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Female Monasticism and Family Strategy: The Guises and Saint Pierre de Reims

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This article argues for the existence of female social networks, which were centered around abbeys and which can be viewed as a female dimension to male patron-client networks. This female dimension forces some reevaluation of the nature of male patron-client networks away from the model of power structures towards a function of noble society. A study of the nuns who resided at the abbey of Saint Pierre de Reims, which was headed by a member of the Guise family, shows an expansive and interwoven network of women, both kinship and affinity, occupying the same physical space or communicating with each other. It also shows that a member of a noble family who was assigned to a church career had a valuable and significant role to play in family strategies and dynastic planning.

IN TWO IMPORTANT ARTICLES, Nancy Lyman Roelker identifies the significant role played by a number of Protestant noblewomen in the creation of a Huguenot nobility.¹ She provides a picture of a female noble culture in which a court-style group developed around a prominent female figure. These women were the matriarchs of networks of noblewomen, connected by blood, marriage, and membership in a group formed in their youth, either at court or within a great household, where they had been intimates and where they had modeled themselves upon a high-ranking noblewoman. These networks adopted not only the cultural practices of their role models but also their religious beliefs. What was the Catholic dimension of this Renaissance tradition? Part of the answer to this question lies within the context of female religious experience, specifically female monasticism. Here an abbey took the place of the household, and an abbess replaced the charismatic matriarch. The evidence shows that there were parallel networks existing in French abbeys to those identified among the French Protestant nobility. Networks of women connected by ties of kinship developed within key dynastic abbeys and were most likely sustained when a member of this group was promoted to the head of her own religious house. Indeed, the existence of such networks is one of the most prominent features arising from a study of female experience within the institutional church. It is the purpose of this article to examine one such network, one which was focused on the abbey of Saint Pierre les Dames at Reims. An analysis of these networks introduces the women of French Catholic noble families to the debate about the nature and structure of noble society. Such an analysis also exam-

¹Nancy L. Roelker, "The Appeal of Calvinism to French Noblewomen in the Sixteenth Century," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 2 (1972): 391-413; idem, "The Role of Noblewomen in the French Reformation," *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 63 (1972): 168-95.

ines noble culture in a female space. It forces a reevaluation of the traditional interpretation of these noble networks during the period of the Wars of Religion, since, at times, these female networks appear to cross the lines of conflict that historians have drawn in the world of male experience.² The women of families who were political and military opponents during the Wars of Religion can be found living apparently peacefully together within the monastic environment.

The church did not just represent a dumping ground or a means of dealing cheaply with children, such as unmarried daughters, who would otherwise be a drain on the resources of the family. It played an important role in dynastic strategies. There was an intimate relationship between the nobility and the church in early modern France, based on the tenure of high ecclesiastical office. It is visible from even the most cursory glance at genealogical tables or lists of those holding benefices during this period. In nearly every generation of the Catholic noble dynasties that dominated French society, there appears at least one younger son with a church career and possibly a daughter who was an abbess. Benefices were passed from generation to generation in similar ways to patrimonial lands and offices, becoming virtual dynastic possessions.³ Such patterns clearly indicate that there was some kind of dynastic strategy in action and that such features of noble careers were not accidental. Studies of medieval monasticism and the Parisian urban oligarchy have contributed useful additional insights into this relationship.⁴ These have shown that a child placed in the church was considered to be a dynastic asset and an integral part of family strategy. A daughter who became a nun was intended, in the medieval period at least, to raise a family's prestige and provide it with spiritual support.⁵ The placement of children in the church was an element of a family's planning that paralleled that operating in the secular sphere. Among the Parisian oligarchy, a son who was placed in a church career did not become simply a monk or a priest; he was given an abbey or a bishopric. This gave the ecclesiastic wealth and status, which he was expected to employ for the benefit of the other members of the family.⁶ Such strategies rested on the theory that the whole prospered if individual members were well placed. This illustrates that dynastic aspirations were not concentrated solely upon the eldest son. Women religious were integral members of this ecclesiastical dynasticism, and their experiences are crucial to an understanding of the relationship between the nobility and the French

²For an outline of the traditional view and some modifications, see Sharon Kettering, "Clientage during the French Wars of Religion," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 20 (1989):221-39.

³Appointments to high ecclesiastical office were theoretically in the gift of the French king and the pope, under the terms of the Concordat of Bologna, but family influence or resignations in favor of a chosen candidate kept certain benefices in the control of a family member. For ecclesiastical dynasties see Michel Peronne, *Les Évêques de l'ancienne France*, 2 vols. (Paris: Université de Lille III, 1977), 482ff., 487, 494; see also Frederic J. Baumgartner, *Change and Continuity in the French Episcopate: The Bishops and the Wars of Religion, 1547-1610* (Durham: Duke UP, 1986).

⁴Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1991); Barbara B. Diefendorf, *Paris City Councillors in the Sixteenth Century: The Politics of Patrimony* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), 124-30, 147ff.

⁵Johnson, *Monastic Profession*, 14, 18.

⁶Diefendorf, *City Councillors*, 130.

church. The example of three of the most important and politically influential families in sixteenth-century France serves to demonstrate the point.⁷

In an analysis of the family strategy of the Montmorency family, Joan Davies notes that the church had as much a place in the dynastic structure as did marriage.⁸ This case study shows that even in this family, where church office was less important, care was still taken to retain hold of certain abbeys, specifically La Trinité de Caen. Nonetheless, marriage remained the favored option for both male and female children. Whatever the attractions of adding an ecclesiastical dimension to the family strategy, it was not worth the sacrifice of a matrimonial opportunity. Montmorency sons were required to ensure the dynasty's continuity and to make profitable marriages, whereas it is possible that daughters were more expendable than their brothers or less likely to find a place in secular dynastic strategies. The Montmorency example does demonstrate that placing a daughter in the church was far less expensive than offering her on the marriage market. For example, a sample of three dowries cost the family fifty thousand to seventy thousand livres, whereas the ceremony surrounding the profession of a nun cost between three hundred and three thousand livres, to which the family added an annuity of a hundred livres.⁹

An analysis of the family strategy of the Lorraine family also illustrates the important role of the church in the dynastic structure. It also shows that the abbesses of the Lorraine family played an important part in the family's ecclesiastical dynasticism.¹⁰ The Lorraine provide one of the best examples of the relationship between the French Catholic nobility and the church during this period. Both sons and daughters sustained a strategy, through the tenure of benefices and ecclesiastical titles, which supported the family's position.¹¹ Among the men of the Lorraine and Guise families, there is a very obvious pattern of the second son's entering the church, whilst another son filled an auxiliary position. There is no such clear strategy among the women. Daughters appear to have been placed in abbeys whenever they could not comfortably be accommodated in the family's matrimonial strategy. The Guise and Aumale branches of the dynasty produced more daughters than the other branches of the Lorraine family and therefore provided more nuns and abbesses than the other branches of the family (table 1, on p. 1107). This was enough to sustain a significant dynastic presence in the church. Here the female

⁷Further research is necessary to determine whether the experience of these families is also typical of the lesser French nobility or a result of their extraordinary position.

