

Diplomacy, family ties and divided loyalties: Joan of Navarre as a queenly diplomat

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EN Abstract. This article examines the diplomatic agency of Joan of Navarre (c. 1369-1437) as queen consort and queen dowager of England. It focuses particularly on the period between 1403 and 1419 and her role as a key pivot point between England and Brittany, as the wife and stepmother of English kings and the mother of Jean V of Brittany. The case study demonstrates key strategies that Joan used to engage in diplomatic relations, both formal aspects such as gift giving and informal “back-channel” methods of influence using her familial networks and trusted courtiers. It offers a reconsideration of the important role that Joan, like other queens and royal women, played in diplomacy which has often been overlooked as the focus has been on male actors and formal negotiations.

Keywords: queenship; diplomacy; gender; politics; England; Brittany

ES Diplomacia, lazos familiares y lealtades divididas: Juana de Navarra como diplomática regia

ES Resumen. Este artículo examina la agencia diplomática de Juana de Navarra (c. 1369-1437) como reina consorte y reina viuda de Inglaterra. Se centra particularmente en el período entre 1403 y 1419 y en su papel como un punto clave de conexión entre Inglaterra y Bretaña, en su calidad de esposa y madrastra de reyes ingleses y madre de Juan V de Bretaña. El estudio de caso demuestra las estrategias fundamentales que Juana utilizó para participar en relaciones diplomáticas, incluyendo tanto aspectos formales, como la entrega de obsequios, como métodos informales de influencia a través de canales alternativos, valiéndose de sus redes familiares y cortesanos de confianza. El artículo reconsidera el papel significativo que Juana, al igual que otras reinas y mujeres de la realeza, desempeñó en la diplomacia, un ámbito que a menudo ha sido pasado por alto debido al énfasis en los actores masculinos y las negociaciones formales.

Palabras clave: realeza; diplomacia; género; política; Inglaterra; Bretaña

Sumario: 1. Introduction: Queens and Diplomatic Actors. 2. Joan's Diplomatic Activity as a Queen Consort. 3. Joan's Diplomatic Activity as a Dowager Queen. 4. Conclusion: The Price of Peacemaking?. 5. Sources and Bibliography

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1. Introduction: Queens as Diplomatic Actors

Diplomacy is a difficult concept to securely define, as Jan Hennings and Tracey Sowerby note “The term ‘diplomacy’ can only serve as a makeshift expedient for want of a clear definition. Exactly where diplomacy began and where it ended in the complex layers of political exchanges in this period is difficult to establish”.¹ Modern historians have often defined it in the sense of the formalized diplomatic networks which grew out of the “New Diplomacy” of early modern Europe, yet doing so has privileged the situation of men working in formalized roles, which as Pohlig, Aggestam and Towns have noted, has meant that women's diplomatic activities have often been overlooked.² As Manuela Santos Silva has noted in her study of Philippa of Lancaster, queen of Portugal (Joan's contemporary and sister-in-law), queens often played a diplomatic role “in the shadows”.³

However, the work of royal and court studies specialists and particularly that of queenship scholars have acted as a corrective to bring their diplomatic activity out of the shadows, demonstrating the role of royal women not just as pawns in diplomacy, but as key actors. As Louise Wilkinson and Sara Wolfson noted in the special issue that they edited on “Premodern Queenship and Diplomacy”, queens were in a unique position to act as diplomats as women “who often physically embodied a treaty of peace or of mutual aid, and who possessed unique, intimate access to princes, kings and emperors, royal wives were well placed to expedite relations between foreign powers”.⁴

Not only were queens well placed to engage in diplomacy, they had a moral imperative to do so—acting a peacemaker or mediator was a key aspect of queenship. Christine de Pizan (another direct contemporary of Joan of Navarre) reflected frequently in her works on the need for queens to act as peacemakers—particularly exhorting her patroness, Isabeau of Bavaria, queen of France to work for peace in the conflict between the Orleans/Armaganac and Burgundian factions which were causing damaging division in the realm.⁵ In her *Livre de Trois Vertus*, otherwise known as the *Treasure of the City of Ladies*, Pizan directs the “good princess” to mediate between parties to resolve dispute, counsel her husband against war and work at all times to promote peace. Pizan states that “This work is the proper duty of the wise queen and princess: to be the means of peace and concord, to work for the avoidance of war because of the trouble that can come of it.”⁶ Pizan notes women are ideally suited to peacemaking because of their “sweeter disposition” which can act as a counter balance to the more “hot-headed” nature of men, who are more disposed to war and conflict. The biblical models of Queen Esther and the Virgin Mary, Queen of Heaven were cited as exemplars of queenly peacemaking and intercession that royal women should model themselves on.⁷

Thus diplomacy was an area of political activity that royal women were specifically called to and expected to engage in, as Murielle Gaude-Ferragu notes “diplomacy offered women one of the spheres of action that allowed them to escape the limits imposed by their state and to go from being passive intermediaries to active mediators.”⁸ Queens engaged in diplomacy through a range of different activities, which allowed them to leverage their position—both in terms of the power of their rank and their position as members of international dynasties—to become significant political actors. They played a vital role in matrimonial diplomacy both as a bride, and also as brokers of marital alliances later in life, leveraging their position as wives and mothers

¹ Sowerby and Hennings, “Introduction”, p.2.

² Pohlig, “Formalisation of Diplomacy”; Aggestam and Towns, “The Gender Turn”.

³ Santos Silva “La dama inglesa”, pp. 214-224.

⁴ Wilkinson and Wolfson, “Introduction”, p.14.

⁵ For further context, see Adams, *Isabeau of Bavaria*, particularly Chapter 3 “Isabeau Mediatrix: Defining the Mediator Queen”, pp. 73-112.

⁶ de Pizan, *Treasure*, p. 23.

