207] Additionally, Enguerrand de Monstrelet's chronicles from

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à la défence du royaume, ils mettaient toute leur vanité dans les richesses, toute leur jouissance dans les délices du corps. Enfin ils oubliaient tellement les règles et les devoirs de la royauté, qu'ils étaient devenus un objet de scandale pour la France et la fable des nations étrangère."

[204] Pintoin as cited by Gibbons in "Historical Villainess," p. 63. "Les habitants du royaume en rejetaient la faute sur la mauvaise administration de la reine et du duc d'Orléans. On déclamait publiquement dans les villes contre leur insatiable cupidité; on disait que, négligaient la défense du royaume et non contents des exactions ordinaires, ils avaient encore l'année précédente éstabli un impôt général."

[205] Chartier, p. 208. "Très puissante et très chrestienne roigne Ysabel, femme de Charles le sixième roy de France de ce nom." Chartier's work however was not as contemporaneous as Pintoin, Juvenal, or Froissarts, and as the official historian under Charles VII we should consider his chronicles as somewhat propagandistic in support of the new king.

[206] Chartier, p. 209. "A esté aussi fort dollehte et prins en desplaisance de ce que injustement les Angloiz avoient publié de son filz car ilz disoient que Charles, dauphin de Vienne, n'estoit pas légitime, et par ce moyen inhabille à succéder à la couronne de France. L'edit roy d'Angleterre prétendoit à y parvenir."

[207] Chartier, p. 209-210. "Et ce venu à la congnoessance de ladite royne, fut moult troublée et navrée en ceur, enjectant mams piours et soupirs qui tellement ront tourmentée, que oncques depuis elle n'eult joye au ceur."

1400 to 1444 do not reveal any sense of his own dissatisfaction regarding the queen's spending, nor does it indicate that there was general public discontent towards the queen either.[208]

Figure 10: *Dance of the Wodewoses*, c. 1470-72.

In the same vein, Froissart's *Chroniques* appears completely barren of criticisms against Isabeau regarding any subject. He does, however, record the famous fire at the *Bal des Ardents* (Ball of Burning Men), a masquerade party, that occurred a few days before Candlemas in 1393 (Figure 10). Isabeau held the ball to celebrate the marriage of one of her ladies-in-waiting. A dance performance was organized that included several princes and the king himself, all disguised as satyrs in suits made of highly flammable flax.[209] Unfortunately, when Louis of Orléans entered

[208] Enguerrand de Monstrelet, *Chronique de 1400-44* (Lucien Douet-d'Arcq, Paris 1857-62).
[209] Froissart, Vol. 6, pp. 96-99. John Bourchier's translation reads 'satyrs' but other sources have employed the term 'wildmen'.

the room carrying a torch, he accidentally set a dancer on fire. Charles had been off to the side entertaining several ladies otherwise the king's life would have been in grave danger considering two men burned to death in place, and two others perished from their wounds several days later.[210]

In light of this incident and despite the depiction of (literally lethal) courtly lavishness, Froissart does not record any discontent among the French directed against Isabeau. Rather, he reports that the queen was so terrified by the incident that she nearly fainted when she realized that one of the dancers was her husband. Froissart records: "when the queen heard the cry that they made, she thought her of the king, for she knew well that he should be one of the six [men], where with she fell in a swoon and knights and ladies came and comforted her."[211] When the king came to see the queen "and as soon as she saw him, for joy she embraced him and fell in a swoon. Then she was born into her chamber and the king went with her."[212] More significantly, according to Froissart the public's anger was targeted at the court nobles whom they believed should have paid for putting the king in mortal danger with their own lives.[213] As for the king, Froissart tells us that the people of France believed the tragic event was a message sent from God for the king to "withdraw himself from such young idol wantonness."[214] Like Monstrelet and Chartier, Froissart is a very neutral source that expressed a complete lack of negative commentary regarding Isabeau, even on the subject of conspicuous consumption. These conflicting commentaries reveal that although there might have been some concerns among the public regarding overspending at court, conspicuous consumption was nonetheless understood as a normal prerogative of monarchs. Thus, Froissart's miniature depicting the *Bal des Ardents* highlights the splendour of courtly life by detailing the expensive tapestries of the ballroom and displaying Isabeau's golden household

[210] Froissart, Vol. 6, pp. 96-97.
[211] Froissart, Vol. 6, p. 98.
[212] Froissart, Vol. 6.
[213] Froissart, Vol. 6.
[214] Froissart, Vol. 6, p. 99.

objects (like plates and goblets) as a matter of fact, and without irony (see background detail of Figure 10).

By exploring Isabeau's expenditure account book to understand fully the extent of the queen's conspicuous consumption, we can conclude that the queen was so successful at this component of ruling that she subsequently came under scrutiny by contemporaries. Grievances made against her were in fact rightly deserved and Isabeau cannot be entirely excused from her spending habits. To understand the scope of this issue, we must also be aware of the financial accounting system and value of the contemporary currency.[215] As Gibbons argues, the queen evidently enjoyed spending her money since records between 1401 and 1403 show purchases of jewelry made up 47% of total expenditure and costing 37,000 *livres*.[216] Luxurious fabrics, especially wool and imported silk, made up a large portion of the queen's total spending as well.[217] But the lavish purchases did not end there. Isabeau's account books also detail orders for expensive furs (especially squirrel), robes, *houppelandes*, *cotehardies*, shoes in leather, velvet, or silk , and various elaborate headpieces including the 'hennin,' a horn shaped headdress said to have been made popular by the queen. The queen also owned several exotic animals including a leopard, given to her by her son John in 1417, and a monkey who was "luxuriously dressed by her own tailor in a turquoise robe, lined with grey fur and carried around on a red leather collar and

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[215] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 382. For clarification, the *livre*, *sou,* and *denier* were the main currencies of late medieval France; twelve *deniers* equaled one *sou*, and twenty *sous* equaled a *livre*. To put it in context, during Isabeau's time a day's worth of wages for a stone mason, the top earning artisan, would have been about 4*s*. It would have taken him four days worth of pay to buy a whole pig at 16*s*.

[216] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", pp. 389 and 391. In 1395 Isabeau spent 64 *sous* on two rings for herself, and purchased a bejewelled collar that was a decorative item for a new hat. The collar contained two clasps which were adorned with rubies, diamonds, and pearls and cost 98 *livres*, nearly the annual income of the queen's treasurer, Hémon Ragueir.

