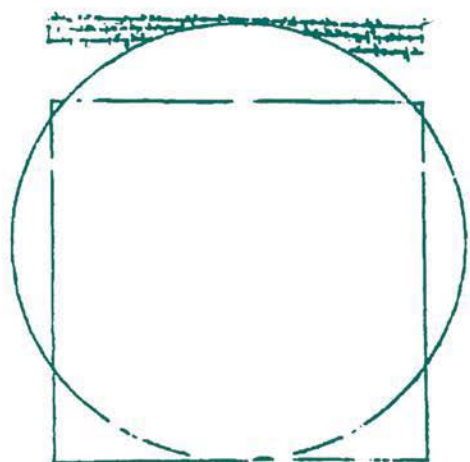


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E-Mail: lhomme.geschichte@univie.ac.at Internet: <https://lhomme.univie.ac.at>

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Christa Hämmerle, Claudia Kraft, Sandra Maß, Claudia Opitz-Belakhal

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Gendered Power Politics in a Nascent Empire. The Case of Maximilian of Habsburg (1459–1519) and Mary of Burgundy (1457–1482)¹

1. Introduction

Around 1500, Europe's political landscape saw major territorial changes effected by long-term conflicts and military expansion. In the heart of the continent, the reign of Maximilian I is a case in point. From 1493 onwards, Maximilian was acting king (and from 1508 emperor) of the Holy Roman Empire, and simultaneously ruler of the Habsburg lands. In the former position he claimed a role as defender of Christendom against the Ottomans which reflected the idea of the emperor's eminence in Latin Christianity. In the latter position, he used these roles to advance his family's dynastic position in a pronounced manner.²

This is testified both by his own two marriages, to Mary of Burgundy and Bianca Maria Sforza of Milan, and even more by his far-reaching dynastic projects involving the Castilian and Bohemian lines. These dimensions required forms of shared rule, and thus Maximilian after the early deaths of his first wife Mary and his son Philipp delegated government in the "Habsburg Netherlands" to his daughter Margaret, who was then followed by her niece Mary (of Hungary), Maximilian's granddaughter.³ Dynastic politics was a family business. Kin of both genders – spouses, sons and

1 This contribution is based on work within the Special Research Program (SFB 92) *ManMax: Managing Maximilian (1493–1519) – Persona, Politics, and Personnel Through the Lens of Digital Prosopography*, Speaker: A. Zajic, funded by the Austrian Science Funds (FWF), Project *Gendering Maximilian – Gendered Dimensions of Court Organisation and Representation* (PI C. Lutter), details at: <https://manmax.hypotheses.org/the-team>.

2 On the political situation in Europe around 1500 see the introduction to this special issue with further bibliography, esp. on p. 11–13. The classic study on Maximilian I. is Hermann Wiesflecker, *Maximilian I., das Reich, Österreich und Europa an der Wende zur Neuzeit*. 5 vols., Vienna 1971–1986. For a recent overview see Manfred Hollegger and Markus Gneiß, *Maximilian I. (1459–1519). Herrscher und Mensch einer Zeitenwende*, Stuttgart 2023²; Markus Debertol et al. (eds.), *Per tot discrimina rerum. Maximilian I. (1459–1519)*, Wien/Köln/Weimar 2022.

3 Cyrille Debris, 'Tu, Felix Austria, Nube'. La dynastie de Habsbourg et sa politique matrimoniale à la fin du moyen âge, Turnhout 2005; on the topos see Alexander Kagerer, *Macht und Medien um 1500. Selbstinszenierungen und Legitimationsstrategien von Habsburgern und Fuggern*, Berlin/Boston 2017, 46–49.

daughters, aunts, and nieces – were key partners in the shared agenda of the dynasty. What is more, medieval monarchical rule was composite, as male and female rulers alike were legitimated and accompanied by formal councils and supported by offices holders and a large number of advisors, courtiers, and staff of both genders.⁴

The sequence of female governors of the Netherlands is a key example of successful Habsburg women rulers who interacted at eye level with their male relatives as peers.⁵ Others were less fortunate: both Mary of Burgundy and her son Philip the Fair died in their mid-twenties; Bianca Maria Sforza's political agency suffered as a result of her husband's inauspicious Milan enterprise. However, dynastic, and personal 'success' or 'failure' did not just depend on political circumstances and only partly on 'individual' qualities. Rather, they were formed by a variety of role models, cultural traditions, and educational norms that in turn were deeply gendered. Starting with legal norms that regulated access to rule, the range and limitations of education and training, and long-standing traditions of thinking about gender and rule, any ruler's political agency was enabled and limited by representations of gender.

In this contribution, we will focus on the effects of gendered representations of pre-modern rule, comparing Maximilian himself and his first wife Mary of Burgundy. Until about two decades ago, Maximilian's and Mary's imageries have developed in a fundamentally unbalanced manner. While research and bibliography on the emperor is enormous, the Burgundian heiress – not least due to her early death – gained much less attention until recently. What is more, recent scholarly assessments underline the extent to which their images and the representations of their marriage were shaped by Maximilian's propaganda that in turn significantly influenced modern historiography "in a way that has led to (Mary's) almost being written out of history". This imbalance was reinforced by diverging foci of regional and national historiographies written in different languages, which privileged different strands of reception. Hence, a comparative reconsideration of the gendered quality of the heterogeneous and ambivalent assessments of both political *personae* during their lifetime, and the many layers of

4 For a global overview see Jeroen Duindam, *Dynasties. A Global History of Power, 1300–1800*, Cambridge 2016; on what follows with ample references: Christina Lutter, *Gendering Late Medieval Habsburg Dynastic Politics: Maximilian I and His Social Networks*, in: *Austrian History Yearbook*, 55 (2024), 1–16, at: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0067237824000274>, access: 14 Oct. 2024. On the various forms of couples' shared ruling practice see the contributions by Julia Burkhardt and Isabella Lazzarini in this special issue, as well as, for instance, Sebastian Roebert, *Die Königin im Zentrum der Macht. Reginale Herrschaft in der Krone Aragón am Beispiel Eleonores von Sizilien (1349–1375)*, Berlin 2020, 17–23, and Cristina Andenna, *Stellvertretung im Königreich Sizilien-Neapel und die Stellung der ersten angevinischen Königinnen als Vikarinnen des Königs*, in: Gabriela Signori and Claudia Zey (eds.), *Regentinnen und andere Stellvertreterfiguren. Vom 10. bis zum 15. Jahrhundert*, Berlin 2023, 85–110, 98f.

