

ON THE EMPRESSES OF THE LATIN EMPIRE (1204–1261) (5).
MARIE OF BRIENNE

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ABSTRACT. The article represents the fifth part of the series “On the Empresses of the Latin Empire (1204–1261)”. This one is dedicated to Marie of Brienne, wife of Baldwin II. She was the daughter of John of Brienne and Berengaria of Castile. Marie was betrothed to and then married Baldwin II in 1240 and became empress of the Latin Empire. After the birth of her son Philip (around 1243), she went to France and to the estate of the Courtenay family in Flanders. There she managed the lands on her husband’s behalf. After being exiled to the Latins from Constantinople in 1261, she settled in Naples and probably died there in 1275. Perhaps she was buried in the church of St. Denis in Paris. The author divides her life into four periods that determine her career. The most important periods in her life were the years 1240–1261. The text is based mainly on documentary, sphragistic and sparse chronicle sources. Marie of Brienne has not had an independent biography.

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Marie of Brienne was the fruit of the union between Berengaria of León and John of Brienne¹ contracted in Burgos in May 1224.² The first news that a child was expected from this marriage is a 1225 mention by Richard of San Germano: *Ioannes rex Ierosolimitanus rediens de partibus ultramontanis cum filia regis Hispanie uxore sua*

¹ See Z. Pentek, *O cesarzowych Cesarstwa Łacińskiego (1204–1261). Berengaria of León*, “Balcanica Posnaniensia. Acta et studia” 2023, vol. 30, p. 43–52.

² Ernoul, *Chronique d’Ernoul et de Bernard le Trésorier*, ed. L. de Mas-Latrie, Paris 1871, p. 450; G. Martínez Díez, *Alfonso VIII, rey de Castilla y Toledo (1158–1214)*, Gijón 2007, p. 21, 47; G. Perry, *The Briennes. The rise and fall of a Champenois Dynasty in the age of the crusades, c. 950–1356*, Cambridge 2018, p. 138.



*pregnante...*³ This gives the premise to believe that Marie was born in April 1225 at the earliest. However, precise answers to the questions of where and when this happened cannot be given. At least three years later, her birth proved to be the inspiration to the barons of the Latin Empire, who – after Robert left the throne – saw in her father the Latin emperor-regent, and in her – the future empress that she could become after marrying Baldwin II, born in 1217. In the autumn of 1228, senior Latin deputies John (d. 1234),⁴ Bishop of Maditha, Villain of Aulnay (ca. 1269),⁵ marshal of the Latin Empire, and Pons of Lyon (*Pontius de Lugduno*), got along to John of Brienne with a proposal to assume the regency of Constantinople and a promise that Marie would marry Baldwin II, son of the late imperial work – Peter of Courtenay and Yolanda of Flanders. The relevant agreement was concluded in Perugia⁶ and it was confirmed on April 9, 1229 by Pope Gregory IX.⁷ Thus, the girl's future was decided in her early childhood, and so she was to become the political 'sacrifice' that her father should – according to the agreement – make by taking the throne in the Queen of Cities. It also meant an official betrothal to the teenage Baldwin II.

Even before John of Brienne's family arrived in Constantinople, there was an earthquake there – in April 1231 – which was taken as a bad omen.⁸ Meanwhile, John of Brienne was sojourning on the Apennine Peninsula, at first in April in Venice,⁹ and later – until the end of May – in Rieti, somewhat delaying his departure for Constantinople. Eventually, Marie and her parents arrived in Constantinople in the second half of 1231, perhaps in late September or early October of that year, when her parents were crowned an imperial couple,¹⁰ From then on, Marie's life at the court in Constantinople begins. Unfortunately, we know nothing about this period in her life until, according to Alberic of Trois Fontaines, the moment indicated at the end

³ *Ryccardi de Sancto Germano notari chronica*, ed. G. H. Pertz, MGH SS 19, Hannover 1866, p. 344.

⁴ *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, ed. C. Eubel, Monasterii 1913, vol. 1, p. 320.

⁵ J. Longnon, *Recherches sur la vie de Geoffroy de Villehardouin, suivies du catalogue des actes des Villehardouin*, Paris 1939, p. 44.

⁶ G. L. Fr. Tafel, G. M. Thomas, *Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig*, vol. 2, Wien 1856, no. 273, in particular p. 266–270.

⁷ Georgii Acropolitae *Opera* recensuit Augustus Heisenberg, editionem anni MCMIII, correctiorem curavit Peter Wirth, vol. 1, Stutgardiae 1978, chapter 27; *L'Estoire de Eracles Empereur et la conquete de la terre d'Outremer (suite)* [in:] *Recueil des Historiens des Croisades, Historiens Occidentaux*, vol. 2, Paris 1859, p. 381–382; B. Hendrickx, *Régestes des empereurs latins de Constantinople (1204–1261/72)*, Θεσσαλονίκη 1988, no. 168–170, p. 114–116 [further Hendrickx, *Régestes*].

⁸ *Ryccardi de Sancto Germano notari chronica*, p. 364.

⁹ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 172–178, p. 116–120.

