

GENDERING THE LATE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLD



Edited by Susan Broomhall

# Women and Power at the French Court, 1483-1563

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

## Women and Power at the French Court, 1483–1563

# Gendering the Late Medieval and Early Modern World

Series editors: James Daybell (Chair), Victoria E. Burke, Svante Norrhem, and Merry Wiesner-Hanks

This series provides a forum for studies that investigate women, gender, and/or sexuality in the late medieval and early modern world. The editors invite proposals for book-length studies of an interdisciplinary nature, including, but not exclusively, from the fields of history, literature, art and architectural history, and visual and material culture. Consideration will be given to both monographs and collections of essays. Chronologically, we welcome studies that look at the period between 1400 and 1700, with a focus on any part of the world, as well as comparative and global works. We invite proposals including, but not limited to, the following broad themes: methodologies, theories and meanings of gender; gender, power and political culture; monarchs, courts and power; constructions of femininity and masculinity; gift-giving, diplomacy and the politics of exchange; gender and the politics of early modern archives; gender and architectural spaces (courts, salons, household); consumption and material culture; objects and gendered power; women's writing; gendered patronage and power; gendered activities, behaviours, rituals and fashions.

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*Edited by*  
*Susan Broomhall*

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Cover image: Ms-5116 réserve, fol. 1 v (détail): Claude de France recevant un manuscrit des mains d'Anne de Graille. © Bibliothèque nationale de France

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden

Lay-out: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 94 6298 342 7

e-ISBN 978 90 4853 340 4 (pdf)

DOI 10.5117/9789462983427

NUR 685

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# In the Orbit of the King

Women, Power, and Authority at the French Court,  
1483–1563

*Susan Broomhall*

## Abstract

This essay provides both an assessment of the most recent historiography of women and power in early modern Europe and also explores possibilities for new analyses of power and authority through the lens of gender studies and broadening interpretations of politics and power in cultural, social and material forms. It situates the studies to follow in the collection in relation to a burgeoning scholarship on courts in early modern Europe and highlights the distinctions of the contemporary French experience that this volume reveals.

**Keywords:** women, power, authority, emotions, cultural politics, male rule

Towards the end of 1563, Catherine de Médicis (1519–1589) drafted a lengthy memoir intended for her son, Charles IX (1550–1574). The young man was about to assume rule of the French kingdom from his mother. Growing religious tensions across the court and country made it a challenging time to establish the authority of an inexperienced sovereign. Catherine's advice to the young man looked back to the past, to the reigns of three predecessors, his father Henri II (1519–1559), his grandfather François I (1494–1547), and Louis XII (1462–1515). Catherine set out a code of courtly conduct that was social, spatial, and emotional, promising to assert Charles's royal authority by outlining to him 'what I consider necessary to have you obeyed by all your realm, and [...] to see it in the state that it was in the past, during the reigns of the kings your father and grandfather'.<sup>1</sup> Advising her son, Catherine

<sup>1</sup> 'ce que j'estime aussi nécessaire pour vous faire obéir à tout vostre royaume, et [...] le revoir en l'estat auquel il a esté par le passé, durent les règnes des Rois Messeigneurs vos père

narrated a golden age of past male rulers in a highly emotive visualization of Charles as the latest in a long lineage of successful kings.<sup>2</sup>

However, this age to which Catherine could look back fondly was also a time when contemporaries had firmly recognized the power and influence of leading women and their networks, in religious affairs, key literary and artistic endeavors, and over the governance of the kingdom. Antonio de Beatis, secretary of Cardinal Luigi d'Aragon, recorded from his observation of the court during 1517 that François I's mother, Louise de Savoie (1476–1531), wielded 'absolute power' over the royal couple.<sup>3</sup> During his visit to the king in Rouen, among the few he identified by name, de Beatis observed Louise and her sister, Philiberte, with Queen Claude, who he specifically noted was treated with 'great respect and honor' by the king.<sup>4</sup> At Gaillon, he observed that a number of the senior men resided in surrounding villages, including his employer, the cardinal, 'because he could not stay in the palace, even though there were numerous rooms, because of the quantity of lords and ladies who escorted Queen Claude and the queen mother'.<sup>5</sup> Salic law, and the assertion of agnatic primogeniture for the French throne, might have determined that ultimate authority to rule France lay with men, but this did not preclude women from visible influence and authority at the court.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, Catherine's first years at the French court, and the memories of it that she imparted to her son Charles, had been in the orbit of these very women de Beatis observed at first hand.<sup>7</sup> That they could work together, independently or in opposition, to achieve their objectives she knew well. Catherine had been among another, later, group of women that included François's sister, Marguerite d'Angoulême (1492–1549), his daughter Marguerite de Valois (1523–1574), his mistress Anne d'Heilly de Pisseleu (1508–1580), Duchess of Étampes, and Marguerite de Bourbon-Vendôme, Duchess of

et grand-père', La Ferrière-Percy, p. 91. There are competing views about the date of this text. However, Cosandey, 2016 (p. 61, n. 4) presents compelling evidence to place it just after the proclamation of the majority of Charles IX in 1563.

2 For a more detailed analysis of this text, see Broomhall, 2018b, pp. 87–104.

3 'un pouvoir absolu', Beatis, p. 137.

4 'beaucoup de respect et d'honneur', Beatis, p. 136.

5 'parce qu'elle [Sa Seigneurie] ne pouvait pas rester dans le palais, bien que les chambres y fussent nombreuses, à cause de la quantité de seigneurs et de dames qui faisaient escorte à la reine Claude et à la reine mère', Beatis, p. 145.

6 A range of scholars has debated the precise political and cultural contexts in which Salic law came to be applied in the French context. See Hanley, 1997a; Hanley, 1997b; Hanley, 1997c; Cosandey, 2000, Chap. 1; Viennot; Conroy; Taylor.

