

Margreet BRANDSMA, *Tussen twee dynastieën. Margaretha van Bourgondië (1374-1441), gravin van Henegouwen, Holland en Zeeland*, Hilversum, Verloren, 2022 (Middelleeuwse Studies en Bronnen, 181), 304 pp. ISBN 9789087049842. € 29,00.

Margaret of Burgundy took an important part in the power games of the late medieval Low Countries, the kingdom of France and the Burgundian State. She was the daughter of Philip the Bold, duke of Burgundy, and Margaret of Male, countess of Flanders, and as such the granddaughter of a French king and the sister of John the Fearless, the next duke of Burgundy. Born in 1374, she was raised in the duchy of Burgundy, thus in the southern part of her parent's possessions, until the age of nine years old. At this point, she leaved to stay for a year in the Low Countries and the Paris area, then got married in 1385, aged ten years old, in the frame of a large and ambitious scheme of alliance between the Houses of Burgundy and Bavaria in the Low Countries. For nearly twenty years, she was then a consort to the heir apparent of the three counties of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, young William of Bavaria (son to the regent, later count, Albrecht/*Aubert* of Bavaria). They were titled as count and countess of Ostrevant (from a smaller county within the county of Hainault), and William was appointed governor of Hainault by his father on two occasions. Margaret was then present at council with her husband, and she sent letters of administrative and political kind (p. 48).

In 1404, William succeeded his father, to be ranked William VI in Holland and William IV in Hainault, still with Margaret at his side. Two years later, their sole child and daughter Jacqueline (*Jacoba* in Dutch) was married to John of Touraine, son of King Charles VI, and later dauphin. Again, Margaret played a political role (p. 55-64, 67, 68), acting as a deputy of her husband, and being praised for her know-how in diplomatic negotiations. She was instrumental in the 1414-1415 negotiations leading to the reconciliation between her brother and the French royal party.

But in 1417 William died and Margaret became a widow and a countess dowager, aged 42. She then stood by the new reigning princess, her daughter Jacqueline, first herself a widow, then a wife to Duke John IV of Brabant. To make a long story short, she took side with Jacqueline against Brabant and Burgundy, when her daughter married Humphrey, duke of Gloucester, until Jacqueline's loss of effective power in 1427-1428 and abdication in 1433. In the summer of 1430, Margaret appears as chief of the council in the subscription of at least one act of her daughter (p. 112). She also claimed for herself the succession to the Duchy of Brabant in 1430 but was evinced by her Burgundian nephew Philip the Good. During that time, she remained an important and influential member of the three States of Hainault.

As Brandsma observes, Margaret appears in many paragraphs and footnotes of scholarly works dealing with other characters or issues, but has never received the full attention of a biographer. This book is the result of the author's doctoral dissertation at the university of Leyde (actually, her second dissertation, as Margreet Brandsma was already a doctor and a researcher in biology, before turning to medieval history). This is not only a biographical study, but above all a fine piece of gender history, with a focus on political and cultural issues, and a sound transnational approach, combining French, Belgian and Dutch historiographical traditions. The possibilities and limitations of a medieval noble woman in a position of power, are at the core of an inquiry that aims at understanding structures, much more than collecting peculiar events. Comparisons are, very sensibly, focused on women in the Low Countries, among other Isabel of Portugal and Margaret of York, duchesses of Burgundy. Unlike others, Brandsma doesn't abuse of the rhetoric of novelty. On the contrary: she pays tribute to other scholars; she does not claim to discover a new overwhelming interpretative framework, but she aims to contribute critically to a collective endeavour. This quality needs to be underlined as it is in my view a true example of good scholarly practice and scientific maturity.

Sources are not always as rich as one would like them to be. For instance, some letters are mentioned by the accounts, although the originals have not been preserved and their precise content remains largely unknown (p. 48). Margaret's testament has not been preserved (p. 125 n. 58, p. 180 n. 25), nor has the inventory of her books and other movable goods (pp. 126, 238 and 240). There is no contemporary portrait of the countess, either (p. 22). Nevertheless, a lot of unpublished material has been consulted by the author in Lille, Brussels, Mons, The Hague, Leyde and Haarlem. Among the preserved sources are a list of Margaret's household members in 1439 (edited on pp. 273-281), where the servants and courtiers are listed by categories, but unlike household ordonnances with no description of the tasks nor the level of wages, and a budget of the court expenses for the year 1440, to say nothing about a list of foreseen pilgrimages written in Margaret's own hand (p. 220-226, facsimile on p. 223).