⁸Joan Davies, "The Politics of the Marriage Bed: Matrimony and the Montmorency Family, 1527-1612," *French History* 6 (1992), 64. Davies notes that there was some surprise among contemporaries that the Montmorency did not make more use of their political influence to place family members in high ecclesiastical office. For the Guise family's marriage strategy, see Stuart M. Carroll, "Ceux de Guise": The Guise Family and Their Affinity in Normandy, 1550-1600" (Ph.D. thesis, Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, 1992).

⁹Davies, "Marriage Bed," 67.

¹⁰This is a point recognized in J. Bergin, "The Decline and Fall of the House of Guise as an Ecclesiastical Dynasty," *Historical Journal* 25 (1982).

¹¹For a fuller discussion of this theme, see Joanne Baker, "The House of Guise and the Church, c. 1550-1588" (D.Phil. thesis, University of Oxford, 1995).

ecclesiastical strategy was aided by the fact that women traditionally held far fewer benefices than men.¹² Claude, duc de Guise had four daughters who survived into adulthood; two made good marriages whilst two entered church careers. The elder of those who entered the religious life, Renée de Lorraine, was abbess of Saint Pierre de Reims from 1542 until her death in 1602 and briefly of Origny and of Poulengy. Her sister, Antoinette, was abbess of Saint Paul les Beauvais and then of Faremoutier from 1555 until her early death in 1561. Their brother Claude, duc d'Aumale, fathered five daughters. Again, only two of these women married, and their sisters entered the cloister. Louise became abbess of Saint Jacques de Vitry en Perthois from 1585 to 1602, and Marie headed the abbey of Chelles from 1583 to 1627, whilst Antoinette was very briefly abbess of Origny before her death. In a similar example, four daughters of Charles de Bourbon-Vendôme and Françoise d'Alençon became nuns and abbesses during this period because their brothers and sisters had already explored the potential of the marriage market.¹³

Within such a structure and female dynastic framework, it did not encroach upon the family's ecclesiastical strategy when Catherine de Lorraine, the only daughter of François, duc de Guise was needed for the marriage market. There was no obvious position for her to fill in the ecclesiastical patrimony. The retention of key benefices by the family did not depend upon Catherine's entering the church. This was because her aunt, Renée de Lorraine, was to remain abbess of Reims until 1602, at which time she was replaced by a Guise woman two generations younger, her great-niece, Renée de Guise. Had there been a surplus of Guise daughters in the second half of the sixteenth century, they would doubtless have been provided with abbeys to extend the dynasty's collection in the female sphere. Likewise, the Elbeuf and Mayenne cadet branches of the Lorraine family did not have a large number of daughters and did not broaden their interests into female monasteries.

Female ecclesiastical dynasticism was limited by a different tenure practice from that followed by their male kin. Women were less likely to be monastic pluralists and clearly could not hold two or more bishoprics. If they were pluralists, they headed only two abbeys simultaneously and then usually for very brief periods of time. This meant that there was far less opportunity for the next generation to inherit. Only one niece could succeed an aunt to a single abbey, whereas an uncle could distribute a variety of benefices to a number of heirs. This led to a completely different structure of ecclesiastical dynasticism among women, whereby a niece or a younger sister started her career as a nun in an aunt or elder sister's abbey and was then promoted to her own benefice whilst her aunt or elder sister remained in office.

¹²In contrast to his sisters, the cardinal de Lorraine held between ten and twelve benefices at any one time between 1550 and 1574.

¹³Unfortunately, there is very little information on any of these abbeys and none on Saint Pierre de Reims, in particular. Unlike many major and important French abbeys, they have not benefited from a monastic biography. This reflects the general neglect of church and monastic history for this period. The picture is equally bleak in respect of French female monasticism in general.

An analysis of the tenure patterns of both the male and female religious of the Lorraine family identifies a number of benefices that were retained by the family through successive generations. On the male side, the archbishopric of Reims and the abbeys of Montier en Der, Saint Remi de Reims, Saint Denis en France, Saint Urbain, Fécamp, and Cluny were passed from uncle to nephew or from brother to brother and in the case of the bishopric of Metz, from cousin to cousin. Renée de Lorraine and her sister Antoinette, the daughters of Claude, first duc de Guise, were the first generation to establish a female presence in the church. A female ecclesiastical "patrimony" only developed in the Guise family in the seventeenth century on the foundations established by Renée and her nieces.¹⁴ The Lorraine women, therefore, played an active role in the development and expansion of the family's ecclesiastical patrimony in France. Such a patrimony contributed to the dynasty's power.

Whereas their uncles and brothers inherited a tradition of ecclesiastical tenure from the ducal house of Lorraine and often began their careers with benefices within the duchy, the Lorraine women had no such model upon which to draw. The female members of the ducal house of Lorraine did not contribute to the status of the dynasty in this way. This is somewhat surprising, given the power that an abbess could hold within the Holy Roman Empire. In the absence of a patrimonial model and of a Lorraine ecclesiastical inheritance in the female sphere, these women appear to have drawn upon the tradition of high ecclesiastical office that existed amongst their female Bourbon kin. Indeed, the abbey of Chelles was transferred from one dynasty to the other when Marie d'Aumale succeeded Renée de Bourbon-Vendôme in 1583. This Bourbon dynastic female monasticism centered on the abbey of Fontevault, where a Bourbon was abbess for five generations from 1491.

