1. The Political, Symbolic, and Courtly Power of Anne de France and Louise de Savoie

From the Genesis to the Glory of Female Regency

Aubrée David-Chapy

Abstract

The last decades of the fifteenth and the dawn of the sixteenth century represent a political and institutional turning point when women such as Anne de France and Louise de Savoie asserted themselves at court and at the head of the realm. This chapter considers how both princesses established and sustained power. Their legitimacy was built on blood, dynasty, law, and royal choice, adopting similar strategies to strengthen their power and wielding an unusual authority. Surrounded by many women, both regents build a ‘royaume de féminie’ at the royal court where they displayed their political and symbolical power. Under their influence, the female court became a political sphere where they held first rank, just under the queen.

Keywords: regency, Anne de France, Louise de Savoie, networks, eloquence, ethics

In France, the end of the fifteenth century and beginning of the sixteenth century witnessed the emergence of female regency, which became progressively established as an institution and form of government in itself. The French court became a place of exercise of women’s power where two princesses, Anne de France (1461–1522) and Louise de Savoie (1476–1531) imposed themselves, successively, at the head of the realm, and played an essential part in the genesis of this new kind of power.


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First, Anne de France, dame of Beaujeu, daughter of Louis XI (1423–1483), rose to power at her father’s death in order to assist her younger brother, Charles VIII (1470–1498). With the help of her husband, Pierre de Beaujeu (1438–1503),¹ she managed the realm for more than a decade and asserted her unequaled influence. Without having any official title, she played an important role in entrenching modern regency. It was a feature of every subsequent reign, from François I (1494–1547) to Louis XIV (1638–1715). Anne de France exerted her influence on her brother until his death in 1498, and she imposed her political and symbolic authority both at the French court and at the head of the realm. In 1515 the newly crowned François I officially entrusted his mother Louise de Savoie, Duchess of Angoulême, with the regency, before leaving the country for his first Italian expedition that culminated with victory at Marignano. Again in 1524, at the time of his second Italian War, he bestowed the regency upon his mother, giving her many prerogatives. This was the first time a woman had been officially appointed as a regent.² Anne and Louise stand apart from the female regents who followed, including Catherine de Médicis (1519–1589), Marie de Médicis (1575–1642), Anne of Austria (1601–1666), and Maria-Theresa of Austria (1638–1683). Neither woman was a queen, and each used her particular status, as ‘Daughter of France’ for Anne, and as ‘the King’s Mother’ for Louise, to legitimize her presence at the head of the realm and to build power at the French court.

This power had two interlinked aspects: one political, the other symbolic. This study analyzes the genesis of female regency as a new institution officially integrated into monarchy. It examines the nature of this new power exerted by two women who gained the authority to rule for the king. It aims to demonstrate that, over years and in spite of several limitations, this female power, modeled upon royal power, could be identified with the auctoritas and imperium, which were usually the preserve of the king. This study also investigates the strategies that Anne de France and Louise de Savoie employed at the French court to retain power and limit that of their opponents. Finally, it analyzes the different political and symbolic means that each woman used to build, strengthen, and practice their power.

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¹ He became Duke of Bourbon in 1488.
² This includes even Blanche of Castile (1188–1252), mother of Saint Louis (1214–1270).
Rising to Power: The Genesis of Feminine Regency

A priori, neither Anne de France nor Louise de Savoie was destined to exert an almost sovereign power by the side of Charles VIII or François I. Neither had been part of the King’s Council before arriving on the political stage. Nevertheless, they had had experience at the French court where each had been brought up and lived, either as the king’s daughter in the case of Anne or, for Louise, as niece of Charlotte de Savoie (1441–1483).³

From an institutional perspective, the two women came to power in very different ways. In 1483, Anne’s accession to power because of the king’s minority occurred outside of any legal framework. Indeed, there was no fixed rule as to the choice of the regent who received power during a sovereign’s minority. Traditionally, the latter was under the guardianship of his mother, the queen, but no law determined this practice. Anne de France took advantage of this situation to exclude her mother from the tutelage of the king, whom she took under her own care. There were several points in her favour. At the death of Louis XI, whose main councillor was her husband, Pierre de Beaujeu, the couple were already established at the head of the realm. Their accession to power provided political continuity that Louis XI desired. Indeed, in 1482 the king had verbally designated them legatees of power to his son Charles during a famous session in which he gave instructions to the dauphin.⁴ All the contemporary chroniclers, including Philippe de Commynes (1447–1511) and Alain Bouchart (b. 1440), confirm that the king intended to bring the Beaujeus to power during Charles VIII’s minority.⁵ Yet, in the ordinance written after this episode, the couple were not identified directly. This vagueness weakened their position and forced them to confront others who considered themselves as the legitimate holders of power. Their most vigorous opponent was the first blood prince, Louis II, Duke of Orleans (1462–1515), future Louis XII, who would inherit the crown if Charles VIII died without issue. Louis claimed the regency due to his rank

³ Louise de Savoie was the daughter of Count Philippe of Bresse, future Duke of Savoy, and the niece of Louis XI.
⁴ Pardessus, pp. 56–60: ‘Nous lui avons ordonné, commandé ainsi que père peust faire à son filz, qu’il se gouverne, entretiengne en bon regime et entretenenement dudit royaume par le conseil, advis et gouvernement de noz parens et seigneurs de nostre sang et lignaige’ (‘We ordered and commanded him, as a father can his son, to govern himself, and rule the realm with the council, advice and government of our parents and feudal lords of our blood and lineage’).
⁵ All translations are my own unless otherwise stated.
⁶ Commynes; Bouchart.
and rallied many noblemen around him. The ‘princes’ party’ opposed the ‘royal party’ of the Beaujeus as early as 1485.