A significant part of Dr Brandsma's study is dedicated to the financial means allowing Margaret to hold her status and play her social and political role. Her dowry of 100.000 francs was not paid, as it was a blank operation with the same amount going the other way round to her sister-in-law (p. 33-34 and p. 146). She received a monthly income for her expenses. As a consort to the count from 1405 on, her monthly income was increased. As her daughter Jacqueline was married as a child to John of Touraine and as the young couple was staying at court under Margaret's supervision, her income raised to 13.000 pounds, with an exceptional 40.000 pounds in 1416 and an additional yearly 7.000 pounds from that year on. She had her own expense clerk and was able to loan money to her husband and to other nobles or family members (p. 135). Becoming a widow, she was entitled to the possession of her dower, as well as some movable goods and a yearly income, but was declared free of her husband's debts (p. 137). Her dower consisted of a combination of yearly incomes on the one hand, and on the other hand manorial and justice incomes and the local lordship in several towns and villages, or even entire districts (*prévôtés, châtelainies*) from Hainault (about a third of the princely domain) and Holland (about 10%); as such, it included about 40% of the population in Hainault and about 12% of Holland population. The composition of this dower changed several times since the marriage contract of 1385; it also gained in size, thanks to her husband and to his successor, their daughter Jacqueline. Brandsma estimates that about 40% from the cumulated domain's incomes from the three counties was distracted from the prince's revenues as the domanial part of Margaret's dower. Even if the ruling count, or countess, had other extraordinary sources of income (such as the subsidies negotiated with the Estates representing the subjects), such a dower was structurally an important charge to the State finances.

This helps us understanding, as Brandsma points out, how she could exercise an enduring political influence, through a large network and a household of about 160 members, up to the standards of her status. Margaret's household was larger than those of earlier princesses in the Low Countries but consistent in size with those of duchesses of Burgundy, namely Margaret of Male, Isabel of Portugal, and Margaret of York (p. 207-208). But, while Burgundian in size, this court was "Bavarian" in its composition, with members from Hainault and Holland (p. 211-216). On the other hand, Margaret's expanses remained in proportion to her incomes, contrary to the assumption of unruly costs made in earlier literature.

Brandsma doesn't hesitate to point out what she sees as failures or bad judgments from Margaret. Being a dowager and one of the main negotiators of her daughter's marriage in 1417, she fostered a marriage with the very young duke John of Brabant, confident in the fact that she could exert her influence on his government, but doing so she underestimated the possibility of an opponent party to overrule her influence and to take the ties of power in hand, says Brandsma (p. 73: "een cruciale inschattingsfout"). Likewise, as the tension had grown between the two factions at the court of Brabant in 1420, she managed with her daughter to have a private interview with the young husband, during which she was so persuasive that he would have agreed to put his land into her government, regretting not to have taken her counsel until that

day. But again, she underestimated the other faction, that took the duke away from court the next day (p. 85: her try had “niet het gewenste effect”). In 1425, she seems to have overestimated the willingness of the Hainaulters, and especially the citizens of Mons, to fight for her daughter’s cause (p. 98-99). There are other limitations: on two occasions, it seems that Margaret’s ability as a negotiator failed short and that, foreseeing the outcome, she preferred to step out of the negotiations, namely before the Peace of Woudrichem in 1419 and before the Treaty of Douai in 1425 (p. 75-77 and 98). That said, on those two occasions, she managed to avoid being coerced to ratify unsatisfactory stipulations.

On the other hand, and unlike A. Janse (2009), Brandsma does credit of some agency to Margaret’s daughter Jacqueline. The narrative often shows mother and daughter acting together, without trying to deny all insight or initiative on the part of Jacqueline, but rather seeing the daughter’s will and the mother’s council and influence as complementary, as were their interests (e.g. p. 70-72, 78, 83-87, 89-90, 96-97, 99, 100-102, 166, 174, 184). More than that, from a certain point on (1425), Brandsma gives the impression that Margaret is fighting for her daughter’s interests, whatever the cost might be for herself, deprived by their adversaries of most of her revenues, rather than imposing her will on her daughter or acting by self-interest (p. 99, p. 103ff., p. 253, 258). She clearly casts doubt on Janse’s theory that from 1417 to 1428 Margaret was *the* Hook party leader (p. 74, 249).

Piety, devotion, and religious patronage played, as expected, an important role in Margaret’s public and private life, although with no special interest to the Modern Devotion or religious reform (see p. 230 and 234). Pilgrimages and donations seem to have been eclectic, traditional and oriented to the commemoration of the donor and her Bavarian family. Brandsma’s analysis is rich in details. Here are three examples. As well as a lady of the Garter since 1405 (p. 54), Margaret was a member of the more local knightly brotherhood of Saint-Anthony-in-Barbefosse near Mons (p. 232-233, 238 and facsimile p. 195), which implied devotion as well as ties to the Hainault nobility. By offering in 1422 a glass-window with herself and count William as donors to a parish church in Mons, capital of Hainault (p. 233), she certainly favoured the *memoria* of her late husband as well as her own status as a princely widow. We also learn that an anchoress lived in her dowry town and headquarters Le Quesnoy and received an annual allowance from Margaret (p. 210 and 231).