[217] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", pp. 382-383. Although wool was a common material in the later Middle Ages, the great assortment of quality, colour, texture, and place of origin made prices of the fabric vary. An *aulne*, which was the measurement used for fabrics, could vary anywhere between 440 mm and 696 mm in length and cost just over 50*s* per *aulne* depending on geography. The Brussels *aulne* was 695 mm, the Prussian *aulne*, 570 mm, and the Riga *aulne* was about 530 mm. High quality wool could be more expensive than other luxury fabrics like silk, even if imported, because of the expensive and labour intensive dying processes to produce more intense colours.

lead."[218] Gibbons points out that to keep animals solely as pets rather than as working animals suggests evidence of a clearly formed consumer society in which disposable income implied power and wealth through material possessions.[219]

It is, therefore, unsurprising that the author of *Le Songe Véritable* criticized Isabeau's spending habits. The Parisian, however, particularly scrutinized the queen's financial ministers – her favourites – who he accused of not only manipulating the queen and mismanaging finances, but also stealing.[220] Line 1054 references Hémon "Hemmonet" Raguier, the queen's treasurer c.1365-1433, and "Le Dame de Semihiere," that is, Anne of Robequin, the wife of Etien Semihier, who was presumably one of Isabeau's ladies in waiting.[221] According to the notes, the queen, who was god-mother to his daughter, gifted Hémon many dresses and wrote him often. A great deal of money moved through the hands of Hémon who paid the income of the ladies and servants of Isabeau's household and consequently, critics were suspicious of his actions.[222] Isabeau was also the godmother of Anne of Robequin, who the queen is said to have entrusted with purchasing jewelry – both an honour and a position that enabled her access to large amounts of money.[223] Therefore although critics were frustrated with the amount of overspending at Isabeau's court, records also indicate that dissatisfaction was chiefly targeted at her administrators and the queen was made guilty by association. After all, the establishment of the queen's own financial administrative institution, completely separate from the king's office offered a clear impression of Isabeau's financial independence and drew suspicions regarding how the money was managed.

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[218] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 390.
[219] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 390.
[220] *Le Songe,* notes, p. 212.
[221] *Le Songe,* line 1054.
[222] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 393.
[223] *Le Songe,* notes, p. 264. See also Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 393.

In 1393 Isabeau was provided with a financial administration, the household of the queen that was independent and not subject to regular audits by his ministers. In 1409 the household was replaced by a personal treasury intended to consolidate her income through a single self-administered organization which collected and controlled its income direct from the source. The queen's treasury was composed of funds from several different sources including the *aides*, the treasury of France, the queen's household, the *hôtel de la reine,* and rent from the queen's domains.[224] This treasury was established the same year in which Isabeau commissioned her second and more complex royal seal, which was previously argued in this study as a physical manifestation of a more authoritative and independent queen. In line with this, the queen enjoyed enormously increased sums, especially when we note that although her income only totaled 10,000 *francs* in early 1393, by 1401 this income was increased to 48,000 *francs*, and by 1402 she was receiving 53,000 *francs*.[225]

Although I argue that it was necessary and understood as acceptable for Isabeau to consume conspicuously to enact her authority as a regent, considering these growing numbers it was ultimately Isabeau's *over* spending in a period of great turmoil that drew criticism. On the one hand, it was precisely because of Charles' mental illness, and the repeated challenges posed by the Princes of the Blood to the queen that forced her to become more independent to be able to compensate for France's lack of political stability through conspicuous consumption. Without the protection normally provided by a husband to a medieval woman, Isabeau had to become more self-sufficient. With a separate treasury run by the queen's own officers, Isabeau would have greater and easier access to royal funds without requiring the permission of the king who was

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[224] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 378. The *aides* was a combination of a royal army tax, as well as a surcharge tax imposed on various goods. The Treasury of France was the main financial administration for French kings which also financed the queen's expenses. Finally, the *hotel de la reine* was a financial institution available to French queens mainly to finance the queen's regular household expenses.
[225] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 380.

often mentally incapable of response. On the other hand, her overly conspicuous consumption in a time of great social, political, and economic crisis gave the impression that she was not concerned with safeguarding the realm at all. This was a particularly contradictory and difficult position to navigate as it was impossible for the queen to appease everyone.

Isabeau's delicate political position due to the king's mental invalidity must repeatedly be highlighted for it is the underlying reason why she came under such scrutiny from later historians: Isabeau essentially ruled as a regnant queen in practice, if not in title. The queen's increased income and the organizational changes put in place were intended to "ensure that royal administration could continue to operate with or without the king's control in the event of his death or over a sustained period when he was too ill to govern."[226] Increasing Isabeau's financial autonomy was Charles' attempt to guarantee the protection and maintenance of his wife and children's livelihoods considering their unstable circumstances. Furthermore, the queen's ever increasing financial agency was also due to her responsibility for her large brood of children.[227] In 1393 the queen's budget was set at 10,000 *francs* annually, but Isabeau was mother to only four children; by 1402 Isabeau's family had seven children, all supported by the queen and resultantly, her funds were necessarily increased to 53,000 *francs*.[228]

On a symbolic level, Isabeau's conspicuous consumption and the display of her luxury goods supported the production of her monarchical image as queen and leader of the co-regency. As Cassandra Auble has argued, precious stones, jewelry, and wealth "served as a valuable means to establish the terms of [royal] legitimacy," especially when we note pre-modern conceptions of

[226] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 374.
[227] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 380.
[228] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 381. Many of Isabeau's children remained supported by her financially even though they were adults by status if not in age including John, duke of Touraine, and Isabelle, widowed queen of England who was returned to France and placed under Isabeau's care once again.

beauty and the senses.[229] In the late Middle Ages and throughout the Renaissance, in accordance to Classical teachings one's exterior beauty was generally believed to parallel one's interior virtue. Vision was deemed the superior of all the sense since visual images were believed to not only stimulate the mind, but to also leave pictorial representations imprinted into one's being and stir the spirit.[230] Specifically referring to Elizabeth I's use of precious stones, Auble tells us that the queen was acutely aware of using precious stones as an "invaluable [element] to her creation of ageless and unfading beauty."[231] Highly aware of the public and gendered nature of her regnant queenship, jewelry was more than a fashion statement for Elizabeth. As Francis Bacon remarked Elizabeth "'imagined that the people, who are much influenced by externals, would be diverted by the glitter of her jewels from noticing the decay of her personal attractions.'"[232] Sparkling jewelry and rich silks were integral to Elizabeth's fashioning of her public persona of "an earthly goddess gracing the people with her presence."[233]

