

3. Louise de Savoie

The King's Mother, *Alter Rex*

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Abstract

Neither queen nor queen-mother, but mother of the king, Louise de Savoie nonetheless played a prominent role in the affairs of France. Married in 1488 at age 11 to Charles d'Angoulême, she gave birth to her illustrious children, Marguerite in 1492, and François in 1494, and asserted her maternal authority after the sudden death of her husband in 1496. As her son rose to be king in 1515, she succeeded in establishing her place at court through astute patronage of arts and letters, aligning herself, in text and image, with illustrious women, past and present. Identified with 'Dame Prudence' as she overcame obstacles and rivals, her tenacious devotion to her children culminated in power as Madame, Regent of France.

Keywords: Louise de Savoie, regency, cultural patronage, motherhood, self-representation

Countess, then Duchess, of Angoulême, Louise de Savoie (1476–1531) was the mother of two illustrious children, Marguerite (1492–1549), poet and future Queen of Navarre, and François (1494–1547), future King François I. Even before her son's ascent to the throne of France, Louise frequented the royal court. Daughter of Philippe (1438–1497), Count of Bresse, then Duke of Savoy, she was raised by her aunt, Anne de France (1461–1522), elder sister of Charles VIII (1470–1498), before marrying Charles d'Orléans (1459–1496), Count of Angoulême and head of a secondary line of the house of Valois in 1488. At her husband's sudden death in 1496, Louis XII (1462–1515) insisted upon joint custody of François, the potential heir to the throne, and compelled Louise and her children to reside at Amboise so as to be closer to court.

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Once her 'Cesar' became king, Louise governed the kingdom as his appointed regent at two different times: first, from July 1515 to January 1516, then from August 1523 to March 1526. But her political role vastly exceeded the periods of her two regencies.¹ The omnipresent mother had her son's ear. During the first fifteen years of her son's reign, she dominated the Council and royal diplomacy, received foreign ambassadors, and negotiated with princes and princesses of the time, culminating in the 'Ladies' Peace' concluded in 1529 with Margaret of Austria (1480–1530). François signed some of his letters with the words 'the King and Madame', while Louise punctuated her own missives with 'at my sole pleasure', an expression ordinarily reserved for the sovereign.² Beyond the official documents, letters, and reports of ambassadors that attest to the key role played by Louise de Savoie in orienting French politics from 1515 to her death in 1531, the books that she commissioned or owned provide ample evidence for her exceptional status, that of an *alter rex*. Although she was neither wife nor daughter of a king, and never herself a queen, the texts and illustrations of Louise's books promoted her image, to members of the court and beyond, as the founder of a new dynasty of French kings, as governess, and as protector of the realm, another figure of her son. This essay considers not only her official power during the periods of her regencies, when she was charged with the government and administration of the state, but also her symbolic stature, the authority that, as the king's mother, she exerted at the court and in the public domain and the strategies by which she achieved and promoted it. Extending the analyses of Anne-Marie Lecoq and Myra D. Orth, we will focus on the historical, religious, and mythological figures regularly invoked by and for Louise as models for asserting her position as *alter rex*.³

Filial Trust, Maternal Love

Only a few months after acceding to the throne, François I conferred the 'rule, government and total administration of affairs' upon his beloved mother, praising her prudence as well as her love.⁴ The royal letter dates

1 Knecht, 2011; Michon, 2015; David-Chapy, 2016 (not yet published during the writing of this essay) and her article in the present volume.

2 'le roi et Madame', 'à mon seul plaisir', Michon, 2011, p. 85.

3 Lecoq; Orth, 1999.

4 'regime, gouvernement et totale administracion des affaires', 'nostre très chère et très amée dame et mère la duchesse d'Angoulesme et d'Anjou, comme à celle dont avons totale et parfaicte confidence et que savons certainement qu'elle se y saura saigement et vertueusement

from 15 July 1515, when preparations for the invasion of Milan were almost complete. In the history of France, Louise de Savoie was the first woman to have been officially appointed regent when she was neither daughter nor wife of a king.⁵ The rights transferred at that time to the Duchess of Angoulême corresponded to a number of royal privileges. François I granted to Louise ‘full power, authority and mandate’ to handle judicial and legal affairs, defend the realm and its cities, convene the courts, and manage finances, both ordinary and extraordinary.⁶ In addition, he entrusted her with the right to grant pardons.⁷ In reality, the rights then conferred upon the Duchess of Angoulême were limited. The king himself retained the great seal that authenticated official documents, so it was he who continued to handle state affairs, especially diplomatic ones and those concerning Italy.

Although this first regency lasted but a few months and granted limited powers to Louise, contemporary writers already considered her the king’s *alter ego*. Soon after François had returned from Italy and Louise’s regency had ended,⁸ the Lyonnais writer Symphorien Champier (1471–1538) published in Paris his *Grandes Chroniques de Savoie*.⁹ The author did not indicate that Louise commissioned the work, but he nevertheless crafted it with details that he knew would curry favour with her. In the frontispiece of the copy offered to Louise, François and Louise are seated on one and the same throne

acquitter par sa prudence, pour la grande et singulière amour et zelle qu’elle porte à nous et icelluy nostre royaume’. The text is quoted from Levasseur, I, 1515–1516, n° 64, pp. 262–68. All translations are our own. About this letter, see McCartney, pp. 126–27.

5 Bertière. The author reminds us that in France, even though Salic law was barely contested, the tradition of leaving his wife in charge of the domain when a husband departed for war or a crusade was well established.

6 ‘plain pouvoir, auctorité et mandement’, Levasseur, I, p. 264.

7 ‘de remettre, quicter, pardonner et abolir à tous ceulx que besoiing sera tous cas, crimes et delictz qu’ilz pourroient avoir commis et perpetrez envers nous et justice’, Levasseur, I, p. 265.

8 According to the *Itinéraire de la chancellerie royale sous le règne de François I^{er}* published in Marichal, ed., *Catalogue des actes de François I^{er}*, VIII, pp. 417–18, François arrived in Sisteron on 13 January 1516 and on 24 February in Lyons where he remained until 28 May.

9 Printed by Jean de La Garde on 27 March 1516, the colophon records that Champier completed the work in 1515 and that he was ‘conseillier et premier medecin’ of Antoine, Duke of Lorraine. The Universal Short-title catalogue (USTC) lists 28 other copies of this edition, all of which bear on the title page a large woodcut of the arms of Savoy. In the presentation copy (BnF, Rés. Vélins 1173), the arms have been painted (a white cross on a red field) and the motto ‘FERT’ added in gold letters to either side of the cross. Moreover, the final words of the lengthy title have been erased so that the names of both Champier and La Garde are missing. The page bearing the colophon is also lacking in this copy, as if the book were a manuscript, individually prepared, rather than one copy — albeit illuminated on vellum — of a printed edition. See M.B. Winn, 2007, p. 268.