¹⁰ *Ryccardi de Sancto Germano notari chronica*, p. 364; Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 171–173, 177–178, p. 116–118, 120; *L'Estoire de Eracles Empereur*, p. 310, 316–317, 320, 355–358, 366, 379; *Régistres de Grégoire IX*, ed. L. Auvrey, Paris 1896, vol. I, no. 656, col. 418–419 (8 V 1231); Ermoul, op. cit., p. 411, 449–450, 454, 470–472; G. Perry, op. cit., p. 162, 163, 170.

of 1233, when she married Baldwin II.¹¹ However, this did not involve a coronation, since according to the agreement her husband's independent reign was to begin after the death of the regent, her father. The couple was indeed young, Marie being eight years old, her spouse sixteen.

From this point on, Marie actually disappears from the interest of historians for several years. One can try to reconstruct her biography, but this is quite a risky endeavor. It is indeed certain that the family of John of Brienne expanded, and Marie was granted three brothers: Alphonse of Brienne, who died of dysentery during the Seventh Crusade circa 1228–1270), Louis of Brienne called Louis of Acre (d. 1297),¹² later Viscount Beaumont-sur-Sarthe, and John II of Brienne (d. 1296).¹³ Marie's brothers were most likely born in the late 1220s and early 1230s of the 13th century. They lived with Marie and her parents in Constantinople only until 1236. This was because in November 1235 the Bulgarian-Nicaean army came near the city and laid siege to it. In order to save the boys, the military success at the sea over the Nicaean fleet was exploited – that is, the victory achieved by the Achaean prince, Geoffrey II of Villehardouin (c. 1195–1246). Taking advantage of the weakening of the Nicaean fleet, Marie's brothers were placed on ships and sent to the court of King Louis IX of France (1226–1270). Perhaps then, Baldwin II too left Constantinople with his brothers-in-law.¹⁴

At the end of the ongoing siege of Constantinople, the events that undoubtedly shook the girl happened. First – in March 1237 – her father John of Brienne died,¹⁵ and soon after – on April 12 of that year – his wife and Marie's mother.¹⁶ The con-

¹¹ *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, ed. L. Weiland, MGH SS 23, Hannover 1874, p. 933: *rex...Iohannes super Grecos...filiam suam Mariem ... Balduini iuveni ...filius comitis Petri.*

¹² His nickname was taken from his birthplace Akka, then the capital of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, to which John of Brienne laid claim as King of Jerusalem.

¹³ St. Alphonsus is said to have been born in Acca around 1228, and died on Sept. 14, 1270, in Tunis during the VII Crusade of Louis IX the Saint. *Chronique de Guillaume de Nangis*, ed. F. Guizot, Paris 1825, p. 153: *...ses trois fils, Alphonse, Jean et Louis, encore enfants*, about the children of Emperor John; G. Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 80, 81, 107–108, 113; *ibid.* p. 172. Whereas H. S. Martínez, *Berenguela the Great and Her Times* (1180–1246). *The medieval and early modern Iberian world*, transl. O. Cisneros, Leiden 2021, p. 172, claims that the first daughter of John and Berengaria was also Berengaria, who died in 1236, but this does not seem likely.

¹⁴ J. S. Langdon, *The forgotten Byzantino-Bulgarian assault and siege of Constantinople 1235–1236 and the breakup of the 'Entente Cordiale' between John III Ducas Vatatzes and John Asen II in 1236 as background to the genesis of the Hohenstaufen-Vatatzes alliance of 1242* [in:] *Byzantine Studies in Honor of Milton V. Anastos*, Malibu 1985, p. 105–136; R. Pernoud, *Królowa Blanka*, transl. E. Bąkowska, Warsaw 1989, p. 178, there anonymously about Marie's brothers and their reception at Blanca's court, while on p. 253 the index incorrectly indicates that Marie was the wife [!] of Baldwin I and the daughter of Henry I of Champagne.

¹⁵ Ph. Mousket, *Chronique rimée de Philippe Mouskes*, ed. F. de Reiffenberg, Bruxelles 1838, verses 29, 396–29, 400. This may have happened on March 23, 1237; Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 183, p. 123.

¹⁶ *Chronica Albrici Monachi Trium Fontium*, p. 941: *In Constantinopoli moriuntur rex Iohannes et uxor eius; Obituaires de la province de Sens*, ed. A. Molinier, vol. 1, part 1, Paris 1902, p. 548 and part 2, p. 650, 655; G. Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 187–188.

fluence of these events meant that Marie theoretically commanded the defense of the city. However, nothing is known about her role in these events. Besides, she was simply too young to cope with the demands of taking the lead on the capital's defensive.