In a similar manner, Isabeau used her jewelry and extravagant gowns – all of which were part of a costume that conveyed French prosperity and stability even though the reality was quite the opposite. Clothing and visual representations were effective propaganda for medieval monarchs to express meaning. New research that employs material culture methodologies have shown that objects including fashion, clothing, jewelry and more should be seen as a physical way of negotiating social status between dominant and lower social groups and cultures.[234] Clothing and jewels alike are 'materials of memory', symbolically embodied objects which functioned as imperative reminders of one's social situation particularly in the highly stratified world of

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[229] Cassandra Auble, "Bejeweled Majesty: Queen Elizabeth I, Precious Stones, and Statecraft" in *Queenship and Power*, p. 36.
[230] Simon Kemp, Garth J.O. Fletcher, "The Medieval Theory of the Inner Senses" in *The American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 106, No. 4 (Winter, 1993), pp. 663-564.
[231] Auble, p. 36.
[232] As quoted by Auble, p. 40.
[233] Auble, p. 40.
[234] Margaret F. Rosenthal, "Cultures of Clothing in Later Medieval and Early Modern Europe" in *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, Vol. 39:3 (2009), p.462.

medieval Europe.[235] As Andrew Cowell puts it, "the symbolic nature of prestige objects within medieval culture and their connection to individual identities, cannot be separated from the strong component of 'performativity' that was involved in the establishment not just of aristocratic identity, but aristocratic power."[236] Inscribed in the very golden stitches of the queen's *houppelande* was the majesty and power of her queenship which she performed whenever she donned her political costume.

This argument is further supported by Gibbon's ideas regarding the queen as a 'social mannequin'. Gibbons cites the story of Saint Elizabeth of Hungary who adopted a strict Franciscan way of living and dress after her husband, Ludwig of Thuringia, died. Even during his life, however, when he was absent Elizabeth is said to have spent most nights in vigil and prayer, casting aside her extravagant gowns for a widow's black attire with a nun's veil, indicating conflict between her identities as a "dutiful aristocratic wife" and as a pious penitent. Yet, when her husband returned she was "careful to 'look the part'" and "reassume[e] the opulent dress expected of her rank," for a wife's plain or untidy appearance could bring shame to her husband.[237] Similarly, Isabeau's splendor was intended to accentuate her husband's honour; as queen, her wealth was an essential symbol of not only Charles' majesty but also of royal power. In Isabeau's case, however, and due to Charles 'absence' from the throne, we can argue more forcefully that the queen's way of dress and general conspicuous consumption was to augment her own authority as queen consort turned regnant queen as a consequence of France's political

[235] See Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000), or Philip Mansel, *Dressed to Rule: royal and court costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II* (Yale University Press: 2005). Susan Crane's *The Performance of Self: Ritual, Clothing, and Identity During the Hundred Years War* (University of Pennsylvania Press: Phyladelphia, 2002), is another well informed source regarding ritual performances in the late-medieval period.
[236] Andrew Cowell, "Swords, Clubs, and Relics: Performance, Identity, and the Sacred" in Meaning and Its Objects: Material Culture in Medieval and Renaissance France, *Yale French Studies*, No. 110 (2006), p. 10.
[237] Gibbons, "'Social mannequin'", p. 372.

upheaval. Isabeau's conspicuous consumption and excessive display of wealth through dress should thus be considered a performance of royal authority and political stability.

Under the umbrella term of conspicuous consumption, however, an additional manner through which Isabeau promoted monarchical authority and unity was gift-giving. With the works of Marcel Mauss (1925) and Natalie Zemon Davis (2000), we know that gift-giving practices in medieval and Early Modern Europe were both socially and culturally significant since the processes and display of gift-giving created meaning, imbued into the very gifts themselves, and signified status. [238] According to Davis, Early Modern France was immersed in a culture of obligation, and gift-giving was essential to this culture as a means of maintaining and securing relationships across kinships and class, between the lay and clergy, the young and old, the rich and poor, and even the living and dead. [239] Gifts functioned to maintain social order within the household and within society as a whole. Gift-giving can be represented by a spectrum of reciprocities: on the one end we have "generalized reciprocity," gift-giving where gifts and assistance are freely given and no return is required of the recipient.[240] These types of exchanges are selfless and usually move among kin and close friends. On the other end of the spectrum exists "negative reciprocity," gift-giving which is usually selfish and occurs between strangers. In these cases, one receives gifts, but does not reciprocate and apply an equivalent amount of effort to get the most out of the offer.[241] Finally, in the middle of the spectrum we have "balanced reciprocity," gift giving processes where the return is fair and the value of the favour or gift reciprocated is comparable to the initial gift such as marriage unions.[242] Gifts like jewels and décor (flasks, goblets, plates, bowls, etc.), were especially desired among the social elite not only because of

[238] Natalie Zemon Davis, *The Gift in Sixteenth Century France* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001), pp. 4-8.
[239] Davis, pp. 4-8.
[240] Davis, pp. 4-8.
[241] Davis, p. 7.
[242] Davis, pp. 5-6. See also Crane, pp. 24-25,

their intrinsic material value, but also because these objects were meant to adorn the body, that is, be worn and displayed conveying their status and wealth. Although pieces for the home like jewel-embellished cups or silverware could be displayed as decorative pieces, they also displayed wealth, status, and power when put to use as a cup or a tool to eat when guests were present.[243]

In the fourteenth century, gift-giving at the French courts developed into a semi-official custom that occurred intermittently in the early 1300s, but by Charles VI's reign, it was a "well-established and major court ceremony."[244] The custom enabled nobles to renew or reaffirm bonds of kinship and political allegiances, or in the case of Queen Isabeau maintain peace between the feuding dukes and appeal to the king to further substantiate her political role. Interestingly enough, although in 1407 Louis the Duke of Orléans was assassinated on the order of John the Fearless which resulted in a great deal of tension among the dukes, the Princes all "continued to exchange New Year's gifts throughout the period, as if to confirm the (perhaps pious) anthropological theory that gift giving is a social strategy that allows for the conversion of aggressive tendencies into competitive rituals of sociability."[245] In fact, in 1413 John the Fearless of Burgundy presented to his "then estranged" uncle, John the Duke of Berry, the *Livre des merveilles* an illuminated compilation of works on travels to the East including the accounts of Marco Polo.[246] Previously, however, the Duke of Berry had promised to meet John the Fearless in the battlefield to avenge the murder of Louis of Orléans. Therefore the New Year's Day gift, given along with a lavish feast, was no doubt a symbolic means of pacification.