(Fig. 3.1).¹⁰ It is tempting to see therein a visual rendition of the political power shared by mother and son. The young king is represented in full regalia (hat encircled with a crown, collar of the Order of St. Michael, mantle adorned with fleurs-de-lis and ermine, coronation gloves, scepter and hand of Justice), apparel in fact reserved solely for the coronation ceremony.¹¹ The chamber in which the book is presented also manifests regal splendor in the raised dais and fleur-de-lis drapery. As for Louise, she appears as usual in widow's clothing, which typically consisted of a dark-colored gown, usually brown or black, adorned only by the ermine or sable lining of her bombard sleeves. A black headdress, often reinforced with a broad white band that, like the nun's bandeau, hides the forehead, falls into long panels in a style popular in the 1490s. Throughout the period, in text and image, this apparel identified Louise as an eternal widow, entirely devoted to her son, now the king.¹² After the death of Charles of Angoulême in 1496, Louise never remarried, a fact that her entourage consistently emphasized. In the manuscript of the *Petit Livret a l'honneur de sainte Anne* (after 1518) addressed to Louise, François Demoulins (c. 1470/1480–1526?) writes that the apostle says that true and good widows are those who wished to have only one husband.¹³ It is notable that in the majority of images, Louise's attire is intentionally unadorned. In the frontispiece to the *Grandes Chroniques de Savoie*, she wears a simple gold chain that seems to correspond to that of François's Order of St. Michael. In other miniatures, while she might wear a finely worked gold belt, she is almost always dressed with a sobriety uncustomary for her rank. Her dress only rarely displays shimmering colors, rich fabrics, or jewels.¹⁴ The sources that recount the major ceremonies of François's reign, especially coronations and royal entries, likewise take note of Louise's sober dress, which distinguished her from other ladies of the court.¹⁵ For the coronation of Eleanor of Austria (1498–1558), for example, Louise's clothes were 'without ornament', while the 'coifs, corsets, mantles

10 BnF, Rés. Vélins 1173, fol. 1^r. The miniature covers the woodcut of a writer at his desk that appears in all other copies. See, for example, the copy at the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal (4-H-1382), digitized on Gallica.

11 Chatenet and Lecoq, p. 22.

12 Zvereva, 2015a.

13 'Tapoustre dyt que les vrayez et bonnez vefvez, ce sont cellez qui n'ont jamaiz voulu avoir qu'un / mari' (Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 4009, fol. 19^{r-v}). In our transcriptions from contemporary sources, we have expanded abbreviations, altered capitals and punctuation so as to conform to modern usage, added a cedilla to ç and an accent aigu to final tonic e (parlé, après) except when it is followed by –z.

14 Zvereva, 2015b, pp. 23–24.

15 David-Chapy, 2015, pp. 72–73.

Figure 3.1 Symphorien Champier, *Les Grandes Chroniques de Savoie*



Paris: J. de La Garde, 1516) Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. Vélins 1173, fol. 1^r

and surcoats' of the ladies, duchesses and countesses who accompanied the queen were 'adorned with precious stones of such value that the smallest was estimated at more than 50,000 *écus*'.¹⁶ This deliberate desire to appear in public, even several decades after the death of her husband, in somber and sober mourning dress, while she occupied a major position at court, constituted a political act.

Without doubt, this attire made explicit the role that Louise intended to play at court. She was neither queen nor dowager queen; she was a widow, an eternal widow. She was mother of the heir to the throne, then king of France. She was head of the family, replacing the *pater familias*, dead 20 years earlier, founder of a new dynasty, regent, veritable *alter rex*, entirely devoted to her son's destiny, to which she expected to contribute significantly, and guardian, in the same capacity as other exemplary widows of history, of the requisite qualities of wisdom, virtue, chastity. If the frontispiece of the *Grandes Chroniques de Savoie* insists on the power that mother and son share, Champier's text calls special attention to Saint Louis (1212–1270) who acceded to the throne at age twelve and was therefore left 'under the tutelage and protection of his mother named Blanche, who without ceasing took great care and solicitude to instruct and teach him in all virtues and in the holy catholic faith'.¹⁷ Genealogical charts demonstrate how the noble houses of Valois, Alençon, and Bourbon descend, through male and female heirs, from Saint Louis. At the end of the *Chroniques*, Champier is careful to record that Louise and her brother Philibert II (1480–1504), 'very handsome children, sensible and courteous',¹⁸ were born to Duke Philippe and his first wife, Marguerite de Bourbon (1438–1483). Louise married the Count of Angoulême and gave birth to François, the very Christian king of France, first of that name.¹⁹ Champier connects François with the Trojan heroes and aligns Louise with Saint Louis, the very Christian French king, and with his mother Blanche of Castile (1188–1252). Composed to the honor and glory of the 'very high and very excellent princess, my lady Louise de

16 'sans aucun enrichissement', 'chappeaux, corsets, manteaux et surcots', 'enrichis de pierreries de telle valeur que le moindre estoit estimé plus de cinquante mille escus'. Godefroy, pp. 218–19. For the identification and description of garments of this period, see the copious documentation and illustration in Van Buren.

17 'en la tutelle et protection de sa mere appelee Blanche, laquelle sans descontinuer print une merueilleuse sollicitude et cusaçon [soin] de le bien instruire et enseigner en toutes vertueuses meurs et en la saincte foy catholicque', fol. 6^r.

18 'tresbeaux enfans, saiges et humains', fol. 131^r.

19 'espousa monseigneur le conte de Angoulesme, de laquelle est venu le roy François, tres-chrestien roy de France, premier de ce nom', fol. 131^r.

Savoie, mother of the very Christian and very excellent king of France',²⁰ Champier addresses her in the dedication as a 'very noble and illustrious' princess. He repeats the same two adjectives to describe the subject of his *Chroniques*, namely 'this very noble and illustrious genealogy' of the dukes and princes of Savoy whose history is eminently worthy of record.²¹

With similar flattery, the Franciscan Jean Thenaud (1474/1484–1542/1543) dedicates to his 'superillustrious lady' le *Triumphe des Vertuz*, an ensemble of four treatises on the cardinal virtues of Prudence, Fortitude, Justice, and Temperance.²² Louise commissioned this work for her son, and it offered ample testimony, both visual and verbal, to the mother–son couple at the helm of the kingdom. The first volume, dating from 1517, includes the treatises on Prudence, honoring her daughter, Marguerite d'Angoulême, and Fortitude, honoring her son, François I.²³ The second volume, dating from about 1519, includes the treatises on Justice, honoring her grandson François (*dauphin* from 1518–1536) and Temperance, honoring her daughter-in-law, Queen Claude (1499–1524).²⁴ The frontispiece of the first volume depicts the traditional presentation of the book.²⁵ The author, tonsured and dressed in a hooded habit tied at the waist with the knotted cord of the Franciscans, kneels before Louise who, as in similar frontispieces for Anne de Bretagne (1477–1514), sits on a throne surrounded by a female court. We know that the number of noblewomen at the court of France increased at the end of the fifteenth century and that these female courts reflected and enhanced the position of the lady who assembled them around her.²⁶ In the frontispiece, the ladies who surround Louise are attired in coloured gowns adorned with belts and necklaces while the Duchess herself wears a rather plain dress, with gold highlights, and a headdress nearly identical to a nun's coif. Here again, her apparel distinguishes Louise from the other ladies represented in the miniature, especially since her dress, as well as the rosary that she holds in her hand, seem to echo the Franciscan robe. It is nonetheless an almost-queen who is depicted, as if the mental image

20 'treshaulte et tresexcellente princesse, ma dame Loyse de Savoye, mere du treschrestien et tresexcellant Roy de France, François premier de ce nom', fol. 132^r, colophon.

21 'tresnoble et illustre princesse', fol. b1^r; 'tresnoble et illustre genealogie', fol. b1^v.

22 On Thenaud, see Pierre. For the editions of the treatises, see Thenaud, with the dedication to his 'superillustre dame' in vol. I, p. 3. About the manuscripts, see Orth, 2015, II, n° 7, pp. 49–56 and n° 8, pp. 56–60.