Baldwin II, while first in France, and then in his domains inherited from his mother Yolanda of Flanders, made a bequest to his wife Marie in June 1239.¹⁷ This is also the evidence – contrary to J. S. Fine's (*1939) claims – that Baldwin II returned to Constantinople as early as July 1239. He was then sojourning in Namur that month.¹⁸ The emperor did not appear in Constantinople until the winter of 1240. On Easter of that year, April 15, the coronation of Baldwin II took place. Whether the crowning of Marie of Brienne took place is not clear, but I take it as a *fait accompli*, as it was confirmed by her later titulary. Unfortunately, nothing is known about these ceremonies. The first, but not necessarily the only child of Baldwin II and Marie was Philip, born in Constantinople between 1241 and 1243.¹⁹ She was thus a teenager when she gave birth to a boy. Shortly thereafter, at the end of 1243, Baldwin II again left Marie and went on a further quest to secure the fate of his state. It seems that there was no political potential seen in Marie, as the role of regent was entrusted to Philip of Toucy (d. 1277).²⁰ He was the son of the previous regent Narjot (d. 1241). One may think that Marie's role was reduced to raising the heir to the throne, but this too is in question, as we will see in a moment. The empress did not return to the pages of documents until April 4, 1247. At that time, a document was drawn up in connection with the stay in Constantinople of the papal envoy, the Franciscan Dominic d'Aragon, who was unable to carry out his mission among the Muslims in the East.²¹ Marie of Brienne thus became a signatory to the documents on behalf of her spouse, but she did not hold any decision-making function.

¹⁷ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 203, p. 133.

¹⁸ J. Van Antwerp Fine Jr., *The late medieval Balkans. A critical survey from the late twelfth century to the Ottoman conquest*, Ann Arbor 1987, p. 132. Baldwin II's presence in his dominions is confirmed by his document, issued in Namur on July 4, 1239, Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 206, p. 134.

¹⁹ J. du Bouchet, *Histoire généalogique de la maison royale de Covrtenay*, Paris 1661, p. 21: *Philippus primogenitus imperatoris Constantinopolitani et hæres eiusdem imperii*; J. Louda, M. MacLagan, *Lines of succession: heraldry of the royal families of Europe*, London 1999, table 124.

²⁰ *Chronicle of Morea*, ed. J. Schmit, London 1904, p. 342, verse 5231, p. 353, verse 5417, which finds its place in Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 230, p. 147–148. On the Toucy family see J. Longnon, *Les Toucy en Orient et en Italie au XIIIe siècle*, "Bulletin de La Société des Sciences Historiques et Naturelles de l'Yonne" 1958, p. 36–39; П. И. Жаворонков, *Никейская империя и французское рыцарство (Ансо де Каюо и Ансо де Туку)*, "Византийский Временник" 2000, vol. 59, p. 79–85 (in particular p. 82) and D. Schwennicke, *Die Herren von Toucy, 1228–31, 1238–39 und 1245–47. Regenten des lateinischen Kaiserreiches* [in:] *Europäische Stammtafeln. Stammtafeln zur Geschichte der europäischen Staaten, Neue Folge, Band III, Teil 4, Das feudale Frankreich und sein Einfluß auf die Welt des Mittelalters*, Marburg–Berlin 1989, table 114.

²¹ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 230, p. 147–148. Dominique d'Aragon was Innocent IV's envoy to the Middle East, see J. Richard, *La correspondance entre le pape Innocent IV et les princes musulmans d'Orient (1244–1247)*, "Oriente moderno. Nouva serie" 2008, vol. 88, no. 2, p. 323–332.

Once again, Marie appears in a letter from Baldwin II – dated October 8, 1248 – addressed to King Louis IX of France, where the emperor gave her full powers over the territories of the Empire (with the aim of pledging these lands) to pay off a debt of 24,000 hyperperes.²² This is how we arrive at the case of Baldwin II handing over his son Philip as a hostage into the hands of Venetian merchants, brothers Giovanni and Angel Ferro.²³ Robert Lee Wolff (1915–1980) suggests that this may have happened before 1248.²⁴ Unfortunately, it is not possible to lay out the imperial itinerary and settle this question of when this happened, or for what amount. In any case, the separation of Marie of Brienne from her son must have been particularly painful for her and the minor child, since the separation was not short-lived, and the boy was taken to Venice.²⁵

Blanca of Castille (1188–1252),²⁶ queen of France, related to Marie, mother of Louis IX, decided to join the effort and arranged for Marie to travel to France, but set certain conditions. One of them was that she was forbidden to sell Namur and Courtenay on account of the debt she had incurred. Blanca's second condition

²² Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 239–242, p. 151–152. The matter of this sum became the axis of an analytical article by Robert Lee Wolff, *Mortgage and redemption of an emperor's son. Castile and the Latin Empire of Constantinople*, "Speculum" 1954, vol. 29, p. 45–84.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 48–49, based on a document issued on June 10 of the second indictment from *Archivio di Stato Venezia*, *Secreta, Pacta Ferrariae*, k. 54v. These issues have recently been discussed in F. van Tricht, *The horoscope of emperor Baldwin II. Political and sociocultural dynamics in Latin-Byzantine Constantinople, Leiden–Boston 2018*, p. 86–87. Finally, Philip was freed from the hands of the Venetians between June 10 and August 31, 1259. F. van Tricht's publication refers to Maxime Préaud's article, *L'horoscope de Baudouin de Courtenay, empereur latin d'Orient*, "Anagrom" 1973, vol. 3–4, p. 9–45. The author refers to Parisian archival records, of which I have marked those relating to the emperor's wife: p. 226, verse 358: Qui en son tens fust nez **de fame**/ Virent qu'il auroit **une dame**; verse 376: Mes **la dame** iroit en la fin – from BnF, fr. 1353, f. 3ra–f. 4rb; p. 228 BnF, fr. 1353, f. 101ra–f. 102vb: Et li Solauz qui est de nuiz femele demontre le devant dit fil qu'il sera relevez par une tres **noble fame** qui sera nee devers Occident, et droitement li Occidenz est o le Occident, quar li Solauz, qui est de nuiz feminins, est joinz o le signe de la Livre, qui est occidentals; p. 232: BnF, fr. 1353, f. 101ra–f. 102vb: [10] Mes Jupiter qui est sires par nature de la .vii.me meson, qui est li Poissons, segnefie que cist sires doit avoir compagne et **fame** de tres haut lignage, et bele de face et chaste, senz luxure, quar li signes del Poissons, qui est froiz et moetes, demontre **la fame** chaste. Mes porce que la meson de cel segnor est chaude et moete, et la meson (f. 102rb) de **sa fame** froide et moete, ne morra li uns guieres devant l'autre. Si devez bien noter ce que Jupiter ne est mie trevez en sa propre meson, c'est es Poissons, mes en autre estrange et loigtiegne, c'est en la .ix.me, qui est retrograda. Quar **la dame** devoit aler hors de son propre siège et de sa meson por les contraires planetes qui li avoient gastees ses possessions. Texts in bold, mark ZP.

²⁴ Marinvs Sanvtvs Torsellvs, *Liber secretorum fidelivm crvcis svper Terrae Sanctae recyperatione et conservacione*, ed. J. Bongars, Hanoviae MDCXI, Typis Wechelians, apud heredes Ioannis Aubrii, p. 73; R. L. Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 52–53.

²⁵ I will not address myself the intricate issue of getting Philip out of the hands of the Ferro brothers, as this was done brilliantly by R. L. Wolff (*ibid.*). I will only refer to this issue in the context of his mother's involvement.

²⁶ Correspondence (not known to be complete) between Marie of Brienne and Blanca of Castile is kept at the *Archives Nationales* in Paris. See *Layettes de trésor des chartes*, ed. A. Teulet, vol. 3, Paris 1863, p. 69, no. 3772 (May 1249).

was to send the Emperor's wife on a trip to the West a month after his return to Constantinople.²⁷ The Emperor, having arrived at the Queen of Cities, reported on the turn of events, and in October 1248 Marie of Brienne took steps to extricate herself from the embarrassing financial situation. Thus began a feverish attempt to raise funds for the state and her son Philip. The empress then, on four ships, left Constantinople, and as it later turned out, this was her last stay in the city. Before January 30, 1249, Marie and her brother John II of Brienne borrowed 550 livres from someone called Scotto, a Tuscan living in Constantinople.²⁸ In Euboea – on January 31, 1249 – Marie took out another loan of 245 livres from the son of the knight Peter of Rosny.²⁹ Marie took further loans from the Tuscan knight Bona de Mons (68 livres) and Ernaut de Nioles (1, 800 livres) in February or spring 1249.³⁰ The transaction was also made while in Euboea. Queen Blanca was the guarantor of the repayment of the debts.

Meanwhile, Louis IX had made an irrevocable decision to go to the Holy Land, of which Baldwin II knew while in France. The king set out from Paris on June 12, 1248, headed for the port of Aigues-Mortes and landed in Cyprus on September 17 of that year.³¹ Marie decided to take advantage of this situation. Having sailed from Euboea, she headed for Cyprus, where the French monarch was temporarily residing. The weather was not favorable for the voyage and, as Jean of Joinville reported:

XXX. En ce temps que nous séjournâmes en Chypre, l'impératrice de Constantinople me manda qu'elle était arrivée à Baffe, une cité de Chypre, et que je l'allasse querir, moi et monseigneur Érad de Brienne. Quand nous vinmes là, nous trouvâmes qu'un fort vent avait rompu les cordes des ancrs de son vaisseau et avait emmené le vaisseau en Acre, et qu'il ne lui était demeuré de tout son bagage que la chape qu'elle avait vêtue, et un surcot de table. Nous l'amenâmes à Limisso, là où le roi, la reine et tous les barons la reçurent très honorablement. Le lendemain je lui envoyai du drap pour un vêtement, et du taffetas pour le doubler (...) L'impératrice vint demander du secours au roi pour son seigneur, qui était demeuré Constantinople, et elle négocia tant qu'elle emporta cent paires de lettres et plus, tant de moi que des autres amis qu'elle avait là; dans lesquelles lettres nous étions tenus par nos serments, si le roi ou le légat voulaient envoyer trois cents chevaliers à Constantinople après que

²⁷ *Chronique de Flandres et des croisades* [Corpus chronicorum Flandriae], ed. J.-J. Smet, vol. 3, Bruxelles 1856, p. 676: *Dame, dist li empereres, il me convient derniers, car je na puis tenir l'empire sans grant coustenge: si me convient vendre le conte de Namurt, qui me vint de mon hyretaige... Et non Dieu, dist le roine, je ne voll pas que vous le vendes. Dame, que ferai-je dont? Par ma foi, dist le roine, je vous presterai xxm livres*; R. L. Wolff, op. cit., p. 53, 60.