7 On Catherine's development from duchess to *dauphine* during the reign of François I, see Broomhall, 2017a.

Nevers (1516–1589), who in the late 1530s formed a tight-knit textual and emotional community of care and concern for the king at court.<sup>8</sup> In Catherine's experience, even a king's mistresses could be part of its orderly system of power. In the 1580s, she recalled that the courtly conduct of her husband's acknowledged mistress Diane de Poitiers (1499–1566), 'was, as with Madame d'Étampes, all honorable, but he [Henri] would have been very annoyed if I had retained close to me those who were so silly as to tear apart [the good order of the court]'.<sup>9</sup> Here and elsewhere, Catherine remembered leading women as integral to a powerful courtly system that she sought to re-create with her son, strong, courteous, and cultivated, at its heart. In this schema, the court's female members were vital participants in the establishment of a particular culturally sophisticated emotional community.<sup>10</sup>

Catherine's reflections came as she looked back over her experiences at the French court into which she had been acculturated as a young woman, when older women had transferred to her systems of knowledge about court conduct and access to influence and authority as they claimed to have experienced them. In time, Catherine's own courtly world would be immortalized in print, thanks to figures such as Pierre de Bourdeille, seigneur de Brantôme (c. 1540–1614).<sup>11</sup> But even her own writing pointed to fractures in the good order of the past that she envisaged for her son. Courtly order of the kind she strove for demanded continual efforts, especially in artistic representations, literary narratives, leisure pursuits, and political policies, to direct courtiers' attention to her goals. These forms of power were coupled with an exceptional emotional control. This encompassed careful performances of feelings, for, as Catherine later confided, 'If I made good cheer for Madame de Valentinois [Diane de Poitiers], it was the King that I was really entertaining [...] for never did a woman who loved her husband succeed in loving his whore'.<sup>12</sup> Women's emotional strategies also involved cultivating networks within and beyond the court, which became their own kind of power. Catherine's varied ruminations highlight the complexities of

8 Broomhall, 2017a.

9 'De Madame de Valentinois, c'estèt, comme Madame d'Estampes, en tout honneur; mais celes qui estoient si folles que d'en fayre voler les esclats, yl eust esté bien marry que je les eusse retenues auprès de moy', Bagueuault de Puchesse, p. 36.

10 On Catherine's concern for morale, see Zum Kolk, 2006; Zum Kolk, 2009a; Zum Kolk, 2009b; McIlvenna; Broomhall, 2017b.

11 Adams, 2016.

12 25 April 1584. 'cet je fèse bonne chère à madame de Valantynnois, c'estoyt le Roy, et encore je luy fésèt tousjours conestre que s'étoyt à mon très grent regret: car jeamès fame qui aymèt son mary n'éma sa puteyn', Bagueuault de Puchesse, p. 181. See further discussion in Broomhall, 2018a.

women's forms of power and authority at the French court that she knew, power that operated through careful emotional management, political and religious engagements, creative visual representations, and narratives voiced with the pen and in print. These forms of power may have been unstable, uncertain, and transient, just as they were for most men below the level of the monarch, but they were no less effective and real, and they made meaning and authority both for those within the court and those beyond it in geography, culture, and time.

### **Women, Power, and Early Modern Court Communities**

This collection explores these ways that a range of women under the rule of a male sovereign interacted with power, principally from within the French court, in order to advance individual, familial, and factional agendas. They did so from a range of positions that extend from holding official courtly status as consorts and regents, to influential and persuasive roles such as mistresses, factional power players and authors. Recent scholarship has demonstrated the important political work conducted by women as ladies-in-waiting, members of household staff with significant responsibilities, as mediators and go-betweens, spies, communication nodes and networkers, and in circles of female involvement in factions around a monarch, in addition to both queen consorts and regnants.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, at the French court, some women studied here worked from within the courtly household, as attendants residing at court, such as lady-in-waiting and insightful writer Anne de Graville (c. 1490–c. 1543). However, women's activities, just as those of men, also extended beyond the courtly domain, as they advanced family and dynastic ambitions, publicized ideas and opinions in letters, scribal texts, and print publications, and conducted diplomatic work in a number of ways. Scholars have shown how women utilized forms of power operating through letters, artwork, clothing, embroidery, or through their participation in gift-giving, fostering, patronage, diplomatic roles, and via social and communication networks.<sup>14</sup> This was also the case in relation to the French court. Moreover, the court was both highly visible, and to some extent and in

13 Recent examples include Zum Kolk, 2009a; Zum Kolk, 2009b; Akkerman and Houben; Walker and Kerr.

14 In addition to studies already cited, see also Frye and Robertson; Tarbin and Broomhall; Campbell, Larsen, and Eschrich; Campbell Orr, 2002a; Campbell Orr, 2004; Herbert; Palos and Sánchez; Daybell and Gordon, Watanabe-O'Kelly and Morton.

some modes permeable, to those who did not physically make contact with the king or reside in proximity to him. The published author H elisenne de Crenne (c. 1510–c. 1560) interacted from beyond the court with high-status individuals at its heart by offering her work as a gift to the sovereign. As a whole, these women’s means to assert their authority were varied, but included involvement in high politics and religious movements, financial transactions, ritual and ceremonies, epistolary exchanges, creative composition and translations, emotional self-management, development of networks of sociability, and sartorial, artistic, and architectural engagements as forms of power. Some of those considered here were perceived by contemporaries and historians to have successfully advanced the agendas that they chose to pursue. Recognition of their achievements has sometimes been voiced, however, as fears, concerns, and criticism. Other women discussed here have received little attention as political protagonists of the early sixteenth century. In this collection, we review the opportunities and actions of diverse women interacting with the court in different circumstances and consider their possibilities for asserting and wielding power.

These women operated with those who were at the apex of authority, in particular the male monarch who was the symbolic center of rule and the court personnel who supported him in that role. Some were queens consort and regents, two official positions for women that have received important attention from scholars in recent years. Not only have the individual women who occupied these roles gained more recognition as significant political actors in their own right, but so too has the complexity of their roles as agents of cultural transfer from natal dynasties to new courts, or as nodes for ongoing cultural exchange, as Helen Watanabe-O’Kelly has recently argued.<sup>15</sup> Yet individual women did not occupy only these roles but could transition through these and other positions and identities during their time at a court. Catherine de M ed ecis, for example, arrived at the French court as a young duchess, assumed the title of *dauphine* after the death of her husband’s elder brother, became a mother, was queen consort to Henri II, acted as his regent, was widowed, and performed on further occasions as governor of the kingdom and close adviser for her sons as the queen mother. Other women of interest here did not participate in courtly life through official positions, although their influence on the king and courtly culture was widely acknowledged by contemporaries. This includes particular mistresses such as Anne de Pisseleu and Diane de Poitiers, who were able to translate emotional intimacy with the monarch into more sustained forms

15 Watanabe-O’Kelly, pp. 231–49.

of influence and authority. These women were not isolated individuals, but were firmly integrated into court life, interacting with women and men in official positions in the court hierarchy. Similarly, those women like Graville and Crenne who wrote manuscript and printed works from or in communication with courtiers were also important in shaping court life through their writings, although only some held official appointments at the court.

