CHAPTER 2

Lessons for My Daughter: Self-fashioning Stateswomanship in the Late Medieval Crown of Aragon

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This essay is in part inspired by a 15th-century book of advice, admonitions, and warnings, Lessons for My Daughter, penned by Anne of France for her only surviving child, 12-year-old Suzanne of Bourbon.1 Anne descended from the house of Aragon via her maternal great-grandmother, Yolande of Aragon, daughter of Joan I and Violant of Bar. The purpose of this brief study is not to analyze the literary leavings of Anne of France; instead I will discuss the ways in which a particular dynasty of royal women consciously self-fashioned their identities to advance their projects as “representative” stateswomen.2 The “players” to be examined here are Elionor of Sicily, queen-consort of Pere IV of Aragon; Violant of Bar, queen-consort of Pere’s son, Joan I of Aragon; María de Luna, queen-consort of Joan’s brother and successor, Martí I of Aragon; and Yolande of Aragon, sole surviving child of the union of Violant of Bar and Joan I of Aragon. Sibil.la de Fortià, Elionor’s successor to the post of Pere’s IV’s


queen-consort, and Isabeau of Bavaria, queen-consort of Charles VI of France, will serve as counterparts to the issues raised in this discussion.

From the reign of Yolande of Aragon’s paternal grandfather, Pere IV the Ceremonious, the crown of Aragon was one of the most powerful in the western Mediterranean; extending from the principality of Catalonia, it encompassed the kingdoms of Aragon, Valencia, Mallorca, Corsica, and Sardinia as well as the duchies of Athens and Neopatria. Yolande of Aragon’s paternal grandmother, Elionor of Sicily, was a woman of rare political sensibility. In 1364 she replaced Bernat II de Cabrera (whom she had ruthlessly opposed) as Pere’s chief advisor; Pere had been obliged to do him to death to appease his opponents in hostile crown territories. Prior to the downfall of Cabrera, during Pere’s absence on campaign in Castile, and while not explicitly nominated the king’s lieutenant-general, Elionor convened Pere’s cortes. Ten years later (in 1374) Pere accorded her the lieutenant-generalcy in recognition of her great value to his royal enterprise; she subsequently continued to act without further formal designation. In discussing Elionor’s informal forays into the political arena, Núria Silleras-Fernández observes that a lack of formal election as the king’s lieutenant “was no impediment to her aggressively independent political capacity, which was well-known to her contemporaries.” Elionor’s is an example of the way in which a queen-consort might successfully self-fashion her identity; stateswomen-queens enjoyed the political confidence and support of their husbands, and “in real terms, the queen’s facility to rule, or to exercise power, rested on her own political and administrative talents and on her capacity to support the dynasty and her individual agenda with clarity and sang-froid.”

Elionor’s elder son’s first wife, Mata of Armagnac, was sent by her husband, the infant Joan, duke of Girona, to the kingdom of Valencia as royal representative in an attempt to quell the disputes of its constantly feuding nobility. Mata, however, seems to have had neither the stomach nor the heart for active stateswomanship, preferring instead to concentrate upon family and to lead a pious

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6 Joan I had first been betrothed to Jeanne Blanche de Valois, posthumous daughter of Philippe VI of France and his second wife, Blanche of Navarre. Jeanne was half-sister to Jean II le Bon of France. She died in 1371, in Béziers, on route to her wedding. This betrothal had been negotiated in France by Joan’s advisers with the full assent of Pere IV. Aurea Javierre, *Mata d’Armagnac, Duquesa de Girona* (Barcelona: Dalmau, 1957), 20–22, cited by Silleras-Fernández, *Power, Piety, and Patronage*, 6.