⁷ See Huneycutt, “The Esther topos”.

⁸ Gaude-Ferragu, *Queenship*, p. 97.

to make strategic marriages for their children as Silvia Mitchell has demonstrated.⁹ Beyond making marriages, peacemaking or resolving conflict, queens worked to ensure good diplomatic relations between their marital court with other realms, near and far, using a variety of tools at their disposal. As this case study of Joan of Navarre will demonstrate, royal women particularly sought to maintain, improve or repair diplomatic relationships between their marital dynasty and their extended natal family.

One diplomatic tool which royal women used to maintain their international familial networks was the art of letter writing, engaging in epistolary diplomacy to impressive effect as Anaïs Waag and Helen Newsome-Chandler have demonstrated.¹⁰ Indeed as Kathleen Neal has noted, the exchange of *litterae de statu* or letters which shared news about health and family matters

were the ideal vehicle for initiating and sustaining intra-familial diplomatic exchange. The genre of *litterae de statu* itself was one exchanged exclusively among kin, and therefore drew attention to the mutual relationship of the correspondents. By reminding the women of their kinship, and the moral and affective obligations it imparted, such letters could seek to engage their support without needing to discuss explicitly the details of the case.¹¹

While letter writing could be an excellent tool to strengthen diplomatic ties between family members, it is important to note that royal women were also involved in diplomacy with realms where they had no familial connections. An excellent example can be found in Ana Echavarría and Roser Salicrú I Lluçh's study of the diplomatic efforts of the royal women of the Nasrid dynasty, who engaged in letter writing and gift exchange with their Christian queenly counterparts in Iberia.¹²

Gift exchange was another area of diplomacy where royal women have been shown to engage fruitfully—both with their peers, courtiers and ambassadors but again perhaps most effectively through their wide-ranging familial networks. As Tracey Sowerby has argued “Gifts were an important means by which international reputations were forged and they offered non-regnant queens opportunities to communicate symbolically their views on international politics” as well as highlighting their “important role as political and cultural intermediaries between their family of birth and their family by marriage.”¹³ Queens could also act as diplomatic intermediaries during international events, representing the interests of both their marital and natal families, as discussed by Sally Fisher in the context of the Field of Cloth of Gold.¹⁴ Finally, queens were involved in formal diplomatic networks—reigning queens dispatched their own ambassadors and regnant, consort and dowager queens were closely involved with visiting ambassadors at court, from receiving envoys to negotiating treaties and agreements with representatives of foreign monarchs—or even act as ambassadors themselves.¹⁵

This article will explore some of these areas of queenly diplomatic activity through the example of Joan of Navarre (c. 1369–1437). Joan was married twice—first to Jean IV of Brittany (m. 1386–1399), with whom she had a sizable family, and secondly to Henry IV of England (m. 1403–1413), where she became stepmother to his own large brood. As wife, mother and stepmother of dukes and kings, Joan became a crucial intermediary between England and Brittany, during a period of frequent conflict and the turbulent politics of the Hundred Years' War. She was also the sister and aunt of Navarrese rulers and the close cousin of Valois kings—as well as being related by blood and marriage to the Dukes of Orleans, Burgundy and Armagnac, whose factions were tearing France apart during her lifetime. Joan learned from the example of her mother, Jeanne de Valois and her aunts Blanche of Navarre and Jeanne d'Evreux who all played crucial diplomatic roles to

⁹ Mitchell, “Marriage Plots”.

¹⁰ Waag, “Queens' letters”; Newsome-Chandler, “January 1522”.

¹¹ Neal, “Royal Women”, p. 799.

¹² Echavarría and Salicrú I Lluçh, “Honourable Ladies”, pp. 259–266.

¹³ Sowerby, “Diplomatic Gifts”, p. 724.

¹⁴ Fisher, “Field of Cloth of Gold”.

¹⁵ An example of medieval queen who undertook a diplomatic mission is Isabella of France who was sent by her husband Edward II to her natal court to negotiate, trusting that her familial connections might make her more successful as an ambassador, see Benz “The Queen as Intercessor” in *Three Medieval Queens*.

heal conflicts between Joan's father Carlos II *el Malo* (or Charles *le Mauvais*) and his Valois cousins and rivals.¹⁶ As duchess of Brittany and queen of England, Joan used all the tools at her disposal including intercession, influence, epistolary diplomacy and gift giving, to promote peace between the branches of her family—aiming both to end wars and ensure that alliances held.

This case study will focus on a particularly fraught period in cross-Channel politics between 1403-1419 and will emphasise the interplay between the formal diplomatic exchanges between England and Brittany with Joan's informal activities to influence and improve relations between the two parties. The rationale for the particular time period for this case study is that it sits between two of the most important moments in Joan's life: her arrival in England in early 1403 for her wedding to Henry IV and her arrest on a charge of suspected treason in October 1419. This article will demonstrate both Joan's role as a highly effective diplomat who played a key role in Anglo-Breton relations as queen consort and dowager, and it will argue that her diplomatic activity was a key factor in her arrest in 1419. While there is a wider web of complicated politics at play that Anglo-Breton relations fit into, for this brief case study, we will particularly focus on these two realms, and the role Joan played as a key point of connection between them.¹⁷

At times we can see clear evidence of Joan's action in the documentation, but at other times we can see or infer the impact of Joan's influence on events by putting all the pieces of the political puzzle together as it were. This is one of the central conundrums of queenship scholars which Theresa Earenfight has drawn attention to—that the documentation relating to their lives is not always as well preserved as the evidence relating to their male relatives.¹⁸ For example, we can find documentation in the *Lettres et Mandements* of Jean V or in the *Calendar of Patent Rolls* which refer to letters that Joan sent, but the letters themselves have not survived. Queenship scholars have the additional challenge that much of a queen's influence took place through her ability to have intimate discussions with the king—discussions which of course are not documented due to their private nature. This stands in contrast with the mechanisms of formal diplomatic channels, where instructions to ambassadors, letters of safe conducts and the detritus of negotiations leading up to production of treaties are normally well documented, preserved and catalogued.

