

## **The Queens Regnant of Navarre: Succession, Politics and Partnership 1274-1512**

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Elena Woodacre's book on the five female sovereigns of the medieval Pyrenean kingdom of Navarre is a timely study considering the latest scholarship on politically active queens in medieval Iberia. This scholarship on ruling women, however, has focused predominantly on individual queens. Woodacre's study is unique in that she examines as a group five queen-regents to investigate the political careers and marital partnerships of these women in order to determine how they exercised power as monarchs and shaped the history of the kingdom of Navarre.

The first chapter of the book starts out with a brief introduction to the kingdom of Navarre and its political significance as a Pyrenean territory that Iberian and French monarchs coveted. Woodacre also provides a brief survey of recent scholarship on queenship in Iberia and beyond, and outlines the significance of studying the ruling queens of Navarre – the kingdom produced the largest group of medieval female rulers than any other European kingdom, which allows for a study that examines how reigning queens from a single family and one geographical location employed different strategies of governance with their male consorts. In chronological order, the rest of the book dedicates a chapter to each queen and highlights the difficulties of female succession as well as how the kingdom's foreign policy concerns shaped their marital alliances.

Chapter two focuses on Juana I, the 13th-century queen who was also countess of Champagne and Brie. To explain the accession of Juana, Woodacre addresses the Navarrese law that permitted female succession in the absence of a legitimate male heir and gave precedence to a female heir over uncles or illegitimate offspring. There was also a significant precedent for women in Iberian kingdoms to inherit the throne as well as the example of Theobaldo I of Navarre, who inherited the throne through the female line. Since Juana was raised at the French court until her marriage to Philip IV of France, the kingdom of Navarre was administered on her behalf first by her mother and later by her father-in-law, the king of France, who also protected Juana's crown from possible usurpers and its Iberian neighbors. Juana's marriage to the Capetian heir made her queen of France and meant that she governed the kingdom of Navarre in absentia. Although Juana was active in the governance of her county of Champagne, there is little evidence that she had any involvement in the affairs of Navarre, a kingdom that she apparently never visited. And while Juana seems

to have enjoyed a close relationship with her husband, Woodacre reveals that Philip ‘exercised the bulk of the ruling authority in both of their domains and that French modes of governance and the interests of France were always paramount’ (p. 44). Juana’s importance, though, lies not only in the precedent her reign set for future female succession in Navarre but also in the influence that France extended over Navarre for 50 years. An absent sovereign and French foreign rule fostered great resentment and did much to prejudice the Navarrese against future male consorts with ties to the French crown.

Juana’s granddaughter, Juana II, and her effective rule over Navarre in the 14th century is the focus of chapter three. As the daughter and sole surviving heir of king Louis of France, support for Juana’s succession was not enough to deter Louis’s brother, Philip of Poitiers, from gaining the French throne, but the *Fueros* of Navarre legitimized Juana’s claim to the throne of Navarre. At the age of seven Juana was married to her cousin Philip d’Evreux, whose territories were in northern France and far from the Navarre. Before Juana’s coronation as queen of Navarre, the Navarrese negotiated to limit the powers of her male consort, particularly in the event that the queen died without an heir. Philip could participate fully in the governance of the realm and serve as regent until Juana’s heir reached majority, but he could not rule in the absence of a direct heir. Woodacre’s assessment of the couple’s partnership is one of a ‘flexible and equitable’ power-sharing dynamic where the couple split their time between all of their territories. Her claim that 15th-century chroniclers viewed the couple as ‘genuine partners’, however, is less convincing, but in no way undermines the evidence that shows Juana’s active engagement as a ruler. Juana clearly was committed to administering her kingdom in Navarre and even administered Philip’s lands in his absence. After Philip’s death, Juana governed the kingdom of Navarre from her French territories and adeptly handled foreign affairs with England, France, and Castile.

Chapter four details the reign of Blanca I, considered the most ‘Navarrese’ queen and whose long reign fostered greater ties with Iberian kingdoms. Blanca spent most of her childhood in Castile with her mother, Leonor de Trastámara, and her first marriage to Martín de Aragon shows how important achieving an alliance with Aragon was to balancing the kingdom’s relations with Iberian rulers. Marriage to Martín de Aragon made Blanca queen of Sicily, where she gained valuable experience as queen-lieutenant administering the affairs of the Sicilian kingdom. After Martín’s sudden death, Blanca returned to Navarre, and once again made an Aragonese alliance with Juan of Aragon once it was established that she would inherit the throne of Navarre. As consort, Juan was permitted to be involved in the governance of the kingdom. His interest in defending the Castilian territories inherited from his mother, however, frequently drew him away from Navarre and eventually involved the kingdom in a costly war with Castile. Thus, the management of the realm remained solely in Blanca’s capable hands. Woodacre labels this type of partnership ‘divide and conquer’ since they administered their own territories and ‘worked separately in order to further their own political goals’ even if it meant ‘working counter to their spouse’s interests’ (p. 104). Indeed, Blanca’s efforts to strive for peace with Castile and maintain French alliances often entailed placing the needs of her kingdom before her husband’s political agenda. Although the couple spent much of their time apart and Juan frequently disregarded what was in the best interest of Navarre, Woodacre notes that Blanca did not attempt to restrain Juan’s damaging agenda in Castile because she may have hoped to avoid personal conflict with her husband. Such a supposition, though, undermines Woodacre’s claim that Blanca worked tirelessly to end the hostilities with Castile. One would imagine that Blanca had strong emotional and familial ties to Castile. She even died in Castile, the country of her birth. It seems odd that such an active queen who spent so many years of her reign trying to make peace with Castile would be willing to overlook her husband’s actions just to avoid marital discord, particularly when the couple maintained separate lives.

