The Life and Afterlife of Isabeau of Bavaria

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Feeding was integral to the conduct of politics in early modern France because it was one of the key forms of competition for power, a mechanism by which the struggle for dominance was played out.

Because the career of Isabeau of Bavaria is not well known, I begin this study by recounting the most important events of her life. No narrative is unbiased, of course. What I attempt to offer, however, is one that conforms to the information available in contemporary sources. As we have seen, Isabeau continues to suffer from a negative reputation in modern histories, although her promiscuity has been shown to be a myth. Also, a general perception exists that she lacked political acumen. However, in this chapter I suggest that the queen’s political activity makes sense within the context of a feuding society. Feuding and what recently has been called “integrative factionalism”—that is, the tendency of the nobility to attach their local quarrels to a central dispute, in this case, that between the Orleanists (followers of Louis of Orleans, later called the Armagnacs after the father-in-law of Louis’s son Charles), and the Burgundians (followers of the Duke of Burgundy and his allies)—were central features of fifteenth-century government. Isabeau’s vacillation between factions and her fruitless peace interventions have long been regarded as evidence of her political clumsiness. But the behavior of those involved in feuds, either as members of factions and or mediators, has been carefully studied and “vacillation” has been shown to be normal; moreover, peace agreements tended to be of short duration. Even when mediators were people of great political clout or moral authority, their power to enforce the agreements that they helped to effect between factions was limited.

In addition to introducing an Isabeau free of her black legend, this survey of the queen’s life is intended to provide a foundation on which to build the more detailed analyses that I propose in the book’s later chapters. In this
chapter, I discuss how the Bavarian princess came to be queen at the most renown of all the courts of Europe at the age of fourteen, entering into a political situation that was already complicated. I then outline four distinct phases of her political career as I see them. The figure that emerges in this chapter is significantly different from the one made popular by the black legend: a respected queen, she is asked to preserve the monarchy from the incursions of the king’s powerful male relatives, and she diligently and competently executes the tasks assigned her. But, as this introduction will demonstrate, Isabeau was the unluckiest of women. Had any one of a number of key events turned out in her favor, her reputation today would be very different.

Elisabeth von Wittelsbach

Elisabeth von Wittelsbach, as Isabeau was known in her native Bavaria (Isabeau and Isabel are French forms of the name Elisabeth), was probably born in 1370, daughter of Stephen III, who was Duke of Bavaria from 1375 to 1413. Although the Bavaria-Ingolstadt branch was not the most important of the Wittelsbach family, Isabeau’s ancestry was nevertheless illustrious: her father descended from the Merovingians and also from Charlemagne via his ancestor Arnulf the Bad, elected first Duke of Bavaria in 911. Her mother, Taddea Visconti, was the daughter of the Milanese Bernabo Visconti, who with his brother, Galeazzo II, and, later, his nephew, Giangaleazzo, ruled over the cities of Lombardy. Some bits of evidence from later in her life hint that her immediate family ties were strong. Regarding Isabeau’s mother, who died when the girl was eleven, nothing concrete is known, but during a trip to Paris in the fall of 1399 intended to gather French support for Ruprecht, Wittelsbach candidate for Holy Roman Emperor, Duke Stephen is recorded as having spent September 28 with Isabeau in masses for Taddea, whose death they commemorated in the same way each year. Isabeau’s relationship with her only brother, Louis of Bavaria (ca. 1368–1447), seems to have been especially close. From the time of his first visit to the French royal court in 1391, the queen did everything possible to promote his career there, making him a central figure in the royal entourage and arranging advantageous marriages for him with two eligible French widows. As for her relationship with her father, the evidence is scarce, but some traces remain. For example, the duke is recorded as having sent a minstrel for her amusement in the early years of her reign. But the most touching sign of the affection in which
Stephen held his daughter is his apparent reluctance to allow her go to France to be viewed by Charles VI as a potential bride. As Froissart imagines the situation, Stephen “pensa moult longuement sus” (thought long about it), before making his decision about whether to permit her to undertake the journey. He then announced that

Il est moult loing de chy, et si y a trop grant regard à faire une roine et femme d’un roy. Si seroie trop courouchiés, se on avoit mené en France ma fille, et puis elle me fust renvoye ; je ay assés plus chier que je le marie à mon aisse dalés moy.

[It (the French kingdom) is very far from here, and the business of choosing a queen, wife of the king, is serious. I would be furious if my daughter were sent to France only to have her returned to me; she is so dear to me that I will marry her here, close to me, in my own time.]

Eventually, Stephen was won over by the Valois, but only after receiving promises that no one, including Isabeau, would be told of the real purpose for her visit to France. Apparently he was as worried that she would be crushed if she were refused as he was that such a rejection would make her less marriageable. Thus she was told that she was going on a pilgrimage to Amiens.

For the French, the Bavarian princess embodied first and foremost an alliance with the Empire against the English. The Hundred Years War had motivated both the English and the French to solicit the help of the Holy Roman Emperor, an office disputed by the rival houses of Wittelsbach and Luxembourg. The French had been longtime allies of the Luxembourg: Charles IV, Luxembourger Holy Roman Emperor from 1355 until his death in 1378, had been the maternal uncle of Charles V of France. However, Froissart claims that Charles V, disgruntled that the special bond between the French and the Luxembourgers had been disturbed by the engagement between Anne of Bohemia—daughter of Luxembourger emperor, Charles IV—and Richard II of England, requested on his deathbed that his son Charles VI marry a German princess. According to Froissart, Charles V sought to ensure that “des Alemans plus grans alliances se fesissent as François, car il veoit que lis rois d’Engletière estoit maries à le soeur dou roy d’Allemaigne” (the Germans would make greater alliances with the French, because he [Charles] saw that the king of England had married the sister of the king of Germany). Still, the king had sought a Wittelsbach alliance against the English even before the engagement, for influence over Hainault-Holland was
coveted by both France and England because of that territory’s role in the wool industry. But the union that the king negotiated between his daughter, Marie, and William, son of the Wittelsbacher Albert of Bavaria, regent of Hainault-Holland, came to nought when Marie, still a child, died in 1377.9 Charles V tried again with an engagement between his daughter Catherine and Wittelsbacher Ruprecht of Bavaria, heir of the Elector Palatine of the Rhine. But for unknown reasons, this marriage did not materialize, either. Instead Catherine married Jean of Montpensier, son of another of the king’s brothers, Jean of Berry, in 1386.10 Although he did not live to see his son marry Isabeau of Bavaria, one assumes that Charles V would have regarded the union at least to some extent as the French response to that between Richard II and Anne of Bohemia.

Isabeau’s Italian family connections were probably not a principal factor in her having been chosen as a bride in 1385. France had designs on Italy at that moment—primarily to force the abdication of the Roman pope, Urban VI, in favor of the French pope, Clement VII, whom Charles V had helped to install in Avignon, an abdication that would have facilitated France’s claim to Naples-Sicily.11 However, Isabeau’s branch of the Visconti family had been pushed from power just months before her marriage, when Giangaleazzo, Lord of Milan and first cousin of the queen’s mother, had arranged to have his co-ruler, the queen’s grandfather, Bernabo, thrown in prison. Still imprisoned, Bernabo expired mysteriously soon afterward.12 Thus the relatives of Bernabo Visconti were in no position to offer serious support to the French at the time of Isabeau’s marriage. Still, her Italian relations are crucial for understanding her own political inclinations during the 1390s, the most marked of which was her opposition to any person or entity allied with Giangaleazzo. She appears to have done her best to foil the ambitious plan on which he embarked after doing away with Bernabo, of creating a single united kingdom in northern Italy. As we will see, during the early years of her reign, Isabeau favored the king’s uncle Philip of Burgundy over the king’s brother Louis of Orleans. Of interest in this regard is that Louis’s wife, Valentina Visconti, was the daughter of Giangaleazzo. In 1361, Charles VI’s grandfather, Jean le Bon, had helped pay his ransom to the English by giving his daughter, Isabelle, to Giangaleazzo’s father, Galeazzo, in exchange for 600,000 florins. Galeazzo then married the girl to his son, a marriage that produced Valentina Visconti, married by her own father to Louis in 1389.13 Isabeau’s loyalty to her kin explains her early negative attitude toward the Duke of Orleans. But we shall see that Isabeau’s alliance
shifted several times during the course of her life in response to political exigencies.

The Bavarian princess first came to the attention of the Valois in 1383.\footnote{14} In May of that year, Charles VI called for aid in a struggle against the English, rivals as we have seen for influence over cloth-producing Flanders, part of the immense territories of royal uncle Philip of Burgundy, effective ruler of France at the time.\footnote{15} In that month the English had landed in the port towns of Flanders from which area they marched menacingly inland. One of the foreign princes responding to Charles’s call for aid was the brother of Stephen of Bavaria, Frederick. When Frederick demonstrated himself to be a firmly allied, the French asked whether he might not have a daughter of an age to marry the king. He did not, but Stephen did, a pretty girl of thirteen or fourteen. The uncles of Charles VI suggested that the girl be brought before the king for an inspection. However, as we have seen, when Frederick reported the request to Stephen, the Duke of Bavaria was not at all eager to let his daughter undergo such an ordeal.

Yet, according to Froissart, the issue was not closed. Philip of Burgundy was particularly interested in Wittelsbach alliances. In 1385 he married two of his children to two children of the Wittelsbachs who ruled Hainaut-Holland. Another Wittelsbach alliance might marshal further resistance against expansion by the English into the continent. Jeanne, Duchess of Brabant in the Netherlands and Philip’s aunt, revived the matter of an alliance with Stephen of Bavaria at the double marriage of Philip’s children, for she was equally eager for another Wittelsbach alliance. Her husband had died in December 1383, leaving Philip of Burgundy as his heir. However, because the Duke of Brabant had left no son, Emperor Wenceslas was claiming that the duchy, a fief of the Empire, should revert to him. Jeanne strongly supported Philip’s claim against the Emperor’s and for this reason was happy to press for further alliances with the Wittelsbachs.\footnote{16} As Froissart recounts, when she resurrected the matter at the wedding, Philip reminded her that there had been no news from Stephen. But she assured him that she would get through to Frederick to see what could be done. She seems to have been successful in her request, for finally it was agreed that Frederick would accompany Isabeau along with the girl’s nurse and her childhood friend, Catherine de Fastavarin (Catherine l’Alemande as she is sometimes called in Isabeau’s accounts), on the simulated pilgrimage to St. Jean of Amiens. Froissart reports that the king fell in love at first sight, and the two were married within days of their initial encounter, on July 17, 1385.
Isabeau’s marriage continued a policy already instigated under Charles V, but, more significantly in 1385, it represented a piece in a game being played by Philip of Burgundy seeking to advance his own agenda. From the very beginning, then, Isabeau was part of a contest between the duke and anyone who would oppose his plans to expand his empire. Given the general compatibility between the interests of her family and those of Philip, she began her career at the French court on Philip’s side. Still, as will be clear, she always put the interests of her family first.