5 Cf. William Monter, *An Experiment in Female Governance. The Habsburg Netherlands 1507–1567*, in: *History Research*, 3, 6 (2013), 441–452.

memory and historiography that constructed their images over the centuries has only begun recently.⁶

Following the general outline of this special issue, we will therefore ask which legal norms and cultural expectations confronted the adolescent Maximilian and Mary when they assumed their political tasks and responsibilities. Which shared or divergent role models and traditions were available to them as they fashioned their own political *personae*? Which political challenges counterbalanced or overruled gendered dynastic thinking? We will argue that gender as an analytical category does not just help to systematically compare representations of female and male rulers within complex power relations. As a relational category, it also allows us to move beyond gendered binaries and open them up to the practical dimensions of the ‘making of’ pre-modern rule that was always shared by various individuals and representative bodies.⁷ The beginning of the couple’s short shared rule (1477–1482) provides a case in point, as the composite quality of the Burgundian territories epitomized contemporary issues of the balance of power between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ influences, of the political participation of elites organized into political bodies, and discussions about princely qualities and the ‘common good’ that was at stake in composite principalities or monarchies.⁸

6 Cf. Michael Depreter et al., Mary of Burgundy. Agency, Government, and Memory, in: id. et al. (eds.), Marie de Bourgogne. Figure, principat et postérité d’une duchesse tardo-médiévale, Turnhout 2021, 13–23; the quote at 23. Similarly Christina Antenhofer, Maximilian und die Frauen: Bilder und Narrative, in: Debertol et al., Per tot discrimina rerum, see note 2, 83–100; Christina Lutter, Zur Repräsentation von Geschlechterverhältnissen im höfischen Umfeld Maximilians, in: Johannes Helmuth, Ursula Kocher and Andrea Sieber (eds.), Maximilians Welt. Kaiser Maximilian I. im Spannungsfeld zwischen Innovation und Tradition, Berlin 2018, 41–60, 51.

7 Seminal is Joan Wallach Scott, Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis, in: American Historical Review, 91, 5 (1986), 1053–1075. Cf. programmatically Theresa Earenfight, Without the Persona of the Prince: Kings, Queens and the Idea of Monarchy in Late Medieval Europe, in: Gender & History, 19, 1 (2007), 1–21; Heather J. Tanner (ed.), Medieval Elite Women and the Exercise of Power, 1100–1400, Moving Beyond the Exceptionalist Debate, Cambridge 2019. This point is also made by Lazzarini in this special issue. Depreter et al., Mary of Burgundy, see note 6, highlight the interactions of gendered rule, state-building, and the politics of memory in the given context.

8 On this tradition throughout the 15th century see Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin in this special issue. Cf. John H. Elliott, A Europe of Composite Monarchies, in: Past & Present, 137 (1992), 48–71; Charlotte Backerra, Personal Union, Composite Monarchy, and ‘Multiple Rule’, in: Elena Woodacre et al. (eds.), The Routledge History of Monarchy, London 2019, 89–111; on the duchy of Burgundy see Jelle Haemers, For the Common Good. State Power and Urban Revolts in the Reign of Mary of Burgundy, 1477–1482, Turnhout 2009; Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, Le royaume inachevé des ducs de Bourgogne (XVIe–XVe siècles), Paris 2016; Jonas Braekevelt, Constitutions, State and Estates: Interactions Between Princely Restrictions and Reforms, Privileges of the Governed and the Control of Absolute Power in the Burgundian Countries, in: François Foronda and Jean-Philippe Genet (eds.), Des chartes aux constitutions. Autour de l’idée constitutionnelle en Europe, XIIe–XVIIe siècle, Paris 2019, 233–251.

2. A hero in defence of the Burgundian dynasty?

When Maximilian arrived in the Low Countries in August 1477 to marry the probably most attractive bride of her generation, the duchy had already been in a profound crisis for some time caused by Duke Charles the Bold's aggressive attempts to extend and all at once centralize the Burgundian territories. His incessant wars and the constant fiscal pressure on cities and principalities had thus already previously met substantial resistance. His death on the battlefield of Nancy against the towering army assembled by Lorraine and the Swiss on 5 January 1477 left his only child and sole heiress Mary not just an illustrious domain, but defeated armies, an empty treasury, discontented representatives of his subjects among cities and nobility, and a powerful external enemy, Louis XI of France, who immediately took advantage of the situation and invaded Burgundian territories.⁹

Mary thus had to defend her heritage against the French king's aspirations built like her own on dynastic claims. Supported by Margaret of York, Charles's widow and Dowager Duchess of Burgundy, she first and foremost negotiated the support of her subjects, represented by the Estates General, to reinvigorate her military forces after the recent devastating losses. Within only a few weeks of her father's death, she revoked many of his fiscal and administrative measures and granted both the Estates General and regional representative bodies of the disparate Burgundian lands several privileges in exchange for their recognition of her claim as legitimate heiress and their active support against the enemy.¹⁰

She agreed to marry Maximilian, son of Emperor Frederick III, a match that her father and Frederick had begun to negotiate a decade before. If the twenty-year old Mary (*1457) was the most sought-after bride of her time, the slightly younger Maximilian (*1459) was the prime candidate among many suitors. Mary was not just the heiress of highly attractive territories, notwithstanding the crisis unleashed by her father, but also an affluent bride who welcomed her groom from a 'foreign' land and an economically modest background, despite his rank as the emperor's son. Prestigious clothes were among the many gifts she sent her future spouse in the months before their first personal encounter.¹¹ Mary's quality as a "diplomatic weapon of universal value"

9 Cf. Wim Blockmans and Walter Prevenier, *The Promised Lands. The Low Countries Under Burgundian Rule, 1369–1530*, Philadelphia, PA. 1999, 174–205, especially 193–195. On the financial situation see Jelle Haemers, *A Troubled Marriage: Maximilian and the Low Countries*, in: Debortol et al., *Per tot discrimina rerum*, see note 2, 421–431.