In the same way, Isabeau's gifting of the *Goldene Rössl* to the king was not just a mere New Years' Day present; rather, it was a gift that was pleading for the king to provide her with

[243] Buettner, p. 604. See also Froissart's miniature depicting *Le Bal des Ardents* (**Error! Reference source not found.**).
[244] Buettner, p. 600. See also Mario Damen, "Princely entries and gift exchange in the Burgundian Low Countries: a crucial link in late medieval political culture" in *Journal of Medieval History* Vol. 33, (2007).
[245] Buettner, p. 602.
[246] Buettner, p. 602.

more authority within the regency council. This request is represented in the figure of Charles VI who is envisioned as a handsome and physically able "courtly hero" on the tabernacle, dressed in full armor – an obvious contrast to the real-life Charles who was often violent or bedridden from his mental illness.[247] That Charles is made to kneel adoringly before the Virgin and Child understood to be Isabeau and the dauphin is quite significant, considering that the tabernacle was a gift from Isabeau to the king. In the words of Buettner, "this consummate object is in sum a gift with a plea, a poignant instance of a 'gift for,' in which gift and return – demand and response – are inextricably linked."[248] Isabeau's active record of gift-giving is indicative of her important political role especially when we note that for the most part women, "being legally and financially dependent on their husbands and fathers found themselves more often on the receiving than on the giving end."[249] With direct access and power over her own independent financial institution, Isabeau challenged this. She exercised gift-giving practices that, under normal circumstances, would have been the job of husband. Hence, Isabeau's gift-giving was enactment of her political authority and regnant autonomy.

Gifts alone, however, were not enough to exact requests or renew kinship ties; rather, it is the performance of the gifting – the act of giving itself– which displays and gives life to the meaning behind the gift. The same can be said regarding gifts that were presented to the queen including the manuscript of Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the Queen*, which contained her famous work *Book of the City of Ladies,* a defense of women. Christine's work was in fact sponsored by Isabeau and thus, Isabeau's patronage of the arts was another traditional queenly function that she performed effectively. As June Hall McCash writes, the patronage of medieval elite women was "one of the few domains in which a public role for women was sanctioned" and

[247] Buettner, p. 607.
[248] Buettner, p. 607.
[249] Buettner, p. 614.

"was an area that provided rich opportunities for women to make their voices heard."[250] It was a relationship that was mutually beneficial to patron and client because it also heightened the social status of the client by bringing them closer to the patron's social circle. We might say then, that Christine's gift also bargained for the heightening of her own prestige as an author. Patronage of the arts was consequently an expression of female power that simultaneously displayed and legitimized the authority of queens like Isabeau. McCash also explains that female patrons were generally highly independent women, that is, women with the financial means to support their chosen artists.[251] Widows, who became legally able to manage their dower properties after their husband's death, or female regents of underage children, for examples, fall into this category.[252] Isabeau also fits McCash's definition of highly autonomous female benefactors of the arts for although she was not exactly a widow, she had full control of her finances and acted as regent for her children.

[250] June Hall McCash, *The Cultural Patronage of Medieval Women* (University of Georgia Press: Georgia, 1996), p. 1. See also J.L Laynesmith, *Last Medieval Queens: English Queenship 1445-1503* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004).
[251] McCash, p. 7.
[252] McCash, p. 7.

Figure 11: *Christine de Pizan*, c. 1410-1414.

We know that Isabeau sponsored Christine's work largely because dedications by artists were generally made out to the benefactor of the commissioned piece. Moreover, the frontispiece of the illuminated manuscript contains a miniature of Christine presenting her work to the queen who sits in the company of several ladies (Figure 11). Although the miniature is not necessarily an accurate depiction of the precise way in which Christine presented the queen with her gift, it nonetheless gives insight into how gifts might have been presented between two individuals of differing rank. The presentation is set in an intimate scene, likely the queen's day chamber of retreat or closet, and is framed by an arch drawn to be part of the room's interior architecture. The

arch resembles a simplified Proscenium Arch, the usually ornate archway that frames theatrical stage openings, as if to suggest that the moment of gift-giving depicted was a theatrical moment of display and performance. The room is decorated with blue and gold tapestry resembling the queen's coat of arms (the pattern of French *fleur-de-lis* and Bavarian lozenge side by side). The blue room is contrasted by the queen's scarlet bed and sofa which are adorned with gold patterns and, once again, the queen's coat of arms. In the centre of the staged room Christine kneels, identifiable by her simple blue wide-neck *cotehardie* and signature white horned headdress, presenting *The Book of the Queen* to Isabeau who contrastingly is dressed in a manner deserving of her rank.

Though several ladies are in their company, Isabeau is made to be the largest figure signifying her social importance and authority. Her lengthy *houppelande* appears to be made of the expensive red *escarlate* wool, embellished with a pattern of gold flowers, and her large sleeves are folded back to reveal the luxurious ermine lining, once again speaking to her social significance. Even the queen's beloved pet dogs are present including a greyhound lying at the feet of her bed, while a smaller dog sits next to her upon the sofa. The attention of all who are in attendance, including that of the reader, are upon the queen as Christine presents her gift, once again signifying that the act of gift-giving was a spectacle, that is to say, a moment of display and performance that defines the relationship between recipient and giver intended to be witnessed by others. Indeed, although the space of presentation is intimate and appears private, the open windows suggest otherwise.

Furthermore, that there are only women in this presentation scene is quite poignant, given the content of Christine's work. Included in *The Book of the Queen* is Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies*, a defense of women's virtue and discussion of their contribution to society. The work is

Christine's most famous literary work, considered to be a direct response to parts of *The Romance of the Rose* written by Jean de Meun who discusses the folly of women. Using a popular medieval convention, Christine inserts herself into the narrative of the text and engages in conversation with several allegorical figures: Reason, Justice, and Rectitude. In the allegory, Christine sits pondering the problem of why so many male authors have shown a great deal of disrespect and insult to women in their work when the three female figures appear before her. They explain that she has been chosen to help build the City of Ladies which is intended to protect women from the vindictive indictments of men, and serve as a symbol of women's true and honourable nature. Lady Reason helps Christine lay the city's foundation while Lady Rectitude aids Christine to build the houses and buildings inside the city walls. Finally, Justice adds the finishing touches to the city and tells Christine that she will be given the keys to the city and that a worthy queen will be found to govern it.

