

# To what extent was Henrietta Maria typical of a medieval woman?

By Mary-Ellen Dyson

## Introduction

In 1625, before embarking on a treacherous journey across the English Channel, the fifteen-year-old Henrietta Maria read her letter from Pope Urban VIII, urging her to be “the Clothilde who subdued to Christ her victorious husband, the Adilberga [Bertha] whose nuptials brought religion into Britain”.<sup>1</sup> She had married Charles I, the King of England and Scotland, by proxy, and was travelling to her new kingdom.<sup>2</sup> Journeying into a heathen land which prohibited her beloved Catholicism, we do not know if she was inspired by the Pope’s invocation of the medieval Frenchwomen who had introduced Catholic teachings to unrepentant lands. We do not know if their sanctity comforted her as she experienced the English people’s vitriol and loathing, ostensibly due to her French heritage and Catholic piety.<sup>3</sup> She would come to be perceived as meddling and wanton by her own subjects,<sup>4</sup> and would eventually be impeached by Parliament in 1643,<sup>5</sup> caught in the thrust of the English Civil War. Her name would be sullied in *The Kings Cabinet Opened* in 1645, when her private correspondence with her husband, Charles I, was revealed to all England; her fearlessness, strength of character and political nous were ignored by the pamphleteers, who emphasised that a Frenchwoman should never have such a place in the King’s ear.<sup>6</sup> The hatred that she has experienced is unlike that of her Catholic successor, Catherine of Braganza, or her secretly Catholic predecessor, Anna of Denmark.<sup>7</sup> One has to wonder, why was Henrietta Maria so deeply detested? Could it be that her feminine force of character was a vestige of an earlier time – the medieval era?

The medieval era is a world beyond all recognition today. Traversing a millennium, it stretches from an epoch before all of Europe’s conversion to Christianity to a time within a generation of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>8</sup> Medieval Europe was an agrarian society dominated by small fiefdoms worked by serfs; the economic notion of *jus utendi et abutendi* [the right to use and abuse] did not exist, meaning that most landowners saw themselves not as owners of property, but as custodians for the next generation. For most of the medieval age, religious unity in Western Europe was strong, with the entire region professing the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed as truth. Piety was seen as being essential for survival.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter from Pope Urban VIII, as cited in Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018. p.71.

<sup>2</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, C. “The Reputation of Dowager Queen Henrietta Maria and the Legitimacy of the Restoration Monarchy” in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023; and Griffey, E. Express yourself? Henrietta Maria and the political value of emotional display at the Stuart court. *The Seventeenth Century*, 35:2, pp.187-212.

<sup>4</sup> Harris, C. “The Reputation of Dowager Queen Henrietta Maria and the Legitimacy of the Restoration Monarchy” in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Harris, C. “The Reputation of Dowager Queen Henrietta Maria and the Legitimacy of the Restoration Monarchy” in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023; and Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Bulman, W.J. The Practice of Politics: The English Civil War and the “Resolution” of Henrietta Maria and Charles I. *Past & Present*, 2010, 206, pp.43-79.

<sup>7</sup> Kishlansky, M. *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714*. London: Penguin Books. 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000.

With Roman masterpieces across the continent having been destroyed, forms of Gothic and Romanesque art and architecture developed during this era, providing Europe with her cultural identity. Perhaps most striking was the medieval era's different attitudes to women. As Pernoud wrote, "women like Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Castile [who lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries] really dominated their century".<sup>9</sup> Queens often exercised power on behalf of their husbands as regents. Women religious were capable of being theological and cultural colossi. Just one example is St. Hildegard of Bingen, who was a prolific composer, theologian and linguist, covering great distances in her lifetime preaching against the Cathar heresy.<sup>10</sup> On the other side of the English Channel, Sr. Marion Norman has discussed how England has an illustrious medieval history of female writers, including "Anglo-Saxon nuns Eadburg, Lioba, Bugga, and Hilda, mediaeval Dame Julian of Norwich, and the fifteenth-century Sion nuns".<sup>11</sup> By the early modern period, the world had changed dramatically. Roman economic notions had returned, with ideas of total ownership facilitating a burgeoning trading economy.<sup>12</sup> Following the Protestant Reformation, the continent was riven with confessional conflicts such as the Thirty Years' War. In Protestant regions, women had no formal role in religious life; in Catholic ones, women religious were expected to remain perpetually behind closed doors.<sup>13</sup> Reginal regencies had become rarer, especially in England. Yet Henrietta Maria, in this early modern world, exerted profound influence and was despised by her enemies for it. She possessed three characteristics that had previously defined medieval queens: patronage, piety, and political influence.