2. Joan's Diplomatic Activity as Queen Consort (1403-1413)

Before we begin the case study, some contextual background information is needed on Joan and the wider political situation leading up to start of the period in question in 1403. As noted previously, Joan was married first to Jean IV duke of Brittany between 1386 until the duke's death in 1399. Together they had four surviving sons (Jean V, Arthur de Richemont, Richard and Gilles) and three surviving daughters (Marie, married to Jean I d'Alençon; Marguerite, married to Alain IX of Rohan and Blanche, married to Jean IV d'Armagnac). Joan was regent of Brittany from December 1399 until December 1402, when she left Brittany to marry Henry IV of England—their wedding took place in Winchester Cathedral on 7 February 1403. While her first marriage had been an example of matrimonial diplomacy to build alliances between Navarre and Brittany, her second marriage was not a diplomatic initiative, but a secret negotiation conducted by Henry and Joan through trusted intermediaries.¹⁹

Instead of improving diplomatic relations between England and Brittany, and with Joan's Valois relatives in France, Henry and Joan's marriage had precisely the opposite effect. France was horrified by the marriage and the possibility of England gaining a hold on Brittany and moved to expel Joan from the regency, forcing her to leave the duchy and leave most of her children behind. Relations with Brittany soon erupted into conflict—by the summer of 1403, a series of tit-for-tat raids began between the Bretons and English, with attacks on Plymouth, the Isle of Wight and in the

¹⁶ The role of Jeanne d'Evreux and Blanche of Navarre as queenly peace-makers is lauded in the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, see Gaude-Ferragu, *Queenship*, p. 94 and Quentel-Touche, "Queen's Virtues", p. 78.

¹⁷ For this wider context of the political situation of the period and Joan's life, see Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*.

¹⁸ Earenfight, "Highly Visible".

¹⁹ For further detail on their matrimonial negotiations see Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, pp. 62-66.

Channel Isles. An entry in the *Calendar of Patent Rolls* in August 1403 notes “many magnates and other men of Brittany [who] have lately invaded the realm, burnt divers towns and killed, wounded, robbed and captured the king’s lieges”.²⁰ The South coast and particularly Devon and Cornwall became a focus for conflict—in the Spring of 1404 Henry IV enacted multiple commissions to Devon “to resist the king’s enemies of France and Brittany who intend shortly to enter the realm”.²¹ This fear was justified as a Franco-Breton force duly arrived outside of Dartmouth but were repulsed by the local citizens in the Battle of Blackpool Sands. The king instructed the sheriff of Devon to bring those captured to him “so that the king may have colloquy with them and learn the secrets of his enemies”.²²

Yet in spite of the conflict between England and Brittany, Joan maintained relations with her son, the young duke Jean V and records in his *Lettres et Mandements* show the queen was in frequent contact. For example in December 1405, Joan sent a mandate to pay one of her esquires and a letter to ask for Guillaume Berthelemer to be pardoned, in concert with a similar request from Yolande of Aragon.²³ Joan had plenty of reasons to be in contact with Jean V—her letters included matters relating to the management of her Breton dower and payments for staff who served her young daughters Blanche and Marguerite of Brittany, who were living with Joan in England at the time.²⁴

An important example of this high-level exchange that Joan was maintaining with her son in Brittany can be seen in January 1406. Joan’s secretary, Jehan du Bois, was given a year’s safe conduct to go between England and Brittany on the queen’s behalf—it was particularly noted that he would be dealing with issues relating to her dowry “and her other negotiations” or business.²⁵ Jehan had been with her since her earliest days in England and was probably part of her household in Brittany as well. Indeed, it is very likely that he was the son of Jehanne and Guiffroi du Bois—Jehanne had been the wet nurse of Joan’s brother, Carlos III of Navarre and had served as one of her ladies-in-waiting in Brittany.²⁶ Jehan was an ideal go-between; his role gave him an official, legitimate reason to travel between the English and Breton courts and his connections in Brittany made him a trusted, well-connected individual who was ideally placed to gather information for the queen and to send confidential messages on her behalf. Joan bolstered Jehan’s position shortly thereafter via letters she sent in March which named him as her treasurer and receiver general in the county of Nantes, the territory which formed the heart of her dower lands in Brittany.²⁷

Over 1406 and 1407, formal negotiations continued between England and Brittany regarding the ransoms of soldiers, sailors and merchants who had been seized in raids on both sides of the Channel.²⁸ Yet the overall mood music in terms of diplomatic relations was improving. In May 1407 a series of important safe conducts were issued—one was for Joan’s right-hand man in Nantes, the city’s governor Tristan de la Lande, to come to England to see the queen.²⁹ Coupled with this were safe conducts proclaimed by Jean V for English and Breton prisoners to pay or negotiate

²⁰ *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 2, p. 298, 26 August 1403.

²¹ *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 2, p. 429, 24 March 1404.

²² *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 2, p. 310, 25 May 1404.

²³ *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 4, p. 69, no. 161, December 1405 and p. 70, no. 165, December 1405.

²⁴ *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 4, p. 75, no. 199 22 January 1406 and p. 70, no. 166, December 1405.