But the most significant aspect of the text is that it offers advice to and justification for female rulers by providing numerous examples of virtuous women, especially queens and noblewomen, who served their kingdoms well. When Christine asks Reason why women are not permitted in the seats of legal counsel, she explains that this is because God commanded that men and women serve him in different offices which were designed to fit their nature. Law courts are places of such open dispute and aggression that they befit the natural aggression found in men who must be able to speak boldly to enforce the law.[253] On the contrary, she argues, women are much gentler creatures and so it would be inappropriate for them to occupy these offices. In other words and as Adams explains, Christine replicates and makes use of the gender hierarchy of late medieval society to assert women's ability to rule and actually apply the customs of the Salic Law to argue that queens are able regents in the absence of their husbands precisely because they could

[253] Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies*, trans. Earl Jeffrey Richards (Persea Books, Inc.: New York, 1982), p. 33.

not legally inherit the throne.[254] Adams argues that the very fact that ordinances repeatedly issued by Charles to make clear his choice of Isabeau as regent over his brothers and uncles indicates that the king saw the queen as no real threat to the crown.[255] Accordingly, though Lady Reason tells us that God designed men and women for different occupations, she goes on to clarify that this is not to say that women were not capable in the fields of law, politics and government.[256]

On the contrary she explains that a great number of capable female rulers existed, both past and present, who were forced to become regent and rule in their husband's stead. She first cites Nicaula, regnant Queen of Sheba, who was "profoundly learned in the Scriptures and all fields of knowledge" and "governed with wonderful prudence" without the need or "desire [for] any man [to] be at her side."[257] Several queens of France are also mentioned as exemplary female rulers including Fredegund, the wife of King Chilperic – the very same queen referenced by Charles VI in his January 1392 ordinance that unequivocally recognized Isabeau's royal authority as mother to the dauphin and underscored her right and capability to act as regent. Reason explains that:

> Following her husband's death, with great skill [did] this lady govern the kingdom of France which found itself at this time in a very great unrest and danger…There was great division among the barons regarding the government, and already a great civil war had broken out…Having assembled the barons in council, she addressed them all the while holding her child in her arms…Through her wise government she delivered her son from the hands of his enemies.[258]

Christine's choice of citing this particularly prudent mediator queen, echoed in the ordinances of both Charles V and VI, is likely intentional considering Isabeau's socio-political climate c. 1405 when the manuscript was gifted. Queen Blanche, who Isabeau has been measured against before,

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[254] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 19.
[255] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 19.
[256] Pizan, p. 33.
[257] Pizan, pp. 33-34.
[258] Pizan, p. 33. See also Adams, "Female Regency", p. 7.

is also referenced as a queen that "governed the kingdom of France while her son was a minor so nobly and so prudently that it was never better ruled by any man."[259]

Surely then, the intertextual references to other successful intercessory queens found in Christine's gift to Isabeau were no accidents. When discussing who would populate the City of Ladies, Lady Rectitude explains that only the most virtuous of women would be made citizens. She then suggests that "the noble" Isabeau, Queen of France be made the first citizen of their honourable city: Queen Isabeau "will not be refused [for she] reign[s] now by the grace of God." In her "there is not a trace of cruelty, extortion, or any other evil vice, but only great love and good will toward her subjects."[260] In making Isabeau the first citizen of a city which only admits the most virtuous women, Christine effectively argued that this queen rightfully belongs to a community defined by reason, justice, and morality because she exhibits these qualities. This is particularly palpable when we note that the final part of *The Book of the City of Ladies* reveals that Mary, the Queen of Heaven, descends to rule and govern the city. Lady Justice believes that "it is right that the assembly of all women beg this most lofty and excellent sovereign princess to reside here below in her humility with them in their City" because she is the ideal model of female virtue.[261] Isabeau is made to be in the company of such esteemed women as the Virgin Mary, Saint Catherine of Alexandria, Saint Margaret, and Saint Justine among a lengthy list of other heavenly women because she is deemed worthy.[262]

When we consider this along with Isabeau's queenly iconography, which established her as an earthly mirror of Mary, Queen of Heaven, it is plausible to say that Christine subsequently confirmed Isabeau's contemporary good reputation. Such praise for the queen and justification for

[259] Pizan, p. 34.
[260] Pizan, p. 212.
[261] Pizan, p. 217.
[262] Pizan, pp. 219-257.

female rule is lastly also underlined through Christine's performance of gift-giving, as depicted in the frontispiece of the manuscript. Certainly the all-female presentation scene can be read as another echoing of *The Book of the City of Ladies* in pictorial form. In the same way Isabeau's *Goldene Rössl* was a gift with a plea to Charles, so too was Christine's gift to Isabeau although the latter contained advice and support for the queen's regency in the face of immense conflict with the Princes of the Blood, and in light of the limitations of the Salic Law. Christine's gift, moreover, was evidence of public support which Isabeau was much in need of in 1405 when tensions between the dukes mounted. By 1405, John the Fearless, the new Duke of Burgundy, was working to further his influence at court with hopes of increasing his income since much of the funds that had been going to his father, Philip the Bold the previous Duke of Burgundy, had been reduced when Philip died the year before. Meanwhile, Louis of Orléans' influence on the regency council was ever increasing, especially since the queen allied with Louis to counteract John's growing ambition.[263] According to Adams, in August of 1405 the situation climaxed when John made a move to seize power of the regency in the incident known as 'the kidnapping of the dauphin'. The Duke departed Arras for Paris on August 15th under the pretense of paying homage for his recent maternal inheritances and to discuss matters of reform with the king, but was accompanied by eight hundred soldiers. Adams points out that under normal circumstances and if his intentions were peaceful, John would not have made such a big show of his military force. [264] The situation became more alarming when the king suddenly fell ill again sometime on the 16th or 17th. Bearing in mind that many Parisians were in favour of Burgundy, the likelihood of John's

[263] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 21.
[264] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 22.

successful takeover of government was quite high especially if the people revolted in his favour and the king was not mentally or physically able to intervene. [265]