That said, the only notable foundation of Margaret was the funeral chapel in the parish church of Le Quesnoy (a few hundred meters from the countess’ castle), the building process of which she personally supervised in 1440-41, as documents show, and was achieved shortly after her death. The chapel had four or five windows, a bell-tower and opened directly to the choir of the church. It was endowed with incomes allowing six chaplains celebrating four daily masses, a clerk, two choir-boys and a treasurer as well as an almonry able to give clothes and shoes to poor people from the city and poor former servants of herself and her daughter (p. 125-128 and 235-236). Brandsma notes that one of the glass-windows featured Jacqueline and her first husband, the dauphin John of Touraine, perhaps as a personal memory of what would have been Margaret’s “most glorious and maybe also most happy times in her life” (p. 125), and also that the chapel was dedicated to SS. Margaret and Eligius (in French *Eloy*), the latter’s being a possible reminder of the victorious siege of Gorinchem on St Eligius’ Day 1417 (p. 235), a moment where Burgundian and Bavarian interests were not yet in conflict and the perpetuation of the count’s line through her daughter not yet compromised. Let us push the argument further: those two facts seem to have everything of a last political statement by a proud old princess. She was buried there, and not in Valenciennes next to her husband, nor in The Hague next to her daughter, father-in-law and mother-in-law. The chapel no longer exists.

In a last chapter, Brandsma brings together for the first time and discusses the scarce data relating to Margaret’s artistic and literary patronage or activity. She possessed a copy of the *City of the Ladies* by Christine de Pizan (1405), a work in which she is praised by the author

for her patronage and that was achieved shortly after her husband's accession as count and shortly before the French marriage of their young daughter Jacqueline, two events that will have fostered Margaret's need to appear as a literary patron and to possess a copy of Pisan's anti-misogynistic treaty, as Brandsma notes (p. 217-218 and 240-242). Margaret had a Franciscan confessor, shared with her husband, Jacques de Guise, and later a Dominican confessor, Guillaume de Dour, both from Hainault (p. 229-230). The former also wrote the *Annales Hannoniae*: it is not clear from Brandsma's account what part Margaret herself may have played in the design of this ambitious chronicle of the counts and county of Hainault from the Trojan origins to the present (but left unfinished and reaching only to the 13th c.). The anonymous *Dict de Marguerite de Bourgogne* dating from the 1430's (ed. by L. Paris 1891) praises Margaret's prowess and boldness in the defence of her land, as well as her wise, prudent and devout character as a pious princess of French royal descent, whose father and elder brother are also commemorated by this text, which in turn makes no mention of her Bavarian husband and daughter; there is no further clue as to its author and circumstances of production (p. 28, 124, 193 and 242-244). Interesting is Brandsma's hypothesis that with this text referring to Penthesilea, Dido and Medea, three fighting women who had lost their male companion (Hector, Aeneas and Jason), Margaret could mirror her own widowhood and the necessity to fight for the three counties without her chivalric husband at her side (p. 246-247).

There are also mentions of performances by poets and minstrels, unfortunately with few hints as to their content. A New Year's song, possibly by Gilles Binchois, might refer to her (p. 242). She loaned four books from the Hainault treasury in 1431: those were standards such as the hunting treaty *Le Livre du roi Modus*, the book *Des clères et nobles femmes* translated in French from Boccaccio (in a manuscript that might have been bought in Paris twenty years earlier for herself and her husband), the Encyclopedia of Bartholomeus Anglicus, also in its French translation, and a choir-book with polyphony (p. 244-245). In 1439, she bought a part of Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum historiale*, again in the French translation. Regarding the visual arts, she protected the painter Robert Campin in 1432 and avoided him a sentence of banishment (p. 238). Brandsma offers also an interesting discussion of D. Vanwijnsberghe (2020) and A. Van Egmond (2020) recent attribution of the famous Eyckian miniatures in the Turin-Milan Book of Hours to Margaret's patronage, an attribution that can not be proven but does not seem out of bound either (p. 239-240). All in all, those scarce data nevertheless allow us to figure out a more consistent activity as a reader and patron, and a reading pattern that seems more secular than religious, with a focus on didactic and historiographical works that fits with a politically active princess (p. 247).