## Patronage

Henrietta Maria's use of patronage in the arts and architecture was transformational for English culture. Henrietta Maria was a patroness of Inigo Jones, perhaps seventeenth-century England's most famous architect; he designed a number of buildings and residences for her, including the Queen's Chapels at St. James' Palace and Somerset House and the Queen's House at Greenwich.<sup>14</sup> Pearce contends that Inigo Jones "introduced classical principles to English architecture",<sup>15</sup> helping England to participate in the Renaissance; this would have been a much more difficult endeavour for Jones without the unstinting assistance of his patron. In addition, Jones' architectural innovations in stage design and theatre assisted later developments in this art form, with Jones' creations including the quintessential proscenium arch.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, Henrietta Maria supported the work of Anthony van Dyck, one of the seventeenth century's most distinctive portrait artists, whose work, Pearce asserts, "connect[s] English art to the Continental tradition",<sup>17</sup> impacting the development of English art thereafter. Now hanging in Washington D.C.'s National Gallery of Art, Van Dyck's

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<sup>9</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000. p.99.

<sup>10</sup> Meconi, H. *Hildegard of Bingen*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press. 2018.

<sup>11</sup> Norman, M. (Sr.) *A Woman for All Seasons: Mary Ward (1585-1645), Renaissance Pioneer of Women's Education*. *Paedagogica Historica*, 1983, 23:1, p.126.

<sup>12</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000.

<sup>13</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018; and Griffey, E. Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

<sup>15</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018. p.303.

<sup>16</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018.

<sup>17</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018. p.303.

portrait of Henrietta Maria alongside Jeffrey Hudson, her favourite dwarf, may well be the most recognisable portrayal of her, not only shaping art but our understanding of history as well; alongside Jeffrey Hudson, no-one would suspect that Henrietta Maria was less than average height. Not only did Henrietta Maria engage in secular art forms, but, as a Catholic, devotional art was important to her as well. An itinerary from 1649 of images in her chapel in Somerset House lists no fewer than twenty-six images, including nine of the Virgin Mary and four of Mary Magdalene.<sup>18</sup> A list of the devotional images present in the room during the birth of Henrietta Maria's daughter, Catherine, features works by distinguished artists such as van Dyck, Raphael and Gentileschi.<sup>19</sup> Henrietta Maria's artistic engagement certainly helped to shape the cultural landscape of England today,<sup>20</sup> with her patronage potentially reminiscent of that of other medieval royal women.

There are numerous examples of medieval queens taking a keen interest in art and serving as patrons of artists. The will of Blanche of Navarre, who was married to the French king, Philip VI, demonstrates that she possessed a diverse collection of beautiful books and objects, such as a richly illuminated book of hours and a decorated, pearl-encrusted belt containing religious relics.<sup>21</sup> Intriguingly, the most significant works within Blanche of Navarre's will all had religious significance, demonstrating an interesting parallel between Henrietta Maria, with her large collection of devotional artworks, and her medieval predecessors. Other medieval queens were also renowned for their patronage; like Henrietta Maria, Blanche of Castile possessed a great interest in both art and architecture,<sup>22</sup> and Eleanor of Aquitaine is often credited with supporting the development of the literary troubadour genre (although historians have since questioned her involvement).<sup>23</sup> On this basis, one might tentatively suggest that Henrietta Maria's interest in art was typical of a medieval woman of her station.