After learning that John was marching on Paris, the queen left Paris with Louis to her fortified castle in Melun where they intended to amass Louis' army. Knowing that the dauphin, the then eight-year-old Louis of Guyenne, would become a "pawn" in the political struggle, Isabeau ordered that her children also be delivered to Melun to be by her side and under her protection.[266] Unfortunately, John intercepted the royal children and their party as they were leaving Paris and forced them back into the city. Adams notes that John risked committing treason by capturing the dauphin since he did not inherit the rights to guardianship of the royal children which was granted to his father in ordinance of 1393.[267] At this point, Louis openly accused John of attempting a *coup d'état* especially because John stipulated that the royal council meet to consider and approve a series of financial reforms in John's favour. These reforms, as Adams puts it, "would have been tantamount to yielding control of the government to John."[268] Paris' Parlement, the Chamber of Accounts, and the regency council however all refused the duke's demands. When the dauphin re-entered Paris, John the Duke of Berry took him into custody and had himself named captain general of Paris as he summoned the king's army to secure Paris against John the Fearless.[269] In late September, John responded by increasing and preparing his troops for armed conflict and by inciting Parisians to oppose Louis of Orléans and Isabeau. As Pintoin records, the Duke of Burgundy was not only undermining the queen's authority through

[265] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 22.
[266] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 22.
[267] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 23.
[268] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 23.
[269] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 23.

his actions, but was also publicly damaging her reputation by questioning the queen's loyalty to the king while bolstering his own.[270]

The queen's slow response to John the Fearless' brazen acts has been the subject of much criticism among scholars who deemed her politically inept. Once again, we must remember Isabeau's complex situation. She was forced to steer through a dire situation: the king was incapacitated, the royal children were kidnapped by a power hungry duke, and Paris was on the brink of open warfare. Moreover, Isabeau's ability to take action was limited when we note that the king's ordinances up until 1402 generally only outlined the queen's role as educator and guardian of the dauphin. Therefore, Isabeau does not appear particularly politically active before this date. However, by 1405 and as the king became more aware of the dukes' boldness, measures were put in place to ensure the safety of the crown. Adams suggests that it was precisely because of the tempestuous circumstances that provoked the king to augment Isabeau's powers on the regency council and underline her mediating function.[271] Accordingly, on October 12, 1405, another ordinance was issued that thoroughly emphasized Isabeau's role as arbitrator in the conflict between the dukes. Through Isabeau's negotiations with the dukes a peace treaty was soon signed on October 16th that momentarily stayed the situation.

Consequently Christine de Pizan's gifting of her *Book of the Queen*, coupled with her "Letter to the Queen of France", were public displays of support for Isabeau's authority.[272] Adams cites the work of Joyce Coleman who has argued that political documents and literary works functioned as "mirror for princes" in the pre-modern world. Coleman asserts the following:

> Political writers like Christine wrote for a wider audience than the individuals to whom they dedicated their works and the works of such authors were often read aloud in the

[270] Pintoin, Vol. 4, p. 168.
[271] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 24.
[272] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 24.

> homes of the nobility and the bourgeoisie. In this way innovative ideas about power were digested, debated, and diffused.[273]

In other words, politically minded writers not only provided advice for their princes, but also attempted to "effect change by training the public how to view figures and institutions."[274] Samuel McCormick has similarly argued that Christine's *Book of the City of Ladies* and *Letter to the Queen* (1405) were works that endeavoured to stir Isabeau to action in France's political drama.[275] McCormick states that by using a voice of deference and showcasing 'exemplary [female] figures' like Venturia, Esther, and Blanche from history, Christine "encourage[d] Isabeau to consider her relation to the history of womankind."[276] A request, on the part of Christine, that required the queen to be politically pro-active but also prudent. Depending on Isabeau's actions, Pizan in effect asserted that she would then be remembered by all posterity as either a good or bad queen.

To this end, Bernard Guenée's work on public opinion at the end of the Middle Ages is particularly enlightening on how the French people viewed their monarchs. In a careful re-reading of Pintoin's chronicles, Guenée shows that the work should be considered more as an opinion piece with Pintoin reflecting on his own period and sharing what he believed was the public's opinion, rather than as an official historical record.[277] Guenée explains that the public opinion of medieval communities can be detected in Pintoin's word choice.[278] The use of expressive terms like 'love,' or 'joy,' can reflect a unified public opinion since it was precisely these sentiments that monarchs used when addressing their subjects to project a kingdom unified by love.[279] After

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[273] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 25.
[274] Adams, "Female Regency", p. 25.
[275] Samuel McCormick, "Mirrors for the Queen: A Letter from Christine de PIzan on the Eve of Civil War" in *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, Vol. 94, No. 3 (2008), p. 274.
[276] McCormick, pp. 276 and 280.
[277] Bernard Guenée, *L'opinion publique à la fin du Moyen Age: d'apres la "Chronique de Charles VI" du Religieux de Saint-Denis*, (Perrin: Paris, 2002), p. 101.
[278] Guenée, p. 19.
[279] Guenée, pp. 19-20.

all, the paternal love of the king for his people, and vice versa, was a "fundamental condition of a good government."[280] Such a relationship brought prosperity to the people who then remained loyal and obedient to the king.[281] The basis of his argument lies in the social divisions of the Middle Ages that separated 'people of authority' from 'common people', something that pre-modern people were intensely conscious of.[282] In other words, the public understood the scripted social dynamics of their period as well as the responsibilities each social class had towards each other: 'people of authority' were expected to ruled, but they had to rule well to earn the loyalty and love of their subjects. Where 'discontent', 'anger', and even 'hatred' is expressed it was because one group failed in their social responsibilities.[283] Guenée asserts that such sentiments can be read as a unified a public opinion.[284]

If public opinion was in development by the late Middle Ages as Guenée argues, then we can interpret Isabeau's gifting of the *Goldene Rössl* to Charles, which occurred earlier in 1405, as well as Christine de Pizan's gift to the queen as attempts to augment Isabeau's publicly perceived political authority. This notion is further strengthened when we consider that at roughly the same time, Isabeau's new royal seal was struck (1409) and her independent financial administration was established (1409). Altogether, these moments of image creation through consumption, gift-giving, and cultural patronage are material evidence of Isabeau's efforts to assert her power and maintain the artifice of political stability and cohesion in a period of intense conflict. As Huneycutt has previously stated, "the power of a medieval queen rested on a perception of