One obvious question, which needs to be asked at this point, is whether these women willingly accepted these careers. It appears that issues of personal choice were less prominent during this period, for both men and women, because an individual tended to comply with dynastic strategy and to adopt a role that benefited the whole. However, there were some young women who protested and escaped the vocation chosen for them. The most notable example is Charlotte de Bourbon-Montpensier, the stepdaughter of Catherine de Lorraine. When Charlotte took her vows, she made a witnessed deposition of protest and again protested when she became an abbess. Although she carried out her duties conscientiously, Charlotte later resolved the issue by fleeing the abbey and eventually married the prince of Orange.¹⁵ In contrast, letters from Renée de Lorraine to the duchesse de Montmorency attest to the willingness of Louise de Montmorency to take her vows. Renée reports that Louise was asking to be professed and that this was a continuation of a wish she had expressed in her youth.¹⁶

¹⁴During the seventeenth century, Lorraine women monopolized the tenure of the abbeys of Saint Pierre de Reims, Chelles, Jouarre, and Notre Dame de Soissons.

¹⁵Roland Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in France and England* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1973), chap. 4.

¹⁶Renée de Lorraine to Madame la Constable, September 5, 1558, Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris (henceforth cited as B.N.), MS fr. 10239, fol. 31.

The politicizing of gender issues has led to the representation of women's experience in the past as a struggle for freedom from male oppression, a perspective that casts a career in the church as an opportunity to escape male domination and to introduce choice into a woman's life.¹⁷ The office of abbess brought a woman status and prestige, and if this was backed by kinship with the social elite, she was in a position to exercise her own authority over her own and the surrounding community and even to challenge secular or ecclesiastical authority. Membership in such a community, even if it were determined by the demands of the family, did bring women a new identity that was not defined by their relationships with men.¹⁸ However, women religious were still reliant upon men to administer their sacraments, and they were still subject to the authority of a male bishop. In the case of Saint Pierre de Reims, economic activity, in the form of the management of the abbey's properties, was undertaken solely by men, and the abbess's *conseil* was completely male. It does seem anachronistic to speak in terms of a female struggle for autonomy in the early modern period, especially since, as Natalie Zemon Davis has pointed out, women were already experiencing independence in many spheres of their lives.¹⁹ Calvinism and the Huguenot movement may have offered these women a greater opportunity for action, but a noble abbess already enjoyed considerable authority whilst Catholicism offered women a greater sense of community through its numerous female saints and emphasis upon the sanctity of the Virgin Mary.²⁰

The idea that a nun or an abbess had a role to play in dynastic and ecclesiastical strategy does not rely upon the distribution of benefices alone. The evidence shows that a nun or abbess retained very strong links with her family and continued to be part of it even within an abbey's walls. There is a lack of studies of sixteenth-century female monasticism, but studies of the medieval period provide a picture of close and sustained links with families and the neighboring community.²¹ Recent research into the Guise family has produced evidence of the place noble female religious occupied in a consciously maintained kin network.²² This network expressed itself through the exchange of letters and small gifts. Such exchanges must be seen in the context of wider noble culture and the debate over the nature of patronage and clientage.²³ The correspondence was expressed in the same highly formulaic language that defined written relationships with those outside the kin network. Women religious used the same set phrases expressing either intimacy or

¹⁷For example see Lina Eckenstein, *Women Under Monasticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1896).

¹⁸See J. Michael Hayden, "States, Estates, and Orders: The *Qualité* of Female Clergy in Early Modern France," *French History* 8 (1994) on the status and identity of female religious.

¹⁹Natalie Zemon Davis, "City Women and Religious Change," in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (London: Duckworth, 1975), 81.

²⁰For this latter point, see Davis, "City Women," 86.

²¹Johnson, *Monastic Profession*, 19, 27; Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London: Routledge, 1994), 69.

²²Baker, "The House of Guise and the Church," chap. 8.

²³Kristen B. Neuschel, *Word of Honor: Interpreting Noble Culture in Sixteenth-Century France* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1989); Sharon Kettering, "Patronage and Kinship in Early Modern France," *French Historical Studies* 16 (1989).

social and geographic distance that can be seen in the letters between secular noblemen.

An abbess, such as Renée de Lorraine, engaged in a correspondence with her secular kin that discussed family affairs: both business matters and more general news.²⁴ Examples of the exchange of small gifts include a cross sent to Renée by her brother, the cardinal de Lorraine, and the donation of two old dresses by Mary Stuart, queen of Scotland, to her aunts, Renée and Antoinette de Lorraine, abbesses respectively of Saint Pierre de Reims and Faremoutier, with which to make *paremens*.²⁵ Gifts to the abbey of Saint Pierre itself also seem to have been a part of the network exchange. For example, the cardinal de Bourbon and the queen of Scotland each gave a cross to the abbey.²⁶ Family unity was similarly reinforced by the occupation of the same physical space. Renée de Lorraine visited the Guise dynastic center, Joinville, and the Lorraine ducal family at Nancy.²⁷ The lay members of a family could also visit an abbess in her abbey. In a letter to her eldest daughter, Marie of Scotland, Antoinette de Bourbon, the dowager duchesse de Guise, wrote of a planned visit to Reims to see two other daughters, abbess Renée and her sister, Antoinette, the abbess of Faremoutier.²⁸

The sense of common identity and common interests can be further seen in the area of administration. The records of Saint Pierre de Reims show that the *conseil*, or management team, that oversaw the financial affairs of the abbey shared several of its members with the archbishopric of Reims, which throughout this period was headed by a member of the Guise family. For example, in 1585 Nicolas le Poivre was the *procureur fiscal* of both the abbey and the archbishopric whilst the grand archdeacons of Reims Cathedral, François Brûlart and Pierre Remy, were also both part of this *conseil*. Pierre Remy was in fact the vicar-general of both the archbishop of Reims and of Renée in the 1560s and 1570s.²⁹

There was a practical side to the relationship between Renée de Lorraine and her family, which emphasizes her significance within the dynastic structure and

²⁴For example, B.N., MS fr. 3233, *passim*, containing letters from Renée to Anne d'Este, duchesse de Nemours and from Marie and Louise de Lorraine-Aumale to their niece, Anne de Lorraine-Aumale, the duchesse de Nemours.

²⁵Renée de Lorraine to Antoinette de Bourbon, June 9, 1548, B.N., MS fr. 20467, fol. 145; Mary to Marie de Lorraine, December 28, 1555, *Lettres, Instructions et Mémoires de Marie Stuart, Reine d'Ecosse*, ed. Alexandre Labanoff (London: C. Dolman, 1844), 29–32.