If the author is happy with the broad picture and discussing the big issues, she regularly engages in erudite discussion as well, contradicting assumptions by earlier scholars when she feels necessary, as we have already seen above. To add one more instance of her strong sense of scholarly discussion, let us mention that a fresh look on some documents enables Brandsma to date the baptism of Margaret's daughter Jacqueline of Bavaria on Sunday 17 July 1401, her birth on 14 July or shortly before; the godmother and godfather were most probably Margaret of Bavaria, then countess of Nevers (as the wife of John the Fearless) and John of Bavaria, prince-bishop elect of Liège, the father's sister and brother (p. 49-50). Likewise, Brandsma discards the recent hypothesis attributing another child to Margaret, born at the turn of 1392-93 to die soon after, as the main evidence appears to rest on a palaeographic misreading (p. 44-45). This leaves Margaret with one miscarriage, when aged 13 (p. 41), and one living daughter, as far as we know, with all the psychological, social, political and religious consequences (see p. 224). In other instances, too, Brandsma corrects reading or dating (p. 44 n. 85, p. 82 n. 61).

One of her book's virtues is to allow further discussion on some interesting points. Some are of a minor importance, although of relevance to scholarship. Contrary to what Brandsma implies, the charter mentioned on p. 94 n. 30 does not certify that Jacqueline relieved the county

of Ostrevant (a small western part of the county of Hainaut, held in fief from France and not from the Holy Roman Empire) from the king of France when she succeeded to her father, as it is a grant to postpone that very relief by a year. Also, the burning of the castle of Quiévrain in the presence of Margaret (p. 106 and n.33) seems to have taken place before the surrender of June 1425, and not during the later phase of Jacqueline's rebellion (1425-1428) as the reader might infer from the mention.

More to the core of this study: was there any pressure on Margaret to marry again? Was this still an option at the time for a 42 years-old widow? This would probably have taken Margaret away from the lands of her in-laws and of her daughter, to a new life. Or was it more useful to the family, both on Burgundian and Bavarian sides, that she stayed near the new countess, first a young widow herself, then married to a young duke, and would act as a non-official but experienced councillor? As she did indeed, before being outplayed by a Brabantine court faction willing to please her brother-in-law? Was there a pressure not to remarry, from her brother the duke of Burgundy, in order to secure the Low Countries dynastic networks and balance of powers? Was this rather Margaret's own decision and sense of priorities or, indeed, of self-interest? Brandsma doesn't address this issue, except by quoting a 1416 charter in which Margaret gives away part of her dower in the event of her own remarriage (p. 136, she was then 41, and not yet a widow).

One also wonders what impact the crusading expedition, defeat and captivity of John the Fearless (1396-1397) could have had on his younger sister Margaret (while her own husband, William, was forbidden to join the crusade). By the way, was Louis the Moore, mentioned from 1416 to 1425, whose wife or widow worked in Margaret's household in 1439 and cared for the camels in Le Quesnoy after 1441 (p. 201, p. 210, p. 281 and n. 131), a person of (North-)African or of Middle Eastern descent, as assumed (p. 201 n. 103)? If so, his functions as doorkeeper (*huissier de salle*) for Margaret's son-in-law Jean de Touraine and later as torchbearer for herself could be seen as instrumentalising his possibly exotic looks for ceremonial purposes. Noteworthy is also by 1439 the presence of one Herald Orange in the household, who seems to have been active for the Burgundian Chalon-Arlay family before joining Margaret's service in unknown circumstances, while the question remains open if her "King of Hainault" was an officer of arms — but why then in the dowager's household and not in the reigning count's own's ? — or a head of musicians (p. 202-203 and 281).

The book is well-written, with a strong sense of synthesis but without neglecting the necessary attention to significant details. Chapters 1 to 6 deal with the life of Margaret in chronological order. Then, special attention is dedicated to the financial aspects of Margaret's life (Chapters 7 to 9, and Appendices 2 to 11). Finally, her court and household (Chapters 10 and 11), and her religious and literary patronage (Chapters 12 and 13) come to the fore. The book includes an English summary (p. 255-261), genealogies (p. 23-25), maps, tables and texts in the form of appendices (p. 262-281), a comprehensive list of primary sources and literature (p. 282-296), an index (p. 297-304), and several plates. A chronology of the main events would have helped the reader as well. The full title for *ECRG* is missing in the list of abbreviations (p. 282) but will be found on p. 287. There are very few misprints (on p. 187 read 1425 and not 1424 for the siege of Mons).

All in all, this is an important contribution to our understanding the agency of late medieval women of power, next to the biographies of Isabel of Portugal (Sommé), Margaret of France (Santamaria) and others: a study of the life and action of a countess who had had role models before her eyes, like her mother Margaret of Male, heiress of Flanders, and her great-aunt Joan of Brabant (p. 38, 59). By contrast, the main unknown character of the story is now her husband, count William.

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