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[280] Guenée, p. 20-22. "C'est l'amour que le roi porte a ses sujets (*amor regis*), et l'amour que les sujets éprouvent pour le roi (également *amor regis*). L'amour 'paternal' qu'un roi porte à son people est une des conditions fondamontales d'un bon gouvernement."
[281] Guenée.
[282] Guenée, p. 132.
[283] Guenée, p. 55.
[284] Guenée, p. 55. I acknowledge the debate regarding historically when public opinion of a unified body can be determined in the pre-modern era, however my thesis is aligned with Guenées arguments which accepts that public opinion was well developed by the fifteenth century.

influence rather than any institutional base." [285] Indeed, by the fifteenth century, as Paula Hohti (2010) has explained, conspicuous consumption was an activity of the social elite that was encouraged in Europe.[286] Citing the Neapolitan court theorist Giovanni Pontano's treatise, *De Splendore* (1498), she explains that pre-modern people were conscious that material objects "constituted a system of signs, or a 'language' that could be 'read' like a text by contemporaries."[287] The argument is made even more viable when we note that illiteracy in the pre-modern world was widespread and, therefore, objects would have been highly effective signifiers of power.

Conspicuous consumption was thus recognized as a necessary element of powerful and stable governance in late medieval France. Isabeau's assertion of power through consumption should be seen as evidence of her clear understanding of her queenly authority. This is further substantiated by the fact that Charles, who was physically and mentally unable to rule for the majority of his reign, depended on Isabeau. The series of ordinances between 1393 and 1409 granted Isabeau increasing authority on the regency council to effectively rule in the king's place. That she actively cultivated an image of a powerful queen using traditional functions of monarchy, and could afford to do so through her own financial administration without requiring consent from the king, suggests that Isabeau should be considered a queen regnant rather than consort who ruled almost as if in her own right.

[285] Huneycutt, p. 138.
[286] Paula Hohti, "'Conspicuous' consumption and popular consumers: material culture and social status in sixteenth-century Siena," in *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 5 (2010).
[287] Hohti, p. 654.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

If we are to understand that a major component of Isabeau's reign depended on conspicuous consumption to assert authority, then it is appropriate to argue that previous scholarship has disregarded the significance of the material aspect of Isabeau's rule. Scholarship reflecting the values of the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries, like those of August Villiers de L'Isle-Adams (1919) and Henri Martin (c. 1878-90), which depended heavily on pro-Burgundian propaganda and elided historical accuracy, exaggerated the notion that Isabeau was widely unpopular and failed in all of her queenly duties. Modern scholars have successfully revised this history, and Rachel Gibbons (1996) pushed the conversation on this queen towards new analyses of consumption at Isabeau's court by exploring her expenditure account books. Gibbons' work provided a highly detailed and interesting micro-economic history on Isabeau. But it remains that scholars overlooked the ways in which histories, especially the highly material history of Isabeau, can be enriched by an exploration of the symbolic meaning of physical evidence. By using an interdisciplinary approach, that is, examining a combination of textual and material evidence, this study has contributed to the current research on Queen Isabeau and wider queenship studies. This thesis suggests that Isabeau should be viewed as a regnant queen in practice, if not in title, for she actively crafted a public persona of great authority to stay the immensely tumultuous political situation in France, and ruled in place of her husband.

However, although I suggest that Isabeau should be regarded as a regnant queen, the fact that she was obligated to repeatedly declare her prerogatives as regent reveals the underlying problem of distrust of queens in the late-medieval period. Queenship in France was an integral part of monarchy by virtue of women's inability to ascend to the throne as legally limited by the

Salic Law, yet by the same token, female rule was perpetually contested because it blurred the lines of the active, public power of kings and the passive, intercessory power of queens.

On the one hand, queenship theories have argued that female rule in the Middle Ages was limited both by the law and by idealized expectations of gender behaviour. Scholarship has generally concluded that the phallocratic and patriarchal world of pre-modern Europe, especially of France, preferred male monarchs, suggesting that the reign of regent or even regnant queens were always makeshift and exceptional substitutes to male rule.[288] On the other hand, and as Earenfight has argued, the language that defined monarchy in the late medieval era was fluid enough to envision monarchy by a man *or* a woman. She has argued that the meaning of monarchy – traditionally defined as governance by a single and usually male ruler – should be expanded to mean governance by an institution that resembles a corporate entity and partnership between king and queen, wherein the former is envisioned as type of chief executive officer, and the latter his vice president.[289] Fundamentally, Earenfight asserted that the substitutionary nature of queenship is the very reason why queens were integral to monarchy and therefore, female rule should not be seen as ad hoc or surprising, an argument which this study is in agreement with.

I would add that the contradictory definitions of queenship presented by these two arguments are wholly expected, precisely because queenship was paradoxical: both limiting and empowering. Future studies may therefore find it useful to consider in more detail the gendered nature of Isabeau's rule and examine the queen's gender, which is constantly performed, as a new category of gender identity. As a case study, Isabeau's complex reign speaks to the inherent contradictions of femininity and queenship in the pre-modern world. Due to the complicated and challenging political climate of late fourteenth and early fifteenth-century France, Queen Isabeau

[288] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 8.
[289] Earenfight, "Without the Persona," p. 8.

was made regent by Charles VI and charged with safeguarding the kingdom and the dauphin. Isabeau's authorities were augmented by the king in a series of ordinances between 1393 and 1409 that enabled the queen consort to rule in the king's place. The reiteration of her political authority in numerous ordinances by Charles indicates recognition of a certain political dependence on, as well as trust in the queen. Despite this, Isabeau's increased political powers were persistently disputed by the Princes of the Blood. Her authority was challenged also by a prevalent French distrust of female rule in the tradition of the Salic Law.

As I have argued throughout this study, Isabeau was therefore forced to reassert her authority by actively shaping her iconography through ritual performance, conspicuous consumption, and extra-literary devices to control the public's perception of her powers. As a female ruler Isabeau enacted change by employing her femininity – her queenly intercession, and projected an image of the ideal virgin-wife, and chaste-mother – as a political tool. By establishing an iconography inspired by Mary, Queen of Heaven, she highlighted the strengths of her position as queen, royal mother, and regent, and successfully accentuated her perceived authority to compensate for France's lack of political stability.