It would also be helpful to examine whether or not Henrietta Maria's artistic patronage was typical of a queen in her own time, the early modern era. Although it would be a challenge for any queen to exert such cultural influence, one does find other examples of early modern queens exercising patronage and possessing extensive art collections. Catherine of Braganza, Henrietta Maria's successor as queen consort, greatly appreciated devotional art, possibly as a result of being Catholic in a hostile, Protestant country.<sup>24</sup> She also possessed a wealth of paintings, some inherited from Henrietta Maria's own collection, with subjects ranging from the suffering and passion of Christ to a saint from her homeland, Anthony of Padua. Another Catholic queen consort from the Stuart era, Mary Beatrice of Modena, encouraged literary

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<sup>18</sup> "The Inventories and Valuations of the King's Goods, 1649-51," as cited in Griffey, E. *Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza*. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

<sup>19</sup> "Abraham van der Doort's Catalogue of the Collections of Charles I," as cited in Griffey, E. *Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza*. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

<sup>20</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing, 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Keane, M. Most beautiful and next best: value in the collection of a medieval queen. *Journal of Medieval History*, 2008, 34:4, pp.360-373.

<sup>22</sup> Earenfight, T. Blanche of Castile, Queen of France. *The Historian*, 2019, 81:1, pp.166-167; Jordan, W.C. Blanche of Castile, Queen of France. *Speculum*, 2018, 93:1, pp.217-220; and Shadis, M. Blanche of Castile, Queen of France. *Royal Studies Journal*, 2017, 4:2, pp.229-231.

<sup>23</sup> Turner, R.V. *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011.

<sup>24</sup> Griffey, E. *Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza*. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

and artistic work, patronising poets such as Henry Caryl and Anne Killigrew and commissioning religious art such as the altarpiece for the Queen's Chapel at St. James' Palace.<sup>25</sup> When assessing Henrietta Maria's patronage in relation to those of other early modern Catholic queens of England, one finds that Henrietta Maria's cultural interests are typical of the early modern period, too, although Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena do not seem to have left as rich a cultural legacy. Although Henrietta Maria's artistic enthusiasm appears to be typical to that of her contemporaries, this does not preclude her from being typical of the medieval period as well. Henrietta Maria's use of patronage is typical of both the early modern and the medieval periods.

## Piety

Henrietta Maria was a deeply devout Roman Catholic. She subscribed to the Cult of the Virgin, and passionately venerated her birthday saint, Catherine of Alexandria, and the patron saint of the Counter-Reformation, Judith.<sup>26</sup> She was a staunch supporter of the Confraternity of the Rosary and the Third Order of St. Francis, both of which she established in her private residence, Somerset House. In spite of the persecution faced by Catholics during this period, a number of royal courtiers converted to Catholicism, possibly as a result of Henrietta Maria's influence and the regular Masses that were held at Somerset House from 1635 onwards. In her later years, Henrietta Maria founded a convent, the Visitation of St. Mary at Chaillot, in support of the Catholic Counter-Reformation.<sup>27</sup> Such piety was shocking and somewhat embarrassing to English courtiers; Protestant ladies asked Charles I to commission a set of prayers for them so that the intense Catholic devotions at court would not make them appear spiritually neglectful.<sup>28</sup> However, in medieval times, Henrietta Maria's religious fervour would have appeared wholly ordinary. Previous English kings and queens, such as Margaret of Anjou,<sup>29</sup> had often made pilgrimages to Our Lady of Walsingham's shrine in Norfolk to give thanks for a pregnancy; Henry VIII was the last royal to do so.<sup>30</sup> Veneration of saints was commonplace in the medieval era; for example, the duchess of Burgundy, Margaret of York, frequently expressed her devotion to the locally popular Sts. Barbara, Anne and Agnes.<sup>31</sup> Does this suggest that Henrietta Maria's piety made her a relic of times gone by?