To capture these complex social, cultural, political, religious, and emotional interactions, the focus of this collection is on women's varied forms of power, their scope for achievement and its outcomes at the French court, understood here as a complex conceptual community, which was movable in physical space and which had its own particular traditions and conventions. It involved elites and service personnel in close proximity with the royal family through official appointments as well as emotional engagements that created opportunities for physical intimacy with rulers and others.<sup>16</sup> The court could convey stability and a coherent set of interests at one level, yet also encompassed many competing interests that continually changed with altered social circumstances and political manoeuvres. It also disseminated its culture and ideologies to a wider populace both physically on progress and in ceremonial entries, and in visual and textual terms depicting the court in media programs that were, in some cases, of the court's making and in others, beyond its control.<sup>17</sup> The power of the French court and its leading women and men, then, reached far beyond its physical form, gaining influence and producing consequences well beyond the borders of the kingdom.

### **The Court as Disseminator of Female Forms of Power**

These essays focus on the French court in an influential period that was book-ended by two female regencies: commencing in 1483 with that of Anne de France (1461–1522) for her young brother, Charles VIII (1470–1498), and concluding with that of Catherine de Médicis for another Charles, her son Charles IX (1550–1574), in 1563. The end date of this collection is not intended to suggest necessarily a change in the nature of women's forms of power or their authority at the French court under the reign of Charles IX and

16 See Zum Kolk, 2009a; Zum Kolk, 2009b; Akkerman and Houben.

17 For conceptualizations of the early modern court and its culture, see Adamson; Campbell Orr, 2002b, pp. 24–32; Cosandey, 2016, pp. 16–18.

beyond, although our period of interest does offer a certain coherence of courtly orientation around French engagement in the Italian Wars, before the period of the civil and religious wars of the second half of the sixteenth century. Furthermore, the French court of this period formed an influential model of how women could draw upon a number of forms of power in order to access authority, and its practices and its assumptions about women's significance as interlocutors at court were passed down and across Europe over time.

Limited by the interpretation of Salic law from rule as reigning monarchs, women were nonetheless appointed as regents by monarchs and their senior male councillors, on multiple occasions during this eighty-year period, as the wives, daughters, and mothers of kings. It was moreover a topic on which women confidently expressed their own ideas and disseminated those of other female authors.<sup>18</sup> It was not the first time that women had been regents and held positions of central influence in France and, as the essays here show, literature including that by Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) which narrated particular predecessors such as Blanche of Castile (1188–1252) and Isabeau of Bavaria (1371–1435) was a vital part of building a repertoire of strategies of authority that women in this era could employ, and that they disseminated as practices of power to others thereafter.<sup>19</sup>

However, it was not merely their significance as regents that determines our work's focus on this time period but also women's activities as diplomats, authors, educators, patrons, and as political and religious factional leaders. In these years, the French court was a noted center of culture, representative of the kingdom's international prestige and ambitions, in which a range of leading women, in positions of power around the monarch that were both formally recognized and informally understood, enjoyed significant influence and authority. During the 22 years that she was twice queen at the French court, Anne de Bretagne (1477–1514), as the heir to the then independent Duchy of Brittany, consort to two monarchs, Charles VIII and Louis XII, continued the court's status as a famed school for educating elite young women that Anne de France had fostered. Nowhere was this more visibly rendered than at the Ladies' Peace (1529), secured by two trainees of Anne de France, Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) and Louise de Savoie negotiating on behalf of Habsburg Emperor Charles V (1500–1558) and François I respectively.

18 Adams, 2015.

19 Adams and Rechtschaffen; Adams, 2009.



The French court became renowned for a kind of female civilizing influence, and a courtly discourse and activities that assumed the participation of women. Several of the most influential works of Christine de Pizan, including the *City of Ladies* and *Othea*, were held in the library of Anne de France, and other women at the court also both possessed and commissioned print and manuscript editions of other works about women in power.<sup>20</sup> Anne de Graille, lady-in-waiting to Queen Claude de France (1499–1524), demanded greater consideration of women's voices and her scribally circulated works foregrounded courtly women as active interlocutors with their own opinions rather than simply as muses of men. In addition to manuscripts, a number of works by Pizan were printed as incunabula in France (albeit not always with reference to her name or sex).<sup>21</sup> Moreover, women at the court began to feature in print publications during this period, spreading female courtly visibility and audibility far and wide. In the first half of the sixteenth century, many of the living women whose works were printed were connected to the court, and the impact of their conspicuousness in print is powerfully suggested by the large increase of the number of female authors in print in the second half of the century.<sup>22</sup>

The French court was at this period the training ground for a number of aristocratic women who went on to shape political life across Europe. That women played a key role in international relations and diplomacy is now well understood, especially as consorts, and the manner in which they transferred ideas and cultural trends through transnational ties has been studied in considerable depth. Adam Morton adopts the term 'cultural encounters' to capture the rich and dynamic array of exchanges and entanglements that royal marriages, and queens consort in particular, enabled between different territories.<sup>23</sup> But women at the French court did not only play such roles as cultural agents when they moved beyond it as brides, but also, for example, as educators of a wider circle of aristocratic women and through their writings. Moreover, the cultural practices that they took with them included significant ideas about the important role of women in courtly life and their sustained involvement in its artistic, literary, religious, and political activities. Margaret of Austria was raised at the French court, under the watchful eye of Anne de France, in expectation that she would become bride to Anne's brother, Charles VIII, a marriage that did not eventuate. English

20 Schutz, p. 74. See generally, Tolley; Broomhall, 2007.

21 Brown.

22 See Broomhall, 2002a.

23 Morton; see also Hufton, p. 5; Campbell Orr, 2004; Sluga and James; Cruz and Stampino.

interactions increased with Mary Tudor Brandon (1496–1533) who became queen consort to Louis XII. These included, perhaps most famously, Anne Boleyn (c. 1501–1536). From a distance, her daughter Elizabeth I (1533–1603) imbibed the formidable voice and spiritual ideas of Marguerite d'Angoulême through her translation of the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (first published in Alençon in 1531), which the young princess offered to her stepmother Catherine Parr (1512–1548) as a New Year's gift, embroidered with the queen's initials, in 1545, and which was then printed multiple times.<sup>24</sup> The influence of the reform-minded Marguerite d'Angoulême on other elite women in Protestant England was publicly disseminated with the funerary poems by the Seymour sisters, Anne, Margaret, and Jane, who composed over a hundred Latin distichs at the queen's death, which were published in France first in Latin in 1550 and then subsequently in a French edition.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, Marie de Guise (1515–1560), who had resided at the French court in her teens alongside Madeleine de Valois (1520–1537), the daughter of François I and Claude de France, later served as regent in Scotland for her young daughter, Mary Queen of Scots (1542–1587). The latter was educated under the watchful eye of Catherine de Médicis and Diane de Poitiers at the French court. The royal daughter with whom Mary shared her room, Elisabeth de Valois (1545–1568), would later take her French courtly training to the Spanish court, as bride of Philip II of Spain (1527–1598). There, Catherine de Médicis continued to engage her daughter, husband and their two daughters, in ongoing emotional and cultural ties with the French court, and to Valois dynastic interests, through correspondence.<sup>26</sup> Renée de France (1510–1575), daughter of Anne de Bretagne and sister of another French queen, Claude, went to Ferrara as bride to Ercole II d'Este (1508–1559), from where she continued to promulgate her Protestant beliefs through lavish artistic and textual commissions. Marguerite de Valois, named for her aunt Marguerite d'Angoulême, and sister-in-law of Catherine de Médicis, took the extensive learning for which she was praised by contemporaries to Savoy, where she became duchess as wife of Emmanuel Philibert of Savoy (1528–1580).

