11. The Life and After-Life of a Royal Mistress

Anne de Pisseleu, Duchess of Étampes

David Potter

Abstract
Anne de Pisseleu, Duchess of Étampes, was maîtresse en titre of François I, one of the first really high profile figures in such a position. This chapter provides a number of perspectives, combining profound suspicion of non-royal women in political power and assumptions about women, marriage, and political power. Artists and writers provide one perspective. Cellini was notoriously sour about her; poets celebrated her favors; architects found in her a patron. Another emerges from her unusual ‘afterlife’, since she lived nearly half her lifetime after the death of François I (until her death in 1580). In that period, she recovered from personal and political disaster in 1547 and became an energetic businesswoman, promoter of her family’s interests, and a notable Protestant.

Keywords: Anne de Pisseleu, networks, financial transactions, religious reform, religious engagement, royal mistress

Power in early modern France was, at the summit, constitutionally masculine, defined by the accumulation of a set of ad hoc assumptions that came to be defined as ‘Salic law’ by the end of the sixteenth century. Yet, in reality, there was much debate about this and rule by female regents was in any case a recurring feature of political authority, accepted, if often grudgingly, as necessary.1 Less formal influence was exercised by the women who shared

---

1 Barnavi, pp. 332–33; Viennot, 2006, Chs. 11, 14; Viennot, 2008, pp. 23–25; Cosandey, 2000, Part II.
the king’s intimate life at a time when royal marriages were often less than satisfactory. Influence exercised by such women was widely criticized and the end of such influence usually accompanied by a damnatio memoriae and the stripping of accumulated privileges. Anne de Pisseleu d’Heilly (1508–1580) was the first major example of such a woman in the political history of early modern France as mistress to François I (1494–1547). Daughter of a middle-ranking Picard nobleman, Guillaume de Pisseleu, lord of Heilly, after the marriage arranged for her by the king to Jean de Brosse-Bretagne (1505–1564), Anne became Countess of Penthièvre (1534), then Duchess of Étampes (1536) and thus attained high status in the social hierarchy. Her downfall in 1547 has often been seen as the terminus of her career. This study aims to juxtapose controversy generated by the wealth and favor accumulated in her youth with a long fightback in which she appears to have used her natural ability to build a new life for herself after the king’s death.

La belle Heilly would have been no more than eighteen when (as the traditional story has it) she became François’s mistress in 1526. Paulin Paris, who relied heavily on the poems of François that he assumed were addressed to Anne, made the strange suggestion that François had established his liaison with her as early as 1523–24, when she would have been only fifteen or sixteen. Arnoul Le Ferron writing in 1554 relates that François, on his sad return from captivity, saw Anne in the company of his mother and much enjoyed her conversation. The biographer and memoirist Pierre de Bourdeille de Brantôme (c. 1540–1614) confirms that François took her as his mistress on his return from Spain and adds that the king may have had other dalliances but she was his ‘chief morsel’. Though Brantôme considered women generally unreliable, he thought ‘Heilly’ an honest person who never abused her favor. By 1527 Anne had become, according to the English envoy Anthony Browne, one ‘whom above others, as the report is, he favoreth’. She accompanied Louise de Savoie (1476–1531) as a member of her household for the negotiations at Cambrai in 1529. By the time of the entry of new queen, Eleanor of Austria (1498–1558), into Paris in 1531, Anne was publicly displayed by François at a window as his companion, ‘whych was not a lytyll

2 Both at Saint-Germain and Fontainebleau Madame d’Étampes had a ‘logis’ with communicating stairs or passages to the king’s (Chatenet, pp. 77–80).
4 Le Ferron, fol. 121r: ‘delectatus est eius comitate & suavitate’, trans. in Du Haillan, II, p. 344.
5 Though the king may have loved others, she was his ‘principal boucon […]. Ceste dame pourtant fut une bonne et honneste dame, et qui n’abusa jamais de sa faveur envers le monde’, Brantôme, 1867, p. 244.
marvellyd at of the beholders’, reported Henry VIII’s envoy, Francis Bryan.7 Thereafter, her influence, for instance concerning patronage, grew into real political power in the 1540s.

In the late nineteenth century, when Paulin Paris wrote the first serious historical study of Anne, he got her story wrong in some crucial ways. His intuition about her good sense and level-headedness, of their love affair shading into steady friendship, is sensitive and convincing. On the other hand, his determination to absolve François from the disgrace of being influenced by a mistress leads him astray. He insisted that she was not seen to exercise any serious influence in public affairs; the romantic image of her influence on the distribution of royal favor was pure invention. He was not even sure whether Anne remained at court in François’s last year. The biography by Desgardins, often referred to, lacks detail and clarity of sources.8 Some of the more widely accepted testimonies to the extent of her influence over François I were argued by Paris to derive from the invective of her husband Jean de Brosse, Duke of Étampes (d. 1564) in the course of a legal dispute during the 1550s over gifts of property made by Anne to her younger sister Charlotte, Countess of Vertus (d. 1604).9 Jean de Brosse had married Anne in 1532 in a bargain with François I by which he recovered his ancestral title of Count of Penthièvre and was later made Duke of Étampes. Subsequently, he considered that Anne had used her favor with the king not only to build up her own fortune but also to diminish his.

Anne’s political influence and her role in influencing the king during the 1540s are no longer in doubt. Her relations with the king’s close advisers Anne de Montmorency (1493–1567), Philippe Chabot de Brion (1492–1543), Claude Annebault (1495–1552), and François de Tournon (1489–1562) were pivotal in the last decade of the king’s reign. To take a few telling examples: her brother assumed she would read his report on a fortress in Picardy and ensure that the necessary funds were made available.10 The Imperial ambassador in 1541 reported that no councillor dared approach the king about anything without checking first with Madame d’Étampes if she approved it.11 The following