10 The classic study on Mary's eponymous *Great Privilege* of 11 February 1477 is Wim Blockmans, *Le Privilège général et les privilèges régionaux de Marie de Bourgogne pour les Pays-Bas 1477. Het algemene en de gewestelijke privilegien van Maria van Bourgondie voor de Nederlanden*, Kortrijk-Heule 1985. On Margaret's support for Mary and Maximilian see Lecuppre-Desjardin in this special issue, p. 60.

11 Cf. Patrik Pastrnak, *Travelling Grooms: A Royal Progress or A Wedding Journey?*, in: Anthony Musson and J. P. D. Cooper (eds.), *Royal Journeys in Early Modern Europe. Progresses, Palaces and*

due to her hereditary status parallels Maximilian's status as saviour of the duchess and her heritage against King Louis XI of France.¹² While many welcomed the young Archduke of Austria as their defender against the French danger, he was no more than a 'foreign' prince consort, confronted with substantial opposition among both towns and nobility. Yet, in the campaigns of 1478 and 1479, he stood his ground and won significant battles, laying the foundation of the larger-than-life image of the hero that was later epitomized in his *Works of Fame* (*Ruhmeswerk*).¹³

One of the ideals that governed his new task and title was chivalry, a formative cultural tradition amongst medieval Europe's nobility. The extent to which this tradition shaped Maximilian's self-fashioning throughout his lifetime, and influenced the way he has been perceived until today is epitomized in his popular epithet, "the last knight".¹⁴ The role model of chivalric knighthood was a corner stone in young Maximilian's education, and yet the Burgundian context provided new models for this powerful construction of princely masculinity. Shaped by the examples of the Valois dukes of Burgundy Philip the Bold, John the Fearless, Philip the Good, and eventually Charles the Bold, it gained new force when he was faced with the eminent necessity of defending the duchy against the military power of France.¹⁵

Like his father-in-law, Maximilian was an ambitious commander who personally led the Burgundian armies and fought alongside his soldiers. He achieved his first substantial victory in the Battle of Guinegate (17 August 1479), where he emerged not just as a talented leader but also as a skilled fighter on the battleground. He exploited the pike square, a tactical formation of the Swiss infantry, which had famously defeated one

Panache, New York 2023, 113–126, 120. Wealth was a key factor for agency, as Lazzarini shows in this special issue.

12 For the quote see Richard Vaughan, Charles the Bold. The Last Valois Duke of Burgundy, Woodbridge 2002, 126 (orig. 1973); for an in-depth analysis see Sonja Dünnebeil, Mary, a "Diplomatic Weapon of Universal Value" for Charles the Bold, in: Depreter et al., Marie de Bourgogne, see note 6, 225–236; and ead., Handelsobjekt Erbtochter. Zu den Verhandlungen über die Verheiratung Marias von Burgund, in: ead. and Christine Ottner-Diesinger (eds.), Außenpolitisches Handeln im ausgehenden Mittelalter. Akteure und Ziele, Wien 2007, 159–184. In fact, children of both genders were for the most part objects in dynastic planning and strategic hopes for the future.

13 On Maximilian's *Ruhmeswerk* consisting of several fictional accounts of his life and genealogy, partly crafted with the Emperor's own participation, see Jan-Dirk Müller, Gedechnus. Literatur und Hofgesellschaft um Maximilian I., Munich 1982; Larry Silver, Marketing Maximilian. The Visual Ideology of a Holy Roman Emperor, Princeton 2008; examples of recent assessments are Kagerer, Macht und Medien, see note 3, and the introduction to Howard Louthan and Jonathan Green, Theudendank. The Illustrated Epic of a Renaissance Knight, London 2022.

14 For instance, the exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York on the 500th anniversary of Maximilian's death (2019) and the catalogue were titled The Last Knight: The Art, Armor, and Ambition of Maximilian I., ed. by Pierre Terjanian, New Haven/London 2019. Cf. the bibliography quoted in note 13, here esp. Silver, Marketing Maximilian, 147–168.

15 Cf. Karl-Heinz Spieß, Idealisiertes Rittertum. Herzog Karl der Kühne von Burgund und Kaiser Maximilian I., in: Martin Wrede (ed.), Inszenierung der heroischen Monarchie. Frühneuzeitliches Königtum zwischen ritterlichem Erbe und militärischer Herausforderung, München 2014, 57–75.



Fig. 1: Wedding Maximilian I and Mary of Burgundy 1477, Albrecht Dürer, Woodcarving, 1515, Detail of the "Ehrenpforte". Source: Wikimedia Commons / public domain

of Maximilian's ancestors, the Habsburg duke Leopold III, in 1386, and the mobile fortress of wagons used by the Hussite armies in the 1420s to stop heavily armed cavalry.¹⁶ However, while Maximilian was probably aware of these precedents, it was in fact Jacques de Savoie, Count of Romont, a commander in many previous campaigns and loyal servant of Mary after 1477, who advised Maximilian to strengthen the infantry after the Swiss model. This later led to the establishment of a new type of mercenary, the German "Landsknecht", and Maximilian's reputation as "father of the Landsknechte".¹⁷

16 Cf. Alexander Querengässer, *Before the Military Revolution. European Warfare and the Rise of the Early Modern State, 1300–1490*, Oxford 2021, 152.

17 Malte Priezel, „Letzter Ritter“ und „Vater der Landsknechte“. Fürstliche Gewaltausübung als Praxis und Inszenierung, in: Helmuth/Kocher/Sieber, *Maximilians Welt*, see note 6, 209–224; Michael

Despite these tactical innovations, the pivotal moment at Guinegate was probably Maximilian's decision to dismount his horse, join his pikemen and fight side by side with them. This act, apparently at odds with traditional fighting conventions, all at once epitomized Maximilian's exceptional bravery as a warrior, and formed a cornerstone of his military reputation.¹⁸ His commanders joined him in foot combat, boosting the infantry's courage through exemplary prowess.¹⁹ Military leadership, fighting skills in hand-to-hand combat, and personal bravery became central elements of Maximilian's self-representation, together with a strategic mind that integrated various military tactics, thus demonstrating exemplary prudence and skilfulness. They all rested upon – and yet modified – time-honoured chivalric values shaped over centuries.²⁰ Later, Maximilian's indubitable military competence was rendered unequivocal by the chroniclers he employed for the *Works of Fame* and eventually in historiography.