These patterns of cultural transfer to other elite environments of female religious creative, literary, religious, and political engagement as forms of power and authority at the French court continued after the period studied

24 Navarre, 1548. See also Prescott; Snyder.

25 Seymour, 1550; Seymour, 1551. Published in English in Hosington; see also Stevenson and Davidson.

26 Broomhall, 2002b; Broomhall, 2015c; Broomhall, 2015b.

here. Another Elisabeth, Elisabeth de Bourbon (1602–1644), became a further Spanish consort, as wife of Philip IV (1605–1665), in the early seventeenth century, while her sister, Christine Marie (1606–1663), married Victor Amadeus I of Savoy (1587–1637). Both women would later act as regents, Elisabeth while her husband was occupied with the revolt in Catalonia and Christine Marie for eleven years on behalf of two of her sons.<sup>27</sup> Their youngest sister also married out from the French court and was seen by contemporary commentators to have brought many of its courtly cultural forms, as well as fervent faith practices, with her, as Queen Henrietta Maria (1609–1669), consort to Charles I of England, Scotland, and Ireland (1600–1649).<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, the French court was itself enriched by female influences brought from elsewhere. In the period of the Italian Wars, foreign brides came to the French court as part of diplomatic solutions to military interventions. As such, they were as much ‘figures of suture’ as the ambassadors that Timothy Hampton has described in these terms; their royal marriages bringing together respective sides after times of war as acts of healing.<sup>29</sup> Burgundian and Habsburg courtly practices shaped both Louise de Savoie and Eleanor of Austria (1498–1558), mother and second wife of François I respectively, who were trained at the court of Margaret of Austria. Catherine de Médicis, consort of Henri II, brought cultural influences from the Florentine and Roman environments in which she had been raised, adding to the many Italian artistic and cultural innovations transferred with French involvement in the Italian Wars. As regent, in 1526, Louise de Savoie oversaw the first steps towards a French alliance with the Ottomans, which endured through much of the century and generated a profound appreciation among female leaders of the French court for exotic material, cultural artefacts and even individuals. Two young women from the Ottoman Empire were raised in the households of Catherine de Médicis and her sister-in-law, Marguerite de Valois.

In the seventeenth century, new female regents in France, Marie de Médicis and Anne of Austria, would look back to the experience of courtly women during this period, as well as those they knew from their home environments, in order to formulate their own, often similar, forms of power to be applied in new social and political contexts. Jean-François Dubost argues that Marie looked for inspiration to her forebear Catherine de

27 On Elisabeth, see studies by Oliván Santaliestra, 2013a; Oliván Santaliestra, 2013b; Oliván Santaliestra, 2014. The activities of Christine Marie are discussed in *Oresko*.

28 Griffey, 2008; and Griffey, 2015. See Bell on the influence of Marie de’ Medici on her daughter.

29 Hampton, p. 9.

Médicis through cultural leadership at court and artistic and architectural patronage that could translate into political actions and authority both as regent and then as mother of a king.<sup>30</sup> Marie faced challenging circumstances in a different political context and the strengthening ideology of absolutism. Nonetheless, models of women with power and authority such as Catherine de Médicis and Louise de Savoie who were regents in times of a king's military engagements would assist her to act in a similar role.<sup>31</sup> Marie's dominating role through the reign of her son mirrored much that was familiar to the actions of Catherine, and as dowagers heavily involved in the arts, Catherine, Marie, and, in her turn, Anne, seem to have formed models for later powerful women in similar positions, such as Hedwig Eleonora in Sweden.<sup>32</sup> Through the movement of women, and the exposure of their voices and visual representations, female forms of power and access to authority that were practiced at the French court in this period were spread far and wide, where they could be adopted and adapted by other women.

### Gender, Politics, and Power

The French court was a significant contributor to wider European courtly culture of its time and generative of new ideas and examples of women's powers and authority. Therefore, it is important to bring analysis of the French court more fully into the current literature. This volume brings together scholars from both Anglophone and Francophone traditions of scholarship on elite women in early modern France, making the most recent research available in an English-language collection. Individual women have been treated with these questions in mind only in a more dispersed manner to date, in collections with generally broad chronological scope.<sup>33</sup> The questions and focus that drive this investigation sit squarely within a burgeoning multidisciplinary scholarship that has been produced with consideration of the relationships between gender, the political, power, and authority over the past few years. For the early modern period, there has been concerted attention to such a lens applied to a range of dynasties

30 In the context of the relationship of their regencies with *Parlement* and the Estates General, see Hanley, 1983, Chaps. 10–12, pp. 231–306; Dubost, 2009a; and the discussion of Marie in the third section of Cosandey, 2000: 'Souveraineté et dignité'.

31 Dubost, 2009b, p. 45.

32 Neville and Skogh, p. 10.

33 See, for example, Viennot; Schaub and Poutrin; Santinelli-Foltz and Nayt-Dubois.

and courts.<sup>34</sup> We explore what forms of power were available to women interacting with the French court in this period. What was the scope for achievement of these forms? What domains of activity — financial, political, religious, or otherwise — did they involve? And what were women's successes in achieving these goals? What did agency, 'success' or the achievement of authority look like, to contemporaries and to twenty-first century scholars?

This collection explores power available to women at the French court, considering its many forms, women's capacity to act through them, their ability to realize goals, and to manoeuvre to their advantage (through their own actions by asserting themselves over others) in a range of domains. Understanding power in this way is complex, as it conceptualizes it in flexible and dynamic (as well as context-specific) terms. The evidence here points to the analytical value of power theorizations that consider relational and dynamic concepts of power as it has been expressed in the works of Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, feminist interventions such as those of Iris Marion Young, Nancy Hartsock, and Mary Caputi fruitfully propose notions of empowerment and models of power that are more transformative than dominating; that is, providing agency and the 'power-to,' and collaborative power forms that consider 'power-with'.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, comprehending how forms of power foster the possibility of authority creates further entanglement since power and authority can be mutually reinforcing and enabling. Some forms of power provide authority, while authoritative status appears to legitimize access to yet other kinds of power. But there were also systemic structures of power in operation, which made forms of power more than practices for women to employ according to their individual circumstances. The prevailing social and cultural structure of the period also governed women's (and men's) possibilities to act, assert, persuade, or dominate. The specifics of the courtly system also imposed a further set of rules and regulations that could on the one hand reinforce the wider social structure and, on the other, subvert it. For example, the ways in which emotional connections could provide some women with a conduit to agency, as a mistress to a king, was one such subversion of wider

34 Levin and Bucholz; Calvi and Chabot; Broomhall and Van Gent, 2011a; Cruz and Stampino; Sluga and James; Broomhall and Van Gent, 2016; Daybell and Norrhem, 2016b. The works published in the series 'Queenship and Power' edited by Charles Beem and Carole Levin by Palgrave/Springer likewise participate in this scholarship.