23 Saint-Petersburg, National Library of Russia, Fr. F. v. XV, I.

24 BnF, ms. fr. 144.

25 For a reproduction, see Voronova and Sterligov, p. 208, pl. 253.

26 Viennot, 2000, pp. 93–96; Zum Kolk.

had superseded historical fact. Louise is seated on steps covered in blue and gold, the colors of fleur-de-lis fabrics, within an architecture à l'antique from which hangs a red drapery bearing her arms.²⁷

In the frontispiece to the second volume of the *Triumphe des Vertuz*, her imagined status is made manifest: Louise is now crowned.²⁸ Dressed in the same gown of golden highlights, with a gold belt, she wears a wide crown and holds in her hands a scepter and rays. She is seated, as on a throne, at the edge of a fountain bearing her arms. This principal fountain irrigates four smaller fountains, the first evoking Fortitude, surmounted by a salamander, with the arms of François I; the second, Justice, with the arms of the *dauphin* François; the third Temperance, with the arms of Claude de France; the fourth Prudence, with the arms of Marguerite d'Angoulême. The Latin inscription inserted near the kneeling author, *Dive Lathone Apollinis et Dyane Matri Virtutum Fonti Perhempni* ('To the divine Latona, mother of Apollo and Diana, perennial source of virtues'), associates Louise with one of the most celebrated mothers of ancient mythology. This assimilation is also found in the second version of Thenaud's dedication: 'You (among the illustrious, renowned, heroic and superexcellent ladies the greatest), represented by poets as that goddess Latona, mother and parent of Apollo and Diana, are that living fountain'.²⁹ The first version establishes a Christian parallel between earthly paradise and the present 'very Christian realm, which is the monarchic and more than imperial house of France' of which Louise is 'the source and living fountain', thus implicitly connecting Louise with the Virgin Mary.³⁰ The frontispiece moreover subscribes to the tradition of Marian imagery, since it derives from images associating Mary with the fountain of gardens (*fons hortorum*) or with the well of living water (*puteus aquae vivae*).³¹

This masterpiece by Thenaud is not the only one to associate Louise with the Virgin Mary. The analogy had already been suggested long before François ascended to the throne in a manuscript offered by the Parisian publisher Anthoine Vérard (1485–c.1512) to Louise around 1500, the *Vie*

27 The initials inscribed in the pavement below, 'L'-M'-F', are those of the Angoulême 'Trinity': Louise, her daughter Marguerite, and her son. See Knecht, 2015.

28 BnF, ms. fr. 144, fol. B. Digitized on Gallica: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10520631m/f5.image.r=trionphe%20des%20vertuz> (accessed 19 January 2017). See also Lecoq, pp. 338–340.

29 Included in the copy of the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 3358 but not in that of St. Petersburg. 'Vous (des illustres, renommes, heroes et superexcellentes dames la plus), figuree par les poetes en celle deesse Lathone, mere et parente de Phebus et Dyane, estes celle fontaine vive', Thenaud, I, p. 4.

30 'royaulme treschrestien, qui est la monarchalle et plusque imperiale maison de France', Thenaud, I, p. 281.

31 Lecoq, p. 340.

Nostrre Dame, the text of which is taken from the *Matines de la Vierge* by the poet Martial d'Auvergne (1420–1508).³² In his dedication, Vérard employs metaphors for Louise ('flower of honor', 'fruit of virtue') that imitate those for the Virgin ('she is virtue, she is the clear fountain'), thus reinforcing the parallel between the two mothers that is illustrated by facing miniatures: the Virgin and Child on fol. 3^r, Louise and her young son on fol. 2^v.³³ If Mary is 'our mother, our supreme head', Louise is the one who holds 'the sovereign branch of the lily'.³⁴ This symbolism endured until Louise's death: her embalmed heart was buried in Notre-Dame Cathedral, in a casket the cover of which displayed a crowned lily issuing from a crowned heart.³⁵

Louise's identification with the Virgin is also noteworthy in the *Chants royaux du Puy de Notre-Dame d'Amiens*, a work composed in 1517–18.³⁶ At the end of May 1517, François, Claude, Louise, and Marguerite undertook a long voyage in Picardy and Normandy. On 17 June, the court visited the cathedral in Amiens where a series of paintings in honor of the Virgin was displayed. Every year, the society of the 'Puy de Notre-Dame', dedicated to the Virgin, organized a poetry contest. At the Feast of the Purification, the newly elected master of the society would announce the verse or palinode he had just composed in the Virgin's honor, which would serve as the refrain for the competition the upcoming year. At Christmas, he would unveil the painting that illustrated the verse and would serve that year as the altar painting for the society. The competition would then be launched. The collection of paintings and poems that hung in the cathedral of Amiens impressed Louise de Savoie: she ordered copies, which were then assembled into a manuscript. Illuminated by the Parisian painter Jean Pichore (fl. 1490–1521) and his workshop, from sketches made by Jacques Plastel of Amiens, the manuscript reproduces 47 of the paintings executed for the contests held between 1458 and 1516. All of them show the Virgin and Child, surrounded by numerous people, in scenes that emphasize the saving grace of Mary. Kneeling as the donor, the master holds in his hands a phylactery (or banner) on which is written the verse of the palinode. In the dedication

32 BnF, ms. fr. 985.

33 For reproductions and discussion of these miniatures, see M.B. Winn and Wilson-Chevalier, p. 239 and pl. XVI, fig. 97.

34 'fleur d'honneur', 'fruit de vertu', 'c'est la vertu, c'est la clere fontaine', 'nostre mere, nostre chef capital', 'du liz la branche souveraine', fols 1^r, 1^v.

35 See the reproduction in Crépin-Leblond and Barbier, p. 137.

36 BnF, ms. fr. 145. Digitized on Gallica: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8426257z?rk=21459;2> (accessed 19 January 2017). Lecoq, pp. 325–35; Zöhl, 2004, pp. 25–42; Zöhl, 2007; Orth, 2015, II, n° 18, pp. 83–88.

scene, Louise is seated on an elaborate gold chair, its high back sculpted with her coat of arms.³⁷ She sits in state at the center of the composition, her feet resting on a green cushion. Dressed in her traditional widow's clothing, she is surrounded by numerous ladies of the court. As Anne-Marie Lecoq and Caroline Zöhl have already noted, the king's mother occupies the place reserved for the Virgin in the paintings of the 'puy' reproduced in the manuscript, while the two magistrates (Andrieu de Monsures and Pierre Louvel) who offer her the book, are represented as the devout worshipers, kneeling at the feet of Mary and their patron saint.³⁸ Louise's already regal posture is thus enhanced with almost-divine authority.

The dedication in the form of a *chant royal*, analogous to those addressed to the Virgin, reinforces the connections between Louise and Mary, their respective maternities, and by extension between François and Christ:

You carried as mother and regent
 The royal blood, the honorific body
 Of King François who rules the French,
 Giving them admirable hope,
 For which, while the unsurpassed queen
 Mary, virgin in her maternity,
 Brought us in person
 The hope of the entire world,
 So are you too, by another quality,
 The frank and humble mother,
 For the great hope of France.³⁹

While Mary is unsurpassed as the virgin mother whose son brought hope to the entire world, Louise nonetheless gave birth to King François, hope of France, thus becoming mother of the entire realm. Although the text's reference to humility alludes to that essential quality of the Virgin at the moment of the Annunciation, the implicit equation of Louise with Mary asserts a stature ordained by God himself, granting the king's mother an authority

37 BnF, ms. fr. 145 fol. 1^v; see <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8426257z/f8.image> (accessed 19 January 2017).

38 Lecoq, p. 333; Zöhl, 2004, pp. 32–34.

39 'Tu as porté comme mere et regente / Le royal sang, le corps honorifique, / Du roy François qui les François regente, / En leur causant ung espoir admirable, / Dont, quoy que la royne insuperable, / Marie, vierge en sa maternité, / Nous a porté quant a l'humanité / Totalement du monde l'esperance, / Aussy es tu, par aultre qualité, / Mere humble et franche / au grand espoir de France', BnF, ms. fr. 145, fol. 2^r, vv. 13–22.

that transcended the terrestrial sphere. Suggested as early as 1500 in Vêrard's dedication to the *Vie Nostre Dame*, the identification of Louise, mother of François, as the temporal equivalent to the Virgin Mary, mother of Christ, is here fully exposed in word and image. This spiritual authority bestowed upon Louise justifies her political role as the king's regent, his *alter rex*.