3. Monitoring princely masculinity – The Order of the Golden Fleece and the *correction*

Military success and ambition were eponymous features of the warring duke Charles the Bold, whose model Maximilian adopted and later passed on to his grandson and successor as Emperor, Charles (V).²¹ But while his father-in-law provided an exemplary role model that became crucial in Maximilian's own representation and practice, it also built on a powerful Burgundian tradition rooted in medieval models of chivalry. In 1430, Mary's grandfather Philip the Good had founded the Order of the Golden Fleece intended to produce social and political integration within the elites of his heterogeneous territories and to forge their loyalty to the Burgundian dynasty. The Order's goal was to foster knightly practice, conceived of as service to God, and it thus followed the

Depreter, Les armées "bourguignonnes" après Nancy. Ruptures et continuités structurelles d'un instrument politique, in: id. et al., Marie de Bourgogne, see note 6, 251–274.

18 Cf. Wiesflecker, Maximilian, vol. I, see note 2, 144–149; Matthias Pfaffenbichler, "wie der (...) kunig ain schlacht tet und die gewann (...)" – Maximilian als Kriegsmann, in: Sabine Haag, Alfred Wiczorek, idem, and Hans-Jürgen Buderer (eds.), Kaiser Maximilian. Der letzte Ritter und das höfische Turnier, Regensburg 2014, 53–61; for a comparative perspective see Thomas Menzel, Der Fürst als Feldherr. Militärisches Handeln und Selbstdarstellung zwischen 1470 und 1550. Dargestellt an ausgewählten Beispielen, Berlin 2003, 130. Details on the battle in Ernst Richert, Die Schlacht bei Guinegate. 7. August 1479, Berlin 1907, 87–90.

19 Cf. Wiesflecker, Maximilian, vol. I, see note 2, 148; Richert, Guinegate, see note 18, 57.

20 Cf. Prietzel, „Letzter Ritter“, see note 17; Silver, Marketing Maximilian, see note 13, 147–168; for a comparative perspective see István P. Bejczy (ed.), Princely Virtues in the Middle Ages. 1200–1500, Turnhout 2009.

21 Cf. Spieß, Idealisiertes Rittertum, see note 15; Maria Golubeva, Between the Courts of Burgundy and Vienna: Models of Military Competence in Dynastic Historiography, c. 1470–1700, in: Wrede, Inszenierung, see note 15, 317–333.

ideals of piety, loyalty, and chivalry.²² By admitting exclusively male members of the nobility, the Order all at once served as an instrument to reinforce social hierarchies, legitimize the power of the ruling elites, and assemble them at the Burgundian court around the duke.²³

When Charles the Bold died, both the duchy and the Order lost their sovereign. Since the duke had no male heir, and women were not admitted to the sovereign's position, the Order's statutes demanded that the heiress's husband should inherit this role.²⁴ Hence, Mary's marriage to Maximilian was of utmost importance for the continuity of the Order, while allowing the prince consort to establish his authority and precedence despite his foreign origin. As a result of this mutual dependency, the young Maximilian was appointed as sovereign of the Order at Bruges on 30 April 1478 – less than a year after the couple was married in Ghent on 19 August 1477 – during the Order's first assembly after Charles' death. The inauguration of the new sovereign was celebrated with enormous splendour, showing off the integrity of the Order and the loyalty of the Burgundian nobility to the prince consort at a moment when some of its members had already taken sides with Louis XI. It was designed to instil hope that the duchy's crisis could be overcome. The public ceremonies demonstrated the new regent's power before the duchy's subjects and the King of France.²⁵

While the meticulously staged layout and sequence of the inauguration ceremonies permitted Mary only a position on the side lines, notwithstanding her crucial position as the duchy's legitimate heiress, which linked the Burgundian dynasty to the role of the prince consort as the Order's sovereign, these ceremonies also underlined the reciprocity between Maximilian's pre-eminence as sovereign of the Order and his role as

22 Cf. Gert Melville, *Rituelle Ostentation und pragmatische Inquisition: Zur Institutionalität des Ordens vom Goldenen Vlies*, in: Heinz Duchhardt and Gert Melville (eds.), *Im Spannungsfeld von Recht und Ritual. Soziale Kommunikation in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit*, Köln 1997, 215–271, 220.

23 Cf. Leonhard Horowski, *xxxj chevaliers sans reproche: Der Orden vom Goldenen Vlies als Instrument burgundischer Elitenpolitik*, in: *Sacra Militia: Rivista di storia degli Ordini militari*, 1 (2000), 187–233; D'Arcy J.D. Boulton, *The Knights of the Crown. The Monarchical Orders of Knighthood in Later Medieval Europe (1325–1520)*, Woodbridge/New York 2000; for a comparative perspective see Andreas Ranft, *Ritterorden und Rittergesellschaften im Spätmittelalter: Zu Formen der Regulierung und Internationalisierung ritterlich-höfischen Lebens in Europa*, in: Kaspar Elm and Cosimo D. Fonseca (eds.), *Militia Sancti Sepulchri: Idea e istituzioni*, Vatican City 1998; on the gendered nature of chivalric practice and its effects on social inclusion and exclusion see Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men. Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia, PA. 2003, 20–66.

24 Cf. Sonja Dünnebeil (ed.), *Die Protokollbücher des Ordens vom Goldenen Vlies*, vol. 1, Stuttgart 2002, 229.

25 Cf. Sonja Dünnebeil, *The Order of the Golden Vlies in the Year 1478 – Continuity or Re-commendement*, in: Anne van Oosterwijk and Wim Blockmans (eds.), *Staging the Court of Burgundy. Proceedings of the Conference "The Splendour of Burgundy"*, London 2013; 59–66, 62f., and ead., *Maximilian I. und der Orden vom Goldenen Vlies*, in: Debertol et al, *Per tot discrimina rerum*, see note 2, 101–116, 104f.

primus inter pares among the brethren.²⁶ Propagating the idea of an elite Christian knightly brotherhood, the Order symbolized the union of Christian virtue, gendered courtly practice, and martial fortitude, while its practical mission was to provide a moral framework for, and control of its members' political and personal conduct. Accordingly, the Order's regular meetings were supposed to have both an integrative and a corrective function for its members: all members including the sovereign regularly had to undergo the ritual of the *correction*. In Maximilian's case, this tool of social monitoring was used specifically to control the 'foreign' prince consort's actions.²⁷