35 Dreyfus and Rabinow, including Foucault's 'Afterword: The Subject and Power,' pp. 208–28; Giddens.

36 See Hartsock; Hirschmann and Di Stefano; Young; Wartenberg; Caputi; Allen.

social expectations that was nonetheless tolerated at the court under many a sovereign.

Often drawing upon theories and concepts developed in sociological and anthropological literature, scholars now look beyond 'high politics' in order to embrace a wide range of acts and agency by both women and subordinate men in environments of power. In relation to such ideas, gender scholars of the early modern period have increasingly questioned the viability of distinctions such as 'private' and 'public' in terms of considering the political work of women and men, especially in courtly environments. Scholars' conceptualizations of arenas of official, formal, and informal political activities render these complex, sometimes overlapping forms and their utility for analysis ambiguous. James Daybell and Svante Norrhem have recently considered the inflection of gender in 'political culture', a broad-ranging term that encompasses 'modus operandi, spaces and institutions, underlying structures and ideas, practices and protocols'.<sup>37</sup> As Merry Wiesner Hanks observes, this term importantly breaks down any conceptual divide between the political and the cultural.<sup>38</sup> In the wider literature on early modern diplomacy, the cultural aspects of political work are also being given renewed attention under the term 'soft power'.<sup>39</sup> Yet there is perhaps a risk that the terminology of hard/soft power, just as formal/informal and high/other politics or public/private, continues to perpetuate gender and other divisions that were not understood in these terms by contemporaries. Given our interest in pursuing a broad conceptualization of women's forms of power, this collection is multidisciplinary in its perspectives, including studies by historians, art and literary scholars who shed light on the agency and authority of courtly women through examination of different kinds of activities and actions, political, religious, creative, literary, social, and emotional.

Great inroads in breaking down historiographical divisions have been made in the area of cultural patronage, including for women at court, now the subject of a large body of scholarship. As Erin Griffey argues in her recent study of the French-born Henrietta Maria, 'display permeated every aspect of the early modern court'; indeed, she argues, it was 'the materialization of authority'.<sup>40</sup> Women at the French court made extensive use of creative commissions in complex representations of their authority. Aubrée

37 Daybell and Norrhem, 2016b.

38 Wiesner-Hanks, p. 217.

39 See, for example, Rivère de Carles.

40 Griffey, 2015, p. 1.

David-Chapy argues here that Anne de France as regent for Charles VIII and Louise de Savoie for her son, François I, established access to high political decision-making not only through official recognition but also through close attention to the symbolic. Significantly, Christine de Pizan emerges as an important inspiration and guide for the models of female virtues that were foregrounded by these princesses. Erin A. Sadlack emphasizes that the cultural training of the French queen, Mary Tudor Brandon, during her brief marriage to Louis XII, primed her for such a role as an 'ambassador-queen'. Her analysis traces the formidable influence once again of Christine de Pizan through the libraries of Mary's female mentors and tapestry commissions. Laure Fagnart and Mary Beth Winn examine Louise de Savoie's commission of many texts and images to define her ambiguous status as mother of a king and as a regent. Fagnart and Winn identify the historical exemplars, biblical heroines, and astrological signs that Louise, neither the daughter of a king nor a consort, combined in pursuit of a compelling narrative of authority.

Lisa Mansfield argues that Eleanor of Austria was likewise adept at employing cultural politics that could assert an identity during her challenging time at the French court, using portraits in particular to locate herself politically and culturally within Habsburg dynastic networks. Discussions of Eleanor's actions as French queen have been limited by assumptions both contemporary and historical that Eleanor was overshadowed at court by François's mother, sister, and mistress, Anne de Pisseleu. Yet, Mansfield contends, during Eleanor's marriage to François, itself an outcome of the Ladies' Peace (1529) engineered by two powerful women, Margaret of Austria and Louise de Savoie, the queen adopted and adapted Margaret's strategic use of portraiture as political communication. Both of François I's wives, Claude and Eleanor, have been marginalized in historiography by the dominating presence of their husband, his mother, Louise de Savoie, and his sister, Marguerite d'Angoulême, who became Queen of Navarre in 1526. Yet Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier re-reads the symbolic power accrued in royal entries (as well as ambassadorial attention to Claude in gifts and interviews) as evidence that the queen consort was well understood in her lifetime as a key courtly figure.

Women's production of creative expressions was clearly a major and continuing form of power that sought to assert authority in the courtly realm. Cynthia J. Brown studies courtly women's attention to commissioning texts and illustrations, composition of new works, and print publication, including a primer given from one queen, Anne de Bretagne, to her daughter, another queen, Claude de France; a prayer book produced by Claude for her sister Renée de France; a comportment manual written by the regent Anne

de France for her daughter Suzanne de Bourbon (1491–1521) that Suzanne organized to have printed; a prayer book given as a gift by Louise de Savoie to her daughter Marguerite d'Angoulême; and Marguerite's work of short stories, the *Heptaméron*, which her daughter, Jeanne d'Albret (1528–1572), was instrumental in having published in a manner befitting her mother's authorial legacy. By contrast, Pollie Bromilow studies how the material, visual, and paratextual apparatus of Hélienne de Crenne's printed publications sought to establish a provincial woman's power to write and be read by female and male readers, even at the court, at a time when, as Brown's essay explores, such roles were more typically undertaken by elite women such as Suzanne de Bourbon and Jeanne d'Albret in service of the publication of their influential mothers' works.

