



# Medieval Feminist Forum

A Journal of Gender and Sexuality

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*The Letters of Margaret of Anjou*, edited by Helen Maurer and B. M. Cron. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2019. Pp. xiii + 303; 2 b/w ill. ISBN: 9781783274246.

This new edition, encapsulating the letters of Margaret of Anjou, is a welcome addition to the works of scholars interested in queenship, gender, and letter writing with a particular emphasis on diplomacy and intercession. It brings together the corpus of Margaret's letters, largely composed in Middle English, and fully contextualized. As opposed to earlier editions of letters, such as Anne Crawford's *Letters of the Queens of England* or the volumes concerned with the letters of Elizabeth I,<sup>8</sup> this edition is impressively and coherently divided into thematic sections, which underpin our understanding of how medieval English queens operated and utilized letters as a form of exercising their diplomatic skills. The letters, published in full for the first time, deserve to be a staple for any scholar and university that focuses upon medieval rulership and queens.

The volume is divided into two distinct parts: the first part, "Great and Good Queen," is largely based upon the letters in British Library Add. MS 46846 which had previously been edited in 1863 by Cecil Munro, with new additions.<sup>9</sup> The first chapter examines Margaret as matchmaker, analyzing her position as guardian of wards, and her actions as an alliance maker among the nobility and gentry for matches which would strengthen bonds and the loyalties of her benefactors. The second chapter, entitled "Holy Orders", analyzes Margaret's role as religious patron and her intervention in securing benefices for favored clerics. Patronage and networking were essential aspects of queenship, and these two chapters clearly demonstrate Margaret's political abilities when securing not only her own power base, but that of her allies as well. Chapter 3 considers Margaret's role as an intercessor, and the delicacy

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8 Anne Crawford, *Letters of the Queens of England* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1997).

9 Cecil Munro, ed., *The Letters of Queen Margaret of Anjou* (London: Camden Society, 1863).

with which queens and noblewomen often had to operate in order to secure intercession and the aims of the benefactor. In chapter 4, Maurer and Cron analyze Margaret's actions as a businesswoman, namely her actions as a landholder and mistress of the household, through which we gain a deeper understanding of the administrative capabilities not only of a queen, but of noblewomen as well. Margaret's position as protector and peacemaker, as discussed in chapter 5, is pivotal when one considers her role in the Anglo-French alliance and the distaste of some of the English nobility for her marriage to Henry VI. Her actions on behalf of her tenants, servants, and involvement in other disputes demonstrate "the importance of these activities to Margaret as queen and good lady" (81). The letters in chapter 6 look at Margaret and money, evaluating the position of the queen in relation to her dower and revenues, as well as how she assisted others in financial matters, and continuing the theme of this section where she acts as a "good lady" (116). Another facet of queenship which often draws the interest of scholars is that of religious beliefs and benevolence, the focal point of chapter 7. In it, Maurer and Cron present letters concerned with charity and the salvation of Margaret and her immediate family, allowing us an insight into queenly religious devotion and practice. The final chapter of this section turns away from the personal and political aspects of queenship that are often examined to one lesser studied: that of the queen and her pastimes; in this case, Margaret's enjoyment of hunting.

In the second section of the volume, entitled "Political Queen," the study turns toward the explicitly political letters related to Margaret's position as queen of England, the majority written by or to her, although others written about her are included for further context. The ninth chapter of this volume focuses on her correspondence with her uncle, Charles VII, king of France, during the negotiations for peace in the 1440s. The documents in chapter 10 record Margaret's actions as queen consort in the 1450s as she sought to exercise power, with the records dominated by excerpts about Margaret's political activities at this time. The discussion in chapter 11 focuses on the event which arguably changed Margaret's situation irrevocably, that of the deposition of Henry VI in 1460. The letters in this chapter demonstrate Margaret's fervor in protecting herself and her son, and her attempts to restore Henry to the English throne. Chapter 12, the final chapter

in this work, draws a close to the study by focusing on Margaret's exile in France in the 1460s and early 1470s. Margaret's retirement to Anjou saw her slip into obscurity, as she was dependent on her father and Louis IX, king of France, for her subsistence. No letters from this time survive, and thus the volume briefly summarizes the final years of Margaret's life.

This study offers a rich investigation into the life and times of Margaret of Anjou, providing the reader with multiple insights into the personal and political aspects of queenship, and how Margaret corresponded with her networks and subjects. As noted in the outline of the text, the volume discusses the foundational aspects of medieval queenship, considering Margaret's roles as a diplomat, intercessor, mediator, administrator, and patron, alongside her networks, piety, and personal occupations. Such a framing is useful for students and scholars new to the field of medieval queenship, as it points the way to further research and discussion.

As noted, the accessibility of the work would make it a useful primary text for undergraduate and postgraduate students not yet familiar with original manuscripts, or indeed those unable to access them, as well as being a vital text for initial works on late medieval English queenship. Likewise, its scholarly analysis and discussions ensure its usage extends to researchers in the field of Royal Studies and medieval England, allowing insights into the wider political dynamics and conditions of fifteenth-century England. Although the letters are largely preserved in Middle English with no accompanying translation, those that are in Latin and French have been translated for the modern reader.

Brought together, this volume also offers a greater understanding of the influences on Margaret's letter writing and composition. The research and contextualization of the sources under study are excellent, providing both novices and experts on the subject an edition which is vital to any examination of Margaret's life, or indeed late medieval English queenship. The work undertaken here stands as an exemplar for future works on the letters of rulers. It demonstrates the importance of having accessible and accurate primary texts and is a welcome addition to a corpus of primary sources for the late medieval period. Its clear references and engagement with the original manuscripts mean that the interested scholar will be able to delve further into the letters

of Margaret should they so wish. Overall, this collection is a must for those interested in the politics of late medieval England, and gender and rulership.

Gabrielle Storey

University of East Anglia/University of Winchester

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*The Mélusine Romance in Medieval Europe: Translation, Circulation, and Material Contexts*, by Lydia Zeldenrust. Studies in Medieval Romance. Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020. Pp. xii + 272. ISBN: 9781843845218.

There has been a recent, and most welcome, uptick in Mélusine studies, with Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm Maddox's translation into English of Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine, or the Noble History of Lusignan* and *Mélusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth*, edited by Misty Urban, Deva F. Kemmis, and Melissa Ridley Elmes.<sup>10</sup> Lydia Zeldenrust's *The Mélusine Romance in Medieval Europe* is a welcome addition to this conversation, providing an examination both textual and geographic of the story and its many variations, and identifying it as a transcultural, pan-European narrative responsive to the concerns of temporality and geography.

The book begins with an introduction which situates this volume in the context of Mélusine studies through the trope of mutations, making a valuable comparison between Mélusine's shifting character and the narrative's movement through time and space. The book is then divided by country/language, with chapters on the French, German, Castilian, Dutch, and English Mélusines; within each part are sections examining manuscripts and editions followed by more the-

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<sup>10</sup> *Mélusine, or the Noble History of Lusignan*, trans. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm Maddox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014); Misty Urban, Deva F. Kemmis, and Melissa Ridley Elmes, eds., *Mélusine's Footprint: Tracing the Legacy of a Medieval Myth* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).