Upon examining the religiosity of other early modern queens, other examples of great piety suggest otherwise. Catherine of Braganza, Henrietta Maria's successor as queen consort, was

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<sup>25</sup> Williams, M. "Mary Beatrice of Modena: Patronage, Poetry, and Power" in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023; and Lim, A. "World of Interiors: Mary II, the Decorative Arts, and Cultural Transfer" in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Griffey, E. Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

<sup>27</sup> Griffey, E. Express yourself? Henrietta Maria and the political value of emotional display at the Stuart court. *The Seventeenth Century*, 2020, 35:2, pp.187-212; and Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018.

<sup>28</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018.

<sup>29</sup> Maurer, H. and Crom, B.M. *The Letters of Margaret of Anjou*. Woodbridge, Suffolk: The Boydell Press. 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Starkey, D. *Henry: Virtuous Prince*. London: Harper Perennial. 2009.

<sup>31</sup> Warren, N.B. *Women of God and Arms: Female Spirituality and Political Conflict, 1380-1600*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2005.

another pious Catholic queen in a Protestant country. She was also devoted to many saints, including Henrietta Maria's favourites, the Virgin Mary, Judith and her birthday saint, Catherine of Alexandria.<sup>32</sup> (Curiously, both Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza were born on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November.) Catherine of Braganza also held Masses at Somerset House, with two to three hundred people regularly in attendance throughout the 1670s.<sup>33</sup> Like her predecessor, she faced parliamentary hostility for her Catholicism, with politicians repeatedly encouraging her husband, Charles II, to divorce and even banish her.<sup>34</sup> It is a view taken by a number of historians that Henrietta Maria's Catholicism was nothing extraordinary among Stuart queens, and that it was only her manner of promoting Catholicism that provoked enmity; as Griffey has suggested, "[unlike] Catherine of Braganza and Mary of Modena, ... Henrietta Maria was insistently, vocally, visibly Catholic, prompting an exceptional hostility beyond mere xenophobia or misogyny".<sup>35</sup> So, although Henrietta Maria's religiosity was shocking to Protestants, perhaps her piety was typical of early modern Catholics.

Yet it would be a stretch to suggest that Henrietta Maria was typical of an early modern Catholic woman, particularly in relation to her views about women's roles within society. Henrietta Maria defied contemporary beliefs about the role of women religious in the Catholic Church by intervening on behalf of Sr. Mary Ward's new institute for women religious. Mary Ward was an English recusant Catholic; growing up in the sixteenth century under persecution, she witnessed the critical role that women played in maintaining their family's faith.<sup>36</sup> She sought to educate girls for this crucial task, and set out to found a religious community for women along the same lines as the recently constituted Jesuits. The opposition from within the Church was immense, with Mary Ward's proposals being seen as unsuitable for women. A Jesuit father wrote of Mary Ward's sisters in 1617, "when all is done, they are but women".<sup>37</sup> In 1631, a papal bull closed Mary Ward's Ignatian Institute permanently. However, Henrietta Maria did not share her fellow Catholics' opposition; she invited Mary Ward for an audience in 1639, offering her support for Mary Ward's cause and the establishment of a convent in England,<sup>38</sup> perhaps suggesting that Henrietta Maria's views were not aligned with prevailing Catholic ideas in the early modern period. It must be noted that Henrietta Maria was not the only early modern queen to support Mary Ward's cause, with Catherine of Braganza permitting the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (the Ignatian Institute's successor) to establish a school in Hammersmith in 1669. Nonetheless, this episode does demonstrate that Henrietta Maria's unconventionality cannot be explained by her Catholicism alone.

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<sup>32</sup> Griffey, E. Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

<sup>33</sup> Gregory, E. Catherine of Braganza during the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis: Anti-Catholicism in the Houses of Commons and Lords, 1678–81. *Parliamentary History*, 2023, 42:2, pp.195–212.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory, E. Catherine of Braganza during the Popish Plot and Exclusion Crisis: Anti-Catholicism in the Houses of Commons and Lords, 1678–81. *Parliamentary History*, 2023, 42:2, pp.195–212.

