

**Stéphan Geonget, Anne Boutet, Louise Daubigny,
Marie-Bénédicte Le Hir (dir.), Le réseau de
Marguerite de Navarre, Genève (Librairie Droz) 2022,
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This collective volume of twenty essays makes a timely contribution to studies of Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549), whose status has steadily risen in academia over the past twenty years, both in French and in Anglo-American university circles. Marguerite is best known for her posthumously published »Heptaméron«; but as the editors of this volume make clear, her literary influence extends much further than this. As a duchess, a queen, a diplomat, and a patron of other writers, Marguerite operated at the centre of a large network of reform-minded writers during the 1520s, 30s and 40s: hence the title of the present work, »Le réseau de Marguerite de Navarre«.

The idea of a »Navarrian network« is not a new one. It is amply demonstrated in two landmark works of scholarship, both of which are duly acknowledged: Jonathan Reid's »King's Sister – Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549) and Her Evangelical Network« (2009), and Isabelle Garnier's »L'épithète et la connivence« (2005). Geonget, Boutet et al. have set themselves the task extending and nuancing these previous analyses of the Navarrian network (particularly Reid's account), through a more granular analysis of its political/religious objectives, its social structures, and its literary specificity. Throughout the volume there is particular emphasis on the third phenomenon, which is often illuminated and contextualised via the other two. Reid had tended to blur the distinction between Marguerite's wider entourage of clients (seeking political support of one kind or another), and her narrower circle of like-minded associates, the reforming *évangéliques*. The essays of the present volume strive to avoid this tendency to blur the lines between the religious and the political – or at least to foreground where they are necessarily blurred, and on what grounds. The result is a coherent set of twenty essays, subdivided into four clear sections that allow the book's focus to alternate between narrow and broader accounts of the network's activities. »Le réseau de Marguerite de Navarre« is alive to nuances, and does not always insist on the centrality of Marguerite herself. Instead, various male and female actors within the network come to the fore, with varying degrees of proximity to the queen, from her entourage of women to her more distant male associates.

In the broadest sense of networking, Marguerite's entire adult life was, to a large extent, marked by making and maintaining alliances with diplomatic shrewdness, and in this she readily sought



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powerful allies who would drive religious reform and promote *évangélique* values across Europe. Loris Petris illustrates this succinctly in his essay on Marguerite's relations with the Du Bellay brothers, whose motivations were nonetheless more narrowly political than her own in seeking to reach out to other Protestant communities threatened by the Habsburg Empire. Guillaume Alonge offers a complementary perspective on Marguerite's influence in Italy through her network of bishops, ambassadors, and spies. Alonge's findings show how, towards the end of her life, Marguerite continued to participate closely in espionage, as she closely followed the evolving diplomatic relations between France and the Ottomans. Via her Venetian contacts, Marguerite sought to pursue the possibility of co-opting Suleiman the Magnificent as well as European Protestant princes in her efforts to resist the Habsburgs.

Though Marguerite was deeply implicated in the struggle for imperial supremacy across Europe, she was no less invested in exercising her own local prerogatives as duchess of Alençon and Berry, then later as queen of Navarre. Nicole Dufournaud's informative genealogical analysis sheds light on Marguerite's suzerainty that took the form of a conspicuously direct administration of her lands. Dufournaud complements her genealogical analysis of Marguerite's family tree with a case study of royal account registers, through which the concentric circles of Marguerite's entourage emerge: an inner *cour des dames* supported by various domestic *serviteurs*, nobles, vassals, and artisans. Neil Kenny is also concerned with relations at court. He examines the role played by literary texts written by women within the Valois-Bourbon royal family network to which Marguerite belonged. Looking at a didactic treatise dedicated indirectly to Marguerite, and then at her own verse epistles, Kenny characterises this royal literature as a repurposed lineage property, passing unevenly from one generation to the next. Movements of literary works within hierarchical, familial networks may thus be characterised as much by conflict as by cooperation.

This duality is an important aspect of networking that recurs on different levels vis-à-vis Marguerite's interactions with various *évangéliques*. Nathalie Szczech's essay offers a revisionist perspective of the figure of Guillaume Farel: going against the traditional historical assessment of Farel as a loose cannon expelled from the 1520s cenacle of Meaux (to which Marguerite herself belonged), Szczech posits a model of distanced collaboration between Marguerite's circle in France and Farel's network across Switzerland. The two networks cooperated until 1536 when Farel's adopted a decidedly different strategy of evangelisation. André Bayrou similarly accentuates the conflicts that tested *évangélique* solidarity, this time within Marguerite's network, as accusations of heresy began to fly among its members. Outwardly fraternal, but inwardly harbouring ideological discord and literary rivalry, the Navarrian network persisted under duress, which, for Bayrou, is encapsulated in the poetics of



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incarceration displayed in Marguerite's »Complainte pour un détenu prisonnier« (1547).

What, then, was the literary object par excellence of the Navarrian network? Isabelle Garnier makes a compelling case for Marguerite's »Miroir de l'âme pécheresse« (1531), her controversial spiritual poem that marked her entry into print publication, and one that would have a decisive impact: barely escaping censure by the Sorbonne, its devotional appeal to women across Europe was constantly reiterated by female readers, male readers, and (male) printers, in an informal subnetwork of what Garnier calls Europe's »village évangélique«. The enthusiastic uptake of Marguerite's »Miroir« within the *évangélique* literary community points towards other salient compositions of the Navarrian network: the numerous funerary homages to Marguerite (*tombeaux*) that circulated after her death, published in 1550–1551. These are analysed in successive essays by Marie-Bénédicte Le Hir and Richard Cooper, the former stressing the emergence of a school of poetry under Jean Dorat – the illustrious »Pléiade« – and the latter emphasizing the presence of a much less well-known regional network of Gascon poets.

Overall, the key strength of the volume is this awareness of those operating, in sociological terms, as »weak links« (Mark Granovetter) – those in the Navarrian network who shared ties to other networks, be they political, religious, or self-consciously literary. Consideration of their apparently peripheral activities raises important methodological questions. How do we reconsider the »central« figure of the network – Marguerite – from the perspective of those on its margins? How is the network reconfigurable in different ways depending on which part of its written trace we analyse – be it Marguerite's own writings (her poetry and her administrative »mandements«), or texts celebrating her, both individual and collective compositions? »Le réseau de Marguerite de Navarre« sheds new light on the sheer breadth, diversity and scope of the Navarrian network. With this in mind, one might have expected a further level of methodological reflection in the introduction on whether the umbrella term, »Navarrian network«, is sufficient to account for a complex picture of »entourages«, »circles«, »cenacles«, and »communities« shifting and reforming around the queen of Navarre in the course of her later life and beyond.



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