²⁶H. Jadart, "Le Trésor de l'abbaye de Saint-Pierre-les-Dames de Reims en 1690," *Travaux de l'Académie Nationale de Reims* 123 (1907–1908): 123; hereafter cited as *TANR*.

²⁷Gabriel, marquis de Pimodan, *La mère des Guises: Antoinette de Bourbon, 1494–1583* (Paris: H. Champion, 1889), 159; Renée to the duchesse de Nemours, Joinville, undated, B.N., MS fr. 3233, fol. 1, fol. 7; Renée to the duchesse de Nemours, Joinville, undated, B.N., MS fr. 3233, fol. 9.

²⁸Marguerite Wood, *Foreign Correspondence with Marie de Lorraine, Queen of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1925), 200–202 (April 10, 1554).

²⁹Archives Départementales de la Marne, Reims, 87H 11, pièces 61–72 (dated 1553 to 1590); hereafter cited as *ADMR*. This overlap of administrative personnel can be seen elsewhere. Bishop Louis Guillard acted as a *procureur* for the cardinal de Lorraine, his brother Duc François, and their mother, Antoinette de Bourbon; Archives Nationales, Paris, Minutier Central, LXVIII 19–27 (1555–1557); hereafter cited as A. N., MC. For the idea of a *conseil*'s directing an integrated family strategy as well as management, see Stuart Carroll, "The Guise Affinity and Popular Protest during the Wars of Religion," *French History* 9 (1995): 128–29.

helps to place Reims as a dynastic center for the Guise. In a reply to a letter from her brother, Duc François, Renée indicated that the abbey of Saint Pierre was used as a depository for family documents. François had sent his treasurer to her for a copy of a contract of *rente*, but Renée explained that she had sent that coffer of his papers to him a long time previously and suggested that the contract might be with other papers that she held relating to the duchesse de Guise's affairs.³⁰ Clearly, therefore, this one contract was not an isolated document, and the abbey must have housed at least a couple of bundles of papers relating to family affairs. This theory is given further support by the statement that the cardinal de Lorraine deposited a copy of his testament with her at the abbey and by the fact that Anne d'Este sent Renée copies of her marriage contract with the duc de Nemours and of the contract of donation she made to her elder children.³¹

As well as safeguarding family documents, there was a more active dimension to this administrative function. Renée de Lorraine also acted as an agent for her nephew, Louis II, cardinal de Guise, by arranging the lease of lands belonging to the temporal of the archbishopric of Reims in the middle and late 1580s.³² In this activity the abbess is emulating the actions of the secular noblewoman, who took over responsibility for the management of patrimonial lands whilst her husband was absent.³³ Indeed, the dynastic importance of the abbess should be placed in the context of the significant contribution that female members of aristocratic families made to a dynasty's success. Separate from issues of dynastic union and regeneration, these women acted as protectors and managers of dynastic resources and also substituted for their male relatives in more politically prominent ways when the family was deprived of effective male leadership.³⁴

As integral members of the dynastic structure, women religious contributed to the fortunes of their families. Their membership in prominent kin networks brought them power and status, most obviously because family influence at court obtained their benefices for them. This is especially the case in respect of the Guise women and their Bourbon cousins. This was a two-way process. Any local influence and personal prestige that an abbess earned augmented the local authority of the family and increased family prestige. She could represent the family more effec-

³⁰Renée de Lorraine to the duc de Guise, undated, B.N., MS Clair 345, fol. 281.

³¹René de Bouillé, *Histoire des ducs de Guise*, 4 vols. (Paris: Amyot, 1849), 2: 550; Renée de Lorraine to the duchesse de Nemours et de Guise, May 20, 1566, B.N., MS fr. 3211, fol. 76.

³²ADMR, 2G 32, pièce 3: an account of leases operating in 1592, noting the terms, dates, and parties involved.

³³Sharon Kettering, "The Patronage Power of Early Modern French Noblewomen," *Historical Journal* 32 (1989): 827-28; David Potter, "The Luxembourg Inheritance: The House of Bourbon and Its Lands in Northern France during the Sixteenth Century," *French History* 6 (1992): 30; many examples can be found in the A. N., MC.

³⁴This management of dynastic resources could include the administration of the ecclesiastical patrimony: Anne d'Este acting for her son, Henri de Savoie, in the management of the archbishopric of Auch; A. N., MC VIII 400, fol. 350; the duchesse de Guise arranging leases of the temporal of the abbey of Saint Denis en France during the minority of her son; Félicie d'Ayzac, *Histoire de l'Abbaye de Saint-Denis en France*, 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Imperiale, 1860), 2: 515. For the political role, see J. Munns and P. Richards, "Exploiting and Destabilising Gender Roles: Anne d'Este," *French History* 6 (1992): 210-11.

tively in the locality, since she was more likely than a senior male ecclesiastic or a prominent secular noble to remain for long periods of time in one place. It is clear that Renée de Lorraine, for example, was placed in one of Reims' abbeys as part of the family's strategy of focusing on Champagne's ecclesiastical center. The authority of the archbishop was the main strand in this policy, but the presence of the abbess served as a permanent link between the Guise family and the town.³⁵ An abbess's kin did not have to share the intangible assets brought by her status with a marriage family, as happened in the case of a secular bride. An "independent" woman could, therefore, be of more value to the dynasty's interests. A powerful abbess could also broaden a dynasty's resource base, in some sense through control of valuable assets but more definitely through her position as a patron (or matron).

An abbess held a certain position in society, as a member of the social elite and as a part of the aristocratic culture of the early modern period.³⁶ Her dynasty and her status brought her power, influence, and authority. Unlike their cardinal and bishop brothers, these women did not participate in national or court life and politics. Their sphere of action was in the provinces and at the family home. By nature of her gender, the abbess's power was local rather than national. The evidence from Reims, although not as full as one would like, gives some impression of Renée de Lorraine's standing within the town. In general, Reims appears to have deferred to whichever figure of authority was in place at the time, showing equal respect for the duc de Nevers and the duc de Guise as the governors of Champagne. This culture included respect for, and deference to, the only permanent representative of a major noble family in the town, Renée de Lorraine. There are some specific examples of the town's demonstration of their esteem for her. On one occasion the town council approached her for her opinion as to which of two possible pictures they should present to the queen.³⁷ On more serious matters, Renée was asked by the nobility of Reims to intercede with her brother, Duc François, for an exemption from the *arrière ban* and by the town to appeal for continued military protection.³⁸ Her influence in the town is highlighted when, following the Blois assassinations, she was attributed a similar role in Reims to that of her sister-in-law and nieces in Paris, thus becoming a focus for the public reaction.³⁹ Yet, despite her presence and encouragement, it still took Reims six weeks to declare for the League, which shows that although she was an influential and respected representative of the family, providing a link between the absentee males and their "power base," she lacked the authority that a warrior noble or magnate could have yielded.