<sup>35</sup> Griffey, E. Express yourself? Henrietta Maria and the political value of emotional display at the Stuart court. *The Seventeenth Century*, 35:2, p.191.

<sup>36</sup> Lux-Sterritt, L. An Analysis of the Controversy Caused by Mary Ward's Institute in the 1620s. *British Catholic History*, 2001, 25:4, pp.636-647.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from a Jesuit father, as cited in Lux-Sterritt, L. An Analysis of the Controversy Caused by Mary Ward's Institute in the 1620s. *British Catholic History*, 2001, 25:4, p.641.

<sup>38</sup> Griffey, E. Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

The piety of these early modern royal women does have something significant in common with the piety of medieval royal women: regardless of their era, they all used their religious devotion as a method of exercising indirect political influence. It is plausible that Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza offered their support to Mary Ward as a method of assisting the recusant Catholic community in England, a cause that they were both devoted to.<sup>39</sup> Their shared promotion of St. Judith demonstrates their commitment to the Counter-Reformation,<sup>40</sup> and their devotion to the Virgin Mary could be seen as a reclamation of the Catholic figure disinherited by many branches of the Protestant Reformation. Examining the pious actions of medieval royal women, a similar pattern emerges. In an act of devotion to the Virgin Mary, the aforementioned Margaret of York placed her crown upon the head of a Marian statue in Aachen, a town which had recently rebelled against Burgundian rule. Warren interprets this as “metonymically” and indirectly asserting Burgundian supremacy through religious symbolism.<sup>41</sup> In another example, one of Margaret of York’s contemporaries, Anne d’Orléans, sister of Louis XII of France, served as the abbess of Fontevraud, an abbey that had historic links to England as a result of the work of its former abbess, Matilda of Anjou, the daughter-in-law of Henry I of England. As Anglo-French relations declined, Anne d’Orléans strengthened the links between her abbey and Fontevraudine orders in England, possibly with the intention of seeing an improvement in the two countries’ relations.<sup>42</sup> Other medieval women used religiosity to consolidate their own position; Ruiz Domingo has suggested that Maria of Navarre used her piety in order to portray herself as the ideal queen consort when her position was unstable.<sup>43</sup> Throughout history, most royal women have had limited access to direct methods of exercising power, although queens regent and regnant existed in Europe both in the medieval and early modern periods. Rather, most have exercised power through indirect political influence, via means such as piety and patronage.

## Political Influence

By the seventeenth century, direct political action by women had become rare. Gone were the days of Eleanor of Aquitaine, who served as regent for much of her husband’s reign whilst he fought in territorial conflicts in France.<sup>44</sup> The most magnificent regency of recent years had been that of Catherine of Aragon, the last queen in Catholic England, with her regency famed for its military successes as she sent Henry VIII the bloodstained coat of the dead King of Scotland.<sup>45</sup> Most early modern queens were expected to act in the realm of indirect political influence. Henrietta Maria was unusual in that she was raised by a queen regent, Marie de

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<sup>39</sup> Gregory, E. “Catherine of Braganza, Queen Dowager of England, 1685–1692: Catholicism and Political Agency” in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023; and Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018.

<sup>40</sup> Griffey, E. Picturing Confessional Politics at the Stuart Court: Henrietta Maria and Catherine of Braganza. *Journal of Religious History*, 2020, 44:4, pp.465-493.

<sup>41</sup> Warren, N.B. *Women of God and Arms: Female Spirituality and Political Conflict, 1380–1600*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2005. p.40.

<sup>42</sup> Warren, N.B. *Women of God and Arms: Female Spirituality and Political Conflict, 1380–1600*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2005.

<sup>43</sup> Ruiz Domingo, L., as cited in Morgan, L. Forgotten Queens in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Political Agency, Myth-Making, and Patronage. *European History Quarterly*, 2020, 50:3, pp.583-585.