Maximilian underwent his first *correction* in 1481 during the Order's assembly at 's-Hertogenbosch, during the on-going war against France. On this occasion, the brethren underlined that Maximilian, despite his youth and foreign origin, had prudently managed to govern the troubled duchy, and praised him for avoiding gambling and debauchery, the classic sins of young men. However, the brethren criticised the duke's recurrent daring bravado on the battlefield and recommended that he should henceforward seek the Order's advice before waging war.²⁸ Their critique echoes fifteenth-century political thought on military prudence. For instance, in *Le livre de faiz d'armes* Christine de Pizan defines "common sense" as a key trait of leadership.²⁹ Likewise, moderation was considered a quality essential to the ability to assess contradictory values according to the circumstances. In such assessments, above all in matters of war and other costly endeavours, the Order wished to be involved.³⁰ Hence, the *corrections* provided a symbolic frame and a practical means for debating shared values, identifying transgressions of moral standards and political mistakes as well as their public perception. Every act of *correction* negotiated and reaffirmed the ideals of the leading elites, including those of the sovereign, against the political needs of the day.

It is not surprising that the matters raised in Maximilian's *correction* of 1481 resembled those put forward against Charles the Bold in 1468.³¹ Fortitude and bravado

26 Details in Dünnebeil, *Continuity or Recommencement*, see note 25, 60–62.

27 Cf. Bernhard Sterchi, *Über den Umgang mit Lob und Tadel. Normative Adelsliteratur und politische Kommunikation im burgundischen Hofadel, 1430–1506*, Turnhout 2005; on the opposition to Maximilian within the Order see Sonja Dünnebeil, *Maximilian I. und der Orden vom Goldenen Vlies*, in: Debertol et al., *Per tot discrimina rerum*, see note 2, 101–116, esp. 105f.

28 Cf. Sterchi, *Lob und Tadel*, see note 27, 435f.; Dünnebeil, *Maximilian I. und der Orden*, see note 27, 105 both with ample quotes from the protocol books; Petra Schulte, *Die Exemplifizierung der politischen Ethik im Herzogtum Burgund*, in: Christine Reinle and Harald Winkel (eds.), *Historische Exempla in Fürstenspiegeln und Fürstenlehren*, Frankfurt am Main 2011, 69–98.

29 Cf. François Le Saux, *War and Knighthood in Christine de Pizan's Livre de faits d'armes et de chevalerie*, in: Corinne Saunders, François Le Saux and Neil Thomas (eds.), *Writing War. Military Literary Responses to Warfare, Suffolk 2004*, 93–106, 100.

30 Cf. Dünnebeil, *Protokollbücher 1*, see note 24, 199; Sterchi, *Lob und Tadel*, see note 27, 433 on Charles's the Bold *correction*, and 436 on Maximilian's, each time including warfare without consulting with the Order.

31 Cf. Sterchi, *Lob und Tadel*, see note 27, 364; 432–436; Dünnebeil, *Maximilian und der Orden*, see note 27, 105.

were so close that it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between the two. Maximilian's *correction* thus demonstrates the ambiguity of princely masculinity in the context of warfare. While the offensive political and military expansionism of the period made warfare an inevitable challenge for male and female rulers alike, military practice was a sphere traditionally dominated by men. The Order's chivalric ideology sustained this practice through an old and yet refined cultural tradition.

Like other contemporary princes, Maximilian had been well trained and prepared for warfare since childhood. Martial values and military practice already formed an integral part of his *habitus* already before his Burgundian experience.³² Yet, not every prince at the time drew on the available models in the same manner. Probably unlike his own father, Frederick III, but comparable to his father-in-law, Charles the Bold, Maximilian obviously conceived of himself both as a virtuous knight and as a strategically thinking warlord – and like his father-in-law, he enacted these role models throughout his lifetime. In his response to the *correction* of 1481, though, Maximilian promised to improve, and enjoined the Knights of the Order to assist him in his moral efforts to balance the several role models embodied by their shared vision of ideal knights and rulers.³³ Despite his excessive warfare he negotiated all of these models and made them a cornerstone of his large-scale endeavours of representation: after all, “Halt Maß” (“Be moderate”) became his motto, epitomized in the towering image of the *Weisskunic*, and even the role of counsellors and representative bodies is underlined by his alter ego, Knight *Theuerdank*, who like Princess *Ehrenreich* and her father habitually seek advice before making crucial decisions.³⁴

4. The princesse naturelle: ‘damsel in distress’ or powerful duchess?

When the French diplomat and chronicler Philippe de Commines compared Mary's position to that of her prince consort, he underlined the importance of her quality as *dame du pays* in popular perception.³⁵ The underlying concept of the ‘natural’ prince or princess was a key motif in contemporary political discourse about dynastic continuity

32 For a comparison see Robert Nye, *The Transmission of Masculinities: The Case of Early Modern France*, in: Philip S. Gorski (ed.), *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, Durham 2013, 286–302.

33 Cf. Sterchi, *Lob und Tadel*, see note 27, 436; Spieß, *Idealisiertes Rittertum*, see note 15; Golubeva, *Models of Military Competence*, see note 21; Todd W. Reeser, *Moderating Masculinity in Early Modern Culture*, Chapel Hill, NC 2006, 11–39.

34 The named figures are the protagonists of the fictional epics *Weisskunic* and *Theuerdank* that form part of Maximilian's *Works of Fame*, cf. above in footnote 13. Dünnebeil, *Maximilian und der Orden*, see note 27, 108 on the motto „Halt Maß“ in the context of the Order.