The Second Regency

On 12 August 1523, as François was preparing for his second Italian campaign, he once again appointed his mother as regent.⁴⁰ In a royal letter the king justified the need for a regency and for his choice:

We could only provide for such a government and administration the person of our very dear and very beloved lady and mother, the Duchess of Angoulême and Anjou, Countess of Maine, as much for the zeal and singular love and legitimate and natural affection that we know she bears to us and to our realm, provinces, and dominions, and to our loyal and obedient subjects thereof, as for the good experience she has in such matters, as in a similar case, when we left for the conquest of our duchy and state of Milan and the dominion of Genoa, soon after our accession to the crown, she exerted and administered while regent and governor for us in our said realms, provinces, and dominions hitherto, to which charge she acquitted herself, as is certain and well known, with such virtue and prudence that she is worthy of praise and singular commendation.⁴¹

The powers granted to Louise were described in more detail than for François's first Italian campaign. They concerned all areas of government

40 Levasseur, III, 1521–1523, n° 355, pp. 282–289. See Henry-Bordeaux; Mayer; McCartney, pp. 131–35; Knecht, 2011, pp. 178–82; Michon, 2015.

41 'Nous [...] ne pourrions pourvoir a ung tel regime et administration, que de la personne de nostre treschere et tresamée dame et mere, la duchesse d'Angoumoys et d'Anjou, contesse du Maine, tant pour le bon zele et singulier amour et affection legitime et naturelle, que savons certainement qu'elle a porte [sic] a nous, et nosd. royaume, pays et seigneuries, bons loyaulx et obeïssans subjectz d'iceulx, que pour la bonne experience qu'elle a en telles matieres, que en cas semblable, que allasmes a la conquete d'iceulx noz duché et estat de Millan et seigneurie de Genues, tantost apres nostre advenement a la couronne, elle exercea et administra demorant regente et gouvernante pour nous en nosd. royaume, pays et seigneuries de deça, en la quelle charge elle s'aquicta, comme il est certain et notoire, si vertueusement et prudemment, qu'elle en est digne de louenge et singuliere recommendacion', Levasseur, III, 1521–1523, n° 355, p. 284. The text goes on to express the king's confidence in Louise's 'senz, vertuz, prudence et integrité'.

affairs, the convocation of sovereign courts, the execution of sentences and arrests made by these courts, the security of the realm, commerce, finances, the right of pardon, and the appointment of officers. The regency extended through the entire captivity of the king following his defeat at the Battle of Pavia on 24 February 1525 until March 1526. Louise, residing at the Abbey of Saint-Just, near Lyons, ruled over an enlarged Council, presided by the chancellor, Antoine Duprat (1463–1535). When the king was taken prisoner, the *Parlement* of Paris sought to reinforce its own power by limiting that of Louise. It encouraged Charles de Bourbon (1489–1537), Duke of Vendôme, the closest male relative of the king and member of the Council, to claim the administration of the government, in place of the Duchess and Duprat. The Duke, it appears, refused to divide the realm, then in crisis.

Despite this fragile context, Louise governed successfully, seeking above all to maintain peace within the realm and to liberate her son. In August 1525, she signed with Henry VIII of England (1491–1547) the Treaty of the More, which broke the Anglo-Imperial alliance and thus put pressure on Charles V (1500–1558) to release her son.⁴² The *Traité de la paix perpetuelle*, published on 22 September 1525, announced on the title page the agreement between the king and ‘Madame, his mother, Regent in France in his absence’.⁴³ A woodcut of the royal arms surrounded by the collar of the Order of St. Michael is printed on the last leaf. Louise also sought support from the sultan Soliman the Magnificent (1494–1566), an initiative that would be crowned with a military alliance against the Emperor in the Mediterranean. Finally, she sent her daughter Marguerite to negotiate directly with the Emperor. Louise’s efforts were successful in maintaining peace and securing the release of François I.

For Louise and her entourage, this second regency became the moment to invoke, as did other elite women of the time, Blanche of Castile. Blanche — as a woman, mother of the king, widow, in charge of her son’s education and then as regent — offered several points of comparison with Louise. The similarity was proclaimed loud and clear in two works that Étienne Le Blanc (c. 1490–1565) composed for Louise: the *Généalogie de Bourbon*, *Histoire des accroissements territoriaux des Bourbons*, *Vie de saint Louis*; and the *Gestes de Blanche de Castille*.⁴⁴ The *Généalogie*, dedicated to Louise

42 Jacqueton.

43 ‘Madame, sa mere, Regente en France en son absence’.

44 BnF, ms. fr. 5719 and BnF, ms. fr. 5715 respectively. Orth, 2015, II, n° 38, pp. 144–46 and n° 37, pp. 140–43. Etienne Le Blanc succeeded his father Louis as *greffier* of the Chambre des comptes

and commissioned by her, was written at a time when she claimed the inheritance of her cousin, Suzanne de Bourbon (1491–1521), heir of the duchy of Bourbon, instead of Suzanne's husband, the constable Charles de Bourbon (1490–1527). The composition is thus placed between 28 April 1521, date of Suzanne's death, and 14 November 1522, date of the death of Anne de France, Suzanne's mother. In the *Généalogie de Bourbon*, Le Blanc states that Suzanne has died without heir, while Anne is still living.⁴⁵ According to Elizabeth A.R. Brown, the work was composed before 11 August 1522, when the *Parlement* of Paris began to examine the challenge to Suzanne's will brought by Louise and François I.⁴⁶ The date of the *Gestes de Blanche de Castille* is more controversial, although it must have been composed after Louise's first regency.⁴⁷

Le Blanc begins by explaining his choice of subject for 'this little book', extracted from the histories of France. Louise descended from Saint Louis, whose mother, Blanche of Castile, had acted as regent for her son, expelling his enemies and governing with virtue and prudence. Blanche was not, however, the first woman to 'defend and save' her people, as Le Blanc demonstrates by citing the two most famous biblical examples.⁴⁸

The good Judith, filled with all beauty and wisdom, being a widow, saved the people of Jerusalem and of all Judea from the hand of Holofernes, lieutenant general of the army of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Assyrians. So also did Queen Esther, wife of Ahasuerus, king of Persia and Mede, from the hands of Haman, cruel tyrant.⁴⁹

in 1509 and became Louise's secretary in 1526.

45 'de present est decedee sans hoir', BnF, ms. fr. 5719, fol. 3^v.

46 Brown, p. 10, n. 26. An edition and study of the *Gestes* is in preparation by Elizabeth A.R. Brown and Mary Beth Winn.

47 Lecoq, pp. 477–78 dates its composition to the first regency. Other scholars propose the second regency (McCartney, pp. 133–35; Viennot, 2008, pp. 80–81; M.B. Winn and Wilson-Chevalier, p. 243). Brown and Zale, pp. 236, 252–53, date it to between 1515 and 1521, before Le Blanc had entered Louise's service. According to Orth, 2015, II, p. 140, the manuscript dates from c. 1520–1522.

48 BnF, ms. fr. 5715, fol. 1^r: 'ce petit livre'; fol. 1^v: 'Et n'est pas la premiere dame qui en l'ancienne et nouvelle loy a deffendu et sauvé le peuple'.

49 'La bonne dame Judich, remplye de toute beaulté et sagesse, estant en viduité, sauva le peuple de Hierusalem et de toute la terre de Judee de la main de Holofernes, lieutenant general de l'armee du roy des Assyriens, Nabuchodonosor. Ce que feist aussy la royne Hester, femme de Assuere, roy de Perse et de Mede, des mains de Aman, cruel tyrant', fol. 1^v.

