

The queen and the abbots: Blanche of Castile

Book or Report Section

Accepted Version

Grant, L. (2018) The queen and the abbots: Blanche of Castile. In: Bauduin, P., Combalbert, G., Dubois, A., Garnier, B. and Maneuvrier, C. (eds.) Sur les pas de Lanfranc, du Bec a`Caen. Cahier des Annales de Normandie, 37 (37). Presses Universitaire de Caen, Caen, pp. 139-148. ISBN 9782902239405 Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/81396/>

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Publisher: Presses Universitaire de Caen

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The Queen and the Abbots: Blanche of Castile.

Veronique Gazeau's work has made a fundamental contribution to our understanding of monasticism in Normandy, and to the lives and careers of abbots, and to the conception of their office. Veronique focussed on ducal Normandy, but her researches have illuminated monasticism and the office of abbot in the duchy in the period after 1204. Indeed, she has played a pivotal role in encouraging research into the duchy in the post-1204 period, a period which had been long neglected, above all with her role in the organisation of the 2004 Colloque on the confrontation of Plantagenets and Capetians in 1204. This paper pays homage to a historian and her abbots with a discussion of the relationships of one of the queens of France – one of the great rulers of France – and two of the most important abbots with whom she dealt.

Blanche of Castile, daughter of Alfonso VIII of Castile, granddaughter of Henry II Plantagenet and Eleanor of Aquitaine, was married in 1200 to the future Louis VIII of France, to cement the result of the Treaty of Le Goulet between her uncle, King John of England, and the French king, Philip Augustus. She was queen consort for three years, during the short reign of her husband, from 1223 to 1226. On his deathbed, her husband left the governance of the kingdom of France, and the care of his heir, the twelve-year-old Louis IX, in Blanche's hands, as sole regent. When Louis IX left on Crusade in 1248, he left the kingdom, once again, under the governance of his mother. Blanche was one of the most powerful women of the Middle Ages, and she was renowned for the firmness, decisiveness and justice of her rule. (1)

Blanche's reputation as a woman of exceptional piety was well established during her lifetime. Charles of Anjou, King of Sicily, the youngest of the children of Blanche and Louis VIII, described her as the 'sancta radix', the holy root, from which grew the noted piety of the family. (2) Blanche founded three Cistercian Abbeys, Royaumont, Maubuisson and Le Lys, and she distributed alms with lavish generosity. Throughout her life, she surrounded herself with men and women of the church – bishops, masters of the Paris schools, abbots, nuns, and holy women. (3) This paper will concentrate on her relationships with Eudes Clément, the abbot of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Denis, and with abbots of the house of Augustinian canons of Saint-Victor in Paris, especially John, known as 'the Teuton'.

Eudes Clément became abbot of Saint-Denis in late 1228, during Blanche's first regency. In May 1245, he was elected archbishop of Rouen, in which office he died, two years later. (4)

In February 1229, the community of the abbey of Saint-Denis wrote to inform the crown of the recent election of Eudes Clément as abbot. This letter was addressed to the young king, Louis IX, though Louis had little involvement with government at this early stage of Blanche's regency, and the letter must have been no more than a formal notification of something of which the royal court would have been perfectly well aware. (5)

The abbey of Saint-Denis had long had particularly close links with the kings of France. It was believed that the abbey had been founded by the Merovingian King Dagobert. Many kings, and a couple of queens, of France had been buried there, including Dagobert, Charles the Bald, and, more recently, Philip Augustus and Blanche's husband, Louis VIII. The abbey held the royal regalia, including the crowns, sceptres and vestments. Occasionally queens were crowned, there, notably Blanche's mother-in-law, Isabelle of Hainault, in 1180, though it had become customary to crown the king at Reims. (6) So close relations between the abbot of Saint-Denis and the king, the queen and the royal court was to be expected. Abbot Suger had been very close to Louis VI, and had written an admiring account of the king's deeds. He was less close to Louis VII. Suger's successor, Eudes of Deuil, had been chaplain to Louis VII, accompanied him on his disastrous Crusade, and wrote an account of it. (7)

Nevertheless, after Eudes of Deuil, relations between the abbots of Saint Denis and the kings of France were less cordial. Louis VII had himself buried elsewhere, in his new Cistercian foundation of Barbeau. Rigord, a monk of Saint-Denis, undertook to write an account of the deeds of Philip Augustus, who had had his queen crowned at the abbey; but Rigord became disillusioned with the king when Philip invited the Jews back into the kingdom of France, and when Philip married Agnes of Meran while his second wife, Ingebourg of Denmark, was still alive. (8) But both Philip Augustus and Louis VIII were buried at the abbey and it is possible that relations warmed before Philip's death. At all events, when, in late 1228, the monks of Saint-Denis elected their prior, Eudes Clément, as abbot, they elected someone with close personal links to the queen regent.