²⁸ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 243, p. 153. In a subsequent letter, Empress Marie asks Queen Blanca to return this sum to Scotto or his representative, upon presentation of the letter within fifteen days; *Ibidem*, no. 244, p. 153; A. Teulet, *Layettes de trésor des chartes*, vol. 3, Paris 1863, p. 69, no. 3773 (May 1249).

²⁹ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 247–248, p. 153–154. Two surviving seals with the image of Marie of Brienne date from this period, see G. Schlumberger, *Sceaux et bulles des empereurs latins de Constantinople*, Caen 1890, p. 19–20 and chart III no. 4; A. Teulet, op. cit., p. 70, no. 3775 (May 1249) as 'Petrus de Rionaco'.

³⁰ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 249–252, p. 156–157; A. Teulet, op. cit., p. 69, no. 3774 (May 1249) appears as 'Hernaudus de Nioliis' and 'Bons de Monz'.

³¹ J. de Joinville, *Histoire de Saint Louis*, ed. N. de Wailly, Paris 1880, chapters XXVIII–XXIX.

le roi serait parti d'outre-mer, nous étions tenus, dis-je, par nos serments d'y aller. (...) Et le roi me répondit qu'il n'avait pas de quoi, et qu'il n'avait si bon trésor qu'il n'eût vidé jusqu'à la lie.³²

What does this account by the champagne seneschal reveal? Well, Marie arrived at the port of Paphos in Cyprus in September or October 1249. From there she wrote a letter to Joinville to ask him to come to help her.³³ The latter eagerly rushed to her aid along with Erard of Brienne (1220–1250), who also accompanied Louis IX on his crusade to Egypt, dying there at the Battle of Mansura.³⁴ In Paphos, Joinville and his companion found Marie in a deplorable condition. The empress received the deliverymen in a sleeveless coat and surcoat. The ship with her closet broke free from its anchor and sailed toward Akka. Joinville of course lavished the empress with fur and other gifts. Most significantly, however, the Empress was taken to Limassol, where King Louis IX was arriving with his family and an entourage of knights. The empress was received with all the ceremony. Marie was equipped with more than a hundred letters and begged the king to aid Constantinople. It boiled down to obtaining three hundred knights from Louis IX. However, the monarch could not meet the empress's expectations. He was leading the Crusade himself, and the army was indispensable to him, as was the money. Therefore, he could not support it financially, as his treasury was empty. Unable to do anything more, Marie left Cyprus and sailed for France, to the court of Blanca of Castile, as previously planned.

Finding herself at the court of Queen Blanca, Marie of Brienne met her maternal grandmother's sister. From there, I assume, Marie wrote a letter on November 7, 1252 to Pope Innocent IV (1243–1254) to support her in her fight against the laity and clergy who were bothering her in defiance of papal instructions.³⁵ However, Blanca's life was coming to an end. She died on November 26, 1252 in Paris. She was able to accompany these last moments with Marie.³⁶

After the death of her benefactor, Marie went to Namur to take care of Flandrian interests.³⁷ This was her first visit to her spouse's Flandrian domains. The empress's activity can be measured by her chancellery activities. On June 24, 1253, in Vieuville,

³² Ibidem, chapter XXX. A newer edition of the chronicle, which was prepared by J. Monfrin (J. Joinville, *Vie de saint Louis*, Paris 1998, p. 68). This edition differs slightly in the layer of lessons, but the pronunciation of the text does not differ from the Natalis de Wailly edition.

³³ The historian's words are confirmed by Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 253, p. 157–158; R. Grousset, *Histoire des croisades et du Royaume Franc de Jérusalem*, vol. 3: *La monarchie musulmane et l'anarchie Franque*, Paris 1936, p. 430.

³⁴ M. H. d'Arbois de Jubainville, *Histoire des ducs et comtes de Champagne*, vol. 4 (1181–1285), Paris–Troyes 1864, p. 177; J. Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, Paris 1996. The author does not mention the figure of Marie of Brienne, only incidentally about contacts with Baldwin II.

³⁵ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 258, p. 160. This researcher surmised that this was information attesting to Marie's presence in France. I believe that the letter confirms not only this fact, but also the longer presence of the empress at Blanca's court.

³⁶ Matthæi Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, *Chronica majora*, V, ed. H. R. Luard, London 1874, Matthæi Parisiensis, monachi Sancti Albani, *Chronica majora*, V, ed. H. R. Luard, London 1874, p. 355.