In line with these illustrious women, Louise, too, had ‘until now guarded and defended the people of France’.⁵⁰ This apparent reference to her regency established a link to those of Blanche of Castile, one during her son’s minority, between 1226 and 1234, the other beginning in 1248, when the king departed for the crusade. To such a regency similarly, wrote Le Blanc, ‘has succeeded, by her great prudence and virtue, the very honorable, powerful and excellent princess and my very revered lady, Madame Louise’.⁵¹ Le Blanc emphasized elements that established a clear parallel between the two mothers. Blanche oversaw her son’s education: she was his tutor and engaged the most worthy and wise counsellors, both religious and lay, that one could find.⁵² The king became benevolent (*debonnaire*) through the advice of his mother who was compassionate and magnanimous, always striving to do good works and to treat everyone, great and small alike, with justice.⁵³ Against the nobles who thought that the government of the realm did not belong to a woman, the king maintained the contrary, and, fully confident in his mother, he entrusted her with his kingdom. Le Blanc asserts another argument against the ‘envious’ who claim that a mother should not hold the government of her son, namely that natural law grants her this power, witness the proverb *bon sang ne peult mentyr* (‘Good blood cannot lie’). Furthermore, virtue reigns in some women more than in many men, and in such cases, ‘they deserve not only to be called women, but men’.⁵⁴ Such statements seem to hold greater significance for the years 1523–26, when Louise’s authority was being contested and her regency extended because of her son’s captivity, than for her first regency.

Moreover, a stylistic analysis of the celebrated frontispiece further substantiates this later date.⁵⁵ According to Guy-Michel Leproux, the frontispiece is closely related to the *Rosenwald Hours* of 1524.⁵⁶ A motif of

50 ‘jusques cy gardé et deffendu le peuple de France’, fol. 1^v.

51 ‘a laquelle regence a, par sa grande prudence et vertu, succedé treshaulte, trespuissante et tresexcellente princesse et ma tresredoubtee dame, Madame Loyse’, fol. 21^v.

52 ‘Blanche, sa mere, le feist endoctriner et enseigner, car elle l’avoit en garde comme tutrice, et luy quist gens de conseil, tant clerks comme laiz, les plus preudhommes et les plus sages que on peut trouver’, fol. 3^r.

53 Blanche ‘tousjours s’estudioit a faire bonnes œuvres [...] faisant justice tant au grant que au petit, sans acception de personnes’, fol. 19^r.

54 ‘elles meritent non seulement estre appellees femmes, mais hommes’, fol. 7^r.

55 Digitized on Gallica: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55005969b/f8.image> (accessed 12 January 2017).

56 Washington, Library of Congress, Rosenwald Collection, ms. 10, fol. 79^v. We thank Guy-Michel Leproux for this information. The Rosenwald manuscript is digitized at <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc/rbc/rosenwald.0014.2> (accessed 12 January 2017). See also Orth, 2015, II, n° 41, pp. 152–56.

two superimposed columns surmounted by winged cupids likewise frames the image of Saint John on Patmos, behind whom rises a similar château built on a rocky cliff.⁵⁷ Seated beneath a dais of green velvet, Louise wears her traditional widow's clothing. Her face derives from an original portrait by Jean Clouet (c. 1485–1541), since lost, that was undoubtedly executed around 1516–18, since it appears in the frontispiece to the *Petit Livret a l'honneur de sainte Anne*, whose dedication mentions only the royal children born before 1518.⁵⁸ She is outfitted with gigantic wings whose significance is multiple. They are, first, a rebus on the 'L' of her name, but also an evocation of her protective role, first of the *dauphin*, then of the king. Similarly, the anonymous author of the *Compas du Dauphin*, composed around 1505–15, begged François's mother to keep him under her wing.⁵⁹ But these wings are also borrowed from the Bourbon emblems, thereby reflecting Louise's claim to that inheritance.⁶⁰ In any event, the king's mother is portrayed as regent, governing the realm, since she holds with both hands the tiller of a rudder, plunged into a rectangular pool filled with water. The rudder is of course the instrument used for directing the country, the traditional symbol of government. This government extends beyond the walls of the palace to include the whole realm; the room in which the two figures appear opens in fact through an Italianate loggia onto a vast landscape. At Madame's feet, lying prostrate on a humble bed, the author awaits a commission, as indicated by the Latin words inscribed on the dais ('remarkable for piety') and on the frame ('say a word and I shall be cured').⁶¹ The words recall those of the preface, in which the author hopes to earn Louise's favor and make her 'turn [her] eyes of pity and clemency on [him], which however has not yet occurred'.⁶² Le Blanc achieved his goal when Louise named him clerk and auditor of the *Chambre des comptes* in May 1525, the *terminus ante quem* therefore for the work's composition. In 1526, he became her secretary and later that of her daughter Marguerite.⁶³ The *Gestes de Blanche de Castille* emphasized Louise's ability to guide the ship of state in the absence of the

57 Fol. 14^v.

58 Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, ms. 4009; Zvereva, 2011, p. 203, cat. 4. The portrait by Clouet is also known from the copy preserved in Knowsley (Derby Collection, inv. W 418, fol. 4, c. 1525) or fol. 2^v of the *Livre d'heures de Catherine de Médicis* (BnF, ms. nouv. acq. lat. 82, c. 1573).

59 BnF, ms. fr. 2285, fol. 7^r, 'sous [son] aile chérie'.

60 See Lecoq, pp. 470–77; M.B. Winn and Wilson-Chevalier, p. 243; Fagnart and Girault.

61 'Insignis Pietate', 'Verbo dic t[antu]m et sanabitur'.

62 'et faire tourner voz yeulx de pitié et de clemence vers moy, ce que toutesfois ne m'est encores advenu', fol. 1^r.

63 Orth, 1999, p. 85.

king, to govern the realm by herself, as had her illustrious predecessor, regent to Saint Louis.

Le Blanc's two works are not the only ones to associate Louise de Savoie with Blanche of Castile, nor was the association with Judith and Esther unprecedented. Indeed, an emblematic example can be found in the stained-glass windows of the Sainte Chapelle, that monumental reliquary erected by Saint Louis to house the relics of the Passion of Christ, including notably the crown of thorns and the True Cross, bought from the Venetians to whom the bankrupt Baudouin, Emperor of Constantinople (1217–1273) had pawned them. Depicting the stories of Judith and Esther, several windows might be interpreted as an homage to Saint Louis's mother, who had assumed the regency during the king's youth, when most of his vassals were in league to usurp the government. The heraldic decor is especially elaborate, with the lily of France, the castles of Castile, *or* and *gules*, and the arms of Castile. The niche reserved for Blanche and her daughter-in-law, Queen Marguerite de Provence (1221–1295), during the religious offices, was arranged beneath these windows.⁶⁴ Contemporary literature paid particular attention to Judith. She is a model of virtue, piety, and chastity in the 1504 *Vies des femmes célèbres* of Antoine Dufour (d. 1509), commissioned by Anne de Bretagne but surely known to Louise, and in the 1534 *Palais des nobles Dames* of Jehan du Pré (d. 1504) dedicated to Marguerite d'Angoulême.⁶⁵ In the *Chants royaux du Puy de Notre-Dame d'Amiens*, prepared for Louise, one refrain focuses on Esther: 'Fair Esther, elected by the king of heaven'.⁶⁶ The author praises Esther for saving the Jews and thereby prefiguring the Virgin's intercession on behalf of humankind. The accompanying miniature depicts, in the right background, Esther kneeling in supplication before Ahasuerus and, in the foreground, being crowned, in a gesture parallel to the Virgin's coronation by the infant Christ, which occupies the center of the painting.