³⁵For a fuller discussion of the strategic focus on Reims, see Baker, "The House of Guise and the Church," *passim*; Mark Konner, "Provincial Governors and Their Regimes during the French Wars of Religion: The Duc de Guise and the City Council of Châlons-sur-Marne," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 25 (1994): 827.

³⁶For the concept of a noble culture, see Neuschel, *Word of Honor*, *passim*.

³⁷Archives Municipales de Reims, ancien fonds registre 41, 181 (August 15, 1559); hereafter cited as AMR.

³⁸Renée de Lorraine to the duc de Guise, November 6, 1557, B.N., MS Clair 344, fol. 243; AMR, ancien fonds registre 43, 88 (April 1568).

³⁹Edouard Henry, *La Réforme et la ligue en Champagne et à Reims* (Saint-Nicolas: P. Trenel, 1867), 103-4, 124-25.

As well as being a member of an aristocratic network characterized by the exchange of letters and small gifts, an abbess could draw upon her connections and family influence to gain favors and advancement for those who can be termed her clients. Evidence from correspondence shows that these women were asked to intervene on behalf of clients and that they acted as patrons, broadening the base of those who owed favors and advancement to their family. As well as the examples cited above, Renée de Lorraine requested that her "poor subjects" be exempt from the expense of supporting gendarmes in a letter to the duc de Nevers in 1554,⁴⁰ whilst the religious of a priory under the jurisdiction of Fontevault invoked the kinship of their abbess to François de Lorraine in a request for exemption from lodging gendarmes.⁴¹ On a more personal level, Antoinette de Lorraine, abbess of Faremoutier, recommended the affairs of a monsieur de Beruin to her mother, the duchesse de Guise.⁴² Similarly, the influence of Renée de Lorraine in the town of Reims was reported to have helped to win an office for the son of her late *argentier*.⁴³ On a smaller scale, as the manager of the resources attached to the benefice she held, an abbess was also able to distribute patronage in the form of the employment of personnel and officers to run estates and in the form of leases to farm the benefice's revenues.⁴⁴ The close connection between social networks and the distribution of patronage also appears to have made an abbess an ecclesiastical patron, a point which is discussed below.

As a patron of the arts, an abbess could contribute to and enhance the image of her family. Her status as an abbess was already a credit to the spiritual prestige of the family, but this could be amplified by a grateful and laudatory literary client. The best example of this diffusion of a godly image comes in a pamphlet dedicated to Renée de Lorraine, which described her restoration of the shrine of Saint Dode and Saint Broue and the distribution of relics to sister abbeys. Here Antoine de Beauchesne, a canon of Notre Dame de Reims and Renée's almoner, praises her virtuous actions, exemplary life, and singular devotions.⁴⁵ A similar effect could be gained from attaching dedications to abbesses to devotional works.⁴⁶

⁴⁰Renée de Lorraine to the duc de Nevers, June 19, 1554, B.N., MS fr. 3212, fol. 51.

⁴¹The religious of Bonne Ile to the prince d'Aumale, undated, B.N., MS fr. 20469, fol. 23; the abbess of Fontevault was François de Lorraine's aunt, Louise de Bourbon.

⁴²Antoinette de Lorraine, abbess of Faremoutier, to Madame de Guise, Saint Pierre, undated, B.N., MS fr. 20467, fol. 149.

⁴³Jean Pussot, "Journalier ou Mémoires de Jean Pussot," *TANR* 25 (1857): 53.

⁴⁴Baker, "The House of Guise and the Church" and Carroll, "Ceux de Guise" both show the importance of these lessees and administrators in the family's affinity.

⁴⁵ADMR, 87H 53, pièce 2. Beauchesne explained that he had printed the account and part of the special service that accompanied his foundation of a mass, "pour vous tesmoigner par les moy(en)nes possible à ma petitesse, le tres-humble service que de tout temps l'ay dedié et consacré a vos vertuz immortelles" (to demonstrate by the small means available, the very humble service that is always dedicated to her immortal virtues).

⁴⁶For example, Nicolas Bacquenois dedicated his translation of Jean Fere, *Le livre des Prédications et forme de prier Dieu* to Antoinette de Lorraine, abbess of Faremoutier, and likewise attached a dedication to Renée de Lorraine to two devotional works by François Picart; Henri Jadart, "Notice sur Nicolas Bacquenois, le premier imprimeur de Reims, 1552-1560," *TANR* 85 (1891).

The abbey of Saint Pierre de Reims represented a focal point not only for the Guise ecclesiastical strategy but also for a network of Catholic women. This female affinity was formed from interlinking kinship relationships and the occupation of the same physical space. It extended beyond the walls of the cloister and was connected with female and male kin in the secular noble world. It played a role in the promotion of nuns to their own abbeys and formed an essential part of female ecclesiastical dynasticism. In this, Saint Pierre appears to have drawn upon the example of the abbey of Fontevault and attempted to adapt the Bourbon model to the Guise family. The two dynasties shared a tradition in the female sphere not only of strong matriarchal figures but also of wide-ranging ecclesiastical networks.