In this unstable context, the États généraux met at the beginning of 1484 in Tours. They aimed primarily to designate the future King’s Councillors and to declare the need for a regency. The decision of the members benefited the Beaujeus, who received the guardianship of the king. Pierre was also designated as Council President in times when Charles VIII and the Dukes of Orleans and Bourbon were absent. Thus, the Beaujeus held power. But they endured opposition from the nobility for several years and it would be 1488 before Anne de France won the war against the dukes, Louis of Orleans, François II of Brittany (1435–1488), and Maximilian of Austria (1459–1519), after the victory of Saint-Aubin-du-Cormier. This took her to the height of her power. During this ‘Mad War’, Anne de France fought to retain her power while ruling the realm, making her a powerful female exemplar for those who followed. She laid the foundations for a feminine practice of power as she ruled almost as a regent. This facilitated Louise de Savoie’s rise to power as a regent in 1515, only nine months after the accession of her son, François I, to the throne. Anne de France’s government prefigured that of Louise de Savoie; it provided both practical and theoretical principles for its establishment. Over three decades, a new institution and the implementation of a power of unprecedented proportions was formed.

The nomination of Louise de Savoie, Duchess of Angoulême, as regent occurred in a peaceful context and did not generate any opposition, for the king took many precautions in the way he designated his mother. After the legal vagueness of Anne’s experience in the 1480s came an institutional precision that strengthened Louise’s status against potential opponents. Thus Anne de France’s de facto regency was followed by a de jure regency instituted in 1515. The rupture was semantic, juridical, institutional, and political. For the first time, a woman held the title of regent with considerable prerogatives that were defined in a royal ordinance, promulgated before the king left for Italy. On the eve of his second departure and during his war, the king promulgated the 1523, 1524, and 1525 ordinances in which he again delegated vast powers to his mother. The shift towards an entirely female power occurred during François I’s captivity in Madrid, in 1525. Louise, regent

6 Bernier, p. 703.
7 Bernier, p. 702.
8 Archives nationales (AN), J. 1037, n°7 and published in Levasseur, I, 1902, pp. 262–67.
of the realm and guardian of the children of France, had issued hundreds of edicts and mandates written in her own name and using her own formula ‘for such is my pleasure’. Louise de Savoie, legitimized in power by her son, was the embodiment of *auctoritas*, *potestas*, and *imperium*. In theory, she was in possession of a quasi-sovereign power.

Thereafter female regency could exist because it had been officially established as a fully fledged power. After Anne de France, women progressively rose to the head of the realm and this process bolstered their personal power. In turn, with the support of the monarchs, both princesses imagined and practiced an almost royal power, during the minority or the absence of the kings with whom they shared the authority. Each wielded a vast power and was involved in all aspects of politics including diplomacy and marriages, domestic and foreign affairs, justice, and economy.

**Proximity to the King: The Key to Power**

As their authority and their presence at the head of the State could be contested, Anne de France and Louise de Savoie both developed strategies to retain power. The differences in their strategies followed from the nature of the power each exerted. Regency was by nature an unstable and weak form of power as it arose in the minority or absence of the sovereign: it was open to challenge, especially when upheld by women.

For Charles VIII’s sister and François I’s mother, a key concern was to remain the exclusive intermediary between the monarch and his subjects. A key strategy to keep power was to remain beside him at court as well as at war. Anne acted as a shield, a bulwark, against the king’s enemies; that is, her own enemies. The rebellious nobles of the realm such as Louis II d’Orléans, Charles d’Angoulême (1459–1496), René d’Alençon (1454–1492), and François de Dunois (1447–1491) were not permitted to approach the royal person. This proximity had a double meaning. It gave power to the Beaujeu family who monopolized and controlled access to the king and also symbolized their power and status. The Beaujeus appeared as the most senior individuals in the realm after Charles VIII. Anne de France exerted power through her permanent proximity to her brother, a symbolic presence that was the guarantee and the expression of her might.

Louise de Savoie’s situation was very different. Her two regencies corresponded with the absence of the sovereign and were generated de facto by his physical distance from her. Alone at the head of the State, she held almost full power. During the king’s absences, the regent stood in for the sovereign and represented him in the eyes of the subjects. The king’s presence was thus superfluous, as his mother assumed the features of a quasi-sovereign, provided with an auctoritas that bestowed real political power. On the other hand, when François I returned, the regent Louise de Savoie, a woman, was deprived of institutional office. The essence of the power she exerted then metamorphosed into a power of influence of the kind more commonly wielded by women in particular, and often difficult for historians to discern and to measure. This power of influence flowed from an everyday presence close to the king, at court, at his Council, and even during the royal ceremonies. Contemporaries at the royal court expressed Louise’s influence through the formula, ‘the King and Madame’, which signified a couple connected through blood, presence, power, and shared decision-making.

For Anne de France and Louise de Savoie, the political consequence of their presence close to the king at court was the exercise of power as a couple. Indeed, Anne exerted power either with her brother, or her husband, but always as one partner in a couple. In her History of the Siege of Brest that follows the Enseignements (1503) written for her daughter Suzanne de Bourbon (1491–1521), Anne de France expressed a personal vision of power. Through the voice of a noblewoman, the main character of the work, she asserts to her husband:

My dear, love and duty claim that, of all principal matters, according to God and wisdom, I should share with you as one heart in two bodies and one will.

Through the words of the protagonist, Anne revealed her personal political practice, in which a wise woman was equal to her husband, especially in matters of rule and decision-making. Moreover, an attentive reading of the correspondence between Anne de France and Charles VIII reveals the extent to which the king’s will merged with that of his sister. Within this inseparable political couple, each played a role: Charles retained symbolic authority,

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13 David-Chapy, 2016, pp. 250, 525.
14 ‘M’amie, amour et devoir veulent que, de tous mes principaux affaires, selon Dieu et raison, vous en dois départir, comme un cœur en deux corps et une même volonté’, David-Chapy, 2016, pp. 107–08.
15 AN, Xi² 9319, 9320, 9321; Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), ms. fr 15538; Charles VIII.
while his sister held the real power; that is, the decision-making power. Anne exerted this prerogative in full: Charles legitimated his sister’s decisions.

This *modus operandi* represented the application of an ideal of government that would gain unprecedented political and mystical magnitude under Louise de Savoie. As regent, she was a member of a united ‘royal trinity’ along with François I and his sister, Marguerite d’Angoulême. Louise de Savoie used this expression, coined by Marguerite, in her letters and in ceremonies to present their relationship as a quasi-mystical union. Even contemporaries used it. For example, the poet Jehan Marot (c. 1450–c. 1526) evoked the ‘royal trinity’, as did the bishop and statesman, Guillaume Briçonnet (1470–1534) who wrote to Marguerite: ‘You are in this world a trinity of persons’. Thus, with the support of her daughter and contemporary authors, Louise de Savoie worked to build her political power on blood and a mystical conceptualization. Whether as a couple or a trinity, however, these formulations functioned only with the presence of the king.

**Masculine and Feminine Networks as Supports of the Regents**

To strengthen their personal power at the head of the realm, Anne de France and Louise de Savoie developed strong networks, especially at the French court, through numerous alliances. The establishment of Anne de France’s government was based primarily on people gathered within networks that she maintained, consolidated, and enlarged. Her power was established through favor and fidelity as well as a party of loyal followers, from princes to nobles and servants of the State, who were integrated into these networks. Loyalty represented a political instrument in the hands of the Beaujeus, as was frequently the case in the period.

The Beaujeus first relied on networks inherited from the reign of Louis XI. In the midst of the ‘Mad War’, Anne de France knew how to maintain the loyalty of military men and servants of the State. She progressively gained the support of the princes who represented a potential threat to her power. Providing gifts and bestowing responsibilities, she won the support

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16 Knecht.
17 She writes: ‘by the grace of God our Trinity has always been united’ (*le Créateur nous a fait la grasse que nostre trynité a tousjours esté unye*), cited in Lecoq, p. 393.
19 David-Chapy, 2018b.
20 These men are Louis Malet de Graville, Jean de Baudricourt, Louis II de La Trémoille, and the marshal of Gié.
of many noblemen, such as the dukes Jean II de Bourbon (1426–1488) and René II de Lorraine (1451–1508). Multiple treaties were developed between 1484 and 1487; alliances were made and unmade in favor of Anne de France, who sought help in the realm and beyond it, particularly in Flanders and in Brittany.  

Above all, Anne de France relied on the House of Bourbon, which was a key pillar for her power. Within this House she found her most faithful supporters who acted as the bulwark to the endangered kingship. Anne’s efforts engaged the mighty Jean II, Duke of Bourbon, her husband’s brother, who vacillated between the royal and princes’ parties. Others, however, including the Bourbon-Montpensier, the Bourbon-Vendôme, and the numerous illegitimate members of the House, were constant supporters. Members of the House of Bourbon were thus over-represented on the King’s Council, in the government, in the royal army, and at court where they supported Anne’s policies. Family relationships played a significant part in her political strategies. Indeed, the parliamentary archives, which allow us to sketch the Beaujeus’ networks, emphasize the extent to which blood and service were essential elements of Anne de France’s policy as ‘regent’ and as Duchess of Bourbon.

Louise de Savoie inherited dynamic and efficient networks that she needed only to maintain. Fidelity was less important for her than it had been for Anne de France. Louise was surrounded by men who applied her policies, and who were present on the King’s Council, the main place of government, which she dominated during her two regencies. In the Council, she supported many powerful men such as Florimond Robertet (1458–1527), Chancellor Antoine Duprat (1463–1535), her brother, René de Savoie (1473–1525), and Jacques de Beaune, Lord of Semblançay (1465–1527), until his disgrace. Moreover, she introduced men into the Council who would become the most important statesmen of her son’s reign, such as Artus Gouffier (1475–1519), François de Tournon (1489–1562), Jean Caluau (?–1522), Jean de Selve (1475–1529), Philibert Babou (1484–1557), Jean Brinon (1484–1528), and Gilbert Bayard (?–1548). As Cédric Michon has pointed out, this group constituted seventeen per cent of the main

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22 Members of the house of Bourbon included Louis, bastard of Bourbon and admiral of France, Charles de Bourbon-Lavedan, Louis de Bourbon-Montpensier, François de Bourbon-Vendôme, Gilbert de Bourbon-Montpensier.
23 AN, XI 9319, 9320, 9321.
councillors of the reign. He argues that Louise ‘asserted herself as the patroness of the Council where she controlled the entries and ordered the departures’.

For both princesses, these fidelity networks were essential and had their counterpart among elite women at the French court and in their correspondence. Female networks are more difficult to trace due to a lack of sources. However, letters that Anne de France sent and received identify more than 20 princesses and noblewomen who belonged to her circle. Several family and political networks coexisted and sometimes overlapped with one another. Blood links were the keystone to the networks of women that Anne created. She was connected to three different family networks that included princesses who belonged to the Houses of France, Savoy, and Bourbon. Second, she was a part of political networks with foreign princesses such as Margaret of Austria (1480–1530) and Anne de Bretagne (1477–1514), among other European women of power. Finally, the fidelity networks linked Anne to ladies and demoiselles of more humble birth, who belonged to families of royal and ducal officers.

Correspondence highlights Anne de France’s superior and remarkable position at the heart of the courtly system. Her correspondents treated her with esteem and deference, even her mother-in-law, Agnès of Burgundy, Duchess of Bourbon (1407–1476), her sister Jeanne de France (1464–1505), and the young queens Margaret of Austria and Anne de Bretagne. Her supremacy was due to her triple status as daughter of France, a woman ruling the realm, and as duchess of a prestigious principality. She acted as a patron to the members of her networks; this augmented her prestige and power, and provided her with an important circle of followers.

Anne and Louise, ‘mirrors of virtue’ in the ‘realm of femynie’

More than any other strategy, however, Anne de France and Louise de Savoie practiced a power based on virtue at court and at the head of the

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24 Michon, p. 77.
25 ‘Elle s’impose indiscutablement comme la protectrice du conseil dont elle contrôle les entrées et ordonne les sorties’, Michon, p. 85.
26 These princesses included her sister Jeanne de France, her aunt Madeleine de France, her mother-in-law, the Duchess of Bourbon Agnès of Burgundy, her sister-in-law Jeanne de Bourbon, her cousins and nieces Philippe de Gueldres, Gabrielle de Bourbon-Montpensier, Jeanne de Bourbon-Vendôme, and Françoise and Marie of Luxembourg.
realm. For these princesses, virtue was at once a factor of legitimacy and a source of power. Virtue was an ethic as well as a policy, a perpetual quest and an object of discourse that permitted them to shine at court. It was partly because of their personal virtues that Louis XI and François I chose Anne and Louise, respectively, to govern, preserve peace and common good, and secure the crown. The virtues modeled by the princesses corresponded to standards Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) theorized and addressed to women in the Book of the Three Virtues. Such ideals had a legitimizing effect upon which these kings and princesses relied. Among these qualities was intelligence, or political ‘finesse’, which both women possessed from long experience and observation at the court. Above all, both Anne de France and Louise de Savoie had inherited a set of political practices from their fathers. This fact is highlighted by the Venetian ambassador Girolamo Zorzi, present at the court from 1485 to 1487, who described Anne as ‘a woman of great seriousness and intelligence, who is walking, by her action, in the footsteps of her father’. The political practice of Anne and Louise was based upon careful observation of the mechanisms and functioning of power at the French court, and inspired by a common heritage of practices, the ‘memory’ of which they perpetuated and maintained through their government.

This ‘finesse’ was enhanced by a shared experience of education and acculturation. First, as princesses, their training stemmed from the same basis and was inspired by the same referents, found in the same books. Second, they shared blood ties and an intimate relationship that developed at the court of France where Anne educated Louise. Anne transmitted to Louise an important cultural heritage based on the imitation of ethical and political models. Thus, when they came to power, Anne and Louise were accomplished and cultured women able to draw upon their culture to govern the realm wisely and virtuously and to shine at court through their conversation and behavior.

30 Louise de Savoie arrived in 1483 at the French court and was educated by Anne de France, as well as Margaret of Austria or Philippe de Gueldres.
31 Anne de France was only 22 years old when she came to power; Louise de Savoie was 40 years old in 1515 and was, at her second regency, a mature woman with 50 years of experience of power.
Beyond culture, they also needed to possess wisdom and prudence, chief among virtues, because both were inherent in the royal office, as Christine de Pizan and other political theorists reminded readers. In her Enseignements, Anne de France reminded her daughter that ‘the nobility, even high, is not worth anything if not ornamented with virtues’. Virtues had to be present in the princesses’ practice of power; they were a tool to retaining power. This was a constituent aspect of the practice of both Anne and Louise.

The exercise of virtuous government by women had its source in the theory written by Pizan. It was embodied in the actions of Anne de France at the head of the State, as early as 1483. The statesman and author, Claude de Seyssel (1450–1520), was not the only author to describe Anne as ‘one of the wisest and most virtuous’ ladies of the realm, as he did in his early sixteenth-century work, Louenges du Roy Louys XII de ce nom. François I praised his mother’s numerous virtues in ordinances conferring the regency upon her. Both women appeared as model Christian princesses, corresponding to Pizan’s description. In such texts, Anne and Louise were endowed with clemency, charity, piety, compassion: that is, feminine virtues suited to a queen of France. The Christian virtues of both princesses added to their political qualities.

Virtue had to be the quest of a lifetime, as Anne de France emphasized more than once to her daughter Suzanne. These theories were embodied in her government in the form of political humility towards the different political units of the realm, according to Pizan’s advice. Among these was the Parlement of Paris whose advice she sought with humility. In exchange, she gained its support in her opposition to the rebellious princes. Thus, Anne displayed humility publicly in order to maintain and strengthen her political authority.

Anne de France also possessed unequaled political acumen. Above all, virtuous government had to be prudent. Just as Pizan advised, the
**Enseignements** glorified prudence, which embraced wisdom, restraint, discernment, intelligence, and self-control, as well as cunning and dissimulation. All of these were aspects of prudence that Anne put into practice as a woman of power.\(^{41}\) Thus were placed the first stones in the construction of a political and allegorical character of Prudence, which supported her *aucitoritas*. Anne transmitted this art of power to her niece Louise de Savoie who gave it a symbolic and allegorical turn.

Indeed, Louise de Savoie, whose cultural and ethical references were the same as those of Anne, perfected her aunt’s model. Louise had to be virtuous for two reasons: first, as the king’s mother and instructor; and second, as regent and a woman of power. She identified herself with Prudence as a strategy of power. François Desmoulin de Rochefort (c. 1470/1480–1526?) and Jean Thenaud (1480–1542) were two key authors who worked for Louise and strove to associate her with the figure of Prudence through their works and iconography. In one manuscript, Louise de Savoie was termed ‘divine Latona, mother of Apollo and Diana and fountain of all the virtues’.\(^{42}\) This identification was also made at royal ceremonies. At royal entries, for example, she was glorified as Dame Prudence. In Rouen, on 2 August 1517, Louise appeared with the features of Pallas-Minerva, holding ‘the shield of prudence’ that she gave to the young king.\(^{43}\) The *mater regis* displayed a political and religious mysticism, in which she guided the sovereign by her ethical and political perfection and holiness.

Finally, Anne de France and Louise de Savoie established their power to lead as women upon virtue. Wisdom was a policy in itself: it had to shine at the French court where the regents represented models for emulation. The example of Anne and her *Enseignements* constituted the basis of a virtuous and wise government that represented an ideal for Marguerite d’Angoulême and other Renaissance princesses including Philippe de Gueldres, Duchess of Lorraine (1467–1547), Margaret of Austria, and Catherine de Médicis. We know that Marguerite d’Angoulême had a personal copy of the *Enseignements*, as did Catherine de Médicis.\(^{44}\)

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\(^{41}\) David-Chapy, 2016, pp. 270–78.


\(^{43}\) ‘escu de prudence’, cited in a relation to the royal entry, Lecoq, p. 113.

\(^{44}\) We do not know whether Louise de Savoie held a copy but the Bourbon library was taken by the Crown when Louise won her trial against the constable Charles de Bourbon. She may have been in possession of her aunt’s book at that time.
The Power of Eloquence at the French Court

Prudence in behavior was closely linked to eloquence, and this verbal prudence was considered a gift from God. It was a political tool, a way of building and reinforcing power and used as such by Anne de France and Louise de Savoie.45

This period witnessed the genesis of a new kind of civility, based on the art of speech, and the presence of women at court. It was theorized in Anne de France's Enseignements as well as in The Book of the Courtier by Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), published in 1528. Mastering the art of eloquence stemmed from an ability to distinguish between reality and appearance, between what was seen and shown, and what was thought and said. It gave one a political advantage. In all situations, as Pizan suggested, one had to ‘have an ordered way of speaking and a wise eloquence’.46 Anne de France, heiress to Pizan's ideas, began to conceptualize eloquence and to establish protocols for it. Anne herself was praised by her contemporaries for her prudent and efficient speech. Thanks to her wisdom and her knowledge, she defeated her enemies, and persuaded her interlocutors. The anonymous author of L'Ainsnée fille de fortune, a panegyric poem composed in honor of Anne in 1489, described her powerful eloquence as follows:

Let all people come
From all countries and lands,
She knows how to speak to them,
About peace or war,
And she speaks so well,
That words never fail her,
She is worthy of praise.47

By her actions, her example and her Enseignements, Anne de France, as a woman of power, placed eloquence and speech at the heart of the ethical and political system. She conferred an essential role upon eloquence, one that continued to be strengthened after her to such a point that it became an ideal for princesses of the period such as Louise de Savoie, Marguerite de Navarre, and Catherine de Médicis.

47 ‘Laissez trestoute gent venir / De tout pais, de toute terre, / Elle les scet entretenir / Soit de la paix ou de la guerre; / Et son langaige si bien ferre, / Qu'elle ne faut point de propos, / Elle est bien digne d'avoir los [louange]', Lancelot, p. 594.
Thus, the literary circle of Louise de Savoie maintained the intellectual emphasis upon speech being at the heart of politics, and idealized women as those who would obtain peace and concord thanks to their gentle eloquence.\(^48\) In 1519–20, François Desmoulins evoked ‘the science and divine speaking of Mrs. Concordia’, Louise, in his *Commentaires de la guerre gallique*.\(^49\) The virtue of eloquence remained closely linked to that of prudence, so important for the king’s mother, who presented herself as born under the sign of Mercury, the god of fluency.

### The Assertiveness of the Court of Ladies

Under the influence of Anne de France and Louise de Savoie, a Court of Ladies emerged as a political space.\(^50\) The court was becoming an increasingly feminized center of power. Formerly a male-dominated sphere, henceforth it contained more and more ladies and *demoiselles* who played symbolic and political roles.\(^51\) Although author Pierre de Brantôme (1537–1614) attributed the development of a strong female presence at court to Anne de Bretagne, it may be necessary to look more closely at Anne de France’s contribution.\(^52\) She worked towards the feminization of the court, even before her sister-in-law. The ducal court of Moulins, in which Anne de France moved as early as 1488, represented a kind of courtly laboratory due to the number of women present there. This female court was intended as the place where the model of the virtuous princess was embodied. Through its moral prestige and its wealth, this Bourbon court was intended as the expression of Anne’s political power. The maintenance of this court, which was the materialization of the ideal of virtuous and noble behavior, was part of a female practice of power. Elements of a political strategy, based on fidelity networks, enhanced it further, reinforcing the princess’s power at the ducal level as well as at the French court. Furthermore, the symbolic power of a brilliant court whose prestige redounded on Anne de France’s authority was considerable. The Court of Ladies reflected the quest for an ideal, at the same time as a deliberate strategy of political reinforcement.

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\(^{49}\) ‘*Sapience et divine faconde de Madame Concorde*’, Desmoulins, Musée Condé, ms. 1139, fol. 55 (1519–1520).

\(^{50}\) See David-Chapy, 2018a.

\(^{51}\) See David-Chapy, 2016, pp. 123 and 264ff.

\(^{52}\) Brantôme, p. 262.
The process of feminization continued with Louise de Savoie. Under the reign of François I, the ‘incorporation of women at the French court’ that Caroline zum Kolk has described was perpetuated under the influence of Louise.53 Her accounts attest it.54 They document a particular organization of her female household as early as 1502 in which she occupied a specific position as ‘royal mother’.55 Composed then only of demoiselles, ladies entered in 1515, the year of her son’s accession to the throne. The personnel grew suddenly and the emoluments of ladies and demoiselles doubled as a consequence of her change of status as the king’s mother. These ladies came primarily from noble families of the Angoumois and Poitou region; that is, from her ducal lands and local networks. As the years passed and Louise’s power grew, the duchess also introduced the daughters and spouses of great servants of the State into her household.56

Strikingly, Louise de Savoie seems to have employed ladies and demoiselles in order to illustrate her political power and her symbolic prestige. Their numbers speak volumes, especially if compared to the number of those in the service of the queen during the same period. In 1530, the Queen, Eleanor of Austria (1498–1558), had 253 officers and servants in her household, among whom were fourteen ladies and demoiselles. In 1531, there were 272, including 25 ladies and demoiselles.57 In the same year, by contrast, Louise’s household contained 250 individuals, of whom 33 were women. The king’s mother was then at the height of her power and symbolically surpassed the queen.

More than ever, the Court of Ladies was asserted as a site of power and self-representation in which each princess expressed and affirmed her political and symbolic power. Both used the court as an instrument of power and the women who were part of their brilliant retinues as a way of producing their prestige through their number, high birth, beauty, and moral conduct. The court became a place of sociability and political friendship to which foreign ambassadors flocked. In 1516, the Mantuan ambassador Grossino wrote to his mistress Isabella d’Este that there were so many beautiful demoiselles

53 ‘L’incorporation des femmes à la cour de France’, Zum Kolk, p. 238.
54 BnF, ms. fr. 3054, fols. 27–32 (1531); ms. fr. 3068, fols. 119–21: Year 1531; BnF, ms. fr. 5593, fols. 20–21: Year 1531; BnF, ms. fr. 7856, fols. 849–59: Years 1496–1518; BnF, ms. fr. 8815, fols. 69–70: Year 1497; BnF, ms. Clairambault 816, fols. 361–87: Years 1502, 1503, 1506, 1517; BSG, ms. 848: Years 1515 and 1522.
55 She was given the title of ‘royal mother’ (mère royale) by Louis XII as early as 1505.
56 On the origin of the ladies of the house of Louise de Savoie, see David-Chapy, 2018a.
57 See the figures given by Zum Kolk, p. 257.
at the court of Anne de France that he had fallen in love with one of them.\textsuperscript{58} The Italians particularly marveled at the friendly reception that princesses and ladies of their households extended to them, and specifically discussed important and serious matters with Anne and Louise. In 1515, Anne still granted audiences. The Mantuan ambassador, and future Duke of Mantua, Federico Gonzaga (1500–1540) described the ‘marvellous joy’ with which Anne welcomed him during his visits.\textsuperscript{59} The relationships were more than cordial but political concerns underpinned the discourse; Anne de France remained above all a woman of power. Gonzaga wrote that he ‘spoke about the Italian case with Madame of Bourbon who told [him] she desired peace.’\textsuperscript{60}

Anne de France and Louise de Savoie both dominated these courts from which they obtained formidable prestige. Indeed, in May 1506, at the betrothal of Claude de France and François d’Angoulême, a contemporary exclaimed of the procession led by Anne and Louise, surrounded by numerous ladies, that ‘it seemed that the realm of fémynie had arrived’ at the French court.\textsuperscript{61} This reflects the image of power, prestige, and perfection that both princesses, who appeared as queens in this ‘realm of fémynie’, sought to bring to life. In the eyes of contemporaries, the courts of these princesses embodied, by their magnificence, the theoretical, cultural, and social ideals proposed by Pizan. They represented the symbolic and political accomplishment of a model that participated in the creation of the new courtly character of the female regent.

### Gaining a Position at Court

Political power was expressed through symbols and with rank at court, which was itself a locus of power. Anne de France and Louise de Savoie dominated the courtly sphere by their presence and the symbols they deployed over time. This staging at court was part of their female power.\textsuperscript{62}

What rank could Anne de France claim in the courtly ceremonies from her royal birth? What place did she hold at the queen's court? *Le Cérémonial des Estats de France*, written by Eleanor de Poitiers, answered these questions

\textsuperscript{58} Grossino to the marquise of Mantua, 28 February 1516, Mantua, Archivio di Stato, A.G. 633. David-Chapy, 2016, p. 603.
\textsuperscript{59} Tamalio, p. 234.
\textsuperscript{60} ‘Hieri ragionando dela cose de Italia con Madame de borbone la mi disse che la desideraria pace’, Tamalio, p. 242.
\textsuperscript{61} Anonymous. ‘Il semblait que le royaume de fémynie fût arrivé’, cited in Viennot and Wilson-Chevalier.
\textsuperscript{62} See David-Chapy, 2014.
for the Burgundian court. For the ‘daughters of France’, blood was more important than the rank of their husband: they were positioned at court just behind the queen. Thus, until 1491, in the absence of the very young queen, Margaret of Austria, Anne de France held precedence in all court ceremonies. According to the chronicler Alain Bouchart (c. 1440–after 1514), Charles VIII’s sister demanded that everybody should curtsey to her. This gesture was supposed to pay homage to the dignity of the woman who was the king’s guardian: ‘Madame de Beaujeu had the guardianship of the person of the king and for this reason, all the other state officers and noble men would curtsey to her’. Moreover, Anne de France projected her omnipresence at state ceremonies such as the coronation, royal entries, and weddings. Her precedence at court continued after her brother’s death. In the reigns of Louis XII and François I, Anne was treated with the utmost respect, as the letters of the Mantuan ambassador Grossino show. In 1516 he wrote that the Duchess of Bourbon was treated with ‘the highest honours by the whole court of France’.

Whereas Anne benefited from a specific rank as ‘daughter of France’, Louise de Savoie had to create a specific position with a kind of dignitas at the center of the court, one which was legitimized by her status as royal mother and regent. A quest for precedence at court inspired her actions and motivated the construction of the political character she designed for herself. A priori, Louise’s body had no sacred nature in itself, as she was not a queen; thus, the king’s mother had to assume a sacredness of a new essence and to transpose the notion of the sovereign body of the queen to the regent’s body. Thus, she assumed an unprecedented courtly character that reflected and expressed her political power. More than Anne de France, Louise de Savoie created a concept around her person to extol her image and power. With her developed the desire to imagine this new political and courtly character of the female regent as a fully fledged woman of power, as devoted to the realm as the king. This process would reach its peak with the queen Catherine de Médicis.