---

8 Paris, II, pp. 239, 204, 311. Paris, on the basis of misunderstood documents, suggests that she cannot have been a Protestant. See pp. 316–17, where he attributes a letter of the Duchess’s niece to her and uses this as evidence (now in SAP, Charrtier d’Heilly, 57, nos. 38–43). Desgardins, passim.
10 Adrien de Pisseleu to Mme d’Étampes, Hesdin, 24 May [1541?], BnF, fr. 2996, fol. 30.
11 Saint-Vincent to Charles V, 7 May 1541, Vienna HHSA, Belgien, P.A.41, fol. 47’. ‘Madame d’Étampes’ was the usual way she was referred to in her lifetime.
year, though the king was with the army in Languedoc, despatches from the front in Flanders were forwarded to her at Lyons.\textsuperscript{12} Her intervention in the appointment of Jean du Bellay as Archbishop of Bordeaux in 1544 was widely commented on at the time.\textsuperscript{13} In this period she employed the standard political tactics of a Renaissance politician: the placement of friends and allies at court, many drawn from her extensive kindred on her father’s side and from the relatives of her mother, the Sanguins. These included Antoine, Cardinal de Meudon (1493–1559), her uncle, who held a high place among the royal councillors late in the reign, as did Nicolas Bossut de Longueval (d. 1553), possibly a kinsman.\textsuperscript{14} Modern historians have been willing to accept that part of the romantic tradition that allowed for the possibility of female influence behind the scenes.\textsuperscript{15} There was doubtless some exaggeration by foreign observers but they universally understood her influence on the king. They widely deplored this and ignored the fact that Anne was using a modified form of the political influence that all courtiers used in order first to gain ‘favor’ (a term deployed generally to convey access to royal power) and exercise influence.\textsuperscript{16} Her status is reflected by her inclusion — as the only non-royal woman — in a series of fifty or so woodcuts created by Hans Liefrinck the elder at Antwerp, which included the most powerful dynastic figures of the day (Fig. 1). It was the only one specifically done \textit{au vif} and must date from Anne’s visit to Brussels with the Queen of France early in 1545.\textsuperscript{17}

This study places Anne’s influence in a wider biographical and cultural context. The carving of David and Bathsheba in the choir stalls at Auch, so reminiscent of François and his mistress, testifies to the necessarily oblique nature of public comment. What has been argued to be a programmatic assertion of female assertiveness in court life, Primaticcio’s decor for the chamber of Madame d’Étampes at Fontainebleau was scarcely for public consumption.\textsuperscript{18} There was some reticence on the part of contemporary writers about her, which reveals common assumptions about irregular female political influence. Though the statesmen and ambassadors of the age were convinced of her importance, she is never mentioned in the memoirs of Guillaume and Martin du Bellay, written in the 1540s and 1550s, one of principal contemporary sources for politics in the reign of François I. The

\textsuperscript{12} Da Thiene to Ercole II of Ferrara, 11 August 1542, ASM, Francia, busta 18 (no pag.).
\textsuperscript{13} Scheurer, III, pp. 277–78.
\textsuperscript{14} See Potter, 2007; Potter, 2011.
\textsuperscript{15} For example, Knecht, passim; Michon, passim.
\textsuperscript{16} Le Roux, Ch.1.
\textsuperscript{17} Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum RP-P-1932-140. See Landau, p. 221.
\textsuperscript{18} Smith and Bentley Cranch; Wilson-Chevalier and Viennot, pp. 203–36.
Figure 11.1  Hans Liefrinck the elder, *Anne de Pisseleu, 1545*

Woodcut after a drawing by Cornelis Antonisz., Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum, cat. RP-P-1932-140. (By permission of the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam).
great essayist Michel de Montaigne (1533–1592) commented wryly on a history which, though by a contemporary, said nothing to the detriment of the king and often stayed silent about matters everybody knew.\textsuperscript{19} Brantôme, in his \textit{Dames galantes}, written in the 1570s, wrote with relish of the \textit{petite bande} of women around the king.\textsuperscript{20} Brantôme sometimes seems to give the impression that the court of François was a kind of royal seraglio,\textsuperscript{21} though both in his biography of François and in the \textit{Dames galantes}, he emphasizes the civilizing role of women at court, in contrast to the introduction of \textit{putains} (whores) by earlier kings. Brantôme, responsible for so many scandalous stories, tells us that François, on his accession, thought that women were the entire adornment of a court ‘for in truth a court without ladies is like a garden without flowers’.\textsuperscript{22} For Brantôme, François was no Heliogabalus, but rather encouraged ladies of good family and of reputation to his court; if it was true that some took lovers, the king was hardly to blame. So, for Brantôme, a court without ladies was hardly worth the name: it would be ‘a court without courtiership’.\textsuperscript{23} Brantôme is also curiously reticent about telling stories involving Madame d’Étampes, recalling little more than a story about the dignified way Françoise de Foix (c. 1495–1537), the king’s earlier mistress, dealt with François’s desire to get back gifts of jewellery and give them to Anne.\textsuperscript{24} The later biographer Antoine du Verdier (1544–1600) in 1573 argued that François simply esteemed Anne for her grace and vivacity and that the relationship went no further.\textsuperscript{25} The historian François de Mézeray (1610–1683) related that François fell into the captivity of a fair lady, while both he and Antoine Varillas (1624–1696), the first serious historian of François I, recorded that Louise de Savoie deliberately placed Anne in his way.\textsuperscript{26} Pierre Bayle (1647–1706), the philosopher and dictionary compiler, blackened her reputation.\textsuperscript{27} Jules Michelet was to embellish these accounts, heedless of chronology, with anachronisms.\textsuperscript{28} As for the accusations that she betrayed secrets to the Emperor Charles V, in most cases these go back to the seventeenth century, though it seems to have been François de Beaucaire

\textsuperscript{19} Montaigne, II.10, p.143.
\textsuperscript{20} Brantôme, [1857], p. 345.
\textsuperscript{21} For example, Brantôme, [1857], pp. 174, 256, 248, 348–49.
\textsuperscript{22} ‘\textit{une cour sans dames c’est un jardin sans aucunes belles fleurs}’, Brantôme, 1842, I, p. 257.
\textsuperscript{23} ‘\textit{une cour sans cour}’, Brantôme, 1867, pp. 127–28.
\textsuperscript{24} Brantôme, [1857], p. 367.
\textsuperscript{25} Du Verdier, III, p. 2347.
\textsuperscript{26} Mézeray, IV, p. 324; Varillas, II, p. 101.
\textsuperscript{27} Bayle, VI, pp. 300–12.
\textsuperscript{28} Michelet, VIII, p. 296.
(1514–1591) who first invented the idea that she and Longueval betrayed France to the Emperor in 1544.\textsuperscript{29}

With the greater visibility of women in public life at court in the early sixteenth century, the role of women in that domain and the basis of female authority came more sharply into focus.\textsuperscript{30} It has been argued, controversially, that the general decline in the independent status of women in the Renaissance period encouraged them to use more informal routes to the acquisition of power. There is no good reason to suppose that such informal influence was new or, indeed, that the formal power of women was any greater before the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{31} Nevertheless, it is clear that the influence of female princesses and aristocrats was taken for granted. Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549) was the object of regular observation by foreign ambassadors as a figure of influence, whose evident charm had to be ‘decoded’\textsuperscript{32}. Yet the court poet Clément Marot (1496–1544) in 1542 was to observe, in a coq-à-l’âne (savage satire) that was particularly ferocious in its satire of public corruption, that he had never read a book that said that women should govern.\textsuperscript{33} This was a view that shaped the reports of most of those ambassadors and statesmen and even some of the artists who came into contact with Anne. It was assumed that, as a woman and one not born to rule, she was a prey to passions and vengefulness, that she could have no consistent ‘policy’ (as though many male statesmen had such consistency).