<sup>44</sup> Turner, R.V. *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2011.

<sup>45</sup> Starkey, D. *Six Wives: The Queens of Henry VIII*. London: Vintage. 2004.

Medici, whose husband, Henry IV, had died when Henrietta Maria was not yet six months old.<sup>46</sup> This may have influenced Henrietta Maria's perception of the role of a queen, inculcating a view that queens were supposed to be politically active. Henrietta Maria certainly was. During the English Civil War, Henrietta Maria proved an invaluable political resource; she traversed Europe in search of resources to support the war effort, and resolved factional conflicts within Charles' wartime court, allowing him to consolidate his authority.<sup>47</sup> These were all perfectly acceptable manners of a queen assisting her husband, using methods that could be termed as "soft power" without attempting to influence the direction of policy. Where Henrietta Maria diverged from contemporary norms was her attempt to advise Charles in relation to military policy. *The Kings Cabinet Opened* was published by Parliament in 1645, revealing the King and Queen's private correspondence which had been captured at the Battle of Naseby.<sup>48</sup> The letters divulged that Henrietta Maria had advised Charles as to the style of decision-making that he should adopt, had urged him to ignore his advisers' suggestions when they contradicted with his strategic commitments, and, most shockingly of all, had actively participated in the creation of his military strategy. This was a propaganda coup for Parliament; the letters were swiftly published in London alongside xenophobic and misogynistic denunciations of the Queen. The episode contributed to pamphleteers' assertions that she had "absolute unlimitable power over the King's sword and sceptre"<sup>49</sup>, fuelling mistrust amongst her subjects.

It is in attempting to exert *direct* influence over political policy that Henrietta Maria deviated from the expectations of early modern queen consorts. Her contemporaries may have exercised influence through indirect means, such as through their piety or use of patronage, but they did not make explicit their views on military strategy in their correspondence. It is my view that this is a significant aspect of the difference between Henrietta Maria and other early modern queen consorts, such as Anna of Denmark and Catherine of Braganza, and is a crucial part of the reason why she has received such extraordinary loathing, from her own time to the present day. Her attempt to exercise direct political influence is one of the characteristics that makes her appear to be so distinctively medieval. The medieval period bursts at the seams with women, royal or otherwise, exerting great power through direct influence and action. Simply examine Pernoud's two examples, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Blanche of Castile. At the start of her reign, Eleanor of Aquitaine was entrusted by her husband with a country only just emerging from civil war, England, and later in her reign was assigned with the task of creating peace in another region, Aquitaine.<sup>50</sup> Blanche of Castile, handpicked by Eleanor of Aquitaine to become Queen of France, was an adept politician from a country with a long heritage of queens reigning in their own right, who served as

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<sup>46</sup> Harris, C. *Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette: Queenship and Revolution in Early Modern Europe*. Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada. 2012. (PhD thesis); Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018; and Woodacre, E. Queenship and Revolution in Early Modern Europe: Henrietta Maria and Marie Antoinette. *European History Quarterly*, 2017, 47:2, pp.351-352.

<sup>47</sup> Pearce, D. *Henrietta Maria*. Stroud: Amberley Publishing. 2018.

<sup>48</sup> Bulman, W.J. The Practice of Politics: The English Civil War and the "Resolution" of Henrietta Maria and Charles I. *Past & Present*, 2010, 206, pp.43-79.

<sup>49</sup> Pamphlet written by Henry Parker, as cited in Harris, C. "The Reputation of Dowager Queen Henrietta Maria and the Legitimacy of the Restoration Monarchy" in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023, p.24.