The Clément family had served the kings of France since the middle of the twelfth century. The family came from Mèz-le-Marechal, near Nemours. One member had been tutor to Philip Augustus. (9) His sons, Aubri, then Henry, followed by Henry's son, John, occupied the office of marshal of France. The marshals Henry and John fought alongside Louis VIII, Henry when Louis was still the heir to the throne. Eudes Clément was a son of Marshal Henry and the brother of Marshal John Clément. Several members of the family were prominent churchmen, with particular links to the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris. One

uncle, also named Eudes, became archdeacon of Notre Dame and Dean of St Martin at Tours; another uncle, Hugh, became dean of the cathedral chapter of Notre Dame in Paris. Hugh Clément, according to his obit at Notre Dame, was an energetic architectural patron. (10) The Cléments had married into two other dynasties from the area of Nemours, who were also at the heart of the Capetian court and of the French church – the Nemours and the Cornuts. (11) Two first cousins of Eudes Clément, Walter Cornut, archbishop of Sens, and his brother, Aubri, dean of Saint-Martin at Tours and then bishop of Chartres, were pre-eminent among the churchmen in the entourage of Louis VIII, Blanche of Castile and the young Louis IX. (12)

Walter Cornut was more than just a great ecclesiastic. (13) He was never given the title of chancellor, but that was in effect his role. He was the most important of the administrator-churchmen at court until his death in 1241. The royal accounts of 1234 demonstrate his importance: often, Blanche sent messengers to Walter to have his help, or his counsel, or to ensure that a decision was implemented. (14) Regina Cornut, probably a sister of Walter and Aubri, was one of Blanche's ladies, from as early as 1213 until 1243. (15) Two other women of the same family, Isabelle and Agnes, served the queen in the 1230s and 1240s. (16)

Eudes Clément, then, could not have had better connections to the very heart of the court of the queen regent. When Eudes attended court, it was usually on business related to Blanche. In 1237, during the early personal rule of Louis IX, Eudes attended the Christmas Court at Vincennes, where he witnessed an act on behalf of the abbey of Saint-Mellon at Pontoise. (17) Louis had recently given his mother Pontoise as a major part of her dower, in exchange for her original dower in north-eastern France, which in 1237 had been given to her second son, Robert, when he was invested with the county of Artois. The abbey of Saint-Mellon was within the castle at Pontoise, and at least two of Blanche's clerks held prebends there. (18)

In spring 1241, Eudes Clément was one of a select group of major churchmen who forced Marguerite of Provence, the wife and queen of Louis IX, to promise that she would never act against the wishes and the testament of her husband, the king. (19) Alongside Eudes Clément, the other churchmen involved were: William of Auvergne, bishop of Paris; Adam of Chambly, bishop of Senlis; and Ralph, abbot of Saint-Victor. All of these men were close associates of Blanche of Castile. We do not know why Marguerite was forced to make this humiliating promise. Her sister was married to Henry III of England, who was, in early 1241, engaged in building an alliance with Raymond of Toulouse and Isabelle of Angoulême

against the Capetians. Perhaps Marguerite had attempted to use her influence with her sister to build bridges between the two kings. Perhaps her close relationship with her sister was enough to make her seem politically suspect. In the 1250s, after the deaths of Blanche of Castile, Raymond of Toulouse and Isabelle of Angoulême, and with Toulouse and Poitou firmly in the hands of his brother, Alphonse, Louis IX took the lead in developing a new close relationship with his cousin, Henry III. At that stage, Marguerite was able to play her part in diplomatic negotiations. (20) But Henry was still a serious threat in the early 1240s, and Blanche never trusted him. At all events, the political disempowering of the young queen by the old in 1241, shows the abbot of Saint Denis prepared to play his part in the high politics of the royal court.