As these examples suggest, a further form of power for these women was the dissemination of their own voices and ideas in manuscripts, letters, and printed editions. Wilson-Chevalier demonstrates how Queen Claude cultivated a flourishing literary culture that maintained the intervention of intelligent social interlocutors such as Anne de Graville, who dedicated her works to the queen. In her analysis of the writings of Anne de Graville, author and lady-in-waiting to Queen Claude, Mawy Bouchard examines a woman's conceptualization of social forms of power through language, speech, and gossip. As Bouchard argues, Graville provides a unique female perspective to contemporary debates about courtly modes of social interaction and women's capacity to think, talk, and decide. She pointedly emphasized the risks to women of courtly speech and conceptualized slander as a kind of rhetorical assault, but also proposed the possibilities of eloquence as a form of resistance for women. While Graville's scribally circulated works were dedicated to the queen, another female author sought courtly patronage by dedicating her works to the king, François. Pollie Bromilow's study of Hélienne de Crenne argues that her works held particular pedagogical value that could empower female readers and enable their participation in the culture of the book, actions that Bromilow argues were deeply political. Jonathan A. Reid extends this exploration into women's creative responses with specific consideration of Marguerite d'Angoulême's activities both at the court and beyond it. Marguerite modeled herself on female forebears: literary, such as the ever-present Pizan; spiritual (including Marguerite Porete (c. 1248/50–1310)); and political — and became, in turn, an exemplar for women after her. Thus, Marguerite acted as a key connection between many of the influential women studied by this volume, such as Anne de Bretagne, Louise de Savoie, Anne de Graville, Anne de Pisseleu, Catherine de Médicis among them, as well as others beyond the French court, such



as the Roman poet Vittoria Colonna (1490–1547) and Genevan religious reformer Marie Dentière (1495–1561).

A number of essays here also consider affective forms of power, in analyses of emotional self-management and the development of networks of sociability. Psychic power, they find, asserted over selves and others created significant consequences. Tracy Adams embeds her investigation of Anne de France within the current literature on elite networks and gift-giving as acts of reciprocal obligations, but extends the analysis by considering how emotions created a particular practice of gift-giving gendered feminine. She argues that Anne's gift-giving practice to other elite women constructed and cultivated distinct female emotional communities, networks of sociability, and gendered affects that did particular kinds of collaborative political work for (or, indeed, that constructed) Anne's exercise of power. Brown's analysis highlights the possibilities of female creativity and spiritual expression conveyed in texts and images transferred in a female lineage, of mother–daughter and sisterly relationships of feeling and acculturation sustained through lavishly illustrated manuscripts and printed texts. Mansfield demonstrates how Eleanor of Austria crafted a physical and sartorial connection in her portraits to a proud Habsburg heritage that resisted courtly hostilities and protected her psychologically by embedding her within a community of care. Sadlack argues that the correspondence of Mary Tudor Brandon attempted to establish alliances and influence at the French court that could be of value to her elder brother, Henry VIII (1491–1547). Diane de Poitiers's interactions, also through correspondence, as an authoritative protagonist both during and after the lifetime of Henri II, suggest a considered use of particular emotional expressions that were tailored to her recipients and topics of discussion. Such rhetoric and practice were vital to Diane, who, like Anne de Pisseleu beforehand, had a precarious status of authority founded upon emotional and sexual transactions that were unofficial and subject to a monarch's changing feelings and fortunes. Denis Crouzet's analysis of Catherine de Médicis's discursive activities as queen consort likewise emphasizes the important role of emotional articulation in developing a flexible political position from which she could advance the prerogatives of the Valois dynasty. As Crouzet argues, Catherine visualized her role as one of benevolence and harmony, and voiced in her letters her desire to act with gentleness and charity, as well as her capacity for fortitude.

Engagement with the dynamic religious politics of the French court was yet another form of power for women. The French court fostered generations of women deeply engaged in promoting religious values and movements.

At the turn of the century, Jeanne de France (1464–1505), divorced wife of Louis XII, founded a new monastic order, the Annonciades, that gathered together young ladies and spawned seven sister convents within 30 years.<sup>41</sup> Visible representations of religious devotion were a long-held avenue for elite female agency and one that many courtly women of this era maintained through financial contributions and in artistic and literary forms.<sup>42</sup> Brown's cross-generational analysis vividly demonstrates female networks of cultural power in which women were influential spiritual interlocutors. By the early sixteenth century, the influence of Protestant views sparked new religious divisions that infiltrated the courtly sphere. Accordingly, elite women's religious engagement began to take on new forms that included visible critique of institutional practices. Some women were closely tied to the religious reform movements within the Church. As Wilson-Chevalier argues in her study of Claude's spaces of agency, the queen attracted a coterie around her that was a counterpoint for those opposed in religious and political terms to the positions of her husband and mother-in-law. Furthermore, evidence emerges in both her choice of confessor and the works dedicated to her that Claude followed the spiritual path of her parents in favor of religious reform.

This reforming position would be advanced in different directions by other women in Claude's immediate environment, as evangelical support by Marguerite d'Angoulême, sustained tolerance by Marguerite de Valois, or espousing Protestantism as was the case for Anne Boleyn and Renée de France. Reid examines the letters and literary output of Marguerite d'Angoulême as well as court records to assess the challenges faced by a female courtier, albeit sister to a king and a queen in her own right, to assert and advance political and religious agendas of her choosing. He argues that Marguerite imaginatively exploited resources and pathways open to her, through courtly activities and writings that were circulated scribally and in print. If Claude de France, Marguerite d'Angoulême, and even Catherine de Médicis were all associated with evangelism during this period, other women became vital protagonists in the advancement of Protestant politics in France and beyond, such as Renée de France and Anne de Pisseleu who converted to the reformed faith. These leading women, perhaps especially

41 See Drèze, 1991; and Broomhall, 2008, pp. 10–15, 49–58.

42 The development of religious culture through the activities and patronage of princesses is an important aspect, and has been discussed elsewhere. Zum Kolk, 2016; Wilson-Chevalier. Wilson-Chevalier outlines the important early role of Claude de France in these reforming movements before the better-known involvement of Marguerite d'Angoulême.

two mistresses whose faith affiliations were diametrically opposed, played determining roles through their networks in the development of factional divisions at court. Diane de Poitiers (1499–1566), for example, advanced the cause of a hardline Catholic network, especially supporting the Guise dynasty to whom she was connected through her daughter's marriage. These factions remained powerful blocs that deeply affected the stability of the kingdom through the second half of the sixteenth century, long after both Pisseleu and Poitiers had left the court.

As can be seen, authors here focus on forms of power, artistic, cultural, creative, literary, emotional, religious, and political interventions, which encompassed and achieved not just formal political acts, but more broadly asserted the interests of women or others of their choosing, even to represent themselves or their sex in a beneficial way. These forms of power are difficult to separate neatly from each other; many worked hand in hand, or one form enabled another. Separately and collectively, they gave these women authority and influence. This suggests a nuance to the conclusion of a recent study edited by Eva Pibiri and Fanny Abbott in which they argue that power itself was masculine.<sup>43</sup> The essays here suggest that women had access to a range of forms of power, from involvement in political decisions, advancement of religious beliefs to commission of creative works, writing narratives of their own, and management of their own emotions and those of others as a potent force for action. These forms of power provided the possibilities for authority, largely understood by contemporaries to be a male preserve. Power and authority were, however, interconnected and often mutually enabling, complicating any overly sharp distinction in terms of the gendered nature of these concepts and their practice.