²⁵ *Foedera* vol.8, 24 January 1406: “Rex, per Literas suas Patentes, per unum Annum duraturas, suscepit in saluum & securum Conductum suum, ac in Protectionem, Tuitionem, & Defensionem suas speciales Johannem de Boyas, Secretarium, Carissimae Consortis Regis, Reginae Angliae, infra Regnum Regis Angliae, cum Quatuor Personis in Comitiva sua, penes Praesentiam ejusdem Consortis Regis, ad Comunicandum cum ea pro Dote sua Britanniae, ac aliis Negotiis suis, tam per Terram, quam per Mare, veniendo, & exinde redeundo, necnon Equos, Bona, Res & Hernesia sua quaecumque; dumtamen Quicquam, quod in Regis, seu Coronae suae, aut Populi sui Praejudicium cedere valeat, non attemptent, nec attemptari praesumant quovis modo.”

²⁶ Narbona Carceles, *Corte de Carlos III*, pp. 80-81, 435; Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, p. 193.

²⁷ *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 4, pp. 86-7, nos. 251 and 252, March 1406.

²⁸ See *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 3, pp. 230-1, 20 May 1406 and p. 224, 17 Sept 1406. *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 44, no. 661, 20 May 1407.

²⁹ *Foedera* vol.8, 10 May 1407.

ransoms and one proclaimed by Henry IV for Bretons coming to England in the context of treating for peace.³⁰ At the end of June, Jehan du Bois working with Tristan de la Lande, released a considerable sum of money, presumably at the queen's behest, towards the payment of her daughter Blanche of Brittany's dowry, in connection with her marriage to the son of the Count of Armagnac.³¹ On his return to Brittany, Tristan may have also brought back a lavishly bejewelled gift from Joan to her son described as "*Une éguierre d'or que la Royne d'Angleterre avoit envoyée à M. le Duc par Tristan de la Lande, garnie de six balais, quinze saphirs, & seize grosses perles, poisant trois marcs quatre onces*" which was recorded in Jean V's inventory of jewels.³²

Almost immediately after this interchange, on 11 July, a truce was signed between England and Brittany with Joan's diplomatic influence noted at the very beginning of the document:

As our very dear and very redoubtable lady and mother, the queen of England, has signified to us several times her desire for all good tranquillity between the very high and excellent prince, and my very redoubtable lord and father, Henry king of England and lord of Ireland, her lord and spouse on one part and ourselves on the other...³³

The connection between Joan's generous donation of funds for Blanche's dowry and the voyages of her trusted officials across the Channel is hardly coincidental. Over the coming years, Joan used gift giving to reinforce Anglo-Breton negotiations for peace as diplomatic relations continued to improve. One of her most significant gifts is the lavish alabaster tomb for her first husband, Jean IV of Brittany, which she commissioned in England and dispatched across the Channel in February 1408.³⁴ The tomb was installed in the Cathedral of Nantes where Jean V founded additional masses to be said for his father's soul and that of "*nostre très redoutée damme et mère la Royne de Angleterre*".³⁵

The Anglo-Breton peace not only held but relations between the two realms seemed to steadily improve, even as Henry IV's own health was beginning to fail. While 1409 saw continued issues around infractions of the truce, including a Breton boat which was boarded by a gang of sailors from Dartmouth and forcibly taken to Ireland, the peace held firm.³⁶ In October 1409, Jean V sent Armel de Chateaugiron to come to England to give homage to Henry IV for the county of Richmond and the following month, Joan was given a license to send a shipment of lead to her son in Brittany.³⁷ Another of her trusted servitors, Berard de Montferrant (or Montferrand) was dispatched by Henry IV in March 1410 across the Channel to Brittany "on certain business".³⁸ Berard had recently been empowered, with the bishop of Bayonne and the mayor of Bordeaux, to negotiate a peace treaty with Castile.³⁹ His success in this role, and in the "business" he conducted in Brittany in 1410 can be seen in a reward Joan made to him the following year, granting Berard the manor of Foston.⁴⁰ Berard's success also led to a long career as a trusted diplomat for the Lancastrians, as they appreciated "Montferrand's worth as a diplomatic envoy, especially through his long-standing connections with Brittany."⁴¹ The truce was renewed in 1411 and notably, Joan's

³⁰ *Foedera*, vol.8, 30 May 1407. *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 45, nos. 664-7, 21 May 1407.

³¹ *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 67, no. 797, 26 June 1407.

³² Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, "Extrait du compte de Jean Mauleon", cols. 1161-1164.

³³ *Foedera*, vol.8, 11 July 1407. Original text is "*Comme, nostre tres chiere, & tres redoutee Dame & Mere, la Royne d'Angleterre Nous eut, par plusurs foiz, signifie le desir qu'elle a que toute bonne Transquillite feust entre, tres hault & excellent Prince, & mon tres redoute Seigneur & Pere, Henry Roy d'Angleterre & Seigneur d'Irlande, son Seigneur & Espoux, d'une Part, & Nous d'autre part...*" *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 75, no. 863, 11 July 1407.

³⁴ For the safe conducts for the three artisans to bring the tomb to Brittany, see *Foedera*, vol.8, 24 February 1408.

³⁵ *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, pp. 147-49, no. 1115, 27 April 1411.

³⁶ *Close Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 3, p. 437, 13 May 1409 and pp. 459-60 16 August 1409.

³⁷ *Foedera*, vol.8, 9 November 1409. *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 130, no. 1084, 14 October 1409.

³⁸ *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 4, p. 182, 12 March 1410.

³⁹ *Foedera*, vol.8, December 1409.

⁴⁰ *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 4, p. 304, 12 August 1411.