Chapter five deals with the reign of Leonor, Blanca’s daughter, who attained the throne after a civil war between her siblings and her father Juan. Because the marital agreement between Blanca and Juan had not specified when, after her death, the king consort had to leave the governance of the kingdom to her designated heir, Juan refused to hand over the crown to their son Carlos and continued to use Navarre as the center of his offensive against Castile. Juan’s actions resulted in a civil war with his son Carlos and daughter Blanca, who were disinherited and in their place, Leonor, the younger sister, was designated Juan’s

successor. Both Carlos and Blanca died under suspicious circumstances, which cleared the path for Leonor to become queen. During the remaining years of Juan's reign, Leonor and her husband Gaston governed the kingdom in his stead until Leonor's schemes to remove her father from the throne caused Juan to take the lieutenancy away and give it to Leonor's son. Although Leonor's eldest son attempted to usurp her right to the throne, his untimely death and a new agreement with her father once again ensured Leonor's succession. Between acting governor and ruling queen, Leonor took on most of the administrative duties of governing the kingdom while her husband spent much of his time at the French court. Woodacre sees this as another example of a couple employing the 'divide and conquer' strategy that allowed each spouse the greatest degree of independence and autonomy in governing their own territory. It is in this chapter that Woodacre argues against the view that female successors served as placeholders until their sons could rule. None of the queens of Navarre stepped aside in favor of their son, nor did they co-rule with a son or grandson in their widowhood. Most of the queens, however, were married when they ascended the throne and had a male consort, which may have eased their accession to the throne. It is perplexing that such an important issue concerning the circumstances of these women's succession to throne (with or without a male consort and with or without a son) is embedded in chapter five rather than discussed in the introduction where the author spent some time explaining the inheritance customs that allowed Navarrese queens to become ruling monarchs.

The final chapter examines the reign of Catalina I, who is often held responsible for the loss of Navarre to Castile. Catalina was a minor when she came to the throne and her mother acted as regent until many years after her marriage to Jean d'Albret. The Cortes of Navarre objected to the French alliance and it frayed relations with Castile, but a French marriage at least ensured that Navarre would remain an independent kingdom and meant that it would not be incorporated into Castile. Woodacre classifies Catalina and Jean's reign in the 'team players' category because they frequently acted jointly in sharing the duties and governance of their territories. Woodacre evaluates the couple's reign to determine if their actions and policies were responsible for Castile's annexation of Navarre in 1512 and argues that they were in an extremely difficult position due to the sheer size of the territories they ruled and their attempts to travel to around and administer both their French and Pyrenean lands. Catalina had also inherited a country badly destabilized by the wars of Juan of Aragon, which had left Navarre under the protectorate of Castile and opened the door for Castile to annex the kingdom when it was most vulnerable.

The conclusion addresses the similarities present in the reigns of the Navarrese queens, reviews the power sharing strategies of the queens and their consorts, and emphasizes how Navarre's geographical location between two rival powers strongly influenced the marriage alliances undertaken to protect the kingdom. While marriages to foreigners forged important political ties and increased the size of the kingdom, Woodacre concludes that, 'these marriages compromised the kingdom's sovereignty and the ability of the monarchical pair to concentrate solely on a course of action that would have the greatest benefit to Navarre' (p. 166). Not only does Woodacre demonstrate the importance of Navarre to the political worlds of France, Castile, and Aragon, but she also shows that the queens were active regents who often fought and won their right to the throne. This survey of five queens and their strategies for ruling offers much to the study of queenship and its narrow focus allows Woodacre to write a very readable political history of Navarre and its queens. However, the author's decision to categorize the partnerships between the queens and their consorts into three models – 'his way', 'team players', and 'conquer and divide' – trivializes the complexity of these couple's ruling strategies, does not lend itself well to studying the effectiveness of each spouse in the power-sharing dynamic, and does not consider if their strategies of sharing power changed over time as the couple adapted to their roles in governing.

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