Blanche, Louise, and Esther were also linked together on 1 May 1517 for the entry of Queen Claude into Paris, following her coronation at Saint-Denis. The street celebrations for the occasion were organized by Pierre Gringore (1475–1538). An abundant documentation, analyzed by Anne-Marie Lecoq and Cynthia J. Brown, describes the raised platforms on which dramatic stagings were performed all along the parade route.⁶⁷ The last play, presented in front of the Palais Royal where the supper was prepared, showed Saint Louis,

64 Leniaud and Perrot, pp. 158, 169. See also Jordan, pp. 344–46; and Wilson-Chevalier, pp. 26–27.

65 C. Winn, 2003, p. 292; Llewellyn.

66 'Plaisant Hester, du roy des cieulx eslute', BnF, ms. fr. 145, fol. 19^r.

67 Lecoq, pp. 377–91; Gringore.

crowned and enthroned.⁶⁸ If one trusts the painter of one of the contemporary manuscripts depicting these events, the king, holding the scepter and the hand of Justice, was flanked by the figures of Justice and Louis's mother, Blanche of Castile.⁶⁹ The presence of the arms of François I and Claude de France, attached to the base of the platform, allows for no doubt: the scene makes an obvious allusion to the mother of the reigning king, as equal in authority to Blanche of Castile. The dialogue between the characters does likewise: it evokes a ruler guided in his decisions by the maternal figure and by Justice.⁷⁰

Furthermore, Claude's entry pageant into Paris in 1517 also emphasized the biblical heroine Esther whom Le Blanc named as predecessor to the French regents, Blanche of Castile and Louise de Savoie. Esther was represented at the Saint-Denis gate, on the first raised platform. The scene is depicted in a manuscript offered to Claude herself, as well as in manuscripts of the *Sacre de Claude de France*.⁷¹ Centered within the symbolic representation of the coronation (the basis for the legitimacy of the queen), Claude is crowned by the dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit (an obvious allusion to the Coronation of the Virgin), surrounded by six heroines of the Bible, each embodying a virtue of the ideal wife: Sarah for fidelity, Rachel for conjugal amiability, Rebecca for prudence, Esther for modesty, Helbora for good morals, Lia for fecundity. Gringore specifies that Esther, despite her humility, found a means to have her enemy Haman hanged.⁷² At the foot of the platform stood four virtues, embodied in four virtuous and venerable widows of France: Prudence, Louise de Savoie; Justice, Anne de France, Duchess of Bourbon; Magnanimity, Marguerite de Lorraine-Vaudémont, Duchess of Alençon (1463–1521); and Temperance, Marie of Luxembourg-Saint-Pol, Countess of Vendôme (1462/72–1547). The order, and indeed the names, of the virtues vary according to the source but the association of Louise with Prudence is widely attested.

The parallel between Louise and Blanche of Castile was also promoted in the *Dicts sybillins par personnages*, an anonymous collection, copied after 1515.⁷³ In the author's dedication 'to the very noble of high renown princess

68 Gringore, p. 307.

69 BnF, ms. fr. 5750, fol. 49^v. The miniature is viewable at the Banque des Images (<http://images.bnf.fr/jsp/index.jsp>); see also Lecoq, p. 389; and Gringore, p. 121.

70 Lecoq, p. 390, who transcribes additional text from Le Moynes, fol. 16.

71 BnF, ms. fr. 5750, fol. 37^v, and ms. 491 de l'École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Paris and British Library Cotton Titus A.XVII respectively. Lecoq, pp. 377–380; Gringore, pp. 109, 122.

72 'Mais non obstant l'humilité de laditte Hester, trouva moyen de faire pendre son ennemy au gibet', Gringore, pp. 163–64.

73 BnF, ms. fr. 2362. Lecoq, p. 582, n. 95; Colin, 'Louise de Savoie et la musique', pp. 222–24. The work contains a mystery play that includes a Noël with music. The manuscript is digitized on

of Angoulême, mother of King François', Louise was compared to illustrious mothers, including Blanche of Castile, who have guided ('conduit') their sons. The author acknowledged

the care that you have for the common good to guide wholesomely your son François, by God's grace, King of the French, like Saint Monica, Saint Augustin, Saint Ciline, Saint Remy, Saint Aelidis, Saint Bernard, and other innumerable saintly mothers, each her child; also like Queen Blanche Saint Louis, to whom she often said that she would rather see him beheaded than that he commit a mortal sin.⁷⁴

This last phrase is encircled in the manuscript with a hand-drawn line, as if a reader had highlighted its importance. It is worth noting that the Cimmerian Sibyl is represented wearing a red dress and a headdress that resembles the one typically worn by Louise, although in her case it is blue.⁷⁵ The corresponding text refers to her Italian origins and underscores the fact that she nursed her son, insisting thereby on a mother's nurturing character. But when the Sibyl speaks, she praises astrology by which, she asserts, God insures the correlation between earth (*monde inferiore*) and heaven (*ciel superior*). She declares that while contemplating the heavens one day, 'the supreme Regent, Intelligence' transmitted to her a 'prophetic light' by which she could recognize the influence of the planets and the signs of the zodiac.⁷⁶ It is to understand the astrological signs that she carries a globe and a sextant. The choice of the term 'regent' and its identification with intelligence is surely not fortuitous in a text dedicated to Louise de Savoie. One other sibyl displays similar attention. The Phrygian Sibyl, who predicts the Resurrection, carries the victory banner of the risen Christ, but in contrast to the colors normally used (a red cross on a white field), here the colors are reversed, so that they are identical to the arms of Savoy: a white cross on a red field.⁷⁷

Gallica: <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b525016145.r=2362?rk=85837;2> (accessed 16 January 2017).

74 'A tresnoble de bonne fame, haulte princesse d'Angoulame, mere du Roy François [...] advertiz aussy du soing que avez pour le bien publicque de conduire salutairement monseigneur vostre filz François, par la grace de Dieu roy des François, comme sainte Monicque, saint Augustin, sainte Ciline, saint Remy, sainte Aelidis, saint Bernard, et aultres innumerables saintes meres chascune son enfant; comme aussy la royne Blanche saint Loys, auquel souvent disoit que myeulx aimeroit le veoir decoller que il commist ung pechié mortel', fol. 2^r.

75 Fol. 19^r.

76 'la supreme Regente, Intelligence', 'lumiere prophetique', fol. 20^r.

77 Fol. 37^v.

Alter Rex: The 'Ladies' Peace'

The culmination of Louise's authority as *alter rex* manifested itself in 1529 when her negotiations with Margaret of Austria led to the Treaty of Cambrai, named in consequence the 'Ladies' Peace', a memorable agreement that brought to an end the second war between François I and Charles V.⁷⁸ During the autumn of 1528, when relations between the king and the emperor had deteriorated, Louise had taken the initiative to contact Margaret of Austria. The two princesses had long known each other: raised together at the court of Anne de France, one of the most politically astute women of the time, they were also sisters-in-law. In 1501 Margaret had married Louise's brother, Philibert II, Duke of Savoy. Preliminary discussions led to a meeting inaugurated on 5 July 1529 at Cambrai. Louise was accompanied by her daughter, Marguerite de Navarre, and by members of the Council, including Duprat and the constable Anne de Montmorency (1493–1567). Margaret of Austria was escorted by members of her Council and her court, and by deputies from the Estates. An important delegation from England, led by Sir Thomas More (1478–1535), Chancellor to Henry VIII, as well as representatives from the Italian states, mainly Venice and Tuscany, joined them. As for the King of France, he was off hunting at La Fère and at Coucy, while the Emperor, then in Barcelona, had already given his consent to the most important provisions. To stay in the background, at least for all appearances, was astute: François and Charles could at any moment reject the agreement if it did not suit them. Each was represented, however, by his most faithful adviser: François by his mother, and Charles by his aunt, formerly his guardian and governor of the Netherlands. Both women had served as regent of their respective realms, and, empowered by the rulers themselves, their authority was unchallenged. On 29 July, after fierce discussions, a compromise was reached. The treaty was signed on 3 August. Two days later, it was celebrated in the cathedral of Cambrai by a Mass, in the presence of François I, then by three days of festivities in the town. The detailed account of the meeting, with its negotiations but also its processions, Masses, banquets, and music, which punctuated the daily meetings, and analysis of the celebrations, in literature and the arts, that immortalized the meeting, both immediately and thereafter, is only now being written.⁷⁹