⁴¹ Stratford, *Bedford Inventories*, pp.414-17. For further discussion of his relationship with Joan see Wooda-

man Tristan de la Lande was made one of the conservators of the truce while in England the Archbishop of Canterbury and Thomas Beaufort, the Lord Admiral of England were also named conservators, underlining the importance of the peace.⁴²

Yet more significant developments followed in the Spring of 1412 which Joan was at the heart of. On 10 May 1412, Armel de Chateaugiron was dispatched to England again to negotiate a treaty of alliance with England “for the affinity that is between him and ourselves [i.e. Henry IV and Jean V] from the marriage between him and our most redoubtable lady and mother the queen of England”.⁴³ At almost the same time, a safe conduct was issued by Henry IV for Joan’s youngest son, Gilles to come to England—he may have been intending to travel with the same diplomatic embassy which was coming to negotiate the alliance.⁴⁴ While it is unlikely that Gilles visited his mother in England at this point, the treaty appears to have been successfully concluded in July and perhaps to mark the event and reinforce the Anglo-Breton alliance, Joan sent a spectacular gift back to Jean V.⁴⁵ The description of this gift is given as follows:

Item, un autre tableau d’or d’une Trinité garni de onze baloiz, dix-sept saphirs, soixante & dix perles, lequel la Reine d’Angleterre envoya à mondit Seigneur par Messire Armel de Chateaugiron, & pese cinq marcs trois onces sept esterlins.⁴⁶

This gift has been identified as possibly being the same *Reliquaire de l’Ordre du Saint-Esprit* which is now in the collection of the Louvre—it is believed to have become part of the French royal collection through the marriage of Joan’s great-granddaughter, Anne of Brittany to Charles VIII and Louis XII of France.⁴⁷ This piece, and the connection with Chateaugiron’s trip is mentioned briefly again in an inventory of Jean V’s jewels between 1414-1424: “*Un tableau d’or que la Royne d’Angleterre avoit autrefois envoyé au Duc par Seu Messire Ermel de Chateaugiron*”.⁴⁸ While the exact date that this valuable gift was sent is unclear, this is still evidence of Joan using gift giving as a way of encouraging good diplomatic relations between England and Brittany.

3. Joan’s Diplomatic Activity as Queen Dowager in the reign of Henry V (1413-1419)

Yet even as relations between England and Brittany seemed on firmer ground, in France the situation was dire due to the escalating conflict between the Orleans-Armagnac and Burgundian factions. Henry IV’s health was deteriorating rapidly, and he passed away on 20 March 1413, leaving his son to succeed him as Henry V (r. 1413-1422). While Joan was now dowager queen, she was still the most powerful woman at court—Henry V was unwed at this stage of his reign and Joan continued in many ways to fulfil the queen’s role at the English court as “the king’s beloved mother”. In the same way that Joan continued to fill the queen’s role at Henry V’s court, she also continued the same diplomatic strategies which she had employed as queen consort. If anything, Joan’s diplomatic activity arguably increased during this period—while this was largely due to the increasing political tension caused by Henry V’s deteriorating relations with France, it also

cre, *Joan of Navarre*, p.208.

⁴² *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 155, no.1125, 27 October 1411. See also *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 4, p. 318 11 May 1411 and *Foedera*, vol.8, 21 December 1411.

⁴³ *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, pp. 158-9, no.1132, 10 May 1412, original (extended) text is “*pur l’affinité estant entre luy et nous pur le mariage d’entre luy et nostre très redoubtée dame et mère madame la royne d’Angleterre, et aussy pur la feauté et hommage que nous luy devons à cause de nostre comté de Richemont, nous aions desir de conserver et maintenir l’amour et naturelle confederation et aussy les alliances et liens d’amitié..*”. See also ordinances regarding the conservation of the truce, *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, pp. 166-67, no.1146, 1412 and further documentation of the 1412 negotiations in ADLA (Archives départementales de Loire-Atlantique) E121-16, dated 21 February 1412.

⁴⁴ *Foedera*, vol.8, 20 May 1412.

⁴⁵ For more on Gilles and his untimely death, see Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, pp.93-4. The Anglo-Breton alliance was passed on 3 July 1412, see *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, pp. 158-59, no.1132, 10 May 1412.

⁴⁶ Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1027.

⁴⁷ Baron and others, *Les fastes du gothique*, pp. 269-271. Louvre MR552.

⁴⁸ Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1161.

demonstrates that Joan was not taking a step back or “retiring” now that she was a dowager queen. She continued to be highly politically active and fully exercised her queenly prerogatives.⁴⁹

Immediately after Joan was widowed, Jean V dispatched William Graundboys with eight panniers of lampreys as a gift to the dowager queen.⁵⁰ While this might be just a kind gift from son to his grieving mother, it may also have been designed to ensure that she continued to promote good relations between England and Brittany with her stepson. Indeed, at the outset of Henry V's reign, the new king seemed keen to preserve the good relations established by his late father. Documents were issued to ensure that the truce was respected and resolve trading disputes with merchants, with particular focus on the West Country and Dartmouth, where the aforementioned Battle of Blackpool Sands had been fought in 1404.⁵¹ By the end of 1413, proctors John d'Abychecourt and John Onyngham had been empowered to confirm the truce between Henry V and Jean V of Brittany and a ten year truce was signed on 3 January 1414.⁵²

From the beginning of 1414 until summer 1415, documentary evidence continues in the same vein—confirmations and proclamations of the Anglo-Breton truce across England, intervening in disputes between merchants to resolve problems and respect the peace between both realms.⁵³ The summer of 1415 proved to be a political game changer in many ways—relations might have been relatively stable between Brittany and England but England's relations with France had been dramatically worsening. Henry V departed England in June for the beginning of his French campaign which soon saw his great victory at Agincourt on 25 October. While this was excellent news for Joan's Lancastrian stepfamily, her Valois cousins had been defeated and her son-in-law Jean d'Alençon had been killed after supposedly fighting valiantly in combat with Joan's favourite stepson Humphrey of Gloucester—Alençon was possibly killed by Henry V himself. Joan's own son, Arthur, was taken prisoner and while Jean V had managed to avoid the battle, by arriving too late, clearly Anglo-Breton relations were questionable at best.⁵⁴ By 1416, we can see clear evidence that Brittany was no longer an ally with multiple letters dispatched to the mayor of Bristol that summer to hold Breton ships and their goods there “and keep them safely until further orders”.⁵⁵