Isabeau’s First Political Phase

Isabeau quickly entered into political life at court. Giangaleazzo’s murder of Bernabo had caused a crisis; both Visconti branches looked to France for backing.17 Giangaleazzo perceived Isabeau as a threat to his plans for expansion and sought to establish his own power base in France by marrying his daughter Valentina to the Duke of Orleans in 1389. Louis’s marriage to Valentina had brought him the county of Asti, and it raised the possibility of a kingdom of his own, to be created of papal fiefs in central Italy and supported by Giangaleazzo as a sort of buffer for his own lands.18 Soon after the marriage, Avignon pope Clement VII sent Louis a bull naming him vicaire de l'Eglise in Rimini, Pesaro, Bertinoro, Fossombrone, Faenza, Imola, and Forli.19 All he had to do was conquer these cities. In addition to the support of his son-in-law, Giangaleazzo enjoyed that of the Duke of Burgundy, who had borrowed money from him and employed his favorite counselor, Antonio Porro, for a pension of 600 francs a year as of 1383.20 Also, for the moment, Philip concurred with Giangaleazzo in supporting Clement VII in the ongoing Papal Schism.21 Clement VII had awarded Valentina and Louis, first cousins, the dispensation they needed to marry, and, for his part, Giangaleazzo was happy to participate in plans for a French expedition to invade Italy and oust the Roman pope, Boniface IX.22 Although in 1395, the French court, with the exception of Louis, would take up the via cessionis, demanding the abdication of both popes, Philip initially participated in plans for the French expedition to Italy.

As for the anti-Giangaleazzo faction, besides Isabeau, it included the Armagnac count Jean III, brother-in-law through his sister Beatrice to the son of the murdered Bernabo, Carlo Visconti.23 David Bueno de Mesquita explains that when Carlo fled after his father’s murder, taking refuge at the court of Duke Stephen of Bavaria, among other places, “his wife Beatrice of
Armagnac returned to her home in Languedoc to rouse her brothers against the usurper.” But at the court in Paris, Isabeau had little support in her opposition to the Lord of Milan until her brother arrived in Paris in late 1391 with a contingent of Bavarian followers, in the first of what would be four extended stays at the French court. Giangaleazzo’s star had ascended. In 1389, the city of Florence, threatened by Giangaleazzo’s defeat of Verona and Padua, made plans to send an envoy to Charles requesting help. In addition to requesting military aid from Jean III of Armagnac, the envoy was instructed to persuade the queen to intervene with her husband, requesting his aid in staving off the Lord of Milan’s advances. After all, the Duke of Bavaria was a Florentine ally. But according to Bueno de Mesquita, this envoy may never have departed for Paris at all: with Valentina just about to arrive in Paris, the time was not right. Moreover, the Florentines had little to offer the French, compared with their Milanese rival. They were neutral regarding the Schism, and, although they offered to turn over to the French any land that they might confiscate from Giangaleazzo, the possibility was too tenuous to tempt Charles VI. A treaty between Paris and Milan was signed in 1391.

Still, the Florentine’s interest in co-opting the queen indicates her perceived influence, and, although she was not able to impose her will early on, the political constellation at court changed in the mid-1390s. The plan to invade Italy to overthrow the Roman pope, supported by both Philip and Louis, was not realized, postponed to a later date when Charles decided to pursue peace with the pro-Roman English. The kingdom created out of the Papal States for Louis likewise came to nothing. In 1394 the Avignon pope died, which promised to bring an end to the Schism. However, the French cardinals in Avignon elected another pope, Benedict XIII. Irate at this missed opportunity to unify the Church, Charles VI decided to withdraw obedience. This decision in turn modified France’s Italian policy, which had depended on Giangaleazzo’s support of the Avignon pope. Moreover, in 1395, the Genoese offered Charles VI sovereignty over the city, further diminishing French dependence upon Giangaleazzo. The Lord of Milan abandoned all hope of an alliance with the French by the end of 1395, opening up new alliances with Holy Roman Emperor Wenceslaus and Boniface IX. Anger against Giangaleazzo turned on Valentina, who was obligated to leave the French court sometime before April 1396, chased out by accusations that she had been bewitching the king. Charles’s fury at Giangaleazzo’s supposed betrayal manifested itself in an outburst recorded by Pintoin. At a dinner with Richard
II during the celebrations for the 1396 wedding between the King of England and Charles and Isabeau’s daughter, Isabella, Charles caught sight of a herald bearing Giangaleazzo’s arms. Outraged, he had the arms torn from the herald and chased him from the court, threatening to throw him in prison if he ever returned. In this new atmosphere Isabeau initiated negotiations with the Florentine ambassador, Buonaccorso Pitti. As Pitti reports in his memoir, the queen summoned him in May 1396, begging him to persuade the Commune of Florence to send ambassadors to the King of France to request an alliance against Giangaleazzo. On September 29, 1396, an alliance was signed between France and Florence against Milan.

Besides the Florentines, the pope recognized Isabeau’s importance as a mediator. In 1389, Clement VII ceded a large number of benefices to Charles, sixty of which were to be carried out in the name of Isabeau. The pope was correct in his assessment of her interest in the issue. After the death of Clement VII in 1394, the queen joined the Princes of the Blood, the Royal Council, and the University of Paris at a council on the Schism held in Paris in 1395, at which the French decided that both popes should be forced to abdicate. The messages that she sent to the king and princes while they were attending a summit at Rheims to discuss the Schism (except in cases specifically noted, Isabeau’s messages no longer exist, only records of payments to messengers) further testify her investment in the problem.

Another political problem in which the queen was involved was the struggle over the imperial crown. Isabeau’s great-grandfather, Louis of Bavaria (1282–1347), had been Holy Roman Emperor, although just before his death he lost the office to his Luxembourger rival, Charles IV (1316–78). Charles IV was followed by his son, Wenceslas, who was voted out of office in 1400 because of his drunkenness and his perceived passivity in politics, including his lack of action regarding the Schism. The electors then chose the Wittelsbach Ruprecht of Bavaria in 1400. Regarding the conflict brought on by Wenceslas’s deposition, Charles VI urged arbitration; Philip, partial to Bavaria, was happy with the decision, while Louis, ally of Wenceslas, was not. Isabeau was instrumental in gathering French support for Ruprecht, and she kept in close contact with him after his election, promoting his causes at court.

Stuart Carroll writes that both authority and charisma were important qualities in a mediator and that “some individuals possessed both qualities.” This seems to have been the case with Isabeau. Queens bore a particular authority by virtue of their anointment during their coronation. Although they
possessed no juridical authority, they were nonetheless royal. But besides her authority as queen, Isabeau appears to have been charismatic. Detailed evidence is hard to come by, but a few traces of her aptitude for politics remain from this period: of her ability judiciously to send the signals she wanted and of the conciliatory manner that would have made her a good mediator. Most important, she appears to have managed tricky relationships well. For example, although generally the ally of Philip of Burgundy, she maintained close relationships with that duke’s political opponents, the marmousets. This term, usually meaning a type of monkey or a grotesque that decorates a building, came to signify a minion and was used derisively to refer to Charles V’s close advisors, whom Philip had chased from power at that king’s death. Isabeau was close to the wife of marmouset Bureau de la Rivière who served her as a *dame d’honneur* when Charles VI asserted control of his own government in 1388 and brought the marmousets back into power. Records of letters sent verify that Isabeau maintained the relationship even after Philip once again ejected the marmousets in 1392 and forced their wives from her household; the many letters she wrote to marmouset Olivier de Clisson, only one of the group to have remained in power after the death of Charles V and constable for Charles VI, suggests that she maintained good relations with him as well. While she sent over forty letters to Philip between 1398 and 1402, she also sent many to Louis of Orleans, even though, as we have seen, her politics were contrary to his on important counts. Her accounts show that in September 1395, she sent four black velvet hats lined with satin to the Emperor Wenceslas, although she did not support the Luxembours. In May of 1401 she received with great honor William, Duke of Guelders, ally of Wenceslas and Louis of Orleans and enemy of Philip of Burgundy. Thibault describes how she entertained him in her own hotel, the Hôtel Barbette. There she offered him a magnificent supper, preceded by a steam bath in her own *étuves*, the walls of which were hung with fine linen from Rheims, decorated with roses and flowers of all variety. Afterward, she had him perfumed with essences from the Orient that she had imported every year from Damas. We also find her negotiating in secret with an ambassador in favor of her enemy Giangaleazzo: in a letter of Charles VI to the Duke of Milan, she is described as willing to press for a marriage between a daughter of France and his son. Although Louis of Orleans was not yet her ally in 1402–3, she lent him 20,000 francs, of which he returned 11,000 on February 1, 1403.

Further evidence of her political acumen is the fact that her help was
sought in mediating the conflict between Philip and Louis during the final years of the fourteenth and the first years of the fifteenth century. In November 1388, Charles VI, then twenty, asserted his right to rule on his own and told his uncles that he would no longer require their presence on his Royal Council. The move, several years in the making, had been hastened by the arrest of the king’s beloved marmouset Olivier de Clisson. In June 1387, Olivier was captured by the Duke of Brittany, ally of the royal uncles, and held in chains. This act outraged the king and weakened the uncles’ position at court. Indeed, Olivier told an emissary from the duke of Lancaster that he had made Charles VI “king and lord in his [own] kingdom and removed him from the government and hands of his uncles.”

Charles proclaimed his independence from his uncles on the return trip from a military expedition of September 1388 to subdue William of Guelders, who had been harassing Brabant. William submitted in November, and the French troops headed home. But in Rheims, they stopped. As John Bell Henneman describes the scene: “There, in the royal coronation city, the king held a meeting of his council, probably according to some plan, since there was no obvious reason for convening the council before reaching Paris. At this council, the cardinal of Laon, [marmouset] Pierre Aycelin de Montagu, made a short speech expressing the view that the king had reached the age when he longer had any need of tutors and should take over direction of affairs himself.” Henneman seconds the argument of Françoise Autrand that the coup can be seen as one episode in a long-term “father-son” style dispute, although in this case the dispute was between uncle and son: “friction between the king and his older son was a pervasive characteristic of the Valois monarchy in France.”

The most significant of the changes resulting from the young king’s assertion of power was that it laid the groundwork for the ascendence of his brother, Louis of Orleans, who from that point on became Charles VI’s closest advisor. This is to say that Charles VI’s action facilitated the feud later known as the Armagnac-Burgundian war, “arguably the most serious feud in later medieval Europe, which dominated the political scene in France for over forty years.” This prolonged conflict spanned generations, and included the assassination of Louis by Philip’s son, Jean sans Peur, to which the Orleanists responded twelve years later with the revenge killing of Jean. The feud, which made possible Henry V’s invasion and occupation of France, was so destructive that by the middle of the fifteenth century the long-cherished right of the nobility to wage wars was challenged, and “the principle
that only sovereign law could make hostile acts legitimate” was widely accepted if not widely applied. During the period in question, however, for the nobility the right to wage war to defend their interests was self-evident, if not approved by the king of France. Even Christine de Pizan, tireless promoter of peace, granted that princes possessed the right to make war on each other. For example, in the Livre des fais d’armes et de chevalerie she notes that “wars and battles by right must not be maintained or judged except by earthly princes who hold their lands from no one except God, as emperors, kings, dukes, and others who are called lord” (my emphasis). This category necessarily included the dukes of Orleans and Burgundy. Indeed, according to Christine, waging war is one of the primary duties of princes, as she writes in the Livre du corps de policie (ca. 1407). Whether Charles VI’s insanity, which severely diminished his ability to broker peace between the quarreling dukes, was responsible for the feud, or whether it was the inevitable outcome of a process of political factionalization that had been occurring throughout the fourteenth century is a matter of dispute.

But whatever its cause, the feud was left to Isabeau to manage, a task which would have required a far greater mechanism of enforcement than she or anyone in the kingdom could have mustered. The rivals were a formidable pair. When Charles V had died leaving an heir of twelve years of age, Philip of Burgundy had succeeded in stripping his brother Louis of Anjou of the regency of the realm bestowed on him by the king, who had specifically separated regency from tutelle, or guardianship of the royal children. This Charles V had assigned his younger brothers, Jean of Berry and Philip, his wife’s brother, Louis of Bourbon, and a council that included his most trusted counselor, Bureau de la Rivière. Bureau de la Rivière also occupied a central position in the regency set out by Charles V; he possessed veto power, so to speak, over regent Louis of Anjou. In spite, or, more likely, because of Charles V’s high regard for Bureau de la Rivière, Philip chased him from power along with Charles V’s other most valued counselors, the marmousets, after the king’s death. Along with Jean of Berry and Louis of Bourbon, Philip had the young king crowned to obviate the need for Louis of Anjou’s regency: Charles VI would rule with help of his uncles. Louis of Anjou soon headed off to Naples to take possession of the throne he had been ceded by Jeanne of Naples, who died in Bari in 1384. Jean of Berry headed south to administer the Languedoc region of France.

Although Philip would later strike the pose of reformer of finances in his struggle to gain the upper hand over Louis, the first years of his effective re-
gency for the young king were troubled by revolts over the taxes he imposed. The royal uncles faced a serious financial problem after the death of Charles V, for on his deathbed, the king had cancelled the *fouage*, the hearth tax, which accounted for about 30 percent of the kingdom’s total tax revenue.\(^{\text{61}}\) The kingdom quite simply could not continue to function as it had under Charles V in the face of such a reduction. But reestablishing taxes only enflamed a difficult situation: revolts had already begun before the king’s death, breaking out in 1378.\(^{\text{62}}\) Nonetheless, shortly after the king’s death, the uncles convened the Estates General in November 1380, to request new taxes. Intensified uprising ensued, first in the southern towns of Puy and Montpellier.\(^{\text{63}}\) In 1382, Paris, Rouen, Amiens, Orleans, Rheims, and a number of Flemish cities revolted, as well. The Parisian Maillotins initially won concessions. But their victory was short-lived. The commune of Rouen was dismantled, while the revolt in Flanders was put down by the victory of a combination of French royal forces and those of Louis of Malle in the battle of Roosebeke on November 27, 1382. With the northern insurgents defeated, the royal troops returned to Paris where the leaders of the revolt were executed and the city’s privileges were revoked.

That difficulty surmounted, Philip went on to reign until Charles dismissed him and Jean of Berry. Along with the uncles’ dismissal, the king made a number of other changes. He reinstated the marmousets in positions of financial responsibility. Jean de Montaigu returned to head the hotel of the king. Jean de Montaigu’s brother, also named Jean, headed the Chambre de comptes. The marmousets created the Cour des aides in 1390 and dominated it.\(^{\text{64}}\) Another change, as André Demurger explains, was the naming of new *baillis* and *sénéchaux*, local officers upon whom royal power depended for its diffusion.\(^{\text{65}}\) Also, from their positions of power, the marmousets began to effect changes that threatened Philip with their potential to restructure access to royal funds. Aiming to tighten administration of the realm, they tried to attach pensions to offices to create a body of *fonctionnaires*.\(^{\text{66}}\) Another change was that although the marmousets retained *aides* on consumption and the *gabelle*, they abolished the *taille*, a direct tax created by the uncles in 1384. Between September 1388 and February 1389, they scrutinized Duke Jean of Berry’s administration of the Languedoc. The result of this examination was that the duke’s officers were suspended, his henchman, Jean Bétisac, was sent to the fire for heresy and sodomy, and Berry was relieved of his post. When the uncles’ power began to diminish, that of the king’s brother, Louis, began to rise. According to Demurger, the marmousets “comptent sur
des princes d’un type nouveau, soucieux avant tout du service de l’Etat: le jeune duc d’Orléans ou l’oncle maternel du roi, Louis de Bourbon, ce prince ‘officier de carrière’ dont on fait volontiers un modèle” (counted on princes of a new type, concerned above all for service to the State: the young Duke of Orleans or the maternal uncle of the king, Louis of Bourbon, this career-officer prince, of whom a model was willingly made).

However, their activity was interrupted in August 1392, when Charles suffered his first known episode of the insanity that would plague him for the duration of life. The episode occurred en route to Brittany, toward which Charles was leading an army to avenge Clisson, this time victim of a failed murder attempt at the hands of Pierre de Craon, who had been exiled from court a year earlier by Louis of Orleans. Craon had fled to safety in Brittany, where he was protected by the duchy’s leader, Jean. The malady’s onset had been preceded by feverishness and incoherence, according to contemporaries, but nothing could have prepared anyone for the catastrophe that would follow. As Charles and his men made their way through the woods, an insane man charged the king’s horse, clutching the bridle. “Ride no further, noble king!” he is reputed to have yelled. “You are betrayed!” The king’s men shoved the man aside, but he followed, repeating his warning. The group burst out of the forest at about noon. Suddenly a page dropped Charles’s lance. The sound of the lance clanging against a steel helmet roused the king to a bizarrely violent action. Drawing his sword, he shouted and attacked, killing some of his knights and fighting crazily until his men gained control of him.

Although the king recovered his senses within a few days, inspiring hope that the incident would be isolated, this was not to be. The incident gave Philip his opportunity to take his vengeance upon the marmousets, dislodging them a second time from Charles’s administration. Fearing for their lives, they fled. With the help of the Duke of Berry, Philip reestablished himself as the head of the government, denying any role to Louis, who was now twenty years old. When Charles emerged from his first episode, he seemed to have forgotten his earlier rebellion against the rule of his uncles and demonstrated only gratitude for their aid. Or, in any case, he did nothing further to curtail their access to power but left Philip and Louis free to pursue their rivalry, which manifested itself about 1398 when Louis began to pose a clear threat to his uncle. To arrive at this point, the Duke of Orleans constructed a checkered empire to counter Philip’s Burgundian territories. His strategy, Demurger writes, was less to create a hegemony in the king-
dom than to spread his power throughout, as moves like the 1402 acquisi-
tion of rights over Luxembourg, smack in the middle of Philip’s holdings, 
suggest.71 He had received in appanage the duchy of Orleans in June 1392 
and the county of Valois in 1393; earlier he had purchased the counties of 
Blois and the Dunois. The king then awarded him the counties of Angoulême, 
Périgord, and Dreux. At the same time he bought Champagne, Luzarches, 
Fère en Tardenois, Château-Thierry, and the counties of Porcien and Soisson, 
as well as the seigneurie of Coucy.72

Eventually the dukes would disagree on all the major issues of the day. On 
the question of the papal schism, Philip, after initially supporting the pope 
of Avignon, came to promote subtraction of loyalty from both popes, while 
Louis consistently favored the pope residing in Avignon, first Clement VII 
and then Benedict XIII.73 As for relations with England, Philip was ever eager 
to maintain the peace so that his northern territories would prosper, whereas 
Louis showed himself belligerent. Regarding their stance toward the Holy 
Roman Empire, in the contested deposition of the Luxembourger Wenceslas 
in favor of the Wittelsbach Ruprecht, Philip of course favored the Wittles-
bachs, while Louis favored Wenceslas, his ally in his ambitions for expansion 
into the empire. Yet another important difference between the men lay in 
their conception of how the realm should be governed. Louis supported 
the program of the marmousets, which Autrand has described as emphasising 
two main things: “l’efficacité et la centralisation.” Furthermore, personnel 
would be chosen for their competence and carefully surveyed.74 For Philip, 
in contrast, a corps of fonctionnaires threatened the traditional privileges of 
princes. He in turn would play the reformer, taking up the call against the 
taxes that Louis raised to wage war against England. Already popular with 
the Parisians, who saw him as a natural ally because their economy required 
that they maintain good relations with Flanders, Philip further cultivated 
their favor by protesting Louis’s taxes.

This was the situation that Isabeau was called on to manage and that 
would become the primary focus of what I am calling her second political 
phase, during which her role was defined by royal ordinance. In the Empire, 
Louis began to gain influence, threatening Philip by acquiring Adolf of Cleves 
and Charles II of Lorraine through fief-rents in 1398. In addition, between 
1401 and 1403, he collected a dozen vassals, including Edward of Bar, from 
the Rhineland and Lorraine. In the east and the north, he surrounded Philip’s 
duchy of Brabant-Limbourg with his allies.75 Most threatening to Philip was 
Louis’s 1401 acquisition of William Duke of Guelders, constantly at war
with Jeanne, Duchess of Brabant, whose territory, as we have noted, Philip was set to inherit. Philip had interceded at different times on her behalf and had acquired rights over her duchy in 1390 as a form of repayment for this service; he also defended the duchy in a war of 1397–99.76 Another bone of contention between Louis and Philip was the duchy of Luxembourg over which Louis gained rights in 1402 from Jost Marquis of Moravia, after a long process of negotiation. Jost had earlier awarded the same to Philip, but when the Marquis of Moravia needed to aid his cousin Emperor Wenceslas, he turned to Wenceslas’s ally, Louis of Orleans.77

To fund this real-life game of Risk, the dukes struggled to control the kingdom’s finances. They therefore attempted to stack the Royal Council with their men. The choice of loyal regional officers to supervise tax collection was another crucial element in their struggle, for once the uncles had returned to power with Charles’s mental illness, they restored certain taxes abolished by the marmousets. Before the marmousets were ousted by the uncles in 1392, writes Henneman, they “had achieved important gains in the sphere of royal finance, reducing expenditures and avoiding the imposition of extraordinary tailles. The uncles had not immediately returned to the unpopular policies of the past, but the marriage of the king’s daughter with a large dowry in 1396 justified a traditional feudal aid, and the crown imposed a taille for this purpose.”78 A year later, there was another taille for the “needs of Christendom.”79 The resumption of these extraordinary taxes increased the importance of the officials who administered the king’s revenues from taxation, counselors-general of the aides, for actually collecting tax revenues from resisting parties was an enormously difficult job. Charles appointed four new counselors-general of the aides in 1399, and fourteen more over the next eight years. Eleven of these were Orleanists, or followers of the king’s brother Louis of Orleans, while only four were Burgundians, or followers of Philip.80

The impending feud nearly broke out in earnest in 1401. With Philip absent from the kingdom for six months to pursue negotiations with Ruprecht, Louis took advantage of the situation to install his men: Guillaume de Tignonville was named provost of Paris and Charles d’Albret and Gontier Col were named counselors-general of the aides. Furious at being outmaneuvered, Philip protested in a letter of October 26 to Parlement that the realm was being mismanaged.81 On December 7 he threatened violence, entering Paris with six hundred men at arms and sixty archers. The city waited nervously, fearing armed conflict. But bloodshed was avoided through rec
Onciliation. Philip’s move can be seen as strategic. As Guy Halsall explains about feuding, the menace of violence is often used to “bring about arbitration and end the dispute.” The ploy worked: Isabeau was called upon to arbitrate. Writes Thibaut: “Le 6 janvier, la Reine, ‘après avoir tant, sur ce, procédé,’ obtint que, ‘moiennant la grâce de Dieu et l’exhortation et admonestement d’aucunes bonnes personnes qui à ce ont labouré, les diz seigneurs se soient soumis à l’arbitrage de la Reine et des Prince, et juré sur les Evangiles d’exécuter les conditions qu’on leur poserait.” (On January 6, the queen, “after much negotiation,” obtained that “through the grace of God and the exhortation and warning of several good people who had worked on it, that the said dukes submitted to the mediation of the queen and the princes, and swore on the gospels to execute the conditions that were imposed upon them.”) The document laying out the terms to which the parties finally agreed notes that Isabeau conducted “une grant meure délibération avec les Princes” (a long, considered deliberation with the princes). The negotiations were crowned with a ritualistic dinner. The queen then held a grand Conseil on January 14.

Isabeau’s Second Political Phase

I have discussed the conflict facing Isabeau in detail, because it is important to emphasize its magnitude and complicated nature. This conflict resulted in Isabeau’s entry into the government in a serious and sustained capacity, instigating a second phase in her political career. This phase can be dated, I suggest, from March 1402, when she received her first appointment as mediator by royal ordinance. But in addition to worry over the feud, Charles VI manifested in his ordinances a nervousness that one of the dukes, prevailing over the other, would go on to assume total control over him. Thus he eventually transformed the mediator role for the queen laid out in his ordinances into one of protector of his throne.

Initially, Charles responded to threats from his male relatives by attempting to lessen the possibility that any one individual could ever amass sufficient power to impose a form of tutelle upon him or his heir, in the case of his death. His earliest strategy, following his father, had been to distribute power between a council of tutors and a regent, who would act as checks on each other, in the event of his death. In January 1393, he had named Isabeau co-guardian of the dauphin, Louis, Duke of Guyenne, and the other royal children. She would share the task with the Dukes of Burgundy, Berry, Bourbon,
and her brother, Louis of Bavaria.\textsuperscript{89} At the same time, in a second ordinance he had awarded regency to Louis of Orleans, in the event that he should die before the dauphin reached majority.\textsuperscript{90} But the arrangement exacerbated the strife it was designed to calm, for Louis, claiming that his regency powers applied during the king’s “absences,” was constantly countered by Philip, who also considered himself the head of the government when the king was unable to function.

Charles then tried to resolve the power struggle by assigning Isabeau to arbitrate between the dukes. He did this first in an ordinance of March \textit{1402}.\textsuperscript{91} In July of the same year, he augmented her authority with an ordinance that reauthorized her to mediate between his unruly relatives and furthermore authorized her to preside over the Royal Council during his periods of debility.\textsuperscript{92} This theoretically imposed equality upon the two dukes as leading members of the Council, while installing Isabeau as impartial president over both. But the strife continued. In April \textit{1403}, Charles passed another ordinance, this one spelling out that all decisions during his absences were to be made by majority rule of the Royal Council.\textsuperscript{93} Isabeau remained president of the Royal Council, but responsibility for decisions was now shared equally by all members. More significantly, the king dealt with his worry that a too-powerful regent would usurp the throne by abolishing the regency altogether. On the king’s death, his oldest son, no matter what his age, would be crowned and assume the office of king without any regent. The absence of a regent in effect increased the potential role of the queen mother, as I discuss in chapter three.

Philip died in \textit{1404}. This should have spelled the end of conflict, for it left Louis the uncontested head of government during the king’s “absences.” The Duke of Berry seems always to have been content with his role on the Royal Council, and he therefore offered no competition.\textsuperscript{94} But after a short lull, the new Duke of Burgundy, Philip’s son Jean sans Peur, appeared on the scene to carry on the strife across the generations. He was determined to take up his father’s position, because without the financial backing of the royal treasury, he could not maintain the empire that Philip had established.\textsuperscript{95} Although the Duke of Burgundy was popular with the Parisians and, for a time, with the University of Paris, his demands were received as attempts at usurpation by Louis and the Royal Council, including Jean of Berry, and by Isabeau, as well.\textsuperscript{96}

Son of King Jean le Bon and brother of King Charles V, Philip’s rank was close to that of Louis, who was also the son of and brother to a king. Jean
sans Peur, in contrast, cousin of the king, was not entitled to a position on par with that of Louis. True, his daughter Marguerite married the dauphin, Louis of Guyenne, in 1405. But Isabeau seems to have been apprehensive that Jean was overstepping his rank, for her reaction was to side with Louis to block the Duke of Burgundy’s access to royal funds. In a treaty with the Duke of Burgundy that she signed the day before the double marriage of the dauphin to Jean’s daughter, Marguerite, and the princess Michelle to Jean’s son, Philip, she spelled out her own understanding of the relationship between Jean and the royal family. She would defend Jean only as far as permitted by the family hierarchy, where the interests of those more closely related to her than Jean (e.g., Louis) must precede Jean’s.

Jean continued to lobby for influence. To this end, he adopted Philip’s strategy of demanding money from the royal treasury while publicly denouncing the mismanagement of government funds under Louis and calling for reform of the realm. An expansionist government can only survive by taxing its people to support its armies. But from the modern perspective that regards taxation not as a means of facilitating expansion but of redistributing the wealth for the common good, the government was indeed mismanaged. The issue of medieval taxation cannot be addressed adequately in this survey of Isabeau’s career; the transformation of the French fiscal system between the mid-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and the development of a regular system of taxation between 1435–45 have been dealt with by experts in the field. Martin Wolfe notes that the notion of a happy relationship between taxation and wealth did not exist at all before the seventeenth century: “We know that medieval men (or, rather, medieval intellectuals) were able by the thirteenth century to conceive of a national state, of national as well as feudal taxing, and of a commonwealth that could be altered by man-made economic policies as well as by God and nature. However, they did not combine these elements into a concept of taxation as useful.”

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to establishing a useful tax system was the exemption of the nobility: those who could least afford to pay supported the system. In the meantime, the Duke of Burgundy, like his father, took advantage of what was in fact a situation that could only have been ameliorated by a complete restructuring of the economy, encouraging public discontent over taxation by blaming the country’s economic woes on Louis.

The strife between Louis and Jean narrowly missed breaking into open war in an episode of 1405 that has come to be known as the “kidnapping of the dauphin,” which I discuss in detail in chapter six. After this, tensions
between the dukes mounted, culminating in the assassination of the Duke of Orleans by Jean’s order in 1407. The royal family received news of the act with shock and horror. Pintoin announces that they “inconsolabiter sane dignum ducebant deflendum sic dedecorose necatum tam preclarum ducem (bewailed, inconsolable, the illustrious duke, so disgracefully slain).” Initially Jean attempted to hide his guilt, meeting with the royal relations at the Duke of Berry’s Hôtel de Nesle. But asked whether he knew anything about the affair, he abruptly confessed and fled Paris, leaving his uncles stunned. However, many of the Parisians supported Jean sans Peur, as they had his father, and now that he had revealed the lengths to which he would go to assert power, the threat that he would force *tutelle*, or guardianship, on the king loomed larger than ever. Thus the Royal Council attempted to manage rather than to confront him, seeking reconciliation between the houses of Burgundy and Orleans in hopes of avoiding further aggression on his part.

It was in this context of apprehension that the king reiterated the regency ordinance first promulgated in April 1403, abolishing regency again on December 26, 1407. This time the ordinance was published in *a lit de justice*, and, like its earlier counterpart, it proclaimed that from that point on royal heirs, no matter what their age, would immediately accede to the throne without the establishment of a regency:

*Senz ce que quelconque autre, tant soit prochain de leur linaige, entrepreigne, puisse, ne doye, ou lui loise entreprendre Bail, Regence, ou autre quelconque gouvernement & administracion dudit Royaume, ne que à nostredit & autres ainsnez Filz dessusdiz, puissent estre faiz, mis ou donnez en & sur leurdit droit à eulx deu par droit de nature, ne ès autres choses dessus touchées, empeschement & perturbacion quelconques, soubz umbre de ce que dit est, ne autrement, pour quelconques raisons, couleur, ou occasion que ce soit ou puist estre.*

[Without any other person, no matter how close their relationship, attempting or being able or being allowed to take over the guardianship, regency or any other type of government and administration of the said realm, nor the rights of our eldest son, his by nature, regarding any of the things said, be affected or subject to impediment or disturbance of any kind, for any reasons whatsoever.]

If the son is a minor, the ordinance stipulates that the realm will be administered “de leur auctorité & en leur nom” (by their authority and in their name) by

*Her Life* 19
The ordinance was intended to establish precedent for future generations, for it speaks in general terms, including no names to link it to the situation at hand. A second ordinance, now lost, must have been more specifically connected to the problem addressed by the first ordinance. In this, the dauphin, just eleven years old, was given power to rule as regent when the king was ill.  

The practical effect of the ordinance of 1403, reiterated in 1407, was to install the queen as coregent. When “absent,” the king would not be replaced by a powerful regent, acting in his own interests. Rather, he would be represented by his coregent, acting in his name. The ordinance of 1403 stipulates that no decision will be final until he is informed of it, when he regains his senses and affirms the decision with his seal. The need to repeat the abolition of regency just after Louis’s assassination within the setting of a lit de justice suggests that the royal family felt menaced by the regency-seeking Jean. Still, it appears that they had no wish to antagonize him. The king allotted him a pension of 36,000 francs, while Isabeau sent him an étrenne, a New Year’s gift. To further appease him, reforms were imposed by royal ordinance on January 7, 1408, in response to his calls. Referred to as an “ordonnance sur le nombre, les fonctions & les gages des Officiers de Justice & des Finances” (ordinance on the number, functions, and wages of the officers of justice and finances), the reform ordinance aimed to cut down the numbers of royal employees in order to “relever nostredit Peuple des très-grans griefz & oppressions qu’il a eu par la grant multitude des Sergens extraordinaire” (relieve our people of the great burdens and oppression they had to bear because of the large multitude of extraordinary officers).

Isabeau’s Third Political Phase

The assassination of Louis of Orleans ushered in a third phase of Isabeau’s political career. Characteristic of this period was her attempt to keep either
the Burgundian or the Orleanist/Armagnac factions from gaining complete control over the government while effacing herself and preparing the dauphin Louis of Guyenne to take up the vacancy left by the king’s “absences.” Through royal ordinances, she saw to the expansion of the dauphin’s role. Although she retained veto power over her son, she remained much in the background during this period. This phase came to an end with the death of Louis of Guyenne in December 1415 at the age of eighteen.

Isabeau has been criticized for vacillating between the princes during this period. Why did she not build her own party to support the dauphin and the king? Timur Pollack-Lagushenko has cautioned against assuming that fifteenth-century factions resembled modern parties with consistent supporters. Indeed, neither the Armagnac nor the Burgundian faction, nor the supporters that the queen attempted to siphon off from both, he writes, could be considered “a party in any real sense,” for they all lacked any “stable membership.”

Early fifteenth-century French aristocrats retained freedom over “how they dispense political and military support,” and switching sides was frequent. The notion of a queen’s party in such a context can only be “an artificial device used to describe the fluctuating levels of support offered to the dukes of Orléans and Burgundy by individual princes at specific historical moments. The two other ‘parties’ are barely more substantial.” In such a context Isabeau’s best strategy was to maintain the conflict at a low enough level to avoid letting either faction establish tutelle over the king, absorbing the monarchy. In this way, she could save the throne for her son, who as an adult might be able to force peace. To carry out her strategy, she formed alliances with whichever side posed the lesser threat to her, was less likely to remove the dauphin from her influence, and was more able to prevent the other side from doing so at any given moment.

Recast in these terms, her strategy looks successful, up until the sudden death of Louis of Guyenne. From 1409 to 1413 the Duke of Burgundy and his followers were useful to her. From 1413 to 1415, it was the Armagnacs. After the death of Louis of Guyenne in 1415, however, both threatened the queen’s very existence. They each wanted only to gain control over the new dauphin and viewed her as an obstacle to their ambitions.

Jean sans Peur returned to Paris in March 1408, where Franciscan theologian Jean Petit proclaimed a justification for the murder, subsequently sent out to the leaders of Europe. The king was insane during the oration, having suffered a lapse just before Jean’s arrival, but he made a partial recovery the following day. Apparently favorably swayed by what he was in-
formed of the defense, he issued a pardon for his cousin, absolving Jean of Louis’s murder.113

Isabeau’s reactions to the pardon indicate her anxiety that Jean was preparing to seize power. In February, she had called the Duke of Brittany, husband of her daughter, Jeanne, to Paris with his army. Additional military support from the King of Sicily and the Duke of Berry arrived to prevent Jean’s occupying Paris and dominating the king, which were the means by which the Duke of Burgundy was expected to take control of the government.114 Although the king was in a remission, these were always temporary, and, when he was insane, power lay in the physical possession of the dauphin. Thus Isabeau needed to remove the boy before Jean got hold of him. Immediately after Petit’s justification, she retreated to the safety of Melun with the royal children. Once there, she fortified the citadel.115 She and the children remained in Melun throughout the spring, safe from the Duke of Burgundy, until he was recalled to his territories by an uprising in Liege that summer.

Isabeau received messages from Jean on June 26 and 27.116 It is not known what they said, but on July 2, the Dukes of Guyenne, Berry, and Bavaria, and the Archbishop of Sens and the Bishop of Chartres, met with the king, who by then had joined his family in Melun, to cancel the pardon he had awarded Jean in March.117 The pertinent document reveals the king’s muddled state, for, in it, Charles claims that Jean had told the king that his brother Louis “avoit machiné & machinoit de jour en jour à la mort & expulsion de nous & de nostre generation & tendoit par plusieurs voyes & moyens à parvenir à la couronne & seigneurie de nostredit royaume” (had worked and was working every day for our death and the expulsion of us and our generation and attempted by different means to take the crown and lordship of the realm).118 But, the king continues, “ne nous fust fait aucune mention de la mort de nostre frere . . . mais nous fut seulement dit qu’il avoit esté battu par le consentement de nostredit cousin” (the death of our brother was never mentioned to us . . . but we were only told that he had been beaten up by the consent of our said cousin).119 For this reason, he claims, he declares his pardon null and void. It should be noted that the queen is not mentioned as present at the meeting to cancel the pardon, whereas the dauphin’s presence is noted. Isabeau had already begun to efface her own position to promote that of her son.

However, she remained a guiding force for the dauphin. She reminded Parisians visually of her role as mentor when she and the boy returned on August 26 to Paris, where they received a joyful greeting, as Monstrelet recounts:
En ces jours la Royne de France qui avoit séjourné à Meleun par certains jours, vint à Paris et amena son fils le Dauphin, lequel estoit monté sur un blanc cheval que conduisoient quatre hommes de pié, et aloit après le chariot de ladite Royne. . . . A laquelle venue fut faicte grande léesse des Parisiens, et fut crié Noël en plusieurs lieux.

[In those days the Queen of France who had spent some time at Melun, came to Paris and brought her son, the dauphin, who was riding a white horse led by four men on foot, and after them came the chariot of the queen. . . . The entry created great joy among the Parisians, who cried “Noël” in many places.]\(^{120}\)

The entry staged the hierarchy of authority that was to be maintained: the queen rode discreetly behind the dauphin. All eyes were turned on the young man, who was making his first public appearance in a procession. To further clarify Isabeau’s relationship to the government for the Parisians, on September 5, 1408, Jean Juvénal des Ursins, lawyer for the king, announced the Royal Council’s decision before a crowd of princes of the blood, prelates, and the people, that given that the king was ill, the dauphin young, and the lords divided in hatred against each other, it was best that the queen continue to preside over the government.\(^ {121}\) The queen asserted her authority again on September 11, when, armed with the king’s revocation of the pardon of Jean sans Peur, she had Jean Petit’s defense refuted.

But Isabeau’s triumph did not last. Enthusiastically greeted by the Parisians when he returned after a decisive victory over the rebellious Liegeois at Othea in November, Jean exuded a power that subdued the Orleanists. Still, the queen remained proactive. Once again, she employed her strategy of simply removing the family from Jean’s grasp, spiriting them off to Tours before his arrival in Paris. On November 2, Charles, insane, was carried away by boat. He was joined in Gien by the queen, the royal children, the Kings of Sicily and Navarre, and Jean of Berry. The group then proceeded to Tours.\(^ {122}\)

From Tours, on January 18, 1409, a new royal ordinance was issued, reinforcing the central role of the dauphin, who would celebrate his thirteenth birthday on January 22. When the queen was occupied, the Duke of Guyenne was to make decisions, although he would report them to the queen. The strategy was undoubtedly to reinforce the boy’s authority—although he would be guided by his mother—to counter the Duke of Burgundy’s power to arouse the Parisians. In the ordinance the king reiterates that he has called
on the queen to “pourveoir & secourir aux grands faitz & affaires de nostredit Royaume en nostre absence” (take care of and attend to the important events and affairs of our kingdom during our absences). However, she sometimes finds herself unable to work as carefully and diligently as she would like. When this occurs, the dauphin will take over “pour Nous, de par Nous, & en nostre nom... à l’expedition & provision desdits grans besognes... après ce que tout aura premierement esté rapporté à nostredite Compaigne” (for us, on our behalf, and in our name, the expedition and provision of the said duties after these have first been reported to our said companion).

Jean sans Peur pursued the royal family. He sent the Count of Hainaut-Holland, kinsman of Isabeau and father-in-law to her son, Jean of Touraine, to Tours to negotiate their return. A Spanish counselor of the Duke of Burgundy makes two important observations about Isabeau at this time: that she had a great deal of influence over the king, who heeded her advice in all things, and that because she was very nervous about Jean sans Peur she was happy to negotiate with him.

The result of the negotiations was a public reconciliation between the Duke of Burgundy and Charles of Orleans, son of the late Duke of Orleans, at Chartres Cathedral on March 9, 1409. Forced to participate, the new Duke of Orleans and his brother, Philip, the Count of Vertus, unwillingly accepted the twenty-one articles of the Peace of Chartres, which contained Jean sans Peur’s defense of the assassination of Louis of Orleans. Although he offered his apologies to the children of Louis of Orleans, the Duke of Burgundy continued to insist that he had acted in the best interests of the kingdom. Also included was an agreement for a marriage between the Count of Vertus and one of Jean’s daughters, which was never carried out. In tears, Charles and Philip accepted their cousin’s apologies, swearing on a Bible to respect the peace. Valentina, Louis’ widow, was not present, having died on December 4.

Thus Jean was reinstated in the government. But the price of the Peace of Chartres was heavy for the kingdom, for the Duke of Burgundy’s reappearance rekindled the feud with the House of Orleans. Bernard Guenée has hypothesized that the feud might have ended had Jean sans Peur only repented of the assassination rather than continuing to justify himself. The process for reestablishing peace normally included an acknowledgement of fault:

Pour rétablir la paix troublée par un homicide, les sujets de Charles VI disposaient d’une procédure fort efficace. Un homicide était commis. Le
coupable avouait sa faute. Il s’absentait du pays. Ses parents parlaient avec les parents de la victime. Tous s’entendaient sur une juste réparation. La justice du roi prenait acte de cet accord amiable. Le roi pardonnait le cas. Le coupable recevait de la chancellerie royale une “lettre de rémission.” Et la société, un instant déchirée par la violence, retrouvait la paix.

[To re-establish peace disturbed by a homicide, the subjects of Charles VI had at their disposal a highly efficacious procedure. A homicide had been committed. The guilty one acknowledged his fault. He left the country. His relatives negotiated with those of the victim. Everyone agreed on a just compensation. The justice of the king took account of the amicable agreement. The king pardoned the case. The guilty one received a letter of remission from the chancellor. And the society, torn for a moment by violence, regained peace.]

Guenée’s hypothesis finds support in research on feuding. Although violence was widespread, lasting hostility was avoidable, with wrongs most often settled through compensation. But Jean’s refusal to comport himself according to custom guaranteed that the strife would not end, and, knowing that the sons of the Duke of Orleans would seek vengeance despite their vow, Jean acted defensively. Throughout the spring and summer, he waited and watched his enemies, a group that, in addition to the Orleans sons, included the royal uncles the Dukes of Berry and Bourbon and marmouset Jean de Montaigu. The Duke of Burgundy struck in autumn, ridding himself of one of his primary detractors: he had Jean de Montaigu executed on the pretext of corruption, on October 17, 1409, despite the vigorous interventions of Isabeau and the Duke of Berry. Other royal officers were stripped of their charges and thrown in prison.

For the moment, Jean sans Peur was master of Paris. Isabeau’s task grew yet more difficult and urgent. On December 27, 1409, at a meeting in Vincennes, she had the Duke of Burgundy awarded tutelle of the dauphin. That the decision was the queen’s is indicated within the ordinance granting tutelle. The decision seems counterintuitive at first glance. But the thirteen-year-old boy was ready to be established in his own household, and he required male guidance in the arts of warfare and politics. Who could take on the role of mentor? The Duke of Berry was offered joint guardianship of the dauphin with Jean, but he refused the offer, claiming that he was too old for such a weighty responsibility.
Still, why appoint Jean sans Peur in the first place? Isabeau’s decision has been variously viewed, with some seeing it as motivated by fear. I believe that this is true, but that the assessment must be nuanced. Undoubtedly she regarded the Duke of Burgundy with apprehension. But Isabeau’s move seems strategic, a decision to co-opt rather than resist him: a decision forced on her, but one through which she nonetheless attempted to exercise dominion. It is important to realize that she did not relinquish control over her son, for decisions made by Jean regarding the *tutelle* were subject to her approval and the king’s; she further guaranteed that the dauphin would feel her influence by seeing to it that her brother, Louis of Bavaria, held a position within the boy’s entourage. As Theodor Straub explains, Louis would remain a constant companion and advisor in the dauphin’s household.\(^{132}\) As such, the move is in keeping with her pattern of promoting her son while remaining behind the scene herself. Far from signaling a defeat, Isabeau’s passing of her son into the Duke of Burgundy’s guardianship evidences her confidence in her son and in the strength of her influence over the boy.

But if the queen had settled with the Duke of Burgundy for the time being, the Orleanists did not accept her decision. They formed the League of Gien in opposition to Jean, allying themselves on April 15, 1410. Among the leading figures in the league were the Orleans sons, the Duke of Berry, and Bernard, Count of Armagnac, Charles VI’s lieutenant-general for Languedoc, by whose name the party would then come to be known. On the day that the league was formed, the king’s nephew Charles of Orleans contracted to marry the Count of Armagnac’s daughter, Bonne.\(^{133}\)

The confederation of Armagnacs gathered to march on Paris in autumn of 1410 to “rescue” the king and the dauphin from Jean. Isabeau was summoned to mediate between the factions. She met with the dukes and other mediators at Marcoussis. However, her efforts were in vain, as Monstrelet describes.\(^{134}\) The situation continued to worsen throughout the fall. Although the university had supported the Duke of Burgundy in the past, they recognized that his assassination of Louis of Orleans and subsequent monopolization of the government had set in motion a conflict that would never end. Pintoin writes that representatives from the university were solicited by the king to deliver their assessment of the situation. Insisting that the hatred among the dukes was implacable, they advised that the only way out of the escalating violence was to remove all involved from power and replace them with wise men devoted to the public welfare.\(^{135}\) Hostility was averted temporarily when Jean sans Peur suddenly offered to negotiate. On November
the Peace of Bicêtre was signed. The lack of seriousness with which the agreement was entered into, however, is proven by the fact that the Dukes of Berry, Bourbon, and Orleans were among a group signing a new alliance against Jean that very evening.\textsuperscript{136}

War broke out again in 1411. For a time Jean retained the upper hand in this conflict, both in military superiority and in public relations. In control of an efficient propaganda machine, he painted the Armagnacs as traitors plotting to remove the king from the throne and concluding a peace treaty with the English, wherein the English promised not to conclude any peace treaties with Jean. In fact, both the Armagnacs and the Burgundians negotiated with the English. Jean also propagated a list of what he claimed to be taxes that the Armagnacs would impose if they managed to wrest power from him.\textsuperscript{137}

But in 1412 Isabeau’s relationship with her son began to bear fruit. Long maligned, Louis of Guyenne has been reevaluated by R. C. Famiglietti, who proposes an analysis of the logic behind his apparent oscillations after the revolt led by Simon Caboche (discussed in greater detail below), that is, as of late 1413.\textsuperscript{138} According to Famiglietti, the dauphin carried out a carefully wrought strategy. His plan was to play the factions off against one another in hopes of eventually drawing enough support away from both to be able to force them to reconcile. But I believe that we can date the dauphin’s proactivity to an earlier date than the aftermath of the Cabochian revolt. The young man assumed the role of mediator on August 22, 1412, and brought about the Treaty of Auxerre.\textsuperscript{139} Demonstrating a new determination and independence from Jean sans Peur, even before the Cabochian revolt, the dauphin forced the dukes to make peace. In the introduction to her \textit{Livre de paix}, Christine de Pizan holds the boy out as the hope of the French people. The work begins on a celebratory note, declaring its purpose as the exhortation to Louis of Guyenne to continue the peace under the virtue of prudence.\textsuperscript{140} True, the introduction to the work strikes an ominous chord, for Christine reveals here that the Peace of Auxerre was quickly disrupted and that she laid down her pen, discouraged, after completing only the first book. The Cabochian revolt intervened. But peace returns, and she takes up where she left off, “après les convenances de paix rejurees en la ville de Pontoise” (after the restoration of peace in the town of Pontoise).\textsuperscript{141}

Unfortunately, the Treaty of Auxerre was futile owing to the absence of any enforcement mechanism.\textsuperscript{142} At that time, the fifteen-year-old Duke of Guyenne was simply too weak in comparison with the Dukes of Orleans and Burgundy. A letter from a merchant of Lucca to his city magistrates under-
lines how powerful Jean seemed to contemporaries: “You may be quite sure that the Duke of Burgundy will remain the most influential and powerful prince of this kingdom. His power is based on the troops which he can raise in his lands. He can muster so many that he fears no one.” But the fact that Christine writes the break in peace into the Livre de paix indicates her hopefulness that the dauphin would eventually bring an end to the feud and impose himself as leader. She urges the young man to soften the hardened hearts of the princes and thus maintain harmony between them:

C’est que tu soies entre eulx tousjours moien de conduire voies de paix par si grant doulceur, non pas sans plus un moys ou deux, maiz a tousjours, que leurs cuers actraies et actendrisses tellement que le runge de la rancune passee tant pour l’amour de toy et de ta doulceur comme pour le bien d’eulx meismes, soit du tout effacié et tourné en amour, benivolence et union ensemble.

[All this, in order that you may always be for them a means of following peaceful ways—not just for a month or two, but forever—by such gentleness that you entice and soften their hearts. So let the sting of past rancor, as much as for the love of you and your gentleness as for their own good, be altogether smoothed away and turned into love, benevolence, and unity.]

Other signs of the dauphin’s growing determination to resist Burgundian influence can be gleaned from Monstrelet’s description of a row that occurred during a meeting of the Royal Council in 1412. On this occasion the chancellor of France, Arnaud de Corbie, and Jean de Nielles, close associate of Jean sans Peur who had appointed him the dauphin’s personal chancellor in 1410, began to fling insults at one another. Arnaud remarked to Jean that his word was no “évangile.” Jean responded that Arnaud “mentoit par ses dens” (lied through his teeth). Filled with ire, the dauphin intervened, grabbing the Burgundian Jean de Nielles by the shoulders, tossing him from the room, and shouting that he was relieved of his job. His new chancellor, Jean de Vailly, lawyer in the Parlement, was instated with the help of Isabeau, according to Juvénal des Ursins. According to Monstrelet, the Duke of Burgundy took anxious note of the dauphin’s new tendencies: he “percevoit assez que toutes les besongnes se machoinoient en entencion de le bouter hors du gouvernement dudit royaume” (he perceived that the machinations were carried out with the goal of removing him [Jean sans Peur] from government of the said kingdom).
To counter the dauphin’s growing independence, Jean sans Peur turned his attention to stirring up trouble among the Parisians. Thinking that he could use the unrest to frighten Louis of Guyenne back into his camp, he encouraged discontent in a city that had been smoldering with friction among the different social groups for several years. In February 1413, the Estates General of Northern France met in Burgundian-controlled Paris and ordered reforms. Jean encouraged the Paris butchers to rise up at the same time under their leader, Simon Caboche. The butchers seized control in Paris, and Caboche became bailiff. Full revolt broke out in April and May.

The most important butcher families, the Saint-Yon, the Thibert, the Guérin, the Deux-Epées, and the Légois, were wealthy and respected. And yet, as Alfred Coville notes, these were gens de métier; a gulf separated them from Paris’s ruling class. Powerful, they could muster followers, but these followers included some of doubtful character. As Coville explains, they were valets, “dévoués aux bouchers, prêts à les aider, à les suivre et même à les devancer. C’était comme une petite armée que la corporation pouvait lever à son gré dans Paris, et une armée qu’aucune violence, aucun excès ne devait effrayer.” (devoted to the butchers, ready to help them, to follow and even proceed them. It was like a small army that the corporation could raise when it wished in Paris, an army that no amount of violence or excess could frighten.) Already for the year 1411 Juvénal des Ursins explains that the butchers were followed by “gens de plusieurs mestiers de Paris, chirugiens, . . . pelletiers, et coustumiers (people of several trades of Paris, surgeons, furriers, and tailors). But, he continues, attached to these were “gens pauvres, et meschans desirans piller et desrober (poor people and bad ones wanting to pillage and steal). The revolt quickly raged beyond the ability of Jean sans Peur to control. The ruling cives, as Pintoin calls them, were outraged by the behavior of the rebels, as was the respected theologian Jean Gerson, who as Brian McGuire writes “described the Cabochiens as low class people who exercised tyranny.” They broke the doors and windows at the Duke of Berry’s Hôtel de Nesle, forced the prévôt des marchands and many of his circle to leave the city, and led a hostile group into the hotel of the dauphin. They threatened clerics and officers close to the king and queen with imprisonment and even execution. Still, on May 26, Charles VI issued the ordinance for administrative reform known as the Ordonnance cabochienne, which proposed changes to the administration of the kingdom in 258 articles. All gifts and pensions granted by the king, queen, and the dauphin were revoked; many royal offices were abolished.
But the rebels’ success was short-lived. The university refused to support them, and the dauphin, outraged at the chaos Jean sans Peur had provoked and was now helpless to staunch, summoned the Armagnacs for assistance in crushing the revolt. The *cives* backed him in his appeal. Furthermore, the king, lucid as of May, added his support to the Armagnacs. They arrived to surround Paris. The Cabochians fell on August 4, and the articles of the Peace of Pontoise were published. With the *Ordonnance cabochienne* withdrawn, the Duke of Burgundy’s reputation was permanently tarnished. The dauphin, for his part, emerged from the crisis a hero, at least as far as Pintoin is concerned. He describes the young man in glowing terms for restoring the peace, referring to him as *generosissimus juvenis*.\(^{155}\)

Isabeau signed an alliance with Charles of Orleans on January 29, 1414. But the Armagnac ascendance turned out to be as catastrophic as the Burgundians’ had been. One serious obstacle rapidly manifested itself: the Armagnacs were unwilling to defer to Louis of Guyenne, who at nearly seventeen years old was in a position to demand their respect.\(^{156}\) Anxious to retain their hard-won power, they had no interest in reconciling with the Burgundians, which was the result sought by the dauphin. As Famiglietti explains, Charles of Orleans and the dauphin fell out early, probably because Charles defied the dauphin’s orders to stop appearing in public in mourning for his father, an action that the dauphin considered incendiary given the tense atmosphere of Paris.\(^{157}\) Charles of Orleans, for his part, seems to have convinced the king to keep the dauphin from attending meetings of the Royal Council throughout October and November of 1413. Indeed, according to the chronicler the Bourgeois of Paris, the young man was locked away and not allowed to be seen by anyone but Armagnacs.\(^{158}\) The dauphin did not accept this treatment docilely. To counter the Armagnacs’ hold over him, in December, he summoned Jean sans Peur back to Paris. Famiglietti writes that his goal was simply to frighten the Armagnacs into listening to him, because he knew that Jean could not occupy Paris without royal assistance, which would not be forthcoming.\(^{159}\) Furthermore, the dauphin appears to have taken part in a failed plot to arm citizens of Paris to rise up against the Armagnacs.

Isabeau, however, intervened at this point, apparently viewing this attempt to use the Armagnacs and Burgundians against each other as dangerous and dismissing Louis’s accomplices from their offices in his household.\(^{160}\) Still, the hostilities wore on. To be the definitive victors in the feud, the Armagnacs would have needed to destroy Jean once and for all, but they were unable to do so. The Duke of Burgundy continued to threaten Paris. The
Armagnacs chased him, but without success; indeed, they were forced into the Peace of Arras on September 4, 1414, after an unsuccessful siege upon that city.

The situation, already bad enough, took a turn for the worse for all the French, when, as Richard Vaughan has described it, “the youthful and ambitious Henry V of England, one of the most aggressive and shifty products of an age of violence and duplicity, prepared and executed an invasion of France for his own advantage and renown, behind the usual smoke screen of ambassadors.”\textsuperscript{161} The disastrous battle of Agincourt was the result on October 25, 1415. The “flower of French knighthood” fell on the battlefield, and Charles of Orleans was taken prisoner by the English, to be held for twenty-five years. Jean sans Peur did not come to the aid of the king at Agincourt, although his brothers Anthony, Duke of Brabant, and Philip, Count of Nevers, died fighting the English.

Still, the tide might have turned had Louis of Guyenne survived to become king. But tragedy struck December 15, 1415. On that day, Isabeau’s great hope for the future of the monarchy vanished when the dauphin, only eighteen, took ill and died unexpectedly.\textsuperscript{162} The kingdom was deprived of its best hope for an end to the feud. As for Isabeau’s personal situation, abruptly it became unclear, for her position long had been that of mentor to the dauphin. It was not certain that she would be able to further her quest for reconciliation, for the political tendencies of the new dauphin, Jean of Touraine, were not obvious.\textsuperscript{163} This dauphin, who had been raised since childhood by the family of his wife, resided in Hainaut. His family status as son-in-law of William Count of Hainaut-Holland would seem to incline him to favor the Burgundians, but the Count of Hainaut-Holland initially refused to send his son-in-law to Paris, cautiously biding his time to see what would happen.\textsuperscript{164} While he waited, the Duke of Burgundy’s troops plundered the country preparatory to an attempt to take Paris.

The king, apparently lucid at the time and fearing the advancing army of Jean sans Peur, awarded the office of constable to Bernard, Count of Armagnac, who was in the south, urging him to march northward with an army as quickly as possible. Bernard arrived in Paris on December 27.\textsuperscript{165} Count William, torn between his duty to the king, under the control of the Armagnacs, and his long-term alliance with the Burgundians, kept the dauphin beside him. In the meantime, Bernard of Armagnac made himself despised in Paris—in particular by raising taxes to continue the struggle against the Burgundians.\textsuperscript{166}
Throughout 1416, Pintoin notes, Isabeau worked actively to restore peace between the warring parties.\textsuperscript{167} The Armagnacs, however, had as little desire as ever to reconcile with their enemy, and thus the queen’s attempts rendered her suspect with them. Armagnac discomfort increased when Jean sans Peur met with William of Hainaut-Holland in November 1416, and concluded a pact with the count regarding the dauphin. Jean and William swore to work to establish a viable government in Paris. From their perspective, this necessarily meant routing the Armagnacs. In this atmosphere, Isabeau refused an invitation to meet the dauphin in Compiègne, fifty miles from the capital, fearing to advance too far into territory where she would be at the mercy of a possibly hostile group.\textsuperscript{168} Instead, she went halfway to Compiègne to Senlis, where she received visits from the dauphine, Jacqueline of Bavaria, and the dauphine’s mother, Marguerite of Hainaut-Holland. At the same time, Count William descended to Paris to negotiate with the Armagnacs, to whom he demanded that the Duke of Burgundy be allowed to enter the city. The demand was refused.

Because control of the dauphin was critical to his remaining in power, the Count of Armagnac could not permit a rapprochement between Jean sans Peur and Isabeau. But on April 4, 1417, the possibility that this would happen vanished, for the dauphin Jean died, without ever having been reunited with his mother. Isabeau sent her physician to her son as soon as she received news of his illness, but nothing could be done. The situation was now dire for Isabeau, for her youngest son Charles, married to the daughter of the Duke of Anjou, recently turned rabid Armagnac, was the only remaining male heir to the throne. Thus the Armagnacs possessed the dauphin. They placed the queen under surveillance. Moreover, they knew that she had been setting aside a treasure of jewels and money that they needed desperately to prolong their war against the Burgundians. On April 18, a group of Armagnacs accompanied the king to Isabeau’s court in Vincennes, arrested Louis Bosredon, her maitre d’hôtel, on the pretext that her court was behaving scandalously, dismantled her household, imprisoned her in Tours, and confiscated her savings to pay their soldiers.\textsuperscript{169} She was thus separated from her daughter, Catherine, and also the wife of the new dauphin, Marie of Anjou, and Catherine of Alençon, wife of her brother, Louis of Bavaria.

The Armagnac-Burgundian conflict raged on, with the Duke of Burgundy preparing once again to march on Paris. He conducted himself like the kingdom’s ruler, receiving an ambassador of the King of Portugal, signing an alliance with the Duke of Brittany, and sending out letters to towns to explain
his intention of delivering the king from his captors and restoring the peace. Pintoin, now horrified by the man he had earlier championed against Louis of Orleans, reports his own amazement that the duke had appropriated such authority so easily and writes that he sought an explanation. He was informed that the French were simply tired of being crushed with taxes and wanted nothing but peace. They were willing to follow anyone who could deliver it: “Vivat, vivat, qui dominari poterit, dum tamen manere possit res publica in pulcritudine pacis!” (Long live anyone capable of governing, if only the republic might rest in the beauty of peace).170

As the feud wore on, Henry V decided to renew the war he had begun in 1415. On August 1, he landed in Normandy with forty thousand of his men. Easily taking Caen and conquering lower Normandy, he continued inexorably toward Paris.

Isabeau’s Final Political Phase

From her Armagnac prison, Isabeau either called on Jean sans Peur for deliverance, or perhaps he convinced her to let him deliver her. According to Monstrelet, Isabeau asked the duke for aid, which he provided, transporting her to Troyes.171 Pintoin, however, explains that Jean, largely successful in his bid to win the hearts of the inhabitants of Normandy and Ile-de-France, decided that he would need the authority represented by the queen to make a claim for government, because the dauphin and the king were both creatures of the Armagnacs. Thus he requested that the queen join him, rescuing her on November 1.172 Whatever the case, with this rescue, the queen entered the fourth and final phase of her career. She asserted her right to exercise the regency powers that had heretofore remained latent in the ordinance of 1403, reiterated in 1407. Always before she had remained carefully in the background. But now she stepped forward, proclaiming herself regent in a series of letters sent out to the towns and claiming the king to be held against his will by the Armagnacs.

And yet, on January 10, 1418, she resumed her accustomed role of working behind the scenes by designating Jean sans Peur regent of France.173 Together they abolished the Parlement and Chambres des comptes in Paris and established counterparts almost one hundred miles southeast of Paris in Troyes. But to guarantee their government, the pair would have to capture Paris and physically bring the king to their side. Jean attacked, but initially failed to take the city from the Armagnacs. He succeeded on May 28, 1418,
with the help of a collaborator, Perrinet Leclerc, who opened the gates of Paris to the Burgundian captain, Villiers de l’Isle d’Adam. The dauphin fled. In a horrific massacre, the Burgundians seized control of the king from the Armagnacs, killing their leader, Bernard.

Pintoin recounts that a group of Parisians solicited the queen and the Duke of Burgundy to enter the city and restore peace after the massacre. Isabeau sent a message to the dauphin, Pintoin continues, asking him to enter Paris with them, but he refused. The Parisians, among whom Jean sans Peur had always enjoyed support, welcomed the queen accompanied by Jean on July 14. They were greeted first by twelve hundred “borgois de la ville” (citizens of the city) led by a contingent of men at arms. The king received them kindly, and they established themselves in Paris.

Isabeau’s concern was still to restore peace with her son. However, the dauphin Charles had assumed leadership of the Armagnacs with the slaying of Bernard in May. As a faction leader, he participated directly in the feud, and, like the Armagnacs, he refused to negotiate with Jean. In this he was different from his brother Louis of Guyenne, who had distinguished himself from the factions, regarding his own role as mediatory, his goal as the restoration of peace. On his side, Jean sans Peur was equally intransigent. When he was offered the possibility of restoring a lasting peace by supporting the dauphin as regent for his father, he refused. At least as far as the chronicle of Juvénal des Ursins is concerned, peace between the dauphin and Jean would have been possible had Jean agreed to retire definitively from the government. But Juvénal des Ursins observes angrily that Jean rejected this opportunity for concord:

Il n’est aucun doute que si le duc de Bourgongne ne eust voulu se retirer d’avoir tout le gouvernement, et se disposer et les siens à resister aux ennemis anciens, et laisser le fils avec le pere et la mere, à faire le mieux qu’ils pourroient, la paix estoit bien aisée à faire. Mais il vouloit tout faire, et avoir entierement le gouvernement du royaume, et des finances: mesmes il semblloit par ses manieres de faire, comme aucuns disoient, qu’il se voulust faire Roy.

[There is no doubt that if the Duke of Burgundy had wanted to pull back from the government and decided along with his men to resist the old enemy and leave the son with his father and mother to do the best they could, peace would have been easy to make. But he wanted to do everything and have entire control of the kingdom and the finances: it even seemed, as some said, that he wanted to make himself king.]
The factions seemed irreconcilable until July 11, 1419, when the two princes swore peace at Pouilly, near Melun.177 For a period of about two months, a union appeared to be within grasp, the final agreement requiring just the last details. After several delays, Charles requested a meeting for September 10, this time on the bridge at Montereau. But rather than the negotiations the Burgundians had expected, the Armagnacs finally avenged the death of Louis of Orleans, hacking Jean to death with an axe. The Duke of Burgundy finally paid for his ambition with his own violent death.

Isabeau must have greeted news of her son’s participation in the assassination with despair. She would have believed that peace was imminent when Jean sans Peur set off to meet Charles at the bridge at Montereau. The revenge killing caused Charles VI to disinherit his son.178 The black legend of Isabeau has always maintained that with the Treaty of Troyes, which provided for the marriage of her daughter Catherine of Valois to Henry V and assigned the French royal succession to Henry V and his children, she denied the paternity of Charles. Presumably her purpose would have been to invalidate his claims to the throne with the goal of strengthening her own position within the Burgundian network. But the notion that she disinherited her son as illegitimate, like the stories of her promiscuity, came into existence only after her death. The king’s dispossession of his son was the response to the dauphin’s violent reprisal of the feud his parents had been struggling without success to stop for twenty years.

As for the final moment in Isabeau’s political career, the Treaty of Troyes, the analysis of her role presented by Paul Bonenfant in 1958 already offered a sympathetic image of the queen as torn between conflicting duties to her son and to peace, holding out as long as possible in the face of terrible pressure from the new Duke of Burgundy, named Philip, like his grandfather, and the English. But already by the summer of 1419, Henry V had conquered all of Normandy and demanded that the inhabitants acknowledge him as legitimate ruler through an oath of allegiance.179 Ultimately she ceded to what must have been a persuasively posed argument by Henry V’s messenger, Louis de Robersart, who arrived without a delegation to confer alone with Isabeau in January 1420. What he said to the queen to enlist her support for Henry V remains a mystery, but Robersart was from Hainaut, spoke French natively, held possessions from the house of Bavaria, and, trusted friend of Henry, he also possessed English nationality; he had the confidence of all involved.180 Although the Treaty of Troyes has been badly viewed from a patriotic perspective, it is crucial to keep in mind that in 1420, many in the
French kingdom were perfectly happy with the settlement. The English had possessed enormous territories within the country since Eleanor of Aquitaine’s marriage to Henry II of England; there was nothing new about English lordship for many French speakers. Although Henry V was English, his son would be both English and French. Thus within the space of one generation, the French would be governed by a French king. As Mark Warner argues, “there were numerous Frenchmen who felt that their interests might best be served by aligning themselves with the Anglo-Burgundians rather than with the party of Charles VII.” In 1420, anger about the treaty was motivated not by a sense of betrayed nationalism but by factional loyalties. Although the dauphin’s disinherition had the effect of later inspiring the written articulation of the principles of royal succession, these did not exist fully at the time.

After the treaty, Isabeau resided in English-controlled Paris, at the royal residence of the Hôtel St. Pol, leading a sober and relatively diminished existence. She seems to have exerted no further influence over political affairs. But the peace she had hoped for was elusive. Henry V died in 1422, followed shortly by Charles VI in that same year. Regency of the realm passed to the brother of Henry V, John of Lancaster, Duke of Bedford, for the heir, Henry VI, was a baby of nine months. Charles and the Armagnacs continued their struggle for power. Still, Isabeau was not entirely forgotten by the new administration. Clément Fauquembergue, greffier of the Parlement of Paris, records that she was visited in September 1423, by the Duke of Burgundy, the Count of Richmond, and the Duke of Bedford. And yet, several chroniclers mention her degraded estate. The Bourgeois of Paris refers to her as pauvrement gouvernée. But if she lived in poverty compared to her former life, she was nonetheless surrounded by a small entourage of beloved friends. Her last years were hardly lonely ones. Catherine of Alençon, her brother’s second wife, was at her side, as was Amélie von Ortenburg, Madame de Moy, native of Germany, who had probably already joined the queen in 1405, and served her as a dame d’honneur from 1409 to 1417, rejoining the queen near the end of her life. Others appear in the documents: Marie de Brimiers, Jacqueline de’Amboise, and Madame de La Frete. The queen died in 1435.

To return to the point with which I introduced this chapter, on balance, one cannot call the career of Isabeau of Bavaria successful. However, her lack of success must be attributed to bad luck rather than incompetence. A long series of “what might have been” highlights the magnitude of her ad-
verse fortune. Had Isabeau been a widow, like Blanche of Castile, her role would have been clearer, and there is a chance that she could have siphoned off enough support for the dauphin from the two factions to have forced them to give up their claims on the government. But with Charles VI jealously reclaiming his throne during his periods of recovery, Isabeau’s role never became anything more substantial than temporary substitute for the king, a role that did not afford her sufficient authority to wrestle the dukes into submission. Unlike the dukes, who maintained the constant support of their followers, Isabeau fulfilled a restrained and essentially unstable role. Or had the dauphin Louis of Guyenne survived long enough to impose his authority upon the factions, forcing the Armagnacs and Burgundians to reconcile, Isabeau would occupy a position of respected queen-mother in the collective imagination today. Or had the dauphin Jean survived to establish a stable government with Jean of Burgundy, defeating the Armagnacs, once again, her reputation as loving and protective queen-mother would be guaranteed today. Or had Henry V survived to old age, remained popular, ushered in an era of relative peace and economic expansion, and given birth to a mentally robust son, the double monarchy might have survived the resistance of Charles VII and gone on to die a gentler death later in the century. Or had Philip of Burgundy assumed regency of the kingdom after the death of Charles VI instead of the Duke of Bedford, peace might have ensued. Nicole Pons writes that “Philip enjoyed considerable support even outside his own lands: the example of the Parisians’ attachment to the Dukes of Burgundy was not an isolated instance, and many living in the kingdom would certainly have been willing to obey him.” Or to go back to the beginnings of the feud, had Philip of Burgundy produced no male heirs, the conflict between him and Louis of Orleans would have vanished with his death before causing much damage. Had any of these events, all of them beyond Isabeau’s control, turned out differently, a positive outcome for her career would have been possible.