35 “Car ce peuple de Gand et aultres villes l’avoient en plus grant reverance que le mary, a cause qu’elle estoit dame du pays.” Philippe de Commines, *Mémoires*, Livre VI, chap. 6, ed. by Joël Blanchard, Paris 2001, 466.

as a requirement for the stability, peace and justice of any rule, and was thus crucial in the process of Mary's succession.³⁶ Women, who ruled either in their own right or as regents for male relatives, were a political reality in pre-modern Europe. Learned political discourse and the many examples of female rulers generated competing role models and gave rise to debates.³⁷

Succession laws were equally heterogeneous and became contested in times of struggle over territorial hegemony and expansion. Some polities, like the Duchy of Burgundy, allowed dynastic inheritance of women and men alike (albeit the latter mostly by default), while others like France excluded women from hereditary succession. As the Burgundian dukes formed a cadet line of the French Valois dynasty, Mary's succession after her father's sudden death was a gateway for French claims to succession according to the Salic Law.³⁸ The ensuing conflict, relying on both arguments and arms, shows that dynastic succession could not be taken for granted. On the contrary, arguments in favour of succession were only constructed within these struggles and reflected in richly layered contemporary and later chronicles of courtly and urban background as well as in literature, visual and material culture.³⁹ Mary's position as *princesse naturelle* by virtue of dynastic inheritance was neither taken for granted at home, but rested on her subjects' loyalty expressed in the political and financial support of her territories' representatives – not least for the military initiatives of her new husband. Hence, dependencies were complex. Unless Mary were accepted as heiress, the 'foreign' prince consort would not have been accepted as military leader of the Burgundian armies, nor would the Estates General have supported his campaigns with their money and forces. The interplay between the strife for dynastic continuity, the challenges of the imminent war with France, urban revolts from 1477 onwards, and the

36 Cf. Éloïse Adde and Jonathan Dumont (eds.), *Naturalisation and Legitimation of Power (1300–1800)*, Paris 2024; Jonathan Dumont and Elodie Lecuppre-Desjardin, *Construire la légitimité d'un pouvoir féminin*, in: Depreter et al., *Marie de Bourgogne*, see note 6, 41–60, for a comparative perspective see Michel Pauly (ed.), *Die Erbtöchter, der fremde Fürst und das Land. Die Ehe Johanns des Blinden und Elisabeths von Böhmen in vergleichender europäischer Perspektive*, Luxembourg 2013.

37 On the famous *Querelle des femmes* that developed since the days of Christine de Pizan and Jean Gerson see Gisela Bock and Margarethe Zimmermann (eds.), *Die europäische Querelle des Femmes im 15. und 16. Jahrhundert. Querelles. Jahrbuch für Frauenforschung*, Bd. 2, Stuttgart/Weimar 1997. From the abundant bibliography: Heide Wunder (ed.), *Dynastie und Herrschaftssicherung in der Frühen Neuzeit. Geschlechter und Geschlecht*, Berlin 2002; *Zeitenblicke*, 8, 2 (2009): *Gynäkokratie. Frauen und Politik in der höfischen Gesellschaft der Frühen Neuzeit*, ed. by Katrin Keller; Earenfight, *Persona*, see note 7, and most recently Signori/Zey, *Regentinnen*, see note 4.

38 On the process of its legal construction see Derek Whaley, *From a Salic Law to the Salic Law: The Creation and Re-Creation of the Royal Succession System of France*, in: Woodacre et al., *History of Monarchy*, see note 8, 443–464; Eliane Viennot, *La France et le pouvoir. L'invention de la loi salique (Vè–XVIè siècle)*, Paris 2006.

39 Cf. part 1 in Depreter et al., *Marie de Bourgogne*, see note 6, 27–190.

interests of an ambitious nobility constituted an open field of negotiation and action with fundamental effects on Mary's and Maximilian's positions alike.



Fig. 2: Mary of Burgundy, daughter of Charles the Bold; portrait by the circle of the Master of the Legend of St. Madeleine c. 1530–1540. Source: Wikimedia Commons / public domain

Hence, in the aftermath of her father's death, Mary and her court deliberately used the image of the young, orphaned virgin threatened by her relative and godfather Louis XI to win the loyalty and support of her subjects. The gendered image of a 'damsel in distress' relying on male representatives of the Burgundian elite and later on her husband became a persistent popular trope that exploited chivalric Burgundian courtly culture, partly because it was deployed for various interests both during the wars against France, and later in the upheavals against Maximilian.⁴⁰ Contrasting her manifold other representations as a duchess during her short lifetime, it was perpetuated in texts and images after her early death in 1482. Maximilian's own *Ruhmeswerk* played a key role in

⁴⁰ Most recently Olga Karaskova-Hesry, L'image de la duchesse: Marie de Bourgogne (1477–1482) dans des œuvres de Jean Molinet, in: Sandra Hindman and Elliot Adam (eds.), *Au prisme du manuscrit. Regards sur la littérature française du Moyen Âge (1300–1550)*, Turnhout 2019, 181–201; Lisa Demets, Gendering Political Ideology in Late Medieval Bruges: Mary of Burgundy as City Maiden in the Manuscripts of the *Excellente Cronike van Vlaenderen*, in: Depreter et al., *Marie de Bourgogne*, see note 6, 83–101, and Lecuppre-Desjardin in this special issue.

this long-term process by idealizing and ‘objectifying’ his wife as an exemplary consort and heroine of virtue and honour, worthy of his eternal love and protection.⁴¹

Recent scholarship has drawn a nuanced image of the political *persona* of Mary during her short reign as Duchess of Burgundy.⁴² A key dimension of her self-fashioning was the long-standing tradition of women regents in the Burgundian lands, personified by a line of duchess consorts who provided important role models for Mary, and later also for her daughter Margaret and her grand-daughter Mary.⁴³ While they all acted as regents by virtue of their marriages to Burgundian dukes or through designation by their husbands to rule during their absence, the sudden death of Charles the Bold made it necessary for Mary to shape a new role as duchess in her own right.⁴⁴

Mary’s succession testifies to the political agency that the young duchess developed in the desperate circumstances after 5 January 1477. For example, Mary immediately used her father’s ducal seal until she had created her own coins and seals.⁴⁵ Her image as a hunter and falconer on horseback was modelled on the equestrian iconography of her male predecessors portrayed as armoured knights, the classic representation of princely masculinity. It thus differed significantly from the seals of other Burgundian women regents. As Ann Roberts and Andrea Pearson argue, this choice suggests Mary’s awareness that in her quality as Duchess of Burgundy she actively stepped into her father’s rights as the country’s sovereign, except on the battlefield. Choosing the image of the hunter instead of the warrior suggests an attempt to bridge the gap between claims to lordship held by men on the one hand and the claim to women’s succession on the other.⁴⁶

To become effective in practical politics, these images had to meet contemporary perceptions that were informed by underlying role models and negotiated in various strands of contemporary political discourse. Hence, the ambiguity between these and

41 Cf. Ann M. Roberts, *The Posthumous Image of Mary of Burgundy*, in: Andrea Pearson (ed.), *Women and Portraits in Early Modern Europe*. Gender, Agency, Identity, Aldershot 2008, 55–70; Antenhofer, *Maximilian und die Frauen*, see note 6, and Lutter, *Repräsentation*, see note 6.