<sup>50</sup> Turner, R.V. *Eleanor of Aquitaine: Queen of France, Queen of England*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2011.

regent for her son whilst pioneering new forms of diplomacy and patronage.<sup>51</sup> Some powerful women could and did emerge in the early modern era, but some medievalists have proposed that, as Roman ideas were revived during the Renaissance, Roman social mores about women remaining out of the public sphere were revived as well, making it harder for women to participate politically.<sup>52</sup> In light of this contention, Henrietta Maria's political manoeuvres appear to be atypical of early modern queen consorts; instead, they seem to be vestiges of an earlier time.

## Conclusion

Henrietta Maria was a French Catholic queen in Protestant England, which has often been blamed for the contempt that many of her subjects held her in.<sup>53</sup> Yet any historian seeking to understand Henrietta Maria's reputation must question whether this is a sufficient explanation. In Henrietta Maria's time, early modernity had only recently materialised, following what was perhaps the most dramatic sequence of social change since the fall of the Roman empire.<sup>54</sup> Nations were consolidated from the ashes of fiefdoms, trade began to fuel the European economy, and women's role in society had changed forever. In the midst of such consequential changes, one must examine Henrietta Maria's life not only in light of her early modern contemporaries, but also in light of her medieval predecessors. When exploring the lives of medieval queens, one finds patterns of patronage, piety and political influence; when exploring Henrietta Maria's life, we find her to be similarly patronising, similarly pious and similar in her exercise of political influence. However, upon considering the lives of other early modern queens, one discovers substantial continuity between the medieval and early modern periods. Early modern queens also frequently engaged in the exercise of patronage, and Catholic early modern queens were often no less pious than their predecessors. Queens across periods exercised indirect political influence through diplomacy, culture and image. Yet early modern queen consorts did not frequently attempt to influence military strategy as Henrietta Maria did; her attempts to advise Charles in military matters during the Civil War damaged her reputation permanently.<sup>55</sup> It is in this that Henrietta Maria deviated from early modern expectations. In her patronage and piety, she was typical of an early modern woman; in her exercise of political influence, she was not. In the medieval era, one finds a world where women who did not hold power occasionally advised those who did. The aforementioned St. Hildegard of Bingen wrote to Frederick Barbarossa in 1152 after he was elected King of Germany, offering advice;<sup>56</sup> it is difficult to imagine such a gesture being

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<sup>51</sup> Earenfight, T. Blanche of Castile, Queen of France. *The Historian*, 2019, 81:1, pp.166-167; Jordan, W.C. Blanche of Castile, Queen of France. *Speculum*, 2018, 93:1, pp.217-220; and Shadis, M. Blanche of Castile, Queen of France. *Royal Studies Journal*, 2017, 4:2, pp.229-231.

<sup>52</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000.

<sup>53</sup> Bulman, W.J. The Practice of Politics: The English Civil War and the "Resolution" of Henrietta Maria and Charles I. *Past & Present*, 2010, 206, pp.43-79; Griffey, E. Express yourself? Henrietta Maria and the political value of emotional display at the Stuart court. *The Seventeenth Century*, 35:2, pp.187-212; and Harris, C. "The Reputation of Dowager Queen Henrietta Maria and the Legitimacy of the Restoration Monarchy" in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Harris, C. "The Reputation of Dowager Queen Henrietta Maria and the Legitimacy of the Restoration Monarchy" in Gregory, E. and Questier, M.C. (Eds.) *Later Stuart Queens: 1660-1735*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan. 2023.

<sup>56</sup> Meconi, H. *Hildegard of Bingen*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press. 2018.



acceptable following the introduction of enclosure for women religious in 1298.<sup>57</sup> The medievalist Pernoud once wrote that “women have much to do [in the present day] to recover the place that was theirs in the time of Queen Eleanor [of Aquitaine] and Queen Blanche [of Castile]”<sup>58</sup>, yet Henrietta Maria operated politically in the masculine domains in her own time. In her patronage, piety and exercise of political influence, Henrietta Maria was typical of a medieval woman.

**Word count (excluding footnotes): 3,548**

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<sup>57</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Pernoud, R. *Those Terrible Middle Ages!: Debunking the Myths*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press. 2000. p.113.