³⁷ *Chronique de Flandres*, p. 677.

she promulgated a document giving seven livres of annuity from the estates of Outre-Meuse and Arche and an annual income of thirty measures of oats in exchange for a mill in Vaux, to Fulk, castellan of Samson.³⁸

Marie's more permanent stay in Namur County also meant the involvement in day-to-day local politics. The main parties to the disputes, not only of diplomatic but also of military nature, were William II (d. 1256), Count of the Netherlands, Henry V, Count of Luxembourg (1247–1281), Marie of Brienne *de facto* representing Baldwin II, and the Avesnes brothers – John and Baldwin, sons of Margaret of Flanders, Baldwin I's younger sister. The reason for the spirited action was that Baldwin II had not paid tribute to John of Avesnes. In turn, the latter informed William II about this, which triggered further repercussions in the form of William's attempts to subjugate Namur, but also prompted Henry V's rivalry for the territory. When nothing came out of these initial actions that would have satisfied the contenders, talks were held to end the dispute. We find the evidence of Marie's further actions in 1254. She was the testator of the truce signed at Quesnoy on July 26, 1254, after the war of succession between William II, Count of Holland and the authorities of Avesnes and Dampierre. Its signatories were Charles, Count of Anjou, and Margaret, Countess of Flanders, sister of Baldwin I.³⁹ In 1256, Marie of Brienne fell into a local dispute with her brothers John (1218–1257)⁴⁰ and Baldwin of Avesnes. On September 24 of that year, a relevant document was signed in which the aforementioned brothers relinquished all claims to the county of Namur and declared their withdrawal from the support received from Count Henry V.⁴¹ Henry V's failure to accept this plan meant that, if anything, the Avesnes brothers would stand up for the interests of Baldwin II and his wife. This indeed happened during later events, when the lords of Avesnes sided with Marie. At this stage, the dispute dragged on for two more years, until June 17, 1258. It seemed that Louis IX's return from the crusade to France would prove salutary for Marie's affairs. At the time, she issued a document in Binche announcing to Namur authorities, knights and other military officers that these were Louis IX's territories, which she was now handing over to Margaret, Countess of Flanders. So Marie of Brienne was divesting herself of fortresses and castles.⁴² The Empress was quite persistent in her efforts to keep Baldwin II's ancestral domains, but in the end she had to get rid of them. It is not known whether these were her independent decisions, or whether they were also inspired by Louis IX or some advisors unknown to us.

³⁸ *Monuments pour servir a l'Histoire de provinces de Namur, de Hainaut et de Luxembourg*, vol. 1, ed. F. de Reiffenberg, Bruxelles 1844, p. 144, doc. XVI: *Nous Marie, par le graze de Dieu, empereriz de Rommanie...* together with the seal of the Empress; Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 259, p. 160–161.

³⁹ *La querelle des d'Avesnes & des Dampierre*, ed. Ch. Duvivier, vol. 2, Bruxelles–Paris 1894, p. 379–380, doc. CCXXIV: *...ilustre domine Marie, Dei gratia Constantinopolitane imperatrici...*

⁴⁰ H. Obreen, *Avesnes (Jan van)* [in:] *Nieuw Nederlandsch Biografisch Woordenboek*, vol. 1, Leiden 1911, col. 200.

⁴¹ *La querelle des d'Avesnes*, p. 424–426.

⁴² *Ibidem*, doc. 253, p. 523 (text in Old French); Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 262, p. 165 (the publisher gives the page number incorrectly – '253' regarding the place 'Bing'); R. L. Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

In addition to this thread, the mention should be made of the reactions of the feudal lords fighting over Namur. Marie's letter, as it turned out, was an unsuccessful attempt to influence the turbulent and dynamic reality that exceeded the empress's self-agency. And so, in 1256 her *bailli* was murdered in a tavern.⁴³ The deed was committed by the young sons of Namur's burghers. The empress trying to respond to these actions was opposed by those dwellers of Namur, appealing for help from Henry V, who was proclaimed the ruler of Namur on Christmas 1256.⁴⁴ Marie did not seem to have been in town at the time, as she was not among those besieged in the Namur fortress. The siege proved ineffective and was dragging on. To top it all off, Richard of Cornwall (1256–1262) – Count of Poitou, a Welf anti-King of Germany, acting in opposition to Alfonso X of Castile (1252–1282) – decided to intervene. The former first entered the Netherlands, then sided with Henry V and anointed him Count of Namur. It was clear that such actions by Richard were aimed not so much at Marie as at her cousin Alfonso of Castile. In view of this, Marie of Brienne recruited an army – so she must have had the means to pay for it – perhaps from the men of John of Avesnes, who died on Christmas Day 1257, and proceeded to take action against Henry V. In the end, it was not possible to come to the effective relief of the crew of Namur. Marie abandoned further efforts to recapture Namur in this situation and so succumbed to pressure from Henry V's troops. The garrison surrendered on January 21, 1259, and the townspeople reportedly gladly accepted the new ruler.⁴⁵

Although Marie was not oblivious to the fate of her only son, there was little she could do. Baldwin II, on the other hand, in 1258 managed to raise an unknown amount of funds to free Philip.⁴⁶ Marie, however, did not participate in these financial operations, and it seems that her knowledge of this was negligible. The efforts made by the Emperor and even Louis IX proved futile.⁴⁷ Philip remained in Venice at the mercy of Ferro brothers.

R. L. Wolff believes – not without reason, but also without evidence – that after these Flanders events Marie of Brienne went to the court of Alfonso X, where she was to seek her son's deliverance from the oppression.⁴⁸ This is evident, among other things, from a document perhaps issued in Castile between June 1258 and May 1, 1261.⁴⁹ This document refers to Philip's planned marriage of one of King Alfonso's daughters. This is confirmed by a document left over after the activities of Pope Clement IV (1265–1268). There we find a letter issued in Perugia on

⁴³ *Chronique de Flandres*, p. 677–678. Unfortunately, the source does not give his name.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 679.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 680.

⁴⁶ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 261, p. 161–165. There, an interesting consideration by the publisher regarding the value of the relics sold by Baldwin II.

⁴⁷ R. L. Wolff, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 64. This is speculation without source support, although it is quite attractive and has some basis.

⁴⁹ Hendrickx, *Régestes*, no. 271, p. 170.

March 31, 1266, confirming such plans, but this engagement never took place.⁵⁰ This is important news for the reason that Philip must have already been freed before May 1, 1261, since he became the subject of matrimonial plans. This may also indicate that the financial support of the Castilian monarch may have been decisive in terms of Philip's freedom.

The further fate of the empress is barely recorded in the sources. We do not know whether Marie of Brienne managed to go to Constantinople yet again, as there is no evidence of this. The capital of the Latin state came into the possession of the Byzantines on July 25, 1261. This marked the end of Baldwin II and his wife's hopes for the continuance of this peculiar state. Marie of Brienne was mentioned in a document dated June 8, 1266 by Baldwin II as *carissima uxor nostra Marie*.⁵¹ There is no mention of her by name in the treaty of Viterbo (May 27, 1267)⁵² of Baldwin II's transfer of titles to Latin lands to the King of Naples from 1266, Charles of Anjou (d. 1285). It can be assumed, with a high degree of probability, that Marie of Brienne henceforth resided in Naples with Baldwin II. And after his death in Barletta in October 1273,⁵³ Marie of Brienne appeared for the last time – in May 1275 – in a letter to Giles archbishop of Sens in 1274–1292.⁵⁴ It is clear from the contents of the letter that she was ill at the time and was sending her knight, a certain Regnault of Bautboys,⁵⁵ to the archbishop. It seems reasonable to conclude that the Empress died after May 1275. This probably happened in Naples, but there is no evidence for this. Her mortal remains may rest in Paris' St. Denis. There is a black, recumbent statue of a woman, with no inscription as to whom it is supposed to depict, and with only oriental details. It was carved in stone from the surroundings of Tournai in present-day Belgium. The statue was originally in the Cistercian abbey of Maubuisson, which was founded in 1236 by

⁵⁰ *Régistres de Clement IV (1268–1268)*, ed. E. Jordan, Paris 1894, doc. 1036 [2036 erroneously given], p. 376: *pro matrimonio inter ejus filiam et filium Balduini imperatoris Constantinopolitani denegat*; still a reference – Marinvs Sanvtvs Torsellvs, *Liber secretorum fidelium crvcis syper Terrae Sanctae recuperatione et conservatione*, ed. J. Bongars, Hanoviae MDCXI, Typis Wecheliani, apud heredes Ioannis Aubrii, p. 73.

⁵¹ *Layettes du trésor des chartes*, vol. IV, ed. E. Berger, Paris 1902, doc. 5158, p. 174–177.

⁵² *Codice diplomatico del regno de Carlo I. e II. d'Angio*, vol. II, part I, ed. G. del Giudice, Napoli 1869, doc. IV, p. 30–44, on Marie unnamed at p. 42.

⁵³ *Codice diplomatico Barlettano*, ed. S. Santeramo, Barletta 1931, doc. 15 (27 X 1274), p. 16: *Fidelitati tue precipiendo mandamus quatenus Philippo de Sancta Cruce milite etc. ad ipsius requisitionem de marmoribus Curie que penes te sunt in quantitate sufficienti pro faciando fieri sepulcro quodam in Barulo, ubi corpus B[alduini] quondam imperatoris Constantinopolitani clare memorie recordatur debeas assignare. In simile forma scriptum est magistro Iurato Syponi novelli de assignandis eidem Philippo de marmoribus quondam Manfredi Malette dicti Comitis Camerarii existentibus in Sypono*. The emperor is believed to have been buried in the local church in Barletta; S. Santeramo, *Guida di Barletta*, Bagnoregio 1926, p. 23. Traces of his grave are currently missing.

⁵⁴ *Recueil de pièces pour faire suite au Cartulaire général de l'Yonne: XIIIe siècle*, ed. M. Quantin, Auxerre–Paris 1873, doc. 684, p. 345; *Hierarchia catholica medii aevi*, ed. C. Eubel, vol. I, Monasterii 1913, p. 447.

⁵⁵ It probably refers to the village of Boulton-aux-boys located northeast of Reims.

Queen Blanca of Castile.⁵⁶ It may also indicate that Marie's body was deposited there earlier. In any case, without further archaeological research it is impossible to resolve who was buried there.