It is at this point where we can see Joan taking definitive action to rebuild relations with Jean and between England and Brittany. As we have already seen, gift exchange had long been an important part of maintaining relations between Joan and her son, and indeed between England and Brittany. Joan continued to use this gifting strategy of dispatching members of her inner circle to personally deliver gifts to the Breton court, including her confessor Bernard du Sault who brought Jean V a small golden tablet on a gold chain.⁵⁶ In December 1416, Joan sent Jehan du Bois to Jean V in Paris with a diamond for her son which was swiftly followed up by another diamond, this one set in a gold ring, delivered by John Morin (or Jean de Morin) just two months later.⁵⁷

⁴⁹ See Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, particularly Chapter 4 “Dowager: Anything but a ‘Quiet Retirement’”, pp. 104-136 and Part II of the book which demonstrates her continued activity as a patron and in the administration of her dower lands as a dowager queen.

⁵⁰ *Close Rolls Henry V*, vol. 1, p. 5 18 April 1413.

⁵¹ For examples see *Patent Rolls Henry V*, vol. 1, p. 33, 12 August 1413; p. 35-6, 14 April 1413. *Close Rolls Henry V*, vol. 1, pp. 21-22 2 June 1413 and pp. 115-17 26 July, 12 August and 12 September 1413. From the Breton side, see *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 169, nos. 1150 and 1151, 10 August 1413.

⁵² *Foedera*, vol.9, 14 December 1413 and 3 January 1414.

⁵³ *Foedera*, vol.9, 4 January 1414, 4 and 12 February 1414, 18 April 1414, 26 June 1414 and 17 October 1414. See also *Patent Rolls Henry V*, vol. 1, p. 179, 12 February 1414 and p. 221, 26 June 1414.

⁵⁴ For more discussion of the impact of the Battle of Agincourt on Joan's family see Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, pp. 106-108.

⁵⁵ *Patent Rolls Henry V*, vol. 2, p. 74 4 June 1416 and pp. 81-2, 18 August 1416.

⁵⁶ Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1161-2. This confessor may be related Guillem (or Guillaume) Arnault de Saut, sometimes called Boloyte, who was in service to Joan from her days in Navarre as an infanta and remained with her as duchess of Brittany and as queen of England, see Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, 200.

⁵⁷ Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1162.

Shortly after in April, another member of Joan's inner circle, John or Jean Periaunt, was sent to Brittany—this time we also have a record of Periaunt receiving gifts from the duke for his services.⁵⁸ Jean Periaunt had served Joan in Brittany and played an important role as a go-between in the secret negotiations she held with Henry IV over their marriage.⁵⁹ Periaunt and his wife Jeanne, one of Joan's ladies in waiting, remained in Joan's service—weathering the 1404 and 1406 calls for the expulsions of aliens from her household. Indeed the Periaunts were a named exception in the 1404 petition of expulsion, and they received letters of denization in 1411 and 1412, perhaps to ensure that they would be protected from any further attempts to expel Bretons from the English court.⁶⁰ The Periaunts were richly rewarded for their service to Joan with gifts of lands and annuities—Jean was still collecting a £5 annuity as Joan's Master of the Horse in 1428, meaning that he may been in service to her for over 30 years. Periaunt appears to have stayed for at least two months at the Breton court—this was a time when Arthur de Richemont's ransom was being negotiated and Jean V was also issued a safe conduct to come to England personally in April 1417. While Jean V does not appear to have crossed the channel at this point, clearly Joan was keen to keep in close contact with her Breton family when relations with her marital family in England were so tense.

Later that year another safe conduct was issued for Jean V, this time to come to meet Henry V at Alençon in November 1417.⁶¹ The location of the meeting was very sensitive—Joan's daughter Marie was the widowed duchess of Alençon whose husband had been killed at Agincourt. Marie had defended her lands robustly from Henry V, but her stepbrother had ultimately seized the territory from her and her young son, the new duke.⁶² Choosing to meet Jean V here for diplomatic negotiations was sending a signal—just as Henry had defeated Jean's sister and captured his brother Arthur, Brittany could well be next. In spite of this negative context for the negotiations, it appears that Joan was keen to remind them all that they were all family, through her and her marriage to Henry IV. She had already dispatched her secretary to Brittany with yet another diamond mounted in a gold ring for her son Jean V the month before this important meeting.⁶³ Henry V echoed Joan's gift by giving the duke of Brittany a "large diamond in a gold ring" while Jean gave Henry a golden cup and gave another stepbrother Thomas, Duke of Clarence, a crystal cup.⁶⁴ While Joan was not physically present at the negotiations, her presence was felt and noted in other ways—it is very possible that her secretary imparted Joan's insistence that Jean V make peace with his stepbrother along with the diamond ring he had brought to the duke the previous month. In the truce signed at Alençon on 16 November Joan's desire for peace between her son and stepson is explicitly referenced at the beginning of the document:

*Nos, Precibus & Instantiis, Excellentissimae & Praeclarissimae Dominae, Reginae, Matris nostrae, ac Pacis & Tranquillitatis desiderio (quibus in humanae Peregrinationis Itinere nil obtabilius aut securius reputamus) totis viribus inclinati, Treugas, seu Guerrarum Abstinencias, pro Nobis, Regnis, Terris, Patriis, Dominiis, Ligeis, & Subditis nostris, cum eodem carissimo Consanguineo nostro, Duce Britanniae praedicto...*⁶⁵

This echoes the text of the previously mentioned truce of 1407 which halted the Anglo-Breton conflict in Henry IV's reign—much had changed over those ten years, but Joan's role as a vital point of connection between England and Brittany was still important, and her diplomatic efforts to bring peace were equally effective, and specifically credited. In December 1417, instructions to proclaim the truce with Brittany went out across Henry V's domains and we begin to see evidence of the

⁵⁸ *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 213, no. 1241, 29 May 1417. Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1163.