### Authority at the French Court

Realms of power informed and reinforced patterns of conduct across key organizational structures, making a study of women's actions at the French court, and the ideologies that surrounded them, pertinent to other contexts, such as print publication, religious institutions, and legal discourses. Read together, these essays reveal the complexities of elite women's agency at the

43 See Pibiri and Abbott, pp. vii–xiv. 'Le pouvoir était masculin, tout comme l'accès au sacré; y prétendre en tant que femme revenait à contrevenir à la norme. Seuls le caractère exceptionnel et le respect de critères temporels et constitutifs définés par des hommes permettaient de ne pas envisager une incursion féminine, dans ces domaines, comme une transgression'.

French court during this period. The majority of essays focus on individuals who were clearly symbolically at the apex of the courtly hierarchy and others who, through a variety of means and circumstances, enjoyed influence and were able to assert at least some of their own agendas or those of their families and favorites. Nonetheless, each of the studies also emphasizes the active cultural work in visual, textual, and material forms and the social and emotional labor that these women were engaged in to justify, shore up, or advance their capacity for influence at the court. Legitimacy to act in many courtly contexts was precarious and limited. This points to a fundamental difference between the relationship of women and authority, and that of men and authority. Whether as consorts, regents, mothers of kings, or as women employing forms of power in the female voice in manuscript and print, women had to insist upon their right to speak, act, and determine, because it was not assumed.<sup>44</sup> Men too were actively building up their authority and insisted upon their status as men of influence, but women by contrast were repeatedly asserting their fundamental right to wield these forms of power at the same time as they were attempting to employ and preserve them. Royal rule was certainly male in France; indeed, male rule was often argued by male contemporaries to be natural and divine.<sup>45</sup> Authority too, the assertion of one self over another, was a practice that was deeply informed by cultural and social rules and gender ideologies. However, it was also a negotiated and dynamic practice that enabled some women in the right contexts to assert themselves over others.<sup>46</sup> They looked to authoritative women from the kingdom's past, their dynastic heritage, ancient mythology, biblical narratives, and literature, and their identities as mothers, as evidence that their authority in various matters at court was viable and legitimate. Moreover, they created for themselves communities of shared beliefs and feelings, often among women, although not exclusively so, that reinforced their ideas. In some cases, these provided intellectual and spiritual support for evangelical views the status of which was at best ambiguous at the court in this period. However, other modes of community creation suggest insecurities and a need for emotional bonding or buffering that extended beyond practical gains.

44 See also for a slightly later period, Hanley, 2006.

45 See Cosandey, 2000; Viennot, 2006, Hanley, 1997a; Hanley, 1997b; Hanley, 1997c; Taylor; Conroy.

46 For discussions of early modern authority specifically in the context of gender, see Broomhall and Van Gent, 2011b; Broomhall, 2015a.

These essays suggest that there are few limits to the kinds of sources that can be drawn into such analyses if approached with questions about women's power and authority to interpret them with. Authors here consider their varied source material through lenses shaped by literary, anthropological, history of emotion, cultural history, and performativity scholarship. As such, the essays to follow adopt more precise terminology for forms of power that reflects the specific nature of access and scope of authority available to the individuals they study. These terms include governance, control, dominance, creation, drive, status, affluence, influence, persuasion, and dynamism. They consider the agency of their subjects in terms of capacity and capability to act towards their goals, as well as the duration of such agency, particularly in changing life circumstances. Such a focus necessarily recognizes how women's choices, actions and experiences were shaped by the power of others to limit actions and impose the will of another. Nonetheless, their studies reveal that, in this light, women could assert authority from often unexpected positions, sometimes marginalized positions, as well as through more visible and formally recognized roles.

The first group of essays in the volume examines how forms of women's power were conceptualized and practiced by two particular women at the French court. Just as the chronology of the collection is framed by female regencies, the volume begins with Aubrée David-Chapy's study of two game-changing regencies exercised in the period: those of Anne de France for Charles VIII and Louise de Savoie for her son, François I. David-Chapy explores their distinct strategies in very different political and courtly contexts but also their shared approaches to legitimacy as women in, and of, power. The legacy of their highly visible authority at the apex of the court and kingdom would inform the possibilities for action of many elite women in the courtly realm during this period and beyond, as the studies to follow demonstrate. Regency is a key role in which these individuals wielded influence but it was by no means the only status that provided such opportunities. The following essay, by Tracy Adams, likewise examines Anne de France, but in relation to a precise form of her power as an important mediator between elite cohorts at the French court through her gift-giving practices. Focusing upon the visualization of the identity of Louise de Savoie as mother and widow, Laure Fagnart and Mary Beth Winn then examine how Louise's representational achievements sustained her enduring influence as a dominant force in the kingdom as François's political companion, interlocutor, and mediator with foreign powers.

Essays brought together in the volume's second part consider women at both the center and yet seemingly the periphery of power, consorts who

were symbolically powerful as partners of monarchs and reproductive laborers in the service of dynastic continuities, but whose political activities and courtly roles have received little attention to date. The consorts who are the subject of the following three chapters, Mary Tudor Brandon, third wife of Louis XII, and the consecutive wives of François I, Claude de France and Eleanor of Austria, have thus far received little scholarly discussion as figures of power at the French court. Erin A. Sadlack demonstrates, however, how the correspondence of French queen, Mary Tudor Brandon, during her brief marriage to Louis XII, offers an opportunity to analyze her attempts to establish alliances and commission creative projects as an 'ambassador-queen'. With tenures as consorts far longer than that of Mary, the wives of François I, Claude and Eleanor, here also receive renewed attention. Kathleen Wilson-Chevalier indicates in her study Claude's spaces of agency for spiritual, creative, and literary engagements, while Lisa Mansfield argues that Eleanor of Austria was likewise adept at asserting her potential influence and connections to the Habsburg dynasty.

The volume's third part shifts focus to assessments of women's production of creative expressions in the courtly realm. Cynthia J. Brown contributes a cross-generational analysis of female creativity and spiritual expression through spiritual and literary works passed from mothers to daughters, and between sisters. Jonathan A. Reid considers the opportunities for Marguerite d'Angoulême to achieve her own political and spiritual goals through a study of her letters and literary output in manuscript and print. Mawry Bouchard examines the works of Queen Claude's lady-in-waiting, Anne de Graville, which insisted on the importance of women's speech on their own terms. Pollie Bromilow investigates the work of another female author who sought courtly patronage by dedicating her works to the king, François, in her analysis of Hélienne de Crenne whose printed fictional works were among the first published by a living female author and provide a complementary perspective on the production of a creative female voice.

