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Summary

In the first half of the fifteenth century, the dukes of Burgundy gradually obtained many principalities in the Netherlands, including the counties of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland in 1433. The role of the last pre-Burgundian countess, the legendary Jacqueline of Bavaria, has traditionally been emphasised in the series of dramatic events which resulted in this transfer of power. In his 2009 biography, Antheun Janse presented an alternative point of view by stating that Jacqueline was merely a pawn on the political chessboard, while her mother Margaret of Burgundy took the lead. In addition, he put forward that during the 1420s Margaret was leader of the Hook party, which supported her daughter. Since the fourteenth century, dynastic conflicts for power in Holland had been intertwined with party strife between the Hooks (*Hoeken*) and the Cods (*Kabeljauwen*) which divided both nobility and cities. In spite of Janse's suggestion that Margaret played a pivotal role in a decisive period in the history of the Low Countries, up until the present no historical studies had been dedicated to her. This dissertation endeavours to fill this gap.

Margaret of Burgundy (1374-1441) is known mainly for two reasons. Firstly, her marriage in 1385 to William of Bavaria, eldest son of the Count of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, laid the foundation for the transfer of power in these principalities to the Burgundian dynasty some 50 years later. Secondly, she supported her only child Jacqueline of Bavaria who fought many battles in order to prevent this. The combination of these two roles points to a conflict of interest. By supporting her daughter as the rightful Bavarian heir, Margaret inevitably came into conflict with members of her own dynasty of origin, the Valois Burgundians. The overarching question in the research presented here is what tilted the scales for Margaret as a political player in different phases of her life: was it her loyalty to the Burgundian or to the Bavarian dynasty, her connection with the Hook party in Holland, or was she driven mainly by self-interest, as is sometimes suggested? Related to this is the question whether her means were substantial enough to allow her to play her own game.

In this biographical study, a chronological and a thematic approach have been combined. The loyalty question serves as guideline for the first part of this dissertation (chapters 1-6), in which the story of Margaret's life is told chronologically within the broader context of political developments, including various new findings which emerged from my research. The thematic second part is dedicated to her financial position as a widow (chapters 7-9), her court (chapters 10-11) and her religious and literary patronage (chapters 12-13). These subjects have never been studied specifically in relation to Margaret of Burgundy, although incidental information does emerge from the literature. Besides the availability of relevant sources, the choice of these three themes arose from two considerations. Firstly, they are related to personal princely power. And secondly, I hoped that examining her financial (in)dependence, her daily social environment and her literary and religious affinity would offer insight into Margaret's personality and her position in relation to both dynasties. These subjects are considered in a broader context. In particular, her income as a dowager countess and the size of her court are analysed in relation to her contemporaries. Such a quantitative, comparative analysis had not previously been carried out for princely widows.

When Margaret married at the age of ten, she was merely a pawn pushed forward in the political play of her father, duke Philip the Bold of Burgundy, who aspired to increase his influence in the Low Countries. From an early age, her upbringing had impressed her with

awareness of her own high status and kinship with the French royal family. The magnificent marital celebrations must have considerably added to this awareness. In the relatively sheltered environment of the Bavarian court she subsequently grew into a lady. In 1401, when she was in her late twenties, she fulfilled her primary dynastic duty by giving birth to a daughter called Jacqueline, who remained an only child.

When power passed to the next generation in both the Burgundian and the Bavarian principalities after 1404, Margaret became the linchpin of the Bavarian-Burgundian family network. She gained some administrative experience during her husband's absences and set out on the path of international diplomacy by acting as a mediator on behalf of her brother John the Fearless in the French civil war. During this period she was able to loyally serve the interests of both her own dynasty and that of her husband without major difficulties.

After both William of Bavaria and Jacqueline's first husband, the dauphin of France, had died in 1417 Margaret was faced with opposition against her daughter's succession as countess, especially in Holland. She stuck to her late husband's policy by supporting Jacqueline as his rightful successor and by trying to prevent the Cod party from returning to power in Holland. By encouraging her daughter's marriage to her Burgundian nephew, Duke John IV of Brabant, she served the interests of the Burgundian dynasty as well. When this marriage was falling apart she initially acted as a mediator, but to no avail. As a result of her subsequent support of Jacqueline's marital break-up and flight to the English royal court, Margaret's relationship with her own dynasty became tense, but she remained on speaking terms with the new Duke, Philip the Good, who acted as a mediator in Margaret's own conflict with John of Bavaria, her brother-in-law. Nevertheless, it dragged on for years.

When Jacqueline returned with her new husband Humphrey of Gloucester in an attempt to reconquer Hainault and Holland, Margaret continued to support her, in spite of the obvious conflict with Burgundian policy. She was involved in the ensuing peace negotiations, but refused to adhere to the resulting Treaty of Douai which confirmed John of Brabant as count of Hainault and designated Philip of Burgundy as Jacqueline's and her own temporary guardian. Margaret's perseverance in the recognition of her daughter's English marriage implicated that she no longer acknowledged John of Brabant as count of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland. This rebellion against her own dynasty literally came at a high cost.

Medieval princely widows are considered to have been relatively independent as a result of the dower promised to them in their marriage contract, which provided them with their own income after their husband had died. In Margaret's case, as in many others, the actual composition of her dower differed strongly from that in the contract, with income from domains as well as annuities from both Hainault and Holland. The yearly total was impressive. With approximately 21.000 lb a year her income as a widow amounted to a striking 40% of the count's regular income from his domains in Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, excluding special taxes (*beden*). This was a heavy financial burden for the three counties. In absolute terms, Margaret's income was roughly similar to that of Isabel of Portugal (+1471) and Margaret of York (+1503) as dowager duchesses of Burgundy.

In theory, Margaret's income from her dower enabled her to play an active political role at a high level. She herself underlined her separate status as a princely widow in a letter, in which she refused to participate in the 1418 Treaty of Woudrichem, comparing her status to that of her late husband the Count. However, there were clearly limits to a princely widow's independence. When she crossed the lines of family politics, male family

members retaliated with financial measures by seizing her dower domains and cutting off her yearly allowance. The research presented in this dissertation demonstrates that three male opponents and family members, John of Bavaria, John of Brabant and Philip the Good of Burgundy all adopted this strategy. The latter seems to have adopted financial measures as a standard policy against princely widows who got in his way.

Her income allowed Margaret to surround herself with a court which was Burgundian in proportion, but remained Bavarian in composition, with many of its members serving her for many years or even decades. The majority of the nobles which surrounded her were members of families which had traditionally served the count, including her husband and daughter. Although Margaret spent most of her time in the French-speaking county of Hainault, according to a 1439 list, 25% of the nobles at her court were from Holland and Zeeland. Six years after the final transfer of power to Burgundy, and three years after Jacqueline's decease, there were no evident signs of 'Burgundisation' in the composition of her court. Its size and composition not only reflected her high status, but also enabled her to administrate her extensive dower and to play a prominent role in diplomacy.

Margaret left her tracks outside political history as well, although most of these have been erased. Religion played an important role in her daily life, including acts of charity and donations to monasteries and churches. The source material which was examined for this dissertation does not reveal a preference for any particular religious movement, but shows patterns which were common to both her own dynasty and that of her husband, including the fact that sometimes religious acts and political goals converged. Her donations went to monasteries and churches in Holland, Hainault and the north of France. I have found no evidence for gifts to religious institutions in the Duchy of Burgundy, but she did donate to the church of Saint-Denis, which was closely linked to her French royal ancestors. Margaret's personal devotion is most evident from a list of intended pilgrimages written in her own hand.

The traces Margaret left as a book owner and literary patron are scarce but significant. She acted as a benefactor of Christine de Pizan when she was working on her famous 'Book of the City of Ladies', inspired poets and ordered precious illuminations for existing manuscripts. What is known about her ownership of books does not indicate a particular religious involvement, but points to a fascination with her French royal ancestry. Her literary interests, with a preference for didactic and historiographical works, match those of a politically active princess. A laudatory poem dedicated to her suggests that classical heroines like Medea, Dido and the Amazonian queen Penthesilea caught her imagination. Perhaps she identified herself with their militance and ingenuity, as well as their tragic faith.

Contemporary sources hardly ever provide a clear picture of the way in which medieval princesses operated. This is certainly the case for Margaret's political role in the crucial years 1417-33. Partly this is due to the amount and nature of remaining source material, but at least in part it can also be attributed to a deliberate strategy. As a dowager, she claimed to be an outsider in conflicts involving her daughter. As far as we know, Margaret never waged war herself. As a consequence, she made it a matter of principle not to participate in general peace treaties, such as the Treaties of Woudrichem (1419) and Delft (1428) and the charter which designated Philip the Good governor of Hainault (1427). Instead, she chose to enter into separate agreements, thus stressing her special status as princely dowager. Her attitude enabled her to participate in negotiations and to act as a spider in the web. Although most of her actions remain hidden from our view, the

reactions of her opponents, who declared her an enemy and a rebel and took financial measures against her, indicate clearly that her neutrality was just a pose.

Margaret's seemingly neutral position makes it hard to prove that she was indeed the leader of the Hook party, as Janse has suggested. During the dynastic conflict which followed Count William VI's death, the Hooks supported Jacqueline as his rightful successor, with Margaret evidently on the same side. Although it is quite likely that she played a leading role, she seems to have done so behind the screens, while her daughter acted as figurehead. Her concealed way of operating was connected with her position between the Burgundian and the Bavarian dynasty. As a princely widow, she had to navigate shrewdly towards 'the powers that be' in order to achieve her goals.

Margaret's supposed involvement in a number of conspiracies, though not inconceivable, is one of the mysteries which remain unsolved. Her possible involvement in the murder of John of Bavaria as well as her supposed plans for kidnapping John of Brabant and assassinating Philip the Good seem plausible based on means, motive and opportunity, but she was never formally charged, let alone convicted. This may have been due to her high status and femininity, but based on the remaining evidence even the existence of the said conspiracies is uncertain. Except for the murder of John of Bavaria these were not carried out. The alternative explanation, that Margaret's enemies made up accusations in order to damage her reputation and intimidate her and her allies remains a credible option as well.

After her husband's death, Margaret's primary goal was to secure her daughter's position as successor in the three counties. This was what drove her actions and her partisanship. In order to achieve this aim, she acted as a medieval tiger mother, supporting and directing her daughter at decisive moments. From a modern point of view, this is a questionable attitude, but from a medieval perspective it was in line with her dynastic duties, since she followed her late husband's wishes. It has been suggested that she acted purely out of self-interest, but this is not evident at all. By prioritising Jacqueline's interests as heiress she entered into conflict with her own dynasty, which caused her serious financial difficulties. In view of her earlier conflict with her brother-in-law John of Bavaria, who also cut down on her income, she must have foreseen that this was likely to happen. Nonetheless she decided to play the game, and lost. Her attempts to unite the interests of both dynasties failed, and in the end she had to accept that her daughter, the Bavarian heiress, was pushed aside by the Burgundian dynasty. After 1433, when the government had been transferred irrevocably to the house of Burgundy, Margaret withdrew from the playing field. She was with her daughter when she died in 1436. Immediately the next day, she renounced all rights that she might still have to her succession. It illustrates that her efforts had been driven primarily by Jacqueline's interests as the Bavarian heir.

From a more personal perspective, it is evident that Margaret attached great value to her French royal roots. Throughout her life, this was the dynasty she preferred to identify with. It was one thing she had in common with her adversary, the Burgundian duke Philip the Good, who never forgot that he was of French royal blood either.

The memory of Margaret of Burgundy lived on the longest in Le Quesnoy, currently in Northern France, which was her preferred residence for more than 55 years. Not much is left of the former castle of the counts of Hainault which she inhabited, but these days a notice saying '*Château de Marguerite de Bourgogne*' is attached to the modern aboveground walls. At the end of her life, she commissioned a chapel to be built adherent to the parish church, where she was buried. The chapel was destroyed, but the religious

charitable foundation she set up along with it still existed in the nineteenth century. At the end of World War II, a historic comedy was staged in Le Quesnoy, in which she was represented not as a militant princess, but as local benefactress.

Through her politically motivated marriage, Margaret did not only become a hinge between two dynasties, but also between two eras. She personified the Burgundian takeover of Hainault, Holland and Zeeland, but as dowager countess she kept the memory of her husband and daughter's dynasty alive. Especially in Hainault, the Bavarian period did not reach its conclusion until her death in 1441.