A fine window in the cathedral of Chartres provides further testimony to the close relationship of Eudes Clément and the Queen regent. This is the famous window in the south transept clerestory which shows a member of the Clément family, almost certainly John, marshal of France and brother of Eudes, receiving the banner of France – the oriflamme – from the hands of Saint Denis himself, just as the king of France received it from the abbot of Saint-Denis when he set off for war. The image of John Clément as the banner-bearer of the kingdom, is surprising; it almost shows him usurping the role of the king. But there is no evidence that anyone within the royal entourage objected. The bishop of Chartres at the time, Walter, a Cistercian, previously abbot of Preuilley, was another close associate of Blanche of Castile. (21) Bishop Walter received robes as if a member of the royal household, and he acted frequently alongside Walter Cornut on Blanche's behalf during her first regency. (22) The two Walters helped Blanche to force Peter Mauclerc, count of Brittany to accept peace at the Treaty of Vendôme in 1227; the following year, the two Walters persuaded the north French church to provide Blanche with the money promised to her husband to pursue the Crusade against the Albigensians. It was bishop Walter of Chartres who consecrated Eudes Clément as abbot of Saint-Denis. The image of Eudes Clément's brother accepting the oriflamme from Saint-Denis himself at Chartres Cathedral must be seen in this courtly and familial context. (23)

Like his uncle Hugh Clément, dean of Notre Dame in Paris, Eudes Clément was an active patron of architecture. He it was who decided that the abbey church of Saint-Denis must be rebuilt. (24) It is possible that the chevet of the abbey church, built less than a century previously by abbot Suger, was becoming unstable. Eudes' master mason left Suger's ambulatory intact, but he rebuilt the upper main elevation and the levels of the chevet. Suger

had never succeeded in rebuilding the entire abbey church at Saint-Denis, though he had hoped to do so. Instead, he extended the Carolingian church to both east and west. His attempts to rebuild the rest of the church foundered on the fact that the monks of Saint-Denis believed that the old church had been consecrated by Christ himself. (25) Eudes Clément dared to do what Suger had not: he commanded his master mason to rebuild the abbey church. Nevertheless, according to the Saint-Denis monk, William of Nangis, Eudes took the precaution of asking the permission of Blanche as regent, and the young Louis IX, before doing so. (26).

John, known as ‘The Teuton’, abbot of Saint-Victor, had an even closer relationship with Blanche of Castile. John had been abbot of the Augustinian Abbey of Saint-Victor in Paris for some 22 years, from around 1212. (27) As abbot of Saint-Victor, in 1225, he was named as one of the executors of the will of Blanche’s husband, Louis VIII. (28) But John seems to have retired from the office of abbot, probably before 1234. As the ex-abbot of Saint-Victor, he appears to have lived the rest of his life in Blanche of Castile’s household. He first appears on the royal household accounts in 1234, the last year of Blanche’s regency; in the early 1240s, he is recorded in Blanche’s own household accounts. (29) He lived for many years after resigning his abbacy, dying around 1247. (30) There are other examples of abbots who resigned their office, but it was rare. (31) Abbots were consecrated to their office. It was acceptable to move from the office of abbot to that of bishop or archbishop (as did Eudes Clément and Walter of Chartres), or that of cardinal, at the request of an archbishop or the pope. Some abbots had to resign from their office on account of illness. Usually the sick abbot died soon after his resignation, but occasionally, a severe but chronic illness, like paralysis - as in the case of Abbot Ralph of Le Mont Saint Michel in the late 1220s, meant that the abbey had to support an incapacitated ex-abbot for a considerable length of time. (32) The case of John the Teuton is highly unusual. He survived for a long time after his resignation, apparently in good enough health to play a role in Blanche’s household – often, acting as one of her almoners. (33)

John was a renowned scholar, who belonged to the reformist party within the church. Innocent III often asked him to deal with ecclesiastical cases, frequently alongside the legate Robert Courson (34). Blanche, like her husband and St Louis, liked to surround herself with intellectual ecclesiastics, who were usually masters of the Paris schools, like Walter Cornut, Master Simon Langton, the cardinal-legate Romanus of Sant-Angelo, and Jordan of Saxony and other members of the Dominican order in Paris. The presence of John the Teuton in her

household reminds us that Blanche of Castile, like her husband, Louis VIII, had a close relationship with the abbey and the order of Saint-Victor. Because Blanche contravened her husband's will, founding a Cistercian abbey – Royaumont – for the salvation of his soul, rather than the Victorine house that he had requested, historians have often said that Blanche rejected the Victorine order, the preferred order of both Philip Augustus and Louis VIII, in favour of the Cistercians. But the foundation of Royaumont had the explicit consent of Louis VIII's executors – who included Abbot John of Saint-Victor. (35) And the presence of John the Teuton in her entourage shows that Blanche herself remained a great supporter of the Victorines. She was accepted as a 'sister' of the order. In the order's necrology she is described as: 'sororis nostre qui.....nostram ecclesiam mirabilis affectus sincere dilectionis complenctens, multa et magna ei beneficia conferens.....Quod in ecclesiae nostre negociis diligenter promovendis'. (36) In 1241, the current abbot of Saint-Victor - Ralph - acted alongside Eudes Clément to curb the young Queen Marguerite's diplomatic initiatives. At the end of her life, Blanche named the current abbot of Saint-Victor – now Robert – as one of the executors of her own will, as Abbot John had been as executor for her husband. (37)