The volume's final section brings together essays that study how emotional rhetoric and sociability practices could generate and define specific forms of power for courtly women. David Potter examines how Anne de Pisseleu, Duchess of Étampes, who rose to enjoy a role of immense political influence at the French court as *maîtresse en titre* of François I, converted her authority at court into forms of power that lasted well after the death of her royal partner. While the extent of her status as a political interlocutor in François's final years has been previously documented, Potter analyzes here the legal, marital, and financial transactions of her familial network that demonstrate Anne's continued significance as a

key figure in these deliberations and in pursuit of Protestantism until her own demise. The following essay studies another prominent woman who rose to influence at the court as a mistress, Diane de Poitiers. Her particular rhetorical forms, and emotional expressions, were designed to insist upon the reach of her influence at court, in securing positions and the king's favor for her nominees, and in asserting her knowledge widely, from matters of child-rearing to international political negotiations and military engagements. Like Pisseleu, Diane outlived the monarch who was her access to status by many years, and thus her correspondence both enacted and reflected activities similar to those of Pisseleu, which were designed to achieve longevity for her reach and influence. Denis Crouzet studies Catherine de Médicis's interventions as regent while consort of Henri II, which developed a pragmatic position of prudence, moderation, and flexibility that she would demonstrate more fully as queen mother and regent for her son Charles IX. Peace — Catherine's objective — demanded these qualities, and a practice of gentleness became more than a feminine tool of power, Crouzet argues, but rather the expression of it.

### **In the Orbit of the Monarch**

What did it mean for women to seek power in a political system such as that of France in which the monarch was always a man? How significant to their actions were individual, cultured men who surrounded themselves with female advisers who were relatives and lovers, and considered, and at times advanced, their opinions? Catherine de Médicis was clearly trying to mold her son Charles in the manner of male rule that she had seen practiced by monarchs during this period (or perhaps idealized in ways useful to women). At the same time, these leading women understood that power, as agency, influence, control, determination of selves and others, was uncertain and unstable in the orbit of the monarch. As such, it was something to be gained, used, preserved, or converted if possible.

Nurturing emotional engagement with royal partners, Anne de Pisseleu and Diane de Poitiers operated in political circles by accruing high status and courtly recognition. This required far more of such women than sexual attractiveness. François I and Henri II, their respective royal partners, were both known to have had sexual relations with other women, which did not accrue for them the sustained political access that Pisseleu and Poitiers achieved. Similar forms of personal and emotional service as family members also proved significant to high political access for other women.

This includes Anne de France and Louise de Savoie, as sister and mother of kings respectively, and Catherine de Médicis for her sons.

Women benefited from access to influence only in certain life stages that signaled different uses and experiences of women's symbolic and lived bodies, from their sexual activity to their reproductive capacity.<sup>47</sup> As wives and mothers of kings, women were recognized with high status that converted into social and cultural power at court, but not necessarily regular influence with the monarch himself or decision-making capacity in the kingdom's affairs, as it did for at least two royal mistresses. Neither of François's two wives, Claude de France nor Eleanor of Austria, acted as regents during his reign, although Catherine de Médicis served multiple times in this role for her spouse, Henri II. Royal wives who came from elsewhere, such as Anne de Bretagne, Eleanor of Austria, and Catherine de Médicis, had to find mechanisms to assert themselves at the French court that both expressed pride in their own dynastic origins and signaled a capacity for harmonious union in their new environments. Producing children assisted these women to assert identities as royal mothers that provided the capacity for influence, particularly if they lived to witness the reign of a son and enjoy the status of queen mother.

Yet, although they shared what appear to be close emotional bonds with their brothers, other sisters of monarchs such as Mary Tudor Brandon, younger sister of Henry VIII, Marguerite d'Angoulême, elder sister of François I, and Marguerite de Valois, younger sister of Henri II, held more ambiguous forms of authority and influence in their brothers' orbits. Agency to determine an independent path was limited. Having fulfilled a dynastic obligation with her first marriage, Marguerite d'Angoulême was given some autonomy from her brother, François, in the choice of her second marriage partner. However, this was a freedom Henri II did not permit his aunt when it came time for Marguerite's daughter Jeanne d'Albret to marry.

In such circumstances, women aimed not to rely on the changeable feelings or disposition of a monarch for their action. The political influence of Pisseleu and Poitiers may have come initially through intimate attachments but they were able to convert it to other, more sustainable, forms of political influence through networks with powerful allies, and especially into lands and monies that they could then control themselves. Jeanne de France chose the convent after her divorce settlement from Louis XII, where she became the creator of a wholly new order for elite women, and acted largely autonomously within it. Other women sought independent action, without reference to monarchs,

47 Schulte; Weil.



in different ways. Mary Tudor Brandon did not wait to discover her brother's inclinations before she followed her own, risking his wrath to wed Charles Brandon soon after the demise of her first husband, Louis XII.

Finally, and importantly, Marguerite d'Angoulême powerfully extended the range of her voice beyond the ears of her brother, or even the court, amplifying her views through the circulation of her writings in manuscript and print. Courtly daughters, Suzanne de Bourbon and Jeanne d'Albret, followed her lead on behalf of their powerful mothers. In doing so, the actions of these elite women provided role models and access to the pen and readers for women of lesser status, whether within the court such as Anne de Graville, or those who gazed at it from afar, such as Hélienne de Crenne. These women, through their own contributions to literature, took up the possibilities that women at court seemed to make available to them and assumed a right to act, speak, and be heard in their own time and since.

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## About the author

**Susan Broomhall** is Professor of Early Modern History at The University of Western Australia. She is author or co-author of eight monographs and ten edited volumes exploring women and gender, power, and most recently emotions and material culture, from late medieval to nineteenth-century Europe, although the particular focus of her work is early modern France and the Low Countries. She has published *Women and the Book Trade in Sixteenth-Century France* (Ashgate, 2002), *Women's Medical Work in Early Modern France* (Manchester University Press, 2004), *Women and Religion in Sixteenth-Century France* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), and most recently (with Jacqueline Van Gent), *Gender, Power and Identity in the Early Modern House of Orange-Nassau* (Routledge, 2016), and *Dynastic Colonialism: Gender, Materiality and the Early Modern House of Orange-Nassau* (Routledge, 2016). She holds an Australian Research Council Future Fellowship, researching emotions and power in the correspondence of Catherine de Médicis. From this research, she has published a series of book chapters and articles, and is currently writing a monograph on emotions in Catherine de Médicis' letters for Brill. From 2018, she leads a major Australian Research Council project, with Carolyn James and Lisa Mansfield, 'Gendering the Italian Wars, 1494–1559'.