⁵⁹ For further discussion of the Periaunts as part of Joan's inner circle see Neighbors and Woodacre, "Politics of Privacy".

⁶⁰ *Patent Rolls Henry IV*, vol. 4, p.368, 19 December 1411 and p. 460, 28 December 1412.

⁶¹ *Foedera*, vol.9, October 1417.

⁶² Sumption, *Cursed Kings*, p. 543. See also Cagney, *Chroniques*, pp. 111-2.

⁶³ Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1162.

⁶⁴ Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1162-3.

⁶⁵ *Foedera*, vol.9, 16 November 1417.

king once again intervening to help Breton merchants and ensure that the truce was observed in his ports.⁶⁶

However the situation was still tense—it was vital to ensure that relations were definitively repaired so the truce could hold and Brittany could be counted as an ally once more. Infractions of the truce were still being policed and in the summer of 1418, a commission was sent to investigate Jean V's claims that Breton merchants had a boat seized and taken to Cornwall which was "laden with wines, iron, salt and other things".⁶⁷ The summer of 1418 also saw the assassination of Bernard VII d'Armagnac, making Joan's niece Isabel, the new duchess of Armagnac.⁶⁸ It would be an understatement to say that the political situation was tense and Joan, with family ties to all sides who was trying to keep peace, decided to step her cross-Channel gifting up a gear.

In July 1418, Joan dispatched her servant Jean de Morin across the Channel again via a ship called the St Nicholas of Nantes replete with gifts for her son and daughter-in-law. The queen's gifts included 8 small barrels of "wine of Tire and Malvesye" and a "papegeay" or parrot for the duchess—Jacotin de Hausseure, her 'merchant of the queen's horses' was also on board to bring horses to the duke as well as a "minstrel at the organ" who came with his own horse.⁶⁹ Given that her Navarrese relatives often exchanged musicians with the courts of their family members, this may have also been another gift from the queen to her son.⁷⁰ Once again, her servants Morin and de Hausseure and even the minstrel, may have been sending diplomatic messages along with the gifts they brought and bringing back news from the Breton court. Joan's diplomatic efforts may have helped an extension of the Anglo-Breton truce in August until All Saints Day.⁷¹

Early 1419 saw another flurry of diplomatic activity—first another extension of the truce in January followed by safe conducts for Jean V to come to Rouen to meet with his English stepbrother Henry V.⁷² Joan aimed to reinforce this important meeting with gifts—sending another diamond to Jean V at Rouen which Henry V matched with a great golden cup which appeared to have unicorn horn at the base, to protect the drinker from poison.⁷³ It may be noted that, with the exception of the boat dispatched in the summer of 1418, the majority of the gifts Joan sent to Jean V in this period were diamonds. This may be a family connection as Marguerite Keane noted in her work on Joan's aunt, Blanche of Navarre, dowager queen of France, that Blanche also gifted and bequeathed diamonds, including giving one to Joan's brother Pedro or Pierre, count of Mortain.⁷⁴ Joan's uncle, the powerful Duc de Berri who was also an important collector and patron, was also interested in gemstones.⁷⁵ Diamonds not only had value as a prized gemstone as they do today, they could signify strength, courage and constancy—all messages that Joan may have sought to convey to her son through her gifts. Again this strategy bore fruit, with a further truce signed between England and Brittany on 19 March 1419, which used the same language regarding Joan's insistence on peace between them.⁷⁶ It is worth noting that this truce was successfully concluded while Henry's concurrent talks with the Dauphin and Burgundy were not—the murder of the Duke

⁶⁶ *Patent Rolls Henry V*, vol. 2, p. 138 5 December 1417. *Lettres Jean V*, vol. 5, p. 225, no. 1267, 30 December 1417 and p. 226, no 1268, 31 December 1417.

⁶⁷ *Foedera*, vol.9, 20 May 1418. *Patent Rolls Henry V*, vol. 2, p. 203 21 July 1418.

⁶⁸ Isabel of Navarre married Bernard's son Jean after the death of his first wife, Joan's daughter Blanche of Brittany, underlining the importance of this connection to her wider natal family.

⁶⁹ *Foedera*, vol.9, July 1418. *Close Rolls Henry V*, vol. 1, p. 469, 20 July 1418 and p. 472, 20 July 1418.

⁷⁰ For example, Joan's niece Blanca I sent minstrels to her daughter Leonor's court in Foix and hosted minstrels from her relative by marriage, Philip of Burgundy, see Woodacre, *Queens Regnant*, p. 102. There is also a record of Johan "arpero real" being dispatched from the Navarrese court to England in 1435—this may possibly be a musician sent by Blanca I to her aunt Joan at the English court or even an English harper dispatched originally by Joan and then sent home again as he is referred to elsewhere as "Johan de Londres", see AGN, *Comptos*, vol. XLII, p. 102-3, no. 257, 14 Sept 1435 and Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, p. 127.

⁷¹ *Foedera*, vol.9, 4 August 1418.

⁷² *Foedera*, vol.9, 12 January 1419 and 12 February 1419.

⁷³ Morice, *Preuves*, vol. 2, col. 1162.

⁷⁴ Keane, *Blanche of Navarre*, pp. 159-66.

⁷⁵ Keane, *Blanche of Navarre*, p. 162-3.

⁷⁶ ADLA E121-14, 19 March 1419.

of Burgundy at Montereau on 10 September was another pivot point in the political turbulence of the Hundred Years War which again recast relations within the branches of Joan's family. Trouble was also coming for the queen herself.