A record of Blanche's finances at the Temple in Paris, where she, like other members of the royal family, kept their monies, survives for the year 1243. This account enumerates the sums that Blanche has lent, and which her debtors owe her. She had lent large sums of money to several abbeys. Most of them were Cistercian abbeys, including £1000 to Pontigny and £1500 to Cîteaux itself. But the largest loans went to Saint-Denis and Saint-Victor with, respectively, £2000 and £3000. (38) These were huge sums; Blanche was acting as a banker for these two abbeys. Saint-Denis, still under the guidance of Eudes Clément, was in the throes of his major rebuilding project, and it is likely that Blanche's loan helped to pay for this. It is not clear why the abbey of Saint-Victor needed to borrow such a huge sum from the queen. But these generous loans reflect the close and personal friendships between the queen and the abbots of the respective abbeys.

Footnotes:

1. For Blanche, see Lindy Grant, *Blanche of Castile, Queen of France* (London/New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).
2. Paul Edouard Didier Riant, 'Déposition de Charles d'Anjou pour la canonisation de Saint Louis', in *Notices et documents publiés pour la Société d'histoire de France à l'occasion du cinquantième anniversaire de sa fondation* (Paris, 1884), p.175.

3. For Blanche's piety and religious patronage, Grant, *Blanche of Castile*, pp. 202-229: for the architecture of the abbeys, Alexandra Gajewski, 'The Patronage Question under Review: Queen Blanche of Castile (1188–1252) and the Architecture of the Cistercian Abbeys at Royaumont, Maubuisson and Le Lys', in *Reassessing the Roles of Women as 'Makers' of Medieval Art and Architecture*, ed. Therese Martin, 2 vols (Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2012), I, pp. 197–244.
4. For his career, *Fasti Ecclesiae Gallicanae, II: le diocèse de Rouen*, ed. Vincent Tabbagh (Turnhout: Brepols, 1998), pp. 86-7.
5. *Layettes du trésor des chartes*, ed. A. Teulet, 5 vols (Paris: H. Plon, 1863–1909), II, no. 1984.
6. Bautier, 'Sacres et couronnement sous les carolingiens et les premiers capetiens', *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'Histoire de France, 1987-8* (Paris, 1989), esp. pp. 52-6. For the coronation of Isabelle of Hainault, Rigord, *Histoire de Philippe Auguste*, ed. Elisabeth Carpentier, Georges Pon and Yves Chauvin, *Sources d'Histoire Médiévale*, 33 (Paris: CNRS, 2006), pp. 138-141.
7. For the relations between Suger and Eudes of Deuil with Louis VII, Lindy Grant *Abbot Suger of St-Denis: Church and State in Early Twelfth-century France* (London: Longman, 1998), pp.205-6.
8. Rigord, *Histoire de Philippe Auguste*, esp pp. 320-1, 340-1. Rigord's text was not completed by the monks at Saint-Denis, but by Philip's chaplain, the secular churchman, William the Breton, see John Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus: Foundations of French Royal Power in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 396-8.
9. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*, p.113; Nicolas Civel, *La fleur de France: les seigneurs d'Ile-de-France au XIIIe siècle* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), p.133.
10. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*, p. 119. For Eudes Clement senior, *Cartulaire de l'église Notre-Dame de Paris*, ed. B. Guérard, 4 vols (Paris, 1850), IV, p.187. For Hugh Clement, *Fasti Ecclesiae Gallicanae, II: le diocèse de Rouen*, p.86; *Cartulaire de l'église Notre-Dame de Paris*, IV, p.187, 5-7.
11. Baldwin, *The Government of Philip Augustus*, p. 121; Civel, *La fleur de France*, p.134, n. 101.
12. Grant, *Blanche of Castile*, esp. pp. 186, 188.

13. For his ecclesiastical career, see *Fasti Ecclesiae Gallicanae, XI: le diocèse de Sens*, ed. Vincent Tabbagh and Edouard Bouye (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009) , pp. 104-9.
14. ‘Recepta et expensa Anno MCCXXXIII inter candelosam et ascensionem’, in *Recueil des historiens des Gaules et de la France*, ed. M. Bouquet et al., 24 vols, Nouvelle édition, publiée sous la direction de Léopold Delisle (Paris, 1869–1904), XXI, (1855), pp. 235, 238, 239, 240.
15. ‘Un fragment du compte de l’hôtel du Prince Louis de France pour le terme de la Purification 1213’, ed. Robert Fawtier in *Moyen âge*, XLIII (1933), pp. 225–50, p.244; Delisle, ‘Mémoire sur les opérations financières des Templiers’, in *Mémoires présentés par divers savantes à l’Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, XXXIII (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1889), part ii, p.101.
16. The evidence for Blanche’s ladies comes from the occasional and fragmentary household accounts, ‘Recepta et Expensa’, pp. 239, 247, for 1234; ‘Itinera, dona et hernesia AD 1239 inter ascensionem et omnes sanctos’, in *RHF*, XXII, (1865) pp. 583–615, pp. 588, 597, for 1239; ‘Comptes de dépenses de Blanche de Castille’, ed. Etienne Symphorien Bougenot in *Bulletin du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques: section d’histoire et de philologie* (1889), pp. 86–91, pp. 90, 91 and from Paris BNF ms lat 9017, f.69 for 1241/2. For a discussion of the ladies of Blanche’s entourage, Grant, *Blanche of Castile*, esp. pp. 172-3.
17. Archives Départementales du Val d’Oise, G. 420 (1)
18. Grant, *Blanche of Castile*, p. 189.
19. *Layettes du trésor des chartes*, II, no 2909.
20. Edgar Boutaric, ‘Marguerite de Provence, femme de Saint Louis: son caractère, son rôle politique’, *Revue des questions historiques*, III (1867), [article reprinted Paris: Victor Palme, 1867], pp. 15-26; Edgar Boutaric, *Saint Louis et Alphonse de Poitiers: études sur la réunion des provinces du Midi et de l’Ouest à la couronne* (Paris: Plon, 1870), pp. 98-111.
21. *Gallia Christiana*, ed. D. Sammarthani et al., 17 vols (Paris, 1715–1865), VIII, cols. 1156-9; Grant, *Blanche of Castile*, pp. 186-7.
22. For the robes, Johann Peter von Ludewig, *Reliquiae Manuscriptorum omnis aevi Diplomatum ac Monumentorum ineditorum adhuc*, 12 vols (Frankfurt, 1720–41), xii, bk. 1, p.4.

23. Grant, *Blanche of Castile*, p. 85, Lindy Grant, 'Representing Dynasty: The Transept Windows of Chartres Cathedral', in *Representing History: Art, Music, History*, ed. Robert A. Maxwell (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p.113.
24. For Eudes' rebuilding, see Caroline Bruzelius, *The Thirteenth Century Church at St-Denis* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985)
25. Grant, *Abbot Suger of Saint-Denis*, pp. 239-40; E. Panofsky, ed. *Abbot Suger on the Abbey Church of St-Denis and its Art Treasures*, 2nd ed. By G. Panofsky-Soergel (Princeton, 1976) p. 100 (De Consecratione), and pp. 42-4, 50-3 (De Administratione).
26. *Chronique latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, ed. H. Geraud, 2 vols, Société de l'Histoire de France (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1843), I, p. 183
27. For his career, see Dom Fourier Bonnard, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale et de l'ordre des chanoines réguliers de St-Victor de Paris*, 2 vols (Paris: Savaète, 1904–08), I, pp. 286-303, and *Gallia Christiana*, VII, cols 673-6. *Ibid.*, col. 673 suggest that he became abbot as early as 1204.
28. *Layettes du trésor des chartes*, II, 1710.
29. For John in 1234, 'Recepta et expensa', p.236; for 1239, 'Itinera, dona et hernesia', p. 606; for 1241/2, 'Comptes de dépenses de Blanche de Castille', pp. 88, 89, 90 and Paris BNF ms lat 9017, f. 69.
30. Bonnard, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale et de l'ordre des chanoines réguliers de St-Victor de Paris*, I, p. 300, n.3.
31. For an illuminating discussion of this issue, see Veronique Gazeau, *Normannia Monastica*, I, pp. 117-133.
32. Lindy Grant, *Architecture and Society in Normandy, 1120–1270* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), p. 162.
33. Grant, *Blanche of Castile*, p.208.
34. Bonnard, *Histoire de l'abbaye royale et de l'ordre des chanoines réguliers de St-Victor de Paris*, I, pp.286-7.
35. See the foundation charter for Royaumont in the Royaumont Cartulary, Archives Départementales du Val d'Oise, 43H3, ff. 1-5.
36. *Obituaires de la Province de Sens*, ed. Auguste Molinier and Auguste Longnon, 4 vols in 5 (Paris, 1902–23), I, 603.
37. Blanche's executors are known from the Fontevraud Cartulary, Paris BNF, ms lat 5480, vol. 1 part ii, p. 474.

38. Delisle, 'Mémoire sur les opérations financières des Templiers', p.101