Tentatively, I want to identify four periods in the life of Marie of Brienne. Her life and career were subordinated from her early childhood to the dynastic politics of her father's family and the House of Courtenay. At an early age she was betrothed to a little older boy, who in turn was to succeed her father on the throne in Constantinople. Upon her arrival in the city, she was quickly married off to Baldwin II. Thus, she had an intense childhood, combined with frequent changes of residence, which was linked to her father's fate. She was further forcibly separated from her brothers, and her parents died within a few weeks in March and April 1237, when she was about twelve years old. She was therefore entitled to feel completely alone. All this was taking place in an atmosphere of military tension associated with the siege of Constantinople, which may have heightened the state of hopelessness and fear for her own future. We know nothing about whether Marie made any educational efforts or if any were made for her. One can only guess that she may have learned two languages as a child, some dialect of French (perhaps Champagne, Flanders) and Castilian, in which her mother spoke. This may have put her in a rather privileged contact with Blanca of Castile during her time in France, and after her death – again, perhaps – she was lodged at the Abbey of Maubuisson. Marie was surrounded by courtiers probably still descended from her parents' entourage. This also raises the possibility that Marie and Baldwin II were similar in terms of a certain emancipation. He did not know his father, after all, he was a heathen, the memory of his mother was shallow, if there was any at all.

The contractual second stage of Marie of Brienne's life opens with the return of Baldwin II to Constantinople. At that time, the girl at the age of about fifteen became Latin Empress. This was a significant change. It marked the prominence of Marie as empress and the hopes of establishing her position at court. This was, in fact, confirmed shortly thereafter when she gave birth to the emperor's heir, Philip, at the age of sixteen to eighteen. This was perhaps the most joyous time of her life, but only until about 1248. However, the Latin state was poor, lacking in human, economic and military resources, and it required great efforts on the part of the ruler to provide it with the slightest sense of security. This was the aim of the efforts of Baldwin II, who not only sold the relics still remaining in Constantinople, but went much further. In exchange for money meant to finance the activity of his state, he agreed to pledge his son as collateral for the debt he had incurred. I believe this was a great blow to Marie of Brienne as a mother. It was a peculiar transaction between the emperor and Ferro brothers, which ended with the deportation of her minor son Philip to Venice. The child became a precarious pledge against a huge debt – especially for the lenders. This

⁵⁶ P. Bony, *Le gisant en marbre noir de Saint-Denis: les signes symboliques de l'impératrice Marie de Brienne?*, "Revue française d'héraldique et de sigillographie" 1984/1989, vol. 54–59, p. 91–112.

long separation of Marie and her son, the long absences of the imperial spouse, the constant struggle for economic survival, must necessarily have deeply affected Marie. It may also have cooled the relations between Marie and her spouse. This cannot be, however, demonstrated or rationally measured, it will likely remain only in the realm of speculation.

The third period in the empress's life is associated with a time of travel and fund-raising for the empire and solicitations for the Courtenay family domains in Flanders. It opens with Marie's ineffective appeal to Louis IX in Cyprus in 1248 during his crusade to Egypt. It revealed, in the symbolic and factual realm, the place and significance of Latin ephemerides in Constantinople. Undoubtedly, Marie of Brienne broadened her geographical horizon by reaching France and Flanders. Getting to know other realities was certainly not easy. She arrived as someone completely unknown, even a stranger. It must be admitted that she valiantly strove to maintain her spouse's domain, entering local politics with varying fortunes, and it is unclear whether she was prepared for such a role. At the same time, she met and strengthened her contacts with Blanca of Castile, although this comity did not last long after all. As Philip's mother, she was also relentless in her efforts to secure his release. However, her efforts were again unsuccessful, unless – of which not much is known – she exerted such influence on Alfonso the Wise that she contributed to the redemption of the teenage Philip. This time in her life closes with two events. One is of a family nature, the return of her son from Venice, and the other, the occupation of Constantinople by the Byzantines, and thus the end of her hopes of returning to the city where she was empress. It seems that this third period in her life was the most strained.

The last, fourth stage of her life, was a declining time about which little is known. It was associated with the loss of her former prestige, leaving aside even its previous dimension. The Treaty of Viterbo meant for Marie of Brienne that she became titular empress of a state that did not exist. At this time, her chancellery involvement faded. Instead, her relationship with Baldwin II was revived, and she no longer chased around the European courts and became a resident in Naples. One might suspect that Baldwin II's itinerary after 1261 is consistent with Marie's doings, but there is not enough evidence to prove that.

Of all seven Latin empresses, Marie Brienne was the youngest ruler and the longest-serving on the throne. These are actually her only distinguishing features. In other respects, her career differed little from her predecessors. The scope of her activities did not go beyond the usual patterns for ladies of her birth and position. She was the emperor's wife, and her 'duty' was to give birth to an heir and raise him well. In the latter matter, her options were – by force of events – quite limited. Nevertheless, the empress took care of her spouse's interests and did not cause any moral scandal that we know of. It is free to look for manifestations of other, even expected of female rulers – such as support for church institutions (donations, foundations), apparent godliness or patronage. The figure of the empress is permanently inscribed in the history of the Latin Empire, it is a biography at times intense, full of tensions and struggles, giving more room for speculation than analysis.

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