78 Russell, pp. 94–161; Knecht, 1998, pp. 283–85 / *Un prince*, pp. 281–83; Hamon.

79 Under the direction of Laure Fagnart, Jonathan Dumont, Pierre-Gilles Girault and Nicolas Le Roux, a newly-funded project on the 'Paix des Dames' is under way at the Université de Liège

Among the various texts in the form of news bulletins that have recorded the event, the most interesting as well as the longest, at twelve folios, is perhaps the publication in Antwerp by Guillaume Vorsterman of the *Triumphe de la paix celebree en Cambrai, avec la declaration des entrees et yssues des Dames, Roix, Princes, et Prelatz*.⁸⁰ The author, Jean Thibault, identifies himself below the title as 'Astrologer of the Imperial Majesty and of Madame', and as such, he was present in Cambrai in 1529.⁸¹ A woodcut on the title page displays three women standing above the prostrate figure of a male warrior in full armor who, according to the text, represents Mars, the god of war. Dressed in elaborate gowns and headdresses, the women are identified by names printed above their heads: Lady Margaret, The Regent, The Queen of Navarre (Fig. 3.2).⁸² Margaret and Louise are turned toward each other, clasping hands. Various astrological symbols appear with each figure, for Thibault explains the achievement of peace by the movement of the heavens, understood through philosophy and astrology as God's order. Libra is the sign for the year 1529, a feminine sign in opposition to the masculine Aries. Given the configuration of the stars and planets at that time, he argues that only the two princesses, Margaret and Louise, could have achieved peace. It was, moreover, in the natural order of things that women would bring an end to the war that had lasted so long. After this introduction, Thibault proceeds to give an eye-witness account of the arrival in Cambrai of the two principals and their retinues, the discussions leading up to the agreement, and its signing.⁸³ He then provides a copy of the accord and describes the ensuing celebrations, with details about the dress, banquets, and music following the king's arrival in Cambrai. Thibault concludes with a discourse on the 'virtue of ladies', citing both Judith and Esther as proof that when God wishes good upon his people, he has it accomplished by women. He claims that the peace achieved by Margaret and Louise is as great as that given to the children of Israel, for all of Christendom awaited it. They deserve as much honor as Judith, for they received from God the grace and

and the Université Paris 13, in collaboration with the Musée royal de Brou (Bourg-en-Bresse). A volume of papers presented at the conferences held in Liège and Bourg-en-Bresse is in preparation.

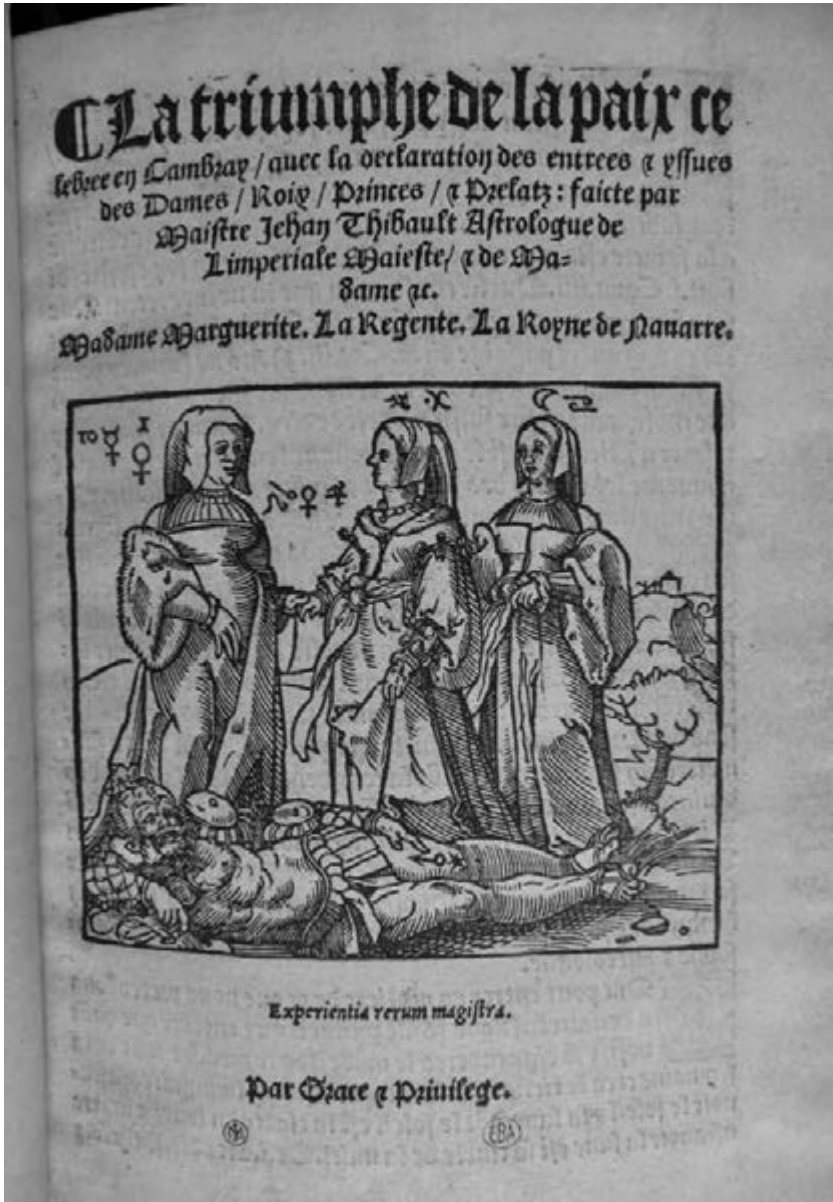
80 USTC 54350; copies seen: Paris, ENSBA Masson 1321; BnF Rés. Lb30.144. Three other copies are known: BnF, Rothschild 2135 (IV.4.73); BnF, Arts du spectacle, 8-RA4-37; Brussels, KBR, II.28.596A. Mary Beth Winn is completing a critical edition and study of the *Triumphe de la paix*.

81 'Astrologue de l'imperiale Majesté et de Madame'. A medical astrologer originally from Antwerp, Jean Thibault was invited to France in 1533 by François I who had met him in Cambrai. See Servet, pp. 10–12.

82 'Madame Marguerite. La Regente. La Royne de Navarre'.