42 Cf. Haemers, *For the Common Good*, see note 8; Depreter et al., *Marie de Bourgogne*, see note 6, with ample bibliography.

43 Cf. Dagmar Eichberger, *Margaret of Austria: A Princess with Ambition and Political Insight*, in: eadem (ed.), *Women of Distinction*. Margaret of York, Margaret of Austria (Exhibition catalogue), Leuven 2005, 49–55; eadem, *Women at the Burgundian Court*. Presence and Influence, Turnhout 2010; Monter, *Experiment*, see note 5.

44 Cf. Lecuppre-Desjardin in this special issue, and Dumont/Lecuppre-Desjardin, *Construire la légitimité d’un pouvoir féminin*, see note 36, 44.

45 Cf. Olga Karaskova, “Ung Dressoir de cinq degrez”: Mary of Burgundy and the Construction of the Image of the Female Ruler, in: Juliana Dresvina and Nicholas Sparks (eds.), *Authority and Gender in Medieval and Renaissance Chronicles*, Newcastle 2012, 319–344, 329.

46 Cf. Andrea Pearson, *Rulership, Ridership, and the Perils of Sealing*, in: Depreter et al., *Marie de Bourgogne*, see note 6, 115–136; Ann M. Roberts, *The Horse and the Hawk*. Representations of Mary of Burgundy as Sovereign, in: David S. Areford and Nina A. Rowe (eds.), *Excavating the Medieval Image*, Aldershot 2004, 135–150.

other representations – for example in Mary's Joyous Entries and patronage politics – of a young duchess strategically fighting for acceptance in a challenging political situation, and her portrayal as a 'damsel in distress' dependent on male advisors and rescued by her marriage to a virtuous knight, underlines the fact that the conflicts around the Burgundian lands involved much more than claims of dynastic succession. Like elsewhere after a ruler's sudden death, the eminent necessity of novel dynastic arrangements and important military decisions involved disputes around the balance of power between representatives of the ruling dynasty and those of the subjects of their lands. In the Burgundian case, these were embodied by the Estates General, but also involved particular interests of regional elites. Alongside practical considerations, these negotiations were always accompanied by considerations of the nature of ideal rulers as they related to issues of a polity's territorial integrity and were represented in their political *personae*.

Mary's *Great Privilege* of 11 February 1477 is a case in point. Traditional historiography claimed that the privilege was imposed on a young, female, and therefore weak ruler by the duchy's powerful representatives.⁴⁷ However, considering the complex power balance at stake, recent scholarship has convincingly argued that the privilege in fact documents the result of a negotiated consent of the multiple parties involved. Mary's concessions revoked many of her father's decisions, strengthened the estates' constitutional rights including their consent to declarations of war, and helped her consolidate her rule in the face of imminent danger. Her subjects' loyalty to the dynasty and to Mary as ruling duchess secured dynastic continuity and increased Mary's agency.⁴⁸ As an expression of the consensus between the ruler and the representatives of her territories, the privilege thus can be read as an example of Mary's political prudence. Shared rule and the distribution of power and specific responsibilities balanced gendered role models.

5. Conclusion: governing composite polities – beyond binaries

When Mary and Maximilian married in August 1477, courtly propaganda emphasized the perfect match of their backgrounds, beauty and youth.⁴⁹ From a dynastic perspective, the couple's greatest achievement lay in its immediate success to ensure progeny. Philipp the Fair was born in 1478, less than a year after the marriage; Margaret followed in 1480, and a third child, born in 1481, died early. The political consensus

47 On the political context of the *Great Privilege* and further concomitant privileges see above, p. 70 with footnote 10; Wiesflecker, Maximilian, vol. 1, see note 2, 114: "Die Führung des schwankenden Staates fiel auf die schwachen Schultern eines zwanzigjährigen Mädchens, Maria von Burgund, die langhin das Ungeheuerliche der letzten Wochen nicht fassen konnte."

48 Cf. Blockmans/Prevenier, *Promised Lands*, see note 9, 196–198.

49 Cf. Antenhofer, Maximilian und die Frauen, see note 6; Lutter, *Repräsentation*, see note 6, 51.

that Mary had achieved with the estates laid the basis for Maximilian's successful military campaigns. And yet, his rights were limited from the start, and framed by gendered norms and values just as much as were those of his wife. The matrimonial contract denied him any right of succession. The couple's future children would be the sole legitimate heirs to the Burgundian duchy through their mother.⁵⁰ While the prince consort was celebrated as hope incarnate on the battlefield, and Mary's first testament (September 1477) granted her husband her properties in case of her premature death without children, he also personified the estates' fear of foreign domination via marriage.⁵¹

In fact, Maximilian soon started to live up to these fears. He undid the privileges granted by his wife and returned to her father's policy of excessive warfare, central control, and heavy taxation.⁵² He denied negotiations with protesting parties, above all among the Flemish cities, which resulted in a series of upheavals that he answered with violence. The conflicts peaked when Mary unexpectedly died in a riding accident (1482) and eventually led to Maximilian's imprisonment in Bruges (1488), while his son and heir Philipp was in custody of a regency council. Warfare against France and the Flemish revolts lasted over a decade, devastated the country, led to the decline of some of its most flourishing cities and the near-bankruptcy of the court and the cities. Supported by his armies and local factions Maximilian eventually prevailed in 1492, two years prior to Philipp's majority, was again recognized as regent for his son and revoked the *Great Privilege* of 1477. And yet it was the Estates General who now like then contributed fundamentally to solving the conflicts of 1482, 1488, and 1492, and to establishing a form of shared rule with the regent, based on regional customs and privileges that de-centred any gendered princely precedence.⁵³

After Philipp's early death in 1506, Maximilian's daughter Margaret took over the regency of the Burgundian lands from her father. Her prudent government built on this type of shared rule with the very same Estates General became a model for three generations of *gouvernantes* in the "Habsburg Netherlands", a period more peaceful and prosperous than the previous decades.⁵⁴

50 Cf. Matrimonial contract of August 18, 1477, edited in: Inge Wiesflecker-Friedhuber (ed.), *Quellen zur Geschichte Maximilians I. und seiner Zeit*, Darmstadt 1996, 38. On the importance of fertility for the standing of a princess or queen, see Lazzarini (p. 20) and Burkhardt (p. 39) in this special issue.