Fontevault was a hothouse for abbesses with Bourbon connections during the tenure of Renée de Bourbon, the aunt of Antoinette, duchesse de Guise. A group of future abbesses grew up in the abbey whilst Renée de Bourbon was abbess; namely, Renée de Lorraine, abbess of Saint Pierre de Reims; Louise de Bourbon (Antoinette's sister), abbess of Fontevault after her aunt; Madeleine de Bourbon, the sister of Antoine de Bourbon and abbess of Sainte Croix de Poitiers; and her sister Renée, abbess of Chelles.⁴⁷ Charlotte de Bourbon, duchesse de Nevers and Renée de Bourbon's sister, retired to Fontevault when she was widowed whilst another sister, Isabelle, was grand prioress at the abbey before becoming abbess of La Trinité de Caen in succession to Renée de Bourbon. Eleanore de Bourbon, the daughter of Charles de Bourbon and Françoise d'Alençon, was a nun at Fontevault before becoming abbess there in 1575.⁴⁸

Under Renée de Lorraine, Saint Pierre de Reims became a similar center. Several members of the Guise family and its cadet branch were nuns at the abbey before receiving their own benefices. Renée de Lorraine's sister Antoinette, later the abbess of Saint Paul les Beauvais and then Faremoutier, was prioress of the abbey in 1550.⁴⁹ In the next generation, two daughters of Claude, duc d'Aumale, Marie and Antoinette, were nuns at their aunt's abbey before becoming abbesses.⁵⁰ Antoinette d'Aumale was grand prioress of Saint Pierre preceding her brief occupancy of the abbey of Origny before her death. Marie d'Aumale moved from Saint Pierre to Chelles for the taking of her vows and became grand prioress and then abbess there.

The network also included a much broader group of extended kin who were connected to the Guise by marriage. A complex web of relationships, best described diagrammatically (table 2, on p. 1108), linked the Guise, Aumale, Brezé, La Marck, and Clermont families, all of whom had a female member at the abbey

⁴⁷*Gallia Christiana in provincias ecclesiasticas distributa in qua series et historia archiepiscoporum, episcoporum et abbatum regionum omnium quas vetus gallia*, 16 vols. (Paris, 1785), 2: 1326. Renée de Lorraine was grand prioress of Fontevault when she was appointed abbess of Saint Pierre de Reims.

⁴⁸Information on these Bourbon women comes from Anselme, *Histoire genealogique et chronologique des pairs de France*, 10 vols. (Paris: Compagnie des Libraires, 1726), 1. Eleanore de Bourbon had originally entered the abbey of Notre Dame de Soissons. Her sister, Catherine de Bourbon, on the other hand, had no connection with Fontevault although she became abbess of Notre Dame de Soissons.

⁴⁹ADMR, 87H 54, pièce 19 (June 14, 1550).

⁵⁰ADMR, 87H 48, pièce 1 (June 1569); ADMR, 87H 71, pièce 4 (December 1583).

of Saint Pierre. The cousin of the two Aumale nuns, Françoise de la Marck, later abbess of Avenay, appears among a list of nuns at Saint Pierre de Reims.⁵¹ She was the granddaughter of Diane de Poitiers and daughter of Robert, duc de Bouillon.⁵² There appears to have been a connection between Avenay and Saint Pierre, and Renée de Lorraine may have had some form of jurisdiction over this other abbey although when the Guise suggested union in 1567, Avenay rejected their advances.⁵³ Françoise de la Marck's sister-in-law, Louise de Montmorency, daughter of Constable Anne de Montmorency, was also a nun at Saint Pierre.⁵⁴ This family connection was not as tenuous as it might at first appear. In 1567 and 1568, there were discussions about the marriage of one of Louise de Montmorency's brothers to one of the Aumale daughters. This alliance was favored by Henri de Montmorency-Damville because of the kinship of his wife, Antoinette de la Marck (sister of Françoise) to the Aumales.⁵⁵ Another of Françoise de la Marck's sisters married Henri de Clermont, who was Diane de Poitiers' nephew. His aunt, Madeleine de Clermont, was also a nun at Saint Pierre de Reims.⁵⁶ In 1555 Antoinette de Lorraine ceded the abbey of Saint Paul les Beauvais to Madeleine de Clermont only shortly after she herself had gained possession of it. The links of this family network were reinforced by the marriage of Diane de Poitiers' other sister, Anne, to Antoine de Clermont, the cousin of Françoise de Poitiers' husband (confusingly also called Antoine de Clermont).

The network was not based purely on kinship connections. Members of the abbey of Saint Pierre included daughters of families connected to the Guise affinity, such as Anne de Sarcilly.⁵⁷ A number of nuns from Saint Pierre who were not related to the Guise family were also promoted to head their own abbeys. In 1590 Madeleine de la Salle became abbess of Saint Remi près Villiers Cotterets after having been a member of Saint Pierre de Reims for many years.⁵⁸ Her colleagues Jeanne Douglas and Charlotte de Hangest de Genlis were promoted to the abbeys of Calvaire and Montreuil respectively.⁵⁹ Madeleine de la Haie and Perrine de

⁵¹ADMR, 87H 48, pièce 1 (June 1569); ADMR, 87H 54, pièce 23 (May 1572). Françoise's mother was Françoise de Brezé, the sister of Louise, duchesse d'Aumale.

⁵²For the important link between the Brezé family and the Guise, particularly in respect of a power base in Normandy, see Carroll, "Ceux de Guise," 29 ff.

⁵³Louis Paris, "Histoire de l'abbaye d'Avenay," *TANR* 61-63 (1876).

⁵⁴A series of letters between Renée de Lorraine and the duchesse de Montmorency discussing Louise and her profession: B.N., MS fr. 3260, fol. 113 (May 25, 1559), B.N., MS fr. 10239, fols. 31, 33, 36 (September 5 and 7, 1558 and June 11, 1559). Antoinette de la Marck was married to Henri de Montmorency.

⁵⁵Davies, "Marriage Bed," 67-68.

⁵⁶ADMR, 87H 17, pièce 18 (June 1548); ADMR, 87H 18, pièce 38 (February 1586); ADMR, 87H 38, pièce 32 (October 1551).

⁵⁷Carroll, "Ceux de Guise," 68-69. Charles de Sarcilly, sieur d'Ernes, was an important figure in the household of the duc d'Elbeuf in the 1580s. The whole family received Lorraine patronage; Carroll, "Ceux de Guise," 83, states that two of Charles de Sarcilly's sisters were nuns at Saint Pierre. Anne is the only one cited in the sources. ADMR, 87H 36, pièce 5 (February 1574); ADMR, 87H 109, pièce 5 (February 1574). There is also mention of an Anne Derne in December 1583 ADMR, 87H 71, pièce 4.

⁵⁸ADMR, 87H 17, pièce 18 (June 1548); ADMR, 87H 18, pièce 38 (February 1586); ADMR, 87H 38, pièce 32 (October 1551).