For Benvenuto Cellini (1500–1571), who saw too much of her for his own peace of mind, she personified fortuna in all its caprice.\textsuperscript{34} For the papal nuncio Hieronimo Dandino (1509–1559), who saw a great deal of her and noted her dislike of gossiping Italians, the king in 1543 was more a prey than ever to his lasciviousness and under her sway. He thought the secret of her success was the spirit of contradiction, always saying the opposite of what others did.\textsuperscript{35} For the Imperial envoy Nicolas Villey de Marnol, Anne had been légèbre (unstable) all her life.\textsuperscript{36} This was the same view as that of the Venetian envoy Marino Cavalli (d. 1572), who reported in 1545 that, despite her previous preference for peace with England, she was pressing for further

\textsuperscript{29} François de Beaucaire, pp. 741, 761, cited in Paris, II, pp. 300–01.
\textsuperscript{30} Chatenet, ch. VI.
\textsuperscript{31} For this debate, see Kelly; Wiesner; Poutrin and Schaub; Wilson-Chevalier and Viennot.
\textsuperscript{32} Prescott; Vose; Reid, II, pp. 499–501.
\textsuperscript{33} ‘Je ne leuz jamais en nul livre, / Que une femme deust gouverner’, Marot, 1962, p. 171.
\textsuperscript{34} Cellini, second part, p. 433.
\textsuperscript{35} ANG, III, pp. 22, 26–27; May 1543, ANG, III, p. 220.
\textsuperscript{36} HHSA, Frankreich 10, ‘Villey-Karl V, V–VIII’, fol. 4r.
war, hoping that failure would undermine Admiral Annebault, her rival.\(^{37}\) Literary views were similar; for instance, Rondabilis, the protagonist of the 1546 *Tiers Livre* by François Rabelais (1494–1553), views all women as frail, variable, capricious, and inconstant.\(^{38}\)

There is plenty of evidence for criticism of her position in widely available satirical poetry, while the *coqs-à-l’âne* of Marot alone would be enough to measure the venom of contemporary literary comment. Such political and literary comment should be expected in a male-dominated world, but this makes it more difficult to estimate the reality of her position. We therefore need to separate out the ‘facets’ of Anne’s life, the way she was perceived by different groups and individuals. According to these, she could be viewed as an ornament to the court, a grasping favorite, a desired patroness, an able businesswoman, later on as a pillar of the reformed church and cantankerous old woman. At different times and over a long life, Anne de Pisseleu played all these roles.

The period of Anne’s supremacy was marked by extensive public debate about female power and coincided with the literary *querelle des amyes*, which brought this into sharp focus. François I commissioned the French translation of *Il Cortegiano* by Baldassare Castiglione (1478–1529), which appeared in 1537 and gave popular currency both to the idea of the woman of the court and to the interpretation of platonic love of Marsilio Ficino (1433–1499). In 1541, Bertrand de La Borderie took up the theme of Castiglione’s third book in his *Amye de Court*, ostensibly a cynical portrayal of a young court woman, surrounded by lovers, who rejects platonic love and seeks independence — ‘my heart, its own master’ — while not refraining from the exploitation of the game of courtly gallantry.\(^{39}\) Naturally, no direct mention is made of Anne de Pisseleu but court morals were clearly a major talking point; the *Amye* declared that it was wise not to refuse a prince’s largesse to an ‘honneste femme’.\(^{40}\)

The work sparked off a major literary battle when, in 1542, Antoine Héroët (c. 1492–c. 1567), a member of Marguerite de Navarre’s circle, published *La Parfaicte Amye*, a simple reply. The following year saw the *Contr’Amye de Court* of Charles Fontaine (1514–1570?). Paul Angier (possibly a pseudonym for La Borderie) contributed *Expérience* in 1544, ostensibly a defence of

---

40  *Screech*, p. 124.
La Borderie but better described as a defence of marriage as a remedy for fornication.\(^41\) The whole affair has been variously interpreted by Émile Telle as a court debate on Neoplatonism or as a feminist confrontation between an aristocratic view of love (the quest for freedom from subordination to men) and a bourgeois ideal, revolted by court scandal.\(^42\) The **querelle des amyes** formed part of a wider debate on female power linked to public corruption. A collection of contemporary **pasquils** about politics in France, now in the Bibliothèque municipale of Lille, represents a fair range of satire at Anne's expense. In one she is made to declare that she would shed not a tear in enjoying her pleasures, 'the king's heart is at my mercy'. In one, François I is compared to Paris, Anne to Helen, the Duke of Étampes to Menelaus.\(^43\)

That Anne was the object of scurrilous public vilification is also demonstrated by the extraordinary **coq-à-l'âne** of 1542 known as *Le Grup de Clément Marot* and confidently, if erroneously, attributed by Georges Guiffrey to the great poet. Marot is portrayed in this work as attributing the problems that led to his second exile for religious opinions to Madame d'Étampes's hatred of him. The work contains an extensive and savage critique of public corruption linked to female influence. It instanced the ups and downs at court, justice denied, corrupt judges, excessive royal liberality leading to higher taxes and oppression by the military, war imminent for foolish desire to acquire territory.\(^44\) In this satire, never of course printed at the time, the author likens the Duchess to the ever hungry monster 'Chichiface' from a sculpture at Saint-Martial of Limoges.\(^45\) Guiffrey suggested that Marot's line, 'she kicked me out of court', could also refer to the Duchess and that she was the mysterious figure blamed for his first arrest in *l’Enfer*.\(^46\) In words of unusual scurrility, he goes on: ‘this devil of a cunt / maker of so many cardinals / so many bishops and new abbots’.\(^47\) Guiffrey, in the light of royal gifts and ecclesiastical benefices acquired by her relatives, was convinced that the subject of the satire could be none other than Madame d'Étampes. As evidence for Marot's authorship, though, he offers simply an

---

\(^{41}\) Screech, Introduction.
\(^{42}\) Telle; Albistur and Armogathe.
\(^{43}\) *‘le coeur du Roy sy est la myenne proie’*, LBM, MS 623, fol. 50.
\(^{44}\) Marot, 1962, pp. 168–74.
\(^{45}\) Marot, 1920, p. 443.
\(^{46}\) ‘*Elle m’a chassé de la court*’. On the identification of the figure in *l’Enfer* of ‘Luna’ with Mme d’Étampes, see Marot, 1920, pp. 444, 454. Though unlikely, it was taken up inconclusively by Becker. ‘Luna’ was also linked by Nicolas Lenglet-Dufresnoy, in his 1731 edition of Marot, to Diane de Poitiers, again without much reason. Marot, 1958, p. 20.
\(^{47}\) ‘*Mais voy tu ce diable de con, / Qui a tant fait de cardinaux, / Force euesques, abbez nouveaux*’, Marot, 1920, pp. 452–54.
anecdote that the poet had been heard to remark of François I, ‘he’s only Étampes sand, good for polishing an old pot’.48 Sablon d’Étampes certainly was an agent for polishing copper or pewter but that Marot should have thus attacked a patroness who had formerly protected him is unlikely, even though the saying was obviously going round.49 Le Grup stands, however, as a startling example of public vilification of the royal mistress which could scarcely be mistaken by contemporaries.

A very different literary dimension (from within the court) emerges from Marot’s verse in honor of the newly created countess, beginning: ‘this pleasant vale called Tempé’, now no longer in Thessaly but with us transported by Jupiter to France. In the Estrenne of 1538, Marot praised Anne’s beauty and loyalty to the crown.50 The court poet Charles de Sainte-Marthe (1512–1555) dedicated his works to her in September 1540, praising her great beauty and great honnesteté.51 Marguerite de Navarre’s discussion of courtly love, La Coche (The Coach) (1541–42), was dedicated to Anne. The relations between Marguerite and Anne were complex. Sometimes described as rivals, they often shared tactical objectives in court politics and, though Marguerite was waspish about many others in her talks with foreign envoys, she never was about Anne. There was clearly also some sympathy between them in matters of religion, which in Anne’s case developed later into Protestantism.52 Marguerite’s poem is a discussion about the miseries and pains of love, which are submitted by Marguerite to the arbitration of Madame d’Étampes in the absence of her brother the king. The text also contains an extended eulogy of Anne (though not named directly) in which she is likened to ‘a sun midst stars who spares nothing for her friends, nor stoops to vengeance on her foes’.53 Marguerite addresses her as cousin and mistress. There are several illuminated copies, the best known in the Musée Condé showing Marguerite presenting the work to Anne.54 It has been argued that the work sought to use Anne as

49 The point was made long ago by Guy, p. 303. Mayer, though, in his edition of Marot, 1962, pp. 37–38, leaves the case open: ‘possible, mais loin d’être certain’. For Marot’s verse in praise of Madame d’Étampes, see Marot, 1966, Étrennes, VIII: ‘Vous reprendrez, je l’affie, / Sur la vie / Le tainct que vous a osté / La Deesse de beaulté / Par envie’.
50 ‘Ce plaisant val que l’on nommoit Tempé’, Marot, 1919, II, p. 43; I, p. 481.
51 Sainte-Marthe, Recueil de poésies, épístre, Dedication, pp. 4–6: ‘debonnaireté de ta noble nature’ of one who was ‘des belles treserudites, des erudites tresbelles’.
52 On their relations, see Reid, I, p. 701; II, pp. 506–12.
53 ‘un soleil au milieu des estoilles [...]. Pour ses amys elle n’espargne rien, / Et des meschants ennemis ne se venge’, MC, MS 522, fol. 43v.
54 For a fuller discussion, see Lundquist, pp. 199–200.
a vehicle through which Marguerite could win back the favor of François at a time (in 1541) when their interests were sharply opposed over the marriage of Marguerite’s daughter. The explanation of this work remains difficult.

One of the most interesting features of Madame d’Étampes’s life is the way she coped with disgrace. Her life after 1547 reveals an ability to deal with extreme hostility and also to use her acumen to rescue her financial fortunes and establish a new independent role for herself. General histories note her disappearance from the public scene, yet she went on to live a long and active life; under 40 at the time of her disgrace, she lived to the age of 72 and not quietly. François I died at Rambouillet near Anne’s château of Limours, on 31 March 1547, having at least twice recommended Anne to his son’s protection. Anne left Rambouillet for Limours two days before. On 3 April, it was reported that she sent to the new king, Henri II (1519–1559), to ask for her old lodgings at Saint-Germain-en-Laye in order to take her leave of him. He replied that she should go to Queen Eleanor, implying that she had wronged her in the past. Her followers were being rapidly dismissed from their posts. The Venetian ambassador was clear by 16 April that all her followers at court had been dispossessed. In May, it was said that Anne had met her husband at Étampes on his way to court, to ask him tearfully to take her into his protection. The duc d’Étampes, once arrived at court, had been told that he could have his wife’s property as a reward for having been so long cuckolded by her. Anne’s sister, Péronne, Mme de Cany (c. 1505–after 1555), was condemned to return certain grants; many others were stripped of their royal grants. The Venetian ambassador reflected on her fall early in June. She had been, he reported, in great terror of losing everything she had acquired over the years and likely to be prosecuted in the courts by her enemies in the new council. Henri II had encouraged her husband to ruin her and reduce her to misery. All those with a grudge had been heard and she had been ordered to pay out 100,000 écus. The king had been convinced that she held a mass

55 Marguerite de Navarre, pp. 36–38.
56 Potter, 2013, nos. 3, 4, 5, 9, 12: ASM, Cancelleria, Estero, Ambasciatori, Francia, busta 24, fo. 46 (decipher) Alvarotti to Ercole II, Paris, 15 March 1547 on the king’s words to his female favorites; 30 March 1547, ibid., fo.108 on the removal of Mme d’Étampes to a chamber further from the king because of the sound of her lamentations; 31 March 1547, ibid., fo.123: Mme d’Étampes has gone to Limours ‘luogo suo con dui paggi soli et uno suo fratello’; 3 April 1547, B 24, fasc. ii, fo.10, François’s recommendation of Mme d’Étampes to his son. (My thanks are due to Jean Sérié and Marcello Simonetta for photographs of these documents.)
57 Potter, 2013, nos. 13, 15.
58 Potter, 2013, no. 15.
59 Francesco Giustinian, 16 April 1547, BnF, it. 1716, p. 105.
60 To Mary of Hungary, 20 May, Potter, 2013, no. 22.
of crown jewels and ordered the inventory of all her possessions. Anne had offered, through the cardinal Jean de Lorraine (1498–1550), to give up all her jewels but begged not to be proceeded against with full rigor. Lorraine obtained the grace that she would not be put on trial but that her husband should come to court immediately and decide what to do with her. Anne was still not out of trouble, as the two cardinals, Odet de Coligny (1517–1571) and Charles de Lorraine (1524–1574), were determined still on her ruin.61

Anne’s fate was a matter of wry satisfaction to foreign observers. There was talk of public penance at court as well as her return of royal jewels. Giulio Alvarotti reported in May (and quoting Virgil’s gloomy judgment about the depths to which lust for gold would lead) the story that Anne had handed over to her husband 1000 *marcs* of silver and 50 in gold that she had in Paris and that the couple had agreed so well when they met at Limours that they had slept together for three nights. As a result, the duke had been looked at askance when he returned to court since he had always asserted that he would never take her back. Nevertheless he had removed her household and given her no new servants. By June it was reported that she was under her mother-in-law’s control at Les Essarts (Vendée) and was being forced to submit to her husband’s management of her property.62

At the end of June there was further news: her sister, Countess of Vertus, had been sent under guard to Poitou, Anne to a castle of her husband’s in Brittany for her ‘insolences’ to him. There she had been pressured to give up her jewels. The king had not wished to proceed further because of his promise to his father but left it to the duke to punish her.63 A declaration by her brother, Adrien de Pisseleu-Heilly, in May 1548 notes that the doctors had diagnosed a recurrent daily fever and that her place of confinement, La Hardouinaye, was ‘very damp and injurious to her health’.64 She had expressed the desire for a change of air at Lamballe, north-west of Rennes,

---

61 This narrative is drawn from the despatch of Giustinian, 8 June, BnF, it. 1716, pp. 177–82.
62 Giulio Alvarotti to duke of Ferrara, 26 May 1547, ASM, Francia, B 24, fasc. ii, fo.198 (decipher): ‘In fatti dicono che Madama d’Estampes con havere dato al marito 1000 marchi d’argento et cinquanta d’oro che si trova ad havere qui in Parigi ha acconci seco i fatti suoi talmente che’l marito dormi seco tre notti in Limors et quando tornò alla corte non fu molto ben veduto per haver sempre fatto professione di non volerla mai per moglie, ma quid non mortalia pectora cogis, auri sacra fames’. ‘Occurens’, 15 June, Potter, 2013, no. 26; Giustinian, 3 July: ‘Madama di Tampes è stata querellata di molte cose, la quale perché il Re Christianissimo a rimesso a discrezione del marito, et perché esso la tiene hora come sua prigioniera ad un castello in Bertagna, non è stata atata altrimenti’, BnF it. 1716, pp. 203–04.
63 Potter, 2013, no. 27.
64 ‘est fort aquatic et contrere à sa santé’. Declaration signed by ‘Antoine’ de Pisseleu, seigneur de Heilly, la Hardouinaye, 26 May 1548, copy, sold: 18 November 2014, Ader-Nordmann, lot 37.
not wishing to be taken to Moncontour, and Heilly undertook on his honor to Étampes’s maître d’hôtel to bring her back once her health had improved. The picture conveyed is a somber one.

Yet for all this, it seems that a formal separation of property had been effected by 1550 and financial sources reveal Anne in the 1550s energetically concerned with the defense of her property portfolio and the management of her money. François I had showered her with gifts, often in the form of grants of property between 1538 and 1542, confiscated from those condemned during the governmental upheavals of the 1530s. Then in October 1545, François transferred to her the properties south of Paris confiscated from former Chancellor Guillaume Poyet (d. 1548). The Duchy of Étampes was conveniently situated to absorb Limours, which had been the property of one of the financiers who had been attacked in the 1530s. Jean Poncher (who died in 1535) had been condemned to a fine of 380, 000 livres tournois and his children were probably forced into a transaction with the king which enabled him to grant Limours to Madame d’Étampes in June 1538. François stayed there in July 1540. At the same time, Anne acquired the seigneurie of Challuau. There, François commissioned around 1542 a hunting retreat on a grand scale, in many ways reminiscent of the château de Madrid and La Muette. The Duchess enjoyed possession here of what the Ferrarese ambassador described in 1546 as a palazzo.

Though the estate of Meudon had been acquired by Anne’s maternal Sanguin grandfather, there were still other claimants to the seigneurié, notably her cousin Claude Sanguin (d. 1545) and his wife, who abandoned their claims in 1542. In the acts conveying their rights to Anne, it was noted that the château, then still occupied by her uncle, the cardinal Antoine Sanguin de Meudon (1493–1559), was one in which, according to a contract of 1542, she ‘takes great pleasure and builds fine and sumptuous edifices’. In effect, the ancestral home of the Sanguins was transformed for Anne into a real palace with two new grandiose wings. Further to the south-west was Angervilliers, also inherited from the Sanguins, and both Dourdan and Limours formed a compact group...
of properties conveniently close to the domain of Étampes. The king himself had come to stay there in January 1539 and June, July, and October 1540.\(^71\)

The Guise were major financial beneficiaries of Anne’s fall and in 1554–55 she was energetically defending the rights of another niece, Jossine de Pisseleu (c. 1520–1580), to the Lenoncourt succession, which they were attempting to acquire.\(^72\) In 1554, Anne ceded by exchange the lordships of Limours and Beyne to her successor as royal mistress, Diane de Poitiers (1499–1566).\(^73\) In fact the acquisitions made by the Lorraines of Meudon and Limours had to be paid for but the process was tortuous. Meudon had been transferred by the Duke and Duchess of Étampes to the Cardinal of Meudon in 1537 and then leased back for 20 years for 1200 livres tournois a year and the seigneurie transferred back to them in June.\(^74\) This needed to be sorted out. Complicated financial transactions by the Cardinal of Lorraine and an Italian financier allowed the Guise to pay Anne for part of their property purchases, for example the moveables of the château of Limours and the ferme of Meudon, amounting to 14,000 livres tournois made in 1552.\(^75\) 1556 saw the sale of the seigneurie of Coussac to Jean d’Escoubleau, lord of Sourdis (d. 1569).\(^76\)

So, despite her difficulties after 1547, Anne de Pisseleu seems to have been able to fight back. In 1556 she was still dame d’Égreville, Bransle, Challuau, et Villemur Saint-Ange.\(^77\) The 1544 gift to Longueval by the Duke and Duchess of Étampes of the lordships of Challuau and Bransle was revoked after Longueval’s death in 1553.\(^78\) Anne’s substantial assets in this period are partly indicated by the receipts, dating from the 1560s and 1570s, for rentes bought either from the municipality of Paris or acquired from individuals between 1553 and 1559, which indicate a total capital investment of 47,615 livres tournois, probably more.\(^79\) She was also acquiring other property in

---

\(^{71}\) CAF, VIII, Itinéraire, July 1540; ANG, I, p. 435. 566, 611 (27–31 October) (none of these stays are recorded in the Itinéraire).


\(^{73}\) AN, MC/ET/XIX/104 (13 March 1554).

\(^{74}\) AN, MC/ET/III/13 (2 July 1537); AN, MC/ET/III/6 (3 June 1537).


\(^{76}\) AN, MC/ET/LXVIII/20 (6 and 8 March 1556).

\(^{77}\) AN, MC/ET/XIX/200 (11 March 1556).

\(^{78}\) AN, MC/ET/CXII/1282 (29 May 1553).

\(^{79}\) These rentes were: 1000 livres sold by Paris in January 1553–54 (BnF, pièces orig. 2291, fr. 28775, doss. 31786); 1000 livres sold in May 1555 (ibid., nos. 43, 45, 46); 800 livres sold in December
Paris by lease. In 1559 she was negotiating to buy the lordship of Menetou from Marguerite de Bourbon, Duchess of Nevers (1516–1589) but baulked at the asking price of 30,000 livres tournois, having seen the last statement of revenues and in the absence of a declaration of noble fiefs depending and a full statement of forest rights. She seems to have managed all this by a combination of astuteness and perhaps continuing good will on the part of influential figures.

The middle years of the century saw Madame d’Étampes using her native acumen and contacts to rescue what she could of her property. Her strategy could be judged as one in which she shifted from exercising political power to exercising power in the private sphere among her family and friends; there seems no doubt that she saw herself at the center of a large extended kinship. The last decades of her life also saw her playing part in the world of political Protestantism, also preoccupied with the disposition of her property, favor or disfavor towards her relatives, and the fighting of law suits being part of her strategy. In that context, the fact that she was a childless substantial landowner comes into play.

February 1559 saw the death of her eldest brother, Adrien, who died in captivity after his capture at Ham following the battle of Saint-Quentin. She commented in a letter at the time that he was ‘the best brother I had and whom I loved the most’. The terms of his ransom were to be a problem for some years. For the first marriage of her nephew Jean de Pisseleu (d. 1581) in 1552, to Françoise de Scépeaux (d. by 1569), she gave a rente of 1200 livres tournois per annum or 30,000 in a lump sum (a useful comparison with the legacy to her niece, Diane de Barbançon (d. 1566)). The Duchess, in fact, fell into dispute with Jean over some debts which she claimed she owed her sister, Péronne de Pisseleu, and she obtained a seizure of his lands, which he reversed by royal letters in December 1563. This, as will be seen below, seems to have left no lasting bitterness.

---

1559 (ibid., no. 34); 500 livres acquired from Nicolas de Pellevé; and by him from Pierre Hotman (ibid., nos. 35, 37); 542 livres acquired from Anne Meigret (ibid., no. 36); 125 livres 16s. 8d. acquired from Antoinette, Duchess of Guise (ibid., no. 40). A total yield of 3967. 16. 8, being interest of 8 1/3 per cent, gives a capital of 47 615 livres. We know also of a rente constituted by her to Antoine Mynard, president of the Parlement, AN, MC/ET/XIX/200 (11 March 1556).

80 AN, MC/ET/XIX/107 (5 October 1555).
81 Anne to Duchess de Nevers, Paris, 14 May 1559, BnF, fr. 3114, fol. 126.
82 Friant, pp. 171–80: ‘le meilleur frère que j’eusse et que plus j’aymois’; Villebon to Humières, 12 September 1557, BnF, fr. 3128, fol. 130; will of Adrien de Pisseleu-Heilly, SAP, Ch. Heilly, 58/I, no. 22; ransom of Heilly, ibid. 60.
83 Compardon and Tuety, 3 September 1552, no. 4159; marriage contract, SAP, 52, no. 9 (2 September 1553); AN, AB XIX, 781, mandement of Charles IX, 9 December 1563.
On 19 March 1560, Anne ceded her seigneurie of Challuau to her niece Jeanne (d. after 1613), daughter of Louise de Pisseleu (d. c. 1563) and Guy Chabot-Jarnac (1514–1584), in favor of her marriage to René d’Anglure (d. 1562), reserving the usufruct for her life. This was part of a pattern during her later life of making provisional dispositions of her property, while keeping a degree of control over the heirs. Her dispositions could be revoked and she did indeed do this. On 1 March 1560, she donated 114,000 livres tournois, ‘in contemplation’ of the marriage of her favorite niece, Diane de Barbançon, daughter of her sister Péronne, ‘for the dear love she bears her […] whom she has brought up since childhood’ to Jean de Rohan, sieur de Frontenay (d. c. 1571), cousin of Jeanne d’Albret (1528–1715), queen of Navarre. She reserved most as usufruct but 24,000 directly in the form of rente on the hôtel de ville assigned on her seigneuries of Angervilliers and Égreville. The 90,000 livres tournois which would come to the couple eventually would be divided in half in the event of there being no children: half to Frontenay and half to the sons of Anne’s brother Adrien. Alongside this she gave Diane her claims to seigneuries she still disputed with Diane de Poitiers. Madame d’Étampes, having had to be cautious about her religious sympathies under François I, was by now quite open about them. The marriage contract was signed and the ceremony took place at Argentan on 28 September 1561, at the high tide of Protestant self-confidence at court, sponsored not only by the Queen of Navarre but also Louis, prince of Condé (d. 1569), admiral Gaspard de Coligny (d. 1572), and the Rohan clan. It was a very public statement by the Protestant nobility that they could hold major religious ceremonies in public. The chronicler Nicolas Brulart (d. 1593) called it a great scandal against the Christian religion and the historian Étienne Pasquier (1529–1615) thought that the marriage ‘thus accomplished, almost at the gates of Paris and of Saint-Germain where the king was staying, done with impunity, greatly strengthened the hearts of the ministers’. Diane’s brother François became a commander in Condé’s army and was to be killed at the battle of Saint-Denis (1567). The Rohan

84 AN, MC/ET/XIX/115 (19 March 1560).
85 ‘pour le bon amour qu’elle a porte […] laquelle elle a nourrye dès son enfance’, SAP, Ch. Heilly, no. 52/ xi. S.A.P. 52, no. 11 (also copy in AN, MC/ET/LXVIII/20), the ratification of 28 September 1561 containing a draft of the contract of 1 March 1560 with notes of acceptance of the terms by Jean and Antoine de Pisseleu dated 29 November 1566 and 11 April 1567. Copy of the contract of 28 September 1561 in AN, Y 107, fol. 309.
86 SAP, Ch. Heilly, no. 52/ xi. S.A.P. 52, no. 11.
family were to be crucial in the Protestant cause. Diane died in September 1566, very much the victim, according to her aunt, of a violent and controlling husband who had ruined her life, stolen her money and ultimately poisoned her.88 Madame d’Étampes pursued her niece’s husband single-mindedly and assembled her family with her. In the spring of 1567, she was joined by her sister Charlotte de Pisseleu and niece Marie de Barbançon (d. 1601) in bringing a case against Frontenay before the Parlement of Paris. This was no doubt intended to prevent his laying hands on the funds included in the Duchess’s donation of 1560. Frontenay was arrested in May 1567 but, though he survived until 1571, the outcome of the case is uncertain. Her attack on her favorite niece’s husband, though, had been energetic.

Thus, Anne de Pisseleu continued to occupy the high profile already observed in her participation in the Protestant marriages of 1561. Naturally, this made her vulnerable during the civil wars. It seems that, because of the fighting, she took refuge, some of the time with Diane, at her castle of Égreville in Gâtinais.89 There had been war in this district in 1562, where Catholic commanders were aided by Spanish troops. Nevertheless, as she wrote to her nephew Jean, lord of Heilly (d. 1581), the French in the army ‘did me all the courtesy they could, saving my land and taking nothing from me’, though no thanks to her neighbors in the region.90 The first war over, she was observed by Sir Thomas Hoby, who visited her at Paris in 1566 and found her ‘a grave, godlie, wise sober and courteious lady, one of the staies of the refourmed religion in Fraunce, one that thinketh aswell of the Q. my sovereign and all her refourmed dooinges [...] offring enie service she can’.91 In 1565, Jean de Brosse died, still legally her husband though long separated. Declaring his Catholic faith and his devotion to royal service, his words about his wife were bitter to the end: ‘since she would never take her place as my wife she can demand no endowment’.92 Yet he appealed to the fact that they all had to face their end, not to continue to hold what she held wrongly in their divided property and to do right by his heir, the vicomte de Martigues (d. 1569).93

90 ‘m’ont fait tout le plaisir qu’ilz ont peu et ont sauvé toutes mes terres que l’on ne m’a rien pris’, Anne de Pisseleu to Heilly, 5 March [1563], BnF, n.a.fr. 23167, fol. 42.
91 T. Hoby to Cecil, Pans, 21 June 1566, TNA, SP 79/84, no. 417, fol. 327v (CSPF, II, no. 512).
92 BnF, Clair. 355, fol. 22. The manuscript breaks off but can be supplemented by Morice, III, cols. 1343–45, signed at Lamballe, 25 January 1565: ‘n’ayant poinct voulu server ny tenir lieu de femme elle ne peult demander douaire’.
93 BnF, Clair. 355, fol. 22.
The affairs of her family and inheritance continued to preoccupy Anne, concerned as she was to exercise her authority over the succession to her property. When Jean de Pisseleu came to marry Françoise de Pellevé in 1569 it was Anne who acted as intermediary. Writing to the lady's uncle and guardian, she expressed her assumptions about a marriage alliance, writing that her nephew had come to her to discuss his desire for it.94 In July 1569, she was trying to obtain payment of her interest on investments (rentes) on the Paris municipality and, denied payment, she was helped, without any earlier obligation, by Jean Ébrard de Saint-Sulpice. She claimed that she had been obstructed by other members of the duc d'Anjou's council 'by the malice of some members of that council who wish me no good'. During the 1570s there is little information on Anne's life available, though the effects of the Massacre of Saint-Bartholomew on her sense of security must have been profound. The lawyer-historian Jacques-Auguste de Thou (1553–1617), who married in 1587 one of Anne's favorites in these years, Marie de Barbançon, stated in his personal memoir that his wife's mother and father had returned to the Church, though in the case of François de Barbançon, this cannot have been the case since he had been killed in battle in 1567. Thou's desire to stress the Catholic credentials of his wife is all too apparent and he makes no mention of Madame d'Étampes among the many relatives involved.95

We can learn a certain amount about her late household from enquiries undertaken after her death.96 The château of Égreville, south of Fontainebleau, was laid out on a smaller scale but along the lines of any great aristocratic residence. In the main corps de logis, her chambre on the first floor was equipped with a cabinet which housed the cupboards containing her jewels and title deeds within the tour neuve and a garderobe. The floor above that had room for guests and servants. Below was the salle and there were other towers with suites of rooms, including the keep. Rooms also existed over the main gate.

94 Anne de Pisseleu to [Nicolas de Pellevé; Archbishop of Reims], Égreville, 21 June 1569, copy; SAP 57, no. 38. The marriage contract was signed on 27 June; see SAP, Ch. Heilly, 52, no. 14. Françoise was the heiress of the eldest of the Pellevé brothers, Jean (d. 1558), the Archbishop's brother.
95 ‘plus par la malice de quelques uns dudit conseil qui ne me veut gueres de bien qu'autrement’, Anne de Pisseleu to Saint-Sulpice, 4 July 1569, sold: Thierry de Maigret Lettres et manuscrits autographes – Archives Talleyrand, 3 December 2017, lot 55; Thou, 1734, I, pp. 118–19.
96 ‘Ensuyvent ls deppositions des gentilzhommes, damoiselles, serviteurs et servantes domestiques de deffuncte, noble et puissante dame Anne de Pisseleu’, December 1580, AN, MC/ET/III/404.
What do the long and detailed examinations of the Duchess’s domestic servants in 1580 (conducted in the light of quarrels over inheritance) reveal about the relationship to their mistress? The first point that stands out is that this elderly (and perhaps by now difficult) woman was surrounded by the young. The gentlemen and *maîtres d’hôtel* of her household were all in their twenties and thirties, her *demoiselles* even younger, ranging from 14 to 30. She had a number of gentlemen, including the eldest, Richard Sanguin, *maître d’hôtel*, aged 50, who was her cousin, natural son of the Cardinal de Meudon.97 Two other *gentilshommes domestiques* in particular stand out, Denis and Pierre Roullin, both entitled *écuiers* and sieurs de Mignonville, a fief of Égreville. There seems little reason to doubt that these brothers, Mignonville, were Protestant activists, captains in the armies of the Prince of Condé in 1585 and Henri de Navarre from 1587, one of them killed at Dreux in 1590.98 Otherwise there were members of the regional gentry connected with these: Prégent Popine, lord of Frolles, aged 39 and Jacques du Val, lord of Vaulx, aged 26. There were six *demoiselles*, mostly in their teens.99 The domestic servants included a *femme de chambre* and her husband, an argentier, two cooks, a page, sommelier and two *valets de chambre*.

Madame d’Étampes signed her last will on 6 February 1580, possibly at Paris though this is not clear.100 Her simple statement of belief was that having prayed to God ‘by his son Jesus Christ to order her actions by the holy spirit [...] pardoning the faults she might have committed’. She ordered her body to be buried ‘peacefully and without pomp’ either at the priory of the Bonshommes of Amiens next to her father or at Angervilliers in the parish church should she die there.101 The terms show both her generosity to her domestic staff and also a determination to repay those whom she thought had slighted her; it was a final instrument of her family power.

97 Royal letters confirming his right to 100 *livres tournois* a year from the property left by cardinal de Meudon to his niece and heir, Péronne de Pisseleu, Madame de Cany, 28 March 1561 and transcript of *distrain* of the property of Madame de Cany in Paris as she had no cash to pay, 9 August 1561, BnF, Dupuy 606, fol. 288–89.
98 Mornay, p. 114; Thou, 1740, VII, p. 243; Aubigné, VI, p. 250; A.M. de Mignonville had been *gentilhomme de la maison* to Guy XIX de Laval in 1577: see Broussillon, IV, p. 304.
99 A sister of the Mignonvilles, Elize Roullin, Mlle de Mignonville, 25, and her nieces Anne Roullin, 14–15 and Esther de Leveston, 14; Renée d’Escolliers, 30, daughter of the sieur de Chesnay; Marie Bude, daughter of the sieur of Rancy; finally, Marie de Barbançon, the Duchess’s great niece, 13–14.
100 BnF, Dupuy 606, fol. 222r–223v.
101 ‘et l’avoir prié de par son fils Jesus Christ vouloir regir et dresser ses actions par son sainct espirit [...] luy remectant et pardonnant les faultes et offenses qu’elle peult avoir commises’ ‘paisiblement et sans pompe’, BnF, Dupuy 606, fol. 222r–v.
Her sister Charlotte, Countess of Vertus, was disinherited along with her son by her second husband, Jacques Brouillard sieur de Lizy, the sieur de Badouville.102 Her nephew Jean de Barbançon was also disinherited for having brought a court case against her. His brother Charles was provisionally awarded Angervilliers as long as he refrained from his brother’s case. The 1560 agreement that her sister Louise’s descendants should inherit Égreville and Challuau was denounced because she insisted it had been extorted from her under false pretences. Louise’s son René d’Anglure de Givry had been killed at Dreux in 1562 fighting for the Guise and his son, Anne d’Anglure, lord of Givry, had entered Égreville ‘in order to murder the lady Renée d’Escolliers one of her demoiselles, whom he sought to shoot with an arquebus’, leaving Renée with a disabled arm.103 Thus, a case had been launched by Anne against Givry and his step-father and tuteur, Claude de La Châtre, the later marshal, Catholic follower first of the Duke of Anjou, then of Guise. The echoes of the case against Frontenay are strong. On the positive side, she left 6000 écus to her great-niece and demoiselle, Marie de Barbançon, three-quarters of the property to her nephew in Picardy, Jean de Pisseleu, lord of Heilly, and the other quarter to her great-nephew Louis de Barbançon, Lord of Cany.104 Madame d’Étampes clearly intended to hand out rewards and punishments in this will and dictate the course of her succession.

Anne de Pisseleu was at Égreville when she fell ill on 13 November 1580 at the age of 72. Her illness lasted eight days and became dangerous on 19 November. At midday, a doctor at Sens was sent for. At 9 o’clock the night before her death, her cook was called from his lodging in the village to prepare a dish of almond milk for her in her room. She was given it at 10. At an hour after midnight, with the Duchess sinking fast, the doctor was called for again. She lost the power of speech and died at two minutes after midnight on 20 November. Most of her domestic servants were in the room, the demoiselles d’honneur, femmes de chambre, the maîtres d’hôtel and a number of the gentlemen. Present, too, was one of her heirs, Louis de

102 Badouville was a Huguenot captured along with Nemours’s natural son the prince de Genevois in 1577 by Mayenne, in danger of their lives but released on the orders of Henri III: L’Estoile, II, p. 113.
103 ‘pour tuer et mettre à mort damoyesse Renee d’Escolliers l’un de ses demoiselles, ce qu’il a pensé executer d’un coup d’arquebuse’. This does not easily accord with the later reputation of Givry as ‘gentilhomme doué de tant de bonnes et rares qualités qu’il s’en trouvait pas de semblable en France’, quoted in Villedieu, p. 119.
104 There is reason to think the Barbançons had converted to Catholicism, since they were high in Catherine de Médicis’s favor and Cany married his daughter to Gaspard de Schomberg, himself a convert, in 1588 (Thou, 1734, I, 133).
Barbançon, seigneur de Cany, and his sister Marie, one of the demoiselles, who had slept on a bed in the Duchess's room during her illness. Those present wept and said prayers for the departed for about three-quarters of an hour. There then followed an unseemly intervention by Cany in commandeering the keys to coffers held by the demoiselles and keys kept by the Duchess herself at her bedside. With these he entered the cabinet and had the boxes and cupboards opened, taking out a certain number of valuable jewels and plate. On the Monday, Cany was seen riding away and the surgeons arrived to embalm the corpse. The bailli of Égreville arrived to apply seals to the property and by Wednesday, La Châtre’s guards had been posted.105 On 28 November the English ambassador Lord Cobham (1527–1597) reported that La Châtre had sent a company of servants to challenge for the inheritance in the name of his wife, Jeanne Chabot.106

Cany's high-handedness in assuming his control of the inheritance clearly had implications for the executors, but given the nature of the account, there is little sentiment about it. The death of the head of the household was a major event and there were some tears wept, as was to be expected. The whole household gathered round the bedside as soon as it was known that Anne was dying. But otherwise, nothing is said about religion and there are no extravagant outpourings of grief recorded. Her will had specified, should she die at Paris, burial at the Bonshommes of Amiens next to her father, with bequests to the friars. Death at Angerville would be followed by burial in the parish church next to the lords her predecessors, peacefully and without show; aristocratic seemliness trumped religion.107

Anne de Pisseleu had exercised a form of power that was intrinsically extra-institutional and dependent entirely of the king’s favor; her role was clearly understood by political insiders. Criticism took the form of conventional hostility to the role of women in power, yet in the king’s lifetime had to be circumspect and oblique. However, she lived more than half her life after the death of the king whose love had given her power and wealth. In this, she weathered the storm of disgrace remarkably effectively, carved for herself a new role and ended her life a moderately wealthy woman whose assets became a matter for ferocious competition among her relatives.

105 This sequence of events is established from the enquiries in December over the high-handed actions of Cany, AN, MC/ET/III/404.
106 ‘Madame d’Estampes is deceased this laste weke, and Monsr de Chartres [sic], follower of Monseigneur [Anjou], hath sent a company of his servants who entred her castle and seased on her goodz, challenging to be one of her heirs by the right of his wife’. Henry Cobham to Walsingham, 28 November 1580, TNA, SP 78/4B, fol. 181.
107 BnF, Dupuy, 606, fol. 222‘.
Works cited

Archives and Libraries
AN – Archives Nationales, Paris
ASM – Archivio di Stato, Modena
ASV – Archivio di Stato, Venice
BnF – Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris
HHSA – Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv, Haus-, Hof- und Staatsarchiv
LBM – Lille, Bibliothèque municipale
MC – Chantilly, Musée Condé
SAP – Amiens, Société des Antiquaires de Picardie, Chartrier d’Heilly
TNA – The National Archives, Kew, London.


TELLE, Émile V. L’Œuvre de Marguerite d’Angoulême reine de Navarre et la querelle des femmes. Toulouse: Lion, 1937.

About the author