51 Cf. Wiesflecker, Maximilian, vol. 1, see note 2, 134; Anne Foerster, *Regierende Herrscherwitwen und das Risiko eines fremden Herrschers: Zum Verhältnis von Dynastie und Geschlecht*, in: Signori/Zey, *Regentinnen*, see note 4, 11–30.

52 On what follows: Blockmans/Prevenier, *Promised Lands*, see note 9, 198–205; Haemers, *Troubled Marriage*, see note 9, 421f.

53 Cf. Haemers, *Troubled Marriage*, see note 9, 422–427 on the reasons for Maximilian's success; Blockmans/Prevenier, *Promised Lands*, see note 9, 203–205 on the role of the representative institution.

54 Monter, *Experiment*, see note 5.



Fig. 3: Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) presents her book to Margaret of Burgundy (1393–1442). Illustration from *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, Paris BN fr. 1177, folio 114 ca. 1475. Source: Wikimedia Commons / public domain

Earlier, against the background of the destruction brought about by the Hundred Years' War, Christine de Pizan had famously advised "good and wise" queens and princesses "to be the means of peace and concord, to work for the avoidance of war".⁵⁵ Margaret knew Christine's writings as did those exemplary women rulers she had encountered during her childhood and youth,⁵⁶ including Margaret of York, who was responsible for young Margaret's education in Mechelen and who remained a trusted advisor until her death in 1503. It was her who together with her stepdaughter Mary in 1477 had negotiated the *Great Privilege* with the Estates General to restore the loyalty of the Burgundian territories and secure their integrity and 'common good'. The Estates' resistance then was in the first place directed against Charles the Bold's aggressive politics of warfare, a politics built on models of masculinity, which Maximilian shared

55 Christine de Pizan, *The Treasure of the City of Ladies. Or the Book of the Three Virtues*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Sarah Lawson, revised edition, London 2003, 23f. Cf. Lecuppre-Desjardin in this special issue, p. 61 with further bibliographical references.

56 Cf. the contributions in Eichberger, *Women of Distinction*, see note 43.

and followed and which led to the same fundamental crises in Burgundy that Claudia Opitz describes for sixteenth-century France.⁵⁷

Charles the Bold and Maximilian accentuated these images of masculinity in their military and financial politics, while their female successors seem to have primarily drawn on an alternative imagery as developed by Christine. And yet, these – at first glance again binary – gendered patterns remained ambivalent in political rhetoric as well as in pragmatic practice. While Christine regularly wrote about the ideal of good and wise rulers of both genders, she knew that women actively participated in warfare.⁵⁸ Likewise, the necessity of negotiating the ‘common good’ among various parties was highlighted both by the male representatives of the Low Countries (and elsewhere) and by several generations of princesses alike. And so, Maximilian’s own image oscillated between the larger-than-life knightly hero and the moderate peacemaker who consulted with his counsellors prior to crucial decisions of peace and war.

Hence, female and male rulers alike constructed and fashioned their images according to political necessities. In doing so they drew on available – not just but always also gendered – role models, adapted them to the needs of the day and modified them throughout their lives. Many different people participated in these processes of image construction, and yet their ‘products’ were again read, judged and used ambivalently by contemporary audiences and historiography alike. A close look into the interactions of the many – including nascent institutional – actors that shaped European politics around 1500 does not only show the complex relations between gendered representations and practices of power. It also testifies to the fact that male rulers did never represent a ‘neutral’ norm, while their female equivalents featured the – albeit many – ‘exceptions’ from it. Gendered expectations and image politics formed an integral part of political representation and impacted power politics that in turn affected men and women alike.

57 Cf. Claudia Opitz-Belakhal, “Krise der Männlichkeit” – ein nützliches Konzept der Geschlechtergeschichte?, in: *L’Homme. Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* (L’Homme. Z. F. G.), 19, 2 (2008), 31–50, 43–49.

58 Among them were several 15th century Burgundian duchesses, as underlined by Lecuppre-Desjardin in this special issue. Cf. Michèle Guéret-Laferté, Jeanne la Preuse, Jeanne la Sainte. La “Pucelle” dans le Ditié de Jehanne d’Arc de Christine de Pizan, in: François Neveux (ed.), *De l’hérétique à la sainte. Les procès de Jeanne d’Arc revisités*, Caen 2016, 213–226; On Joan of Arc as military leader see Kelly DeVries, *A Woman as Leader of Men: Joan of Arc’s Military Career*, in: Bonnie Wheeler and Charles T. Wood (eds.), *Fresh Verdicts on Joan of Arc*, New York/London 1996, 3–19; On early modern representations of warrior women see Chassica Kirchhoff, *The Martial Maid: Armoured Women in the European Imaginery*, in: Stefan Krause (ed.), *Iron Men. Fashion in Steel* (Exhibition Catalogue), Köln 2022, 49–63.

Picture credits

- Figure 1 Wedding Maximilian I and Mary of Burgundy 1477, Albrecht Dürer, Woodcarving, 1515, Detail of the “Ehrenpforte”. Source: Wikimedia Commons / public domain, online accessible at: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Het_Bourgondische_huwelijk_Maximiliaan_trouwt_met_Maria_van_Bourgondi%C3%AB_Triomfboog_van_keizer_Maximiliaan_I_\(serietitel\),_RP-P-OB-1481.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Het_Bourgondische_huwelijk_Maximiliaan_trouwt_met_Maria_van_Bourgondi%C3%AB_Triomfboog_van_keizer_Maximiliaan_I_(serietitel),_RP-P-OB-1481.jpg)
- Figure 2 Mary of Burgundy, daughter of Charles the Bold; portrait by the circle of Master of the Legend of Saint Madeleine c. 1530–1540. Source: Wikimedia Commons / public domain, online accessible at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maria_Karoli_Filia.jpg
- Figure 3 Christine de Pizan (1364–1430) presents her book to Margaret of Burgundy (1393–1442). Illustration from *The Treasure of the City of Ladies* Paris BN fr. 1177, folio 114 ca. 1475. Source: Wikimedia Commons / public domain, online accessible at: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Christine_de_Pizan_presents_her_Book_to_Margaret_of_Burgundy.jpg?uselang=de