

CONCLUSION

IN THIS CASE study, I examined the evolution of Jeanne's and Charles's *fama* on three levels to show how reputation was constructed in different written contexts, and how historians can understand these texts as sources for reputation. The first level distinguished three major narrative phases: the papal inquiry into Charles's canonization, the French chivalric chronicles, and the Breton dynastic histories. The second level played out in the revisions produced by the same author, their continuators, or, for the canonization, by reworking spoken testimony into official record. The third level comprised the detailed variations between individual witnesses (human or manuscript). This multilayered heterogeneity encourages us to think about the norms of power, gender, and reputation as arguments rather than benchmarks, questions rather than answers.

At the first level, I showed how different aims and audiences meant prioritizing specific reputational traits, alongside the relative distribution of leadership within an aristocratic partnership. The proponents of Charles's canonization confronted the complications of lordship during a civil war by establishing his martial masculinity through less violent, even anti-knightly means. Jeanne, although not the focus of that inquiry, provided a useful reference point for the normal parameters of seigneurial authority and spousal responsibilities. Conversely, the chivalric chroniclers commended Jeanne's and Charles's exemplary courtliness and conduct of warfare, incorporating both princes into the paradigm of the martial nobility for whom they wrote. The ducal partnership was built out of their distinct but complementary identities and relationships, and the ability to mutually delegate power to each other. Finally, the Montfortist writers emphasized greater distinctions in the balance of responsibility, in order to mitigate the risks of female succession in light of the challenges facing their ducal patrons. They refrained, however, from developing a particularly negative view of Jeanne's leadership because she was easier to integrate within the all-important dynastic fold.

The developments from version to version within each phase clarified how even written reputations took part in an ongoing debate. At one end of the spectrum, the schematic template of sainthood that was imposed retro-

actively on the collected canonization testimony created a gloss of artificial unity beyond that achieved by the original questioning process. By contrast, Froissart's re-writing of the war did not tend towards any one direction, but experimented continually with the different possibilities of the affective and hierarchical modes of leadership familiar to his audience. Somewhere in the middle, Cuvelier's prose adaptations and the Montfortists reworked specific aspects of the received narrative tradition, supplemented with their own inventions, but were not necessarily internally coherent.

Within the fine-grained level, the real dynamism of reputation became even more complicated. The individual testimony from Charles's associates deployed many different strategies for rationalizing his exceptional leadership, such that witnesses contradicted each other at points. Jeanne could—or could not—share in Charles's pious fortitude; Charles did—or did not—make concessions to normative princely behaviour to uphold his responsibilities to his wife. The reinterpretation of Jeanne's pursuit of her claims as unwarranted aggression, featured in only a handful of Froissart manuscripts but perpetuated and embellished by the later Montfortists, was largely a function of the extent to which any given account wanted to accept Charles's virtue.

The variability evident within this case study underscores the value of a critical approach to reputation as it turned people into personas and events into history. Studying reputation lets us examine which stories elites chose to tell about themselves, why and how they told them, and what those decisions say about their socio-political environment. This process mattered just as much as "what actually happened" because controlling the narrative is fundamental to shaping the relations of power within a society. If the history of political action deals with "the players of the game," the history of political culture asks "what the players presume the nature and limits of their game to be."¹ The repeated representation and commemoration of powerful individuals reflected, and influenced, those presumptions. Nevertheless, we have seen that reputations became more diffuse as the number of interpretations grew. People in medieval societies (like any other) had diverse opinions on gender, authority, and violence—and even a single narrator might change their story under other circumstances. The political culture of the medieval aristocracy, then, emerged from the opposing forces of consolidation and variegation. Because there was never a stable or complete consensus on the rules of a game rife with double standards, constructing

1 Hoak, introduction to *Tudor Political Culture*, 1.

reputation was essentially a sales pitch, aiming to get others to buy in to a given model. Reputation thus offers a window onto the continuous renegotiation of a range of cultural and analytical touchstones, including superficially binary categories such as sacred and secular, masculine and feminine, or war and peace, as well as equally superficial monoliths such as chivalry, lordship, sanctity, and lineage.

This perspective also underscores a number of disparities between pre-modern depictions of collaborative power and modern treatments of this dynamic. Negative reputations, especially of women, have often drawn much greater attention than positive ones. Reducing legitimate rulership to a single actor has obscured the salience of male/female co-rulership in earlier thought. Shared power could as readily be seen as a solution to contested authority as its cause. And the often-formulaic preoccupations of medieval history-writers did not preclude significant versatility in the templates they applied to enhance or downplay partnership. Embracing the complexity of reputation therefore sheds light on the complexity of the political societies it helped support and regulate.

I introduced the concept of relational reputations to draw attention to the importance of partnerships in this discursive process. First, reputation was determined and communicated not simply according to whatever set of standards was thought best to apply, but in comparison to how others achieved or deviated from the ideal. The spousal relationship heightened such parallels and contrasts by building in an immediate counterpart and facilitating the interplay of archetypes between the two. This connection also cut across gendered lines in a way that most other points of reference tended not to, potentially engaging a broader spectrum of norms in the process. Second, commentators passed value judgements not only on each half of the couple, but on the nature of their partnership itself. Being of good or ill repute depended not on individual merit alone, but on how well they worked together in that context. This dynamic sharpened the focus of reputation by directing it at a concrete aim and demanding that it adapt to any new circumstances faced by the couple. Because relational reputations incorporated multiple moving parts, they served as a powerful tool of political critique, and deserve greater attention in our analyses of men's and women's authority in premodern political culture.

At the same time, if the specific implementation of reputational categories depended on the agendas of the moment, the very fact of working through them over and over again ultimately reinforced the terms on which legitimate political authority was evaluated. In other words, the expectations of gender, leadership, and relationships were never one-size-fits all,

but there consistently *were* such expectations. The proof of holiness may have sometimes stemmed from, and sometimes substituted for, the performance of seigneurial knighthood; but either way, sanctity was construed rather more symbiotically with lordship than it might first appear. The respective contributions by each half of a ruling couple to the projects of governance and violence were subjective and even open to wildly divergent value judgements; but the partnership itself remained salient as an integral part of interpreting the nature of their authority as well as a vehicle for bigger narratives about the historical significance of a given reign. The gendering of individuals was not a predetermined or fixed trait, but was continually assessed through their actions in relation to others, even as the essential relevance of gender, and indeed the overall presumption of masculine dominance, went largely unquestioned. Finally, loyalty was determined not only by the bond between leader and follower, but by the networks in which each was enmeshed and which helped identify every power-holder by their place in the wider scheme of things. The more things change, the more they stay the same.

The process of constructing reputation on the basis of such frameworks confirmed the parameters for recognizing political legitimacy, without reifying legitimacy itself as an objective, persistent asset. Instead, the active discourse provoked by contested legitimacy gave these norms the flexible resilience they needed to stay relevant over the long term. More rigid expectations of aristocratic partnerships and gendered authority responded poorly to the pressures of constant crisis, which demanded continual efforts to define who was and was not allowed to wield violence and uphold order. Deploying instead both positive and negative models of martial leadership, and for women and men simultaneously, made it easier to manage the messy hierarchies and associations within the nobility, and gave seigneurial power the gloss of regulation along with considerable plasticity in implementation. These versatile dynamics can help explain how European aristocracies maintained their hegemony despite significant regional variation and ongoing challenges across the medieval and early modern periods.