83 Fol. 6^r.

Figure 3.2 Jean Thibault, *La Triumphe de la paix celebree en Cambrai*



(Antwerp: G. Vorsterman, 1529) Paris, ENSBA, Masson 1321, title page

gift to bring peace and assurance to the people. Finally he calls on the 'bad husbands' who have abased their wives and considered them foolish to honor them for having saved lives. Even though women are fragile in body and tender in complexion, they are often more virile and constant in mind than many men reputed for their knowledge and judgment.⁸⁴ Although Thibault's astrological explanation for the 'Ladies' Peace' seems to express a highly personal view, the opposition between a woman's fragile body and her strong mind, equated with virility, has a long history, sparking debates from the fourteenth through the sixteenth centuries.⁸⁵ To cite only one other example in reference to Louise, Jean Bouchet (1476–c. 1558), in his *Jugement poëtic de l'honneur femenin*, published in 1538, praises her as surpassing her gender and earning 'virile' honors, defeating more enemies through peace than the Roman general Pompey (106–46 BCE) ever did in combat.⁸⁶

In January 1529/30, Jean de Bourdigné (d. 1547) published his *Hystoire agregative des annalles et croniques d'Anjou*.⁸⁷ Printed in Paris by Antoine Couteau and Galliot du Pré for Charles de Boigne and Clément Alexandre of Angers, the work is a history of the world with emphasis on events that occurred in the regions of Maine and Anjou, of which Louise is duchess and the author a native son. The vellum presentation copy contains an illuminated frontispiece that proclaims the power of Louise and the importance of her role in politics (Fig. 3.3).⁸⁸ In a lofty, vaulted chamber, the author kneels before Louise and presents to her a large volume on which is inscribed a Latin phrase: 'A work dedicated to the divine Pallas of Savoy'.⁸⁹ Madame, dressed in her widow's garb, is seated on a high-backed chair, beneath the arms of Anjou, which are suspended from the arch above. To her right are seated noblemen, princes of blood or of the sword, who during the reign of François I dominated the Council.⁹⁰ In the woodcut underlying the painting, they are represented wearing armor and the collar of St. Michael, but the collars have been overpainted with colored tunics in the miniature. Three of the noblemen have a ducal crown, while the

84 'selon leur esperit sont souvent plus viriles et constantes que ne sont plusieurs hommes que l'on estime de grande science et jugement', fol. 12^r.

85 It would appear that the treatise did not circulate widely: only one edition is known, with five extant copies. See note 80.

86 'honneurs / Non seulement femenins, mais virilles', Bouchet, p. 227, v. 901; 'A surmonté par paix plus d'ennemys, / Que par combatz ne fait onques Pompee (p. 228, vv. 931–32).

87 M.B. Winn, 2007, p. 269; M.B. Winn and Wilson-Chevalier, p. 242; Crépin-Leblond and Barbier, p. 132.

88 BnF, Rés. Vélins 761, fol. ā4^v.

89 'Dive Sabaudiensi paladi dicatus labor', fol. ā4^v.

90 Michon, 2011, p. 71.

Figure 3.3 Jean de Bourdigné, *Hystoire agregative des annalles et croniques d'Anjou*



Paris: A. Couteau and G. Du Pré for Ch. de Boigne and C. Alexandre of Angers, 1529 [1530] Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Rés. Vélins 761, fol. 34^v

fourth, who holds a scroll in his hand and whose armor is gold, has a crown of fleurs-de-lis, identifying him perhaps as the *dauphin* François. To her left are seated the clergy, including two bishops and a cardinal. Behind them sit councillors in long robes, their square hats indicating university degrees. Facing them are councillors with plumed hats, representing the bourgeoisie and merchants.⁹¹ No longer is this a court of ladies, as in previous dedication miniatures, but rather a masculine assembly, a group of male councillors who participate, under Louise's direction, in the government of the realm and the appointment of officers. Until her death in 1531 and in addition to the periods of her regencies, Louise is an *alter rex* who, as Cédric Michon has amply demonstrated, controlled the Council.⁹² Completing the scene are the two biblical heroines earlier cited by both Le Blanc and Thibault: Judith and Esther. They too participate in Louise's government. On the side of the noblemen, Judith, accompanied by the inscription 'Judith liberator of the country', stands beneath the arms of Angoulême; on the side of the clerics, Esther, beneath the arms of Savoy, is identified as 'Esther savior of the people'.⁹³ Both women were celebrated for freeing their people, as the inscriptions in the frontispiece underscore. As mediators, both were also considered prefigurations of the Virgin. It is not surprising therefore that they are among the biblical heroines most often invoked as models by the queens of France.

If Louise asserted her power by association with a previous female regent of France, Blanche of Castile, and with the biblical heroines Judith and Esther, she relied also on astrological signs. The 1529 Peace of Cambrai was, according to Thibault, achieved because the stars and planets were aligned under a female sign, enabling the two dominant princesses of the opposing realms of France and the Empire to bring an end to war. It was another celestial event that supposedly alerted Louise to her approaching death. The celebrated memorialist Pierre de Bourdeille, known as Brantôme (c. 1537–1614), records that three days before her death, Louise saw a comet from her window and interpreted it as a sign:

91 We thank Cédric Michon, Robert J. Knecht, and David L. Potter for helping to identify this scene.

92 Michon, 2011, p. 85. The frontispiece is closely related to those of the *Second volume de la première partie du blason d'armoiries*, a work composed in 1520 by Jean Le Féron (Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal, ms. 5255, fol. 2^r) or the *Traité sur l'art de la guerre* of Bérault Stuart d'Aubigny, completed before 1525 (Yale University, Beinecke ms. 695, fol. 2^r). For Le Féron's frontispiece, see <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b55008900v/f5.image> (accessed 30 July 2018); for Bérault, <https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3442866> (accessed 30 July 2018).

93 'Judie patrie liberatrix', 'Hester salvatrix populi', fol. ā4^v.

And suddenly, opening her curtain, she saw a comet that shed light right on her bed. 'Ha! she said, there is a sign that does not appear for people of low estate. God makes it appear for us great men and women. Close the window again: that is a comet that announces my death [...] [...] And three days later, leaving the dreams of the world, she died.⁹⁴

The editor, Maurice Rat, notes that the time in question was three weeks rather than three days, the comet being visible only from 6 August to 7 September 1531, and Louise's death occurring on 22 September.⁹⁵ That did not prevent contemporary authors from evoking the comet in their epitaphs for Louise. Jean de Vauzelles (c. 1495–c. 1557) composed a *Theatre de françoise desolation* in which he writes that her nobility merited a flamboyant sign in the heavens to foretell of her death.⁹⁶ Victor Brodeau (1500?–1540) likewise asserts that the comet signaled Louise's importance, equal to that of a great prince or monarch.⁹⁷ The various epitaphs, both Latin and French, composed for her and published soon after her death, do not cite the heroines who had been referenced during her lifetime, but they praise Louise for having saved her country and brought peace.⁹⁸ François himself penned the first poem included in the collection, and he summarized in a few lines his mother's claim to fame. Addressing her, he writes that she has triumphed 'by saving [her] honor, country and [her] child' and by achieving peace.⁹⁹ As such, she was the worthy successor to Judith and Esther, and to Blanche of Castile. 'Daughter of Virtue, Regent of Honor', Louise de Savoie was the 'Mother of the king, of the French and of France'.¹⁰⁰

94 'Et soudain, faisant ouvrir son rideau, elle vid une comette qui esclairoit ainsi droit sur son lit. "Ha! dit-elle, voilà un signe qui ne paroist pas pour personnes de basse qualité. Dieu le fait paroistre pour nous autres grands et grandes. Refermez la fenestre: c'est une comette qui m'annonce la mort [...]" [...] Et puis, au bout de trois jours, quittant les songes du monde, trespassa,' Bourdeille, p. 282.

95 Bourdeille, p. 503, n. 657. See BnF, ms. it. 1714, missives from Venetian ambassadors concerning France, fol. 137; Chatenet, p. 155.

96 *Theatre de françoise desolation sur le Trespas de la tres auguste Loyse: louable admiration de Savoye & de feminine gloire: represante d'ung vray zele* (Lyons: 10 Nov [1531]); the only known copy is now at the Biblioteca Colombina in Seville.

97 Brodeau, p. 103.

98 *In Lodoicæ Regis Matris mortem*.

99 '[...] avez triumphe du malheur triumpfant / En sauvant vostre Honneur, Pays et vostre Enfant, / En guerre soustenant avec la Paix reduicte / Par vostre grant vertu et tressaige conduite', *In Lodoicæ Regis Matris mortem*, fol. A4.

100 'Fille a dame Vertus, & Regente D'honneur [...], Mere du Roy, des François, & de France, 'Complainte de M.A.D.L.' (Adrien de Launoy), *In Lodoicæ Regis Matris mortem*, fol. B6, vv. 24, 36.

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