⁵⁹ADMR, 87H 36, pièce 5 (February 1574); ADMR, 87H 48, pièce 1 (June 1569); ADMR, 87H 54, pièce 23 (May 1572); ADMR, 87H 80, pièce 18 (September 1556); ADMR, 87H 17, pièce 18 (June 1548); ADMR, 87H 38, pièce 32 (October 1551); ADMR, 87H 80, pièce 18 (September 1556). The information on their promotions from *Callia Christiana*, 9.

Nemours both left Saint Pierre to become abbesses of Saint Jacques de Vitry en Perthois⁶⁰ whilst Françoise (or Madeleine) de Bellefouillère was abbess of Origny.⁶¹

These last three examples are of particular interest because of the connection their abbeys had with the Guise family and because of the evidence of their links with the family's affinity. The impression is given that Saint Pierre became a mother house, with daughter abbeys headed by women who looked to Renée de Lorraine as their matriarch. These networks clearly mirror those identified among Huguenot noblewomen. A male noble gained prestige from a large household and an affinity following, which demonstrated his superior status. A woman, and especially an abbess, did not have the same opportunity for display and appears to have gained prestige in a modified way, through a position as the matriarch of a network of women. Just as a male affinity was formed of both kin and nonkin, so was the network that formed around an abbess.

The existence of a link between the Guise and the abbey of Saint Jacques de Vitry en Perthois is established by the tenure of Marie d'Aumale after Madeleine de la Haie and before Perrine de Nemours. The fact that three nuns from the same mother house became abbesses in succession is strong enough evidence on its own, but the fact that one of these women was a member of the dynasty that controlled the mother house reinforces the point. It is not clear whether any jurisdiction accompanied this connection between the two abbeys.⁶² Our attention is caught by the fact that one of these women is Perrine de Nemours. Her name might suggest that she was the bastard daughter of the duc de Nemours, the second husband of Anne d'Este, especially as there was a correspondence about Perrine exchanged between Renée de Lorraine and the duc and duchesse de Nemours.⁶³ However, a more satisfactory explanation for this coincidence of names can be found by looking to a previous generation. Philippes de Gueldres, the mother of the first duc de Guise, left a pension in her testament for the support of a nun called Yolande de Calabre at the abbey of Sainte Marthe lez Paris.⁶⁴ One of Philippes' titles was duchess of Calabria. This suggests that a noblewoman who "adopted" a young girl and provided for her religious career also gave her a name associated with one of her titles, which provided a permanent reminder of this benefit or patronage. Thus

⁶⁰ADMR, 87H 80, pièce 18 (September 1556); ADMR, 87H 71, pièce 4 (December 1583); *Gallia Christiana*, 9.

⁶¹*Gallia Christiana*, 9, cites her as such, and her name appears in 1548 and 1551 as a nun at Saint Pierre; ADMR, 87H 17, pièce 18; ADMR, 87H 38, pièce 32.

⁶²A similar situation, where one abbey was frequently provided with abbesses from another abbey, occurred at the Augustinian abbey of Saint Etienne in the diocese of Reims, which was fed by Notre Dame de Soissons. The three abbesses of Saint Etienne who began their careers at Notre Dame were Anne de Butor, Madeleine de Bourbon-Vendôme, and Anne de Rouci. Madeleine succeeded her sister Jeanne as abbess of Saint Etienne and was followed by their niece, Jeanne de Bourbon-Vendôme. Notre Dame de Soissons was itself Benedictine and was headed by another Bourbon, Catherine, who was succeeded by Louise d'Aumale and then Henrietta de Lorraine; *Gallia Christiana*, 9.

⁶³Renée to duchesse de Nemours, undated, B.N., MS fr. 3233, fol. 1; Renée to duc de Nemours, undated, B.N., MS fr. 3233, fol. 3. Renée requested financial guarantees so that she could profess the girl.

⁶⁴Augustin Calmet, *Histoire ecclésiastique et civile de Lorraine*, 3 vols. (Nancy: J. B. Cusson, 1728), 3: 378.

Anne d'Este's patronage of Perrine was reflected by giving her the name Nemours. This theory is supported by a letter in which Renée informed Anne that Perrine loved and honored Anne like her (Perrine's) own mother.⁶⁵

Françoise de Bellefourrière, abbess of Origny, was from a family that had long-standing connections with the Bourbon family whilst the abbey of Origny also had links with the Guise family. Françoise was the daughter of Madeleine de Coucy-Vervins, whose family was intimately connected with the ducs de Vendôme. The Coucy-Vervins were central in the ducs de Vendôme's military affinity, and family members also served the Bourbons in nonmilitary capacities. Both Françoise's uncle and father were *chambellans* to François de Bourbon, the father of Antoinette, duchesse de Guise, whilst her mother was a *dame d'honneur* to the duchesse de Vendôme. The Coucy-Vervins evidently drew upon these connections with the Bourbon family and the duchesse de Guise to request favors. In various letters Madeleine de Coucy thanked Antoinette de Bourbon (duchesse de Guise) for what she had done for her nephews and nieces, solicited her for an abbey, and asked her to intercede with the cardinal de Lorraine. When Françoise de Bellefourrière's uncle was accused of treason, Antoinette de Bourbon did what she could to assist him, mainly in the form of looking after the interests of his children, one of whom she placed in the service of Duc François de Guise.⁶⁶ There was another dimension to the affinity relationship between the families since the Coucy-Vervins were also vassals of the archbishopric of Reims through the fief of Chemery.⁶⁷

The abbey of Origny was held by two members of the Guise family in the sixteenth century. Their tenure sandwiched that of Françoise de Bellefourrière. Renée de Lorraine held it briefly in 1555 and Antoinette d'Aumale between 1584 and 1585. The abbey was located approximately twelve kilometers from the town of Guise, the place which gave the dynasty its name. This proximity to dynastic lands and the tenure of two Guise women suggests that the abbey had a connection to the family. It is possible that Françoise was a caretaker, placed by the Guise in this abbey to retain it in the family's influence until a suitable family candidate was available. However, there was no Guise successor to Antoinette d'Aumale, and this was not one of the abbeys over which the dynasty extended control in the seventeenth century. Possibly the dynasty's interests shifted, and the early death of Antoinette closed this direction of ecclesiastical strategy. This kind of patronage, where

⁶⁵Renée to duchesse de Nemours, undated, B.N., MS fr. 3233, fol. 7. A further example of this kind of adoption is provided by Louise de Lorraine, who wrote to the duc de Nemours requesting that he ratify a pension his wife (her niece) had arranged for the support of a "fille flamande." She needed this to allow for the girl's profession. Louise added that if the money was not assured, she would have to send the girl away; Louise de Lorraine to Henri, duc de Nemours, undated, B.N., MS fr. 3233, fol. 64.

⁶⁶Pimodan, *Mère des Guises*, 408–9, citing three undated letters from Madeleine, Jacques, and Jean de Coucy in B.N., MS fr. 20468, fols. 143, 193, 197. See also Potter, "Luxembourg Inheritance," 48; and Potter, "A Treason Trial in Sixteenth Century France; the Fall of Marshall du Biez, 1549–1551," *English Historical Review* 105 (1990) for the connection between the Coucy and Bourbon families. There may be a further family connection in that two of Françoise de Bellefourrière's cousin's daughters married a Du Fay and an Aspremont, names that appear among the nuns of Saint Pierre.

⁶⁷F.A. Aubert de La Chesnaye Desbois, *Dictionnaire de la Noblesse* (Paris: Schlesinger Frères, 1863–1876); ADMR, 2G 134; ADMR, 2G 148, fol. 313.

a candidate was placed in a benefice previously and successively occupied by a member of the dynasty, is clearly seen in the male ecclesiastical model, notably in the cases of the bishopric of Metz and the abbey of Montier en Der.⁶⁸

An event in 1584 highlights the existence of a network of female religious centered on Saint Pierre and Renée de Lorraine. Whilst restoring the shrine of Saint Dode and Saint Broue, Renée de Lorraine discovered a cache of relics. She divided these and distributed them to various religious establishments, all of which had some connection to the Guise family. These included the abbeys of Saint Jacques and Avenay, which were referred to as religious relations and daughters.⁶⁹ The other beneficiaries of this spiritual patronage were Chelles, headed by Renée de Lorraine's niece, Marie d'Aumale, and Notre Dame de Soissons, where Renée's cousin, Catherine de Bourbon-Vendôme, was abbess. Relics were also sent to Notre Dame de Joinville and the churches of parishes dependent on Saint Pierre.⁷⁰

To return to the theme of a parallel between these networks of female religious and the Huguenot circles that contributed to the diffusion of ideas of religious reform, we must consider what role the Catholic equivalent played in keeping a section of the French nobility orthodox. Noble dynasties so intimately connected with the institutional Catholic Church certainly had an interest in remaining orthodox. It is not inconceivable that these Catholic matriarchs and noble abbesses developed a religious style that was adopted by their protégés and network. Such a style would have augmented their spiritual prestige and would have contributed to the dynasty's projection of a Catholic image, especially if amplified by the female religious of their network. However, a reputation for Catholic reform and devout learning among ecclesiastical women belongs rather to the Bourbon family. Eleonore de Bourbon, abbess of Fontevault, was noted for her education and cultivation of learning and the arts whilst following her aunt, Louise de Bourbon, as a Catholic reformer. There is no evidence that the Guise female religious adopted this element of the ecclesiastical tradition from their Bourbon kin, despite inheriting its network model.

The women of the Lorraine family had a more personal, internal style of spirituality. The first duc de Guise's mother, Philippes de Gueldres, insisted upon living an austere monastic life when she entered the abbey of Sainte Clair de Pont-à-Mousson as a widow. She refused the moderating comforts that her children attempted to persuade her to adopt.⁷¹ Antoinette de Bourbon also had a reputation for extreme Catholic piety. One element of this involved the distribution of exten-

⁶⁸Both these benefices were retained in the collections of the Guise cardinals in successive generations. Charles de Lorraine received the bishopric of Metz after the death of his uncle, Jean, in 1550. However, he ceded it to Robert de Lenoncourt in 1551 and to François de Beaucaire in 1555. Metz came back into Guise hands in 1568, and on the death in 1578 of Louis I, cardinal de Guise, transferred to Charles, the son of the duke of Lorraine. Montier en Der was ceded by Charles de Lorraine to Jerome Bourgeois and then Philippe de Lenoncourt but came back into the family collection under Louis II de Guise and was passed on to his ecclesiastical heirs.

⁶⁹ADMR, 87H 53, pièce 2, fol. 2, *parentes et filles de Religion*.

⁷⁰ADMR, 87H 53, pièce 2, fol. 2.

⁷¹Rosalind Marshall, *Mary of Guise* (London: Collins, 1977), 27.

sive gifts of money to religious foundations with which she had some association. Again this reflects the idea of a female pious network and connects with the distribution of relics by Renée de Lorraine. Two of the major beneficiaries of Antoinette's largesse were abbeys headed by her daughter (Saint Pierre de Reims) and her niece (Fontevrault). Another donation went to Sainte Clair de Pont-à-Mousson, the abbey where her mother-in-law had retired and where her daughter, Marie, had been educated.⁷² Renée de Lorraine continued her mother's devotions and gave pious patronage to institutions that had received benefits from Antoinette.⁷³ The fact that a significant amount of this kind of patronage was focused upon the dynasty's benefices and a network of client institutions can clearly be seen as a policy of increasing the family's spiritual credit.⁷⁴

Women religious were clearly a significant element within the dynastic strategies of the highest French noble families. The evidence from the Montmorency, Bourbon, and Guise families, the top strata of the political and social elite, shows that great dynasties took care and employed their influence to position daughters at the head of abbeys, which, in many cases, then became virtual dynastic possessions. It was a strategy that the Guise actively pursued upon entering the French ecclesiastical arena, breaking new ground and developing new spheres of influence. This appears to have been a means for providing for the support of these daughters, allowing them to maintain an aristocratic lifestyle without drawing heavily on the financial resources of the family. These women were far from neglected by their families once they entered an abbey and remained important and significant members of the family structure. As the career of Renée de Lorraine at Saint Pierre de Reims shows, a noble abbess continued to have very close contact with her family through such channels as letters, the exchange of gifts, the sharing of a management team or *conseil*, and the performance of administrative functions. As an integral member of the family, the abbess was able to represent the family in a locality as a source of patronage or a focus of prestige and honor. She broadened the family resource base. However, as a woman she was unable to wield the same kind of political or military power as a male noble. She could assist in, but not independently sustain, the maintenance of a dynastic power base.

Connected to this role in noble culture, the noble female religious also belