

Material Culture and Queenship in Fourteenth-Century France: The Testament of Blanche of Navarre (1331-1398), by Marguerite Keane. Leiden: Brill, 2016. Pp. 261, 34 b/w figures, 2 b/w tables, appendices, bibliography. ISBN: 9789004248366.

As she neared the end of her life, Blanche of Navarre distributed her worldly possessions in a testament of 1396 and two additional codicils (1396 and 1398, respectively). In *Material Culture and Queenship in Fourteenth-Century France: The Testament of Blanche of Navarre (1331-1398)*, Marguerite Keane mines these documents for valuable information and insights into the material culture of a late-medieval queen, but also the relationships and associations important to Queen Blanche. In her testaments, Blanche bequeathed objects ranging from the pious to the practical to her family members, religious advisers, and members of her household. Through careful analysis of these marvelous sources, Keane is able to reconstruct Blanche's family and friendship networks, as well as how she used these gifts to highlight her place among the royalty of France and to ensure she was remembered. The result is a study that contributes significantly to understanding Blanche as both a royal woman and individual.

To trace Blanche's relationships and patronage, Keane assumes a multi-disciplinary approach, employing literature, history, and art history. As she states in the introduction, this is a rather unusual study of patronage in that she is using a text rather than objects—many of which are not extant—to explore royal material culture. The book is organized into six chapters. The first chapter provides an overview of Blanche's life and patronage from her childhood to her death as a dowager queen. The next chapter interrogates the documents on which Keane's argument and analysis is based: the 1396 testament and two codicils. Here she posits that these documents represent a "sentimental autobiography" that allows reconstruction of Blanche's affective relationships. This seems both a reasonable interpretation and an interesting textual approach. Based on her careful analysis of the testaments, Keane argues that two prominent themes emerge regarding Blanche's relationship with those to whom she left bequests: mother (literally to some and figuratively to others) and mediator. The next four chapters are dedicated to examining the objects that Blanche possessed and bequeathed in light of these themes. Keane starts with a discussion of books. At her death, Blanche's library consisted of forty-two books. This is rather modest compared with other royals, and Keane suggests that Blanche may have gifted out books before her death. The testaments reveal a gendered pattern to the bequests of books as Keane finds that Blanche left books on moral education and works that

were associated with previous queens to her female descendants, supporting the thesis that Blanche was continuing her maternal role as educator of these young women. Keane posits that Blanche's bequests were aimed at reaffirming ties among these women and reminding them of their royal descent. Male friends and relatives, in contrast, were often left bequests of money rather than books.

Moving from books to objects, in chapter 4 Keane examines to whom Blanche left reliquaries, altarpieces, and paintings. She finds a correlation between gifts of books and reliquaries, as Blanche left reliquaries and books related to the same saint to relatives and religious communities. These objects reflected and memorialized Blanche's piety, but would also ensure the recipient's prayers for her soul. Keane also cleverly uses the gifted objects recorded in the testaments to reconstruct Blanche's devotional spaces, such as *clotets* or private areas of prayer created by hanging tapestries. Some of these objects carried Blanche's heraldic sign, which would further cultivate memory of her. Chapter 5 considers *joyaux*, or objects that were actually worn by Blanche: crowns, rings, brooches, prayer beads, and gems. These were personal items that Blanche ensured were left to individuals for whom the object would have a specific meaning. Keane argues that prior ownership by Blanche and other queens was important to the object and also the bequest, as it would include the recipient in this line of royal women. The final chapter moves from these more luxe items to household objects, particularly textiles. To her ladies-in-waiting, Blanche left sets of her bedsheets so that they could start households of their own. The queen also made bequests of liturgical textiles to various churches in her dower lands. Indeed, Blanche's own clothing was repurposed into vestments that would be worn by priests, thus allowing for Blanche's presence through her garments during the mass and also remembrance through her gift. The analysis of the testament concludes by summarizing how these objects reveal the relationships that defined Blanche's life. An appendix with descriptions of the objects and to whom they were left is included at the end of the book. Keane provides the original French and also a translation. This is a tremendous resource for scholars, perhaps most particularly for students who may lack the requisite language skills to read the document in its original language.

Keane provides an engaging analysis of the meaning of the objects and bequests. We learn a lot about the objects themselves as well as this medieval queen. The historical context in which Blanche operated, however, could have been better developed. The book sometimes assumes a familiarity with life at the Valois court that not all readers will possess. For example, in considering Blanche's possession and distribution of gems, Keane states that it was "typical

of manic gift-giving practices at the French court” (166). Undoubtedly this was true, but what were these “manic” practices? Balancing the individual with her broader historical context is always a challenge in examining a medieval life, but a bit more background on Blanche’s context would have allowed for a deeper understanding of the significance of her bequests. The complexity and density of Blanche’s bonds of family and friendships is apparent from the discussion, and it is sometimes hard to follow the ties of affinity that bound Blanche to the recipient of her gift and to those from whom Blanche herself had received the object. Having a chart outlining where these people were in terms of blood and affinity to Blanche would have been very helpful, as would placing the detailed genealogical chart at the front of the book to allow the reader easier access to it rather than embedding it in a chapter.

Material Culture and Queenship in Fourteenth-Century France is a welcome contribution to the study of medieval women. It has much to offer the specialist on queenship, but also those interested in material culture and women’s networks. Keane’s analysis showcases how scholars can use objects to reconstruct the physical spaces and the emotional lives and life experiences of medieval donors.

Amy Livingstone
Ball State University