63 Paviot, pp. 163–79; and Broomhall.
64 ‘Madame de Beaujeu avoit la personne du roy en garde et à celle cause tous autres personnaiges d’estat et de nom luy clineroinent le genoil’, Bouchart, p. 170.
66 Guillaume Michel called Louise de Savoie ‘the Royal Blood of France’ (‘Le Sang Royal de France’) in his Penser de royal mémoire (1518).
67 Crouzet.
As a regent and mother of the king, Louise de Savoie had no codified rank in the protocols of the court. To bridge this theoretical gap, she endeavored to gain a rank that reflected her very extensive power and her status as mother of the sovereign. As early as 1515, she was given an exceptional place in ceremonies at the court, in which she had thus far appeared among the second rank. Her son promoted her to an unequaled rank that permitted her to stand next to her daughter-in-law, the queen, during royal ceremonies. Louise valued her place at the very heart of the court and sought to strengthen it from 1515 until her death in 1531.68 Contemporary chroniclers confirm Louise’s precedence in royal ceremonies from as early as 1515.69 For example, in 1517, at the coronation of Claude de France: ‘after [the queen] Madame, mother of the king, walked alone’, followed by the ladies of the court.70 Likewise, in 1531, at Eleanor of Austria’s coronation, Louise again walked first and alone, even before the king’s daughters.71 In 1520, during royal entries in cities of the realm such as Poitiers, Angoulême, Cognac, and La Rochelle, Louise stood next to the royal couple.72 Such an association of the king’s mother to the royal couple during such entries was a remarkable phenomenon in the history of the realm.

The absences of François I whom Louise officially represented justified the place of honor in power and court ceremonies that she was given. Louise de Savoie was engaged in a real conquest of the courtly and ceremonial space where the queen was the only person who legitimately had precedence over her. As was Anne de France before her, Louise was distinguished as the first princess in the realm, after Claude de France and Eleanor of Austria. From 1524 until 1530, when there was no queen, she appeared as the main female figure in the realm. From 1525–1526, she was honored for her political successes during the war against the imperial camp and the liberation of François I from his captivity in Madrid during 1525.73 Through the influence of the king, the realm expressed its gratitude towards the regent via precedence protocols that she had contributed to creating. The institutional invention that gave birth to female regency was linked to an associated invention of protocol. The political character of the regent corresponded with a hitherto unprecedented court figure who symbolically dazzled the court with her prestige and might.

68 See David-Chapy, 2016, pp. 624ff.
69 See the numerous relations in 1619; and Godefroy, 1649.
71 Godefroy, 1649, pp. 796–801.
72 Rivaud.
Louise de Savoie stood as a character apart, between the queen and the other princesses. Such staging arose from an intellectual and carefully considered construction that verged on glorification, thanks to extensive use of symbols in ceremonies, iconography, and books. She was already employing the features of Prudence and associating herself with Saint Louis’s mother, Blanche of Castile, as early as 1517, at Claude de France’s coronation and arrival at the Palais Royal in Paris. Indeed, Blanche of Castile was represented on a scaffolding, saying to the King of France: ‘my beloved son, do love wisdom’. The example of Blanche here functioned as a symbolical and metaphorical reference to the power that Louise, the virtuous mother and widow, held in government. In 1530, when Eleanor of Austria entered Bordeaux, Louise was again associated with the royal couple during the entrance ceremony. The city glorified the king’s mother as a member of the royal dynasty and even of a divine family. She was compared with Pallas, goddess of prudence and wisdom. Ceremonies were an opportunity for Louise de Savoie to display the symbols that she held dear and that she employed to build her image of woman of power and mother of the king.

During the early Renaissance, a double process was occurring, which consisted in the construction of a political and courtly female power. The ‘regents’, Anne de France and Louise de Savoie, dominated both the head of the State and at the French court. Through the power they wielded, both princesses were the pivots of political and court life. Their precedence at court, their numerous networks, their major influence in political decision-making tell us a great deal about the early exercise of female regency in France. In spite of the challenges and opposition they had to overcome, supported by Charles VIII and François I and thanks to political strategies that included networks, proximity next to the king, the virtuous practice of power, and eloquence, they succeeded in gaining unequaled cultural and political might and asserting a legal and institutionalized kind of power modeled on royal power. Ruling the realm, they took part in sovereignty and possessed the auctoritas and imperium usually constitutive of royal power; in the monarchical ceremonies and at court, they were honored and even glorified as women of power. Following in the footsteps of Pizan, both princesses embodied virtuous power. This political and ethical art of behavior at the head of the State and at court was an enduring legacy.

74 Godefroy, 1619, pp. 193–94.
76 Godefroy, 1649, p. 770; and David-Chapy, 2016, pp. 655–56.
for the numerous women who filled the European courts during the early modern period.

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**About the author**