Isabeau's statecraft, firstly, relied on extra-literary emblems as visual reinforcement of her authority in a society that was intensely sensitive to the symbolic meaning of material objects. The extra-literary emblems of medieval queens, that is, their use and appropriations of the material culture of their times help us understand "how queens negotiated the development and representation of their identities in arenas where men typically exercised authority– politics, religion, and culture – through their control, or lack thereof, of the various media available."[290] Debra Barrett-Graves has explained that queenly extra-literary emblems strengthened authority by

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[290] Barrett-Graves, p. 1.

appropriating or shaping the identities of queens for political, religious or cultural purposes to inspire loyalty.[291] Leora Auslander has furthered this by highlighting the difference between what people do with words, and how they use things as the issue of "embodiment and its corollaries of complex sensory perception and mortality."[292] In other words, the way meaning is made and memories stored in text are quite different in objects. Tangible human emotions, detailed description, and a multiplicity of narratives can be determined from objects that textual evidence can otherwise lack.[293] Indeed, Isabeau's royal seals stressed to the public that she was powerful by right of social status, as wife to the king, and by right of blood, as mother of the dauphin. By analyzing objects and their function in Isabeau's highly material world, including the queen's royal seals and her commissioned art pieces among other conspicuously consumed objects, we are able to understand the cultural values and social identities embodied in and constructed by the object.

But assertions of her royal authority materialised in other ways as well. The highly scripted and allegorical divine crowning of the queen at her royal Parisian entry in 1389 established the foundation of Isabeau's queenly iconography. It was a ritual performance understood by contemporaries as literal manifestation of the queen's majesty. For Isabeau to publicly perform the scene in the flesh during an entry that celebrated her own coronation was for her to avow the concept of herself as arbitrator between the king and his subjects, just as Mary interceded on behalf of humanity to Christ. Likewise, Isabeau's gift-giving practices were also performances of her authority and wealth, as gift-giving was a highly public moment of display. Keeping in mind Natalie Zemon Davis' arguments regarding gift-giving as a means of

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[291] Barrett-Graves, p. 7.

[292] "AHR Conversation: Historians and the Study of Material Culture" (henceforth "AHR") in *American Historical Review*, Vol. 115(5), 2009, p. 1356.

[293] "AHR", p. 1356

maintaining or renewing kinship ties and political alliances, it follows that Isabeaus' gift-giving was also an attempt to 'keep the peace', as it were, among the quarreling dukes. Additionally, Isabeau's gift-giving of such inherently and symbolically valuable objects, like the *Goldene Rössl*, falls under the wider term of conspicuous consumption which, in the pre-modern world, was privileged to the social elite. In the same vein, Isabeau's patronage of the arts, as exemplified by her support of Christine de Pizan, were additional ways in which the queen asserted her authority.

However, although I explored Isabeau's cultural patronage by examining the work of Christine de Pizan, this subject can be expanded upon, for Isabeau was also a benefactor of several churches and engaged in alms giving to the poor.[294] By developing the discussion regarding Isabeau's patronage, future studies may be able to expand on the subject of this queen's piety, a major element of her queenship. While I have examined this matter by exploring Isabeau's use of Marian iconography as well as her motherhood, the conversation can be broadened to consider her performance of piety. This may be particularly fruitful considering the vigorous arguments made in the past regarding the queen's devoutness.

Furthermore, while I only briefly touched on the subject of Isabeau's sexuality, this may be another interesting subject of research given the criticisms of infidelity and promiscuity made by previous scholars against her. I have argued that Isabeau's iconography depended on the paradox of idealized female virtues and expected feminine behaviours of the late medieval period, specifically, virgin-wife and chaste mother. On the one hand women were expected to aspire towards virginity as embodied by Mary, but as wives their very function was to be sexual. Motherhood was, in the same way, contradictory because mothers (ideally) had to be perceived as asexual beings to be accepted as good women, but the very fact that they were mothers denoted

[294] Verdon, p. 74.

their active sexuality. To investigate this subject, future studies may consider analysis of *Le Pastoralet*, another piece of Burgundian propaganda launched against the queen that I cite but do not explore in full.

Finally, this project has generally focused on the iconography of Isabeau's queenship, but the problem of precisely how the queen was perceived by her public is still inconclusive. I have suggested that the very fact that Isabeau repeatedly asserted her authority through material objects indicates the significance and existence of public opinion that could affect governance and policy development in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century in France. I have also argued that because the attitudes of contemporary sources conflicted with each other, this signifies that Isabeau was neither universally hated nor loved by the wider public. The sources used, however, originate from Paris and therefore contemporary public opinion regarding the queen and the political situation from the rest of France is yet to be determined. Generally, however, scholarship on Isabeau is restricted by the primary evidence that survives – the chronicles and the anonymous propagandistic sources – which can be fragmented, limiting the extent of research. Future studies may consider employing a similarly interdisciplinary approach that combines analysis of both textual and material evidence to provide a fuller history on this queen.

As a female ruler Isabeau achieved political redress by balancing and conforming to expected gender ideology. Isabeau manifested her power through the material objects of her court or her extra-literary devices, through cultural patronage, gift-giving and conspicuous consumption – all of which were traditional means for queens to enact power. Additionally, the Marian iconography that Isabeau drew from was not novel, the Esther topos was asserted as the exemplary model of queenship in Europe since the ninth century.[295] In re-examining the

[295] Huneycutt, p. 127.

contemporary writing of chroniclers in contrast to Burgundian propaganda pieces, I conclude that the bad reputation Isabeau garnered from nineteenth and twentieth-century historians declaring her an unsuccessful and unpopular queen is most undeserved. There is little evidence to suggest that the queen was widely detested by the French people for being a negligent mother and adulterous wife, or because she was believed to be immoral or treasonous. On the contrary, I argue that Isabeau did everything in her power to safeguard the kingdom. If she was slow to respond to the political situation, as scholars have previously stated, this was because she was cautious in determining the safest political avenue for the future of the dauphin and the realm. Of all the accusations against Isabeau, the one we can conclusively identify as public opinion against the queen regards *over* spending and high taxation. Isabeau was perhaps too successful or too enthusiastic in her conspicuous consumptions as a means of compensating for the instabilities of the monarchy. Ultimately, this study has endeavoured to further the conversation on this queen who has largely been neglected by the wider academic community and all but forgotten by popular histories. Founded on theories on queenship and gender, I argue for a more nuanced understanding of Isabeau of Bavaria's reign in the complicated context of turbulent late medieval France.

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