4. Conclusion: The Price of Peacemaking?

As noted previously, Joan's household, with its large contingent of foreigners from Brittany, France, Navarre and beyond had been under scrutiny and pressure from her arrival in England in 1403. In 1404 and 1406, calls for expulsions of aliens had been both reactions to conflict with Brittany and, perhaps more importantly at that point, part of the intensive negotiations between Parliament and the Crown to reduce the royal household overall and decrease expenditure.⁷⁷ In 1416, Joan's household was targeted again, and the political backdrop of Henry's Continental campaigns and Brittany's status as an on-again off-again ally was vital context for this petition:

all kinds of aliens born outside the allegiance of the king, both Bretons and others, who have not been made denizens, should be completely driven out and banished from the realm, with their servants and familiars who were not born in the allegiance of England, irrevocably, upon pain of life and of limb. Yet recently, notwithstanding this ordinance, many Bretons, having no regard for the aforesaid ordinance and penalty, have returned to the realm, and some are dwelling about the queen's person in her household, and others very close to the said household and elsewhere within the realm, **in order to hear, know and learn the secrets of the realm and reveal them to the Bretons, who are the greatest enemies of your realm, and in order to remove the money and treasure from the said realm, to the great harm of the king and the great damage of all the realm.**⁷⁸

The text in bold at the end of this passage links directly to Joan's diplomatic activity which we have traced in this case study. Joan had been sending her trusted, Breton servants to Brittany, taking with them "money and treasure" which she had been sending as gifts. As noted previously, by sending trusted emissaries to the Breton court, the queen was likely sending coded messages through them, things which could not be trusted to paper but could be sent verbally through servants bearing gifts and letters. These same servants were bringing back news of the Breton court to Joan, but the concern in this petition is that they could also be sharing secrets from the English court with the Bretons, whose loyalty was questionable and fluctuating.

Three years later, in October 1419, just as the political situation had taken a dire turn in France, Henry V seized Joan's lands and the queen herself, placing her in secure confinement. It was only on his deathbed in August 1422, that Henry recanted, setting Joan free and restoring her lands to her.⁷⁹ Joan was never formally tried but was it was claimed in Parliament that she "plotted and schemed for the death and destruction of our said lord the king in the most evil and terrible manner imaginable".⁸⁰

While various suggestions have been made as to why Henry V took this drastic action to effectively imprison his stepmother, including financial motives or personal conflict with or dislike of Joan, this article suggests a different motivation.⁸¹ The combination of Joan's intensive engagement in diplomatic events and the rapid seesaw of the political situation and alliances may have been the motivation for this volte-face from Henry V. While Henry was very concerned about plots against him, Joan had always been referred to as his "beloved mother" and as discussed previously, had continued to be active at court during his reign, effectively fulfilling the female aspect of monarchy while Henry remained unwed. Joan's diplomatic activity and gifting strategy

⁷⁷ *Parliament Rolls*, January 1404 and March 1406.

⁷⁸ *Parliament Rolls*, March 1416.

⁷⁹ For a full discussion of her arrest and confinement, see Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, pp.113-23.

⁸⁰ *Parliament Rolls*, October 1419, original text is "*avoit compassez et ymaginez la mort et destruccione de nostre dit seigneur le roi, en le pluís haute et horrible manere, qe l'en purroit deviser*".

⁸¹ A summary of key arguments for her arrest can be found in Woodacre, *Joan of Navarre*, pp.115-6.

had acted in concert with Henry's political initiatives with Brittany aiming to keep Brittany as an ally who could provide vital support for Henry's campaigns, particularly in Northern France.

However, at this stage, with the political situation changing and potential concern about her own divided loyalties as a dowager duchess of Brittany, a Navarrese infanta and a member of the wider Valois dynasty, Henry might have felt that he needed to shut her down. Removing her lands took away her economic agency and ability to send gifts to her family and sequestering her meant that she had a much-reduced household (with most of the foreign contingent removed) and could not dispatch trusted servants abroad, nor receive many visitors. Joan was never formally charged, nor tried, and was kept in very comfortable circumstances—if Henry truly believed that she was a danger to him or actively plotting treason, this would not have been the case. Instead, she was held in relative comfort, on a charge which might have been considered plausible, given the concerns expressed in the petition that her household was full of foreign spies. This gave Henry a reasonable pretext for confining her in order to limit her political engagement and activity.

It is ironic that Joan's very success as a queenly diplomat ultimately led to her darkest days as a political prisoner. Once she was released, Joan was keen to restore her position and standing as queen, even if she was only the young king Henry VI's step-grandmother, and a somewhat nebulous relation who had been tainted by the treasonous charge made against her. While she remained active in the later years, her diplomatic engagement never again reached the same level of activity as it had during the period of this case study, between 1403-1419.

In conclusion, this case study has demonstrated Joan's effectiveness as a queenly diplomat and the continuity between her actions as a queen consort and dowager, demonstrating that she was in no way retiring from the political scene as a widow until her arrest in October 1419 forced her to do so. We can see how well her gift giving strategy worked to improve or ensure good relations between England and Brittany, through the connection between her gifts and diplomatic initiatives such as meetings, truces and alliances. We can also see her desire for peace between her children and stepchildren attested to directly in the text of diplomatic documents. Finally, we can also see how effective she was in this arena through Henry V's decision to sequester her in order to remove her from the political scene. While this brief case study is just one example of Joan's diplomatic activity as duchess, queen and dowager between England, Brittany, France and Navarre across her long life, this particularly turbulent period offers a clear example of how she was able to engage fruitfully in politics through gift giving and exercising her networks of service and family connections. It highlights the many ways in which women were able to engage in "back-channel" diplomacy—looking beyond the role of male actors and formal embassies, we can see the vital work that was done by queens and royal women as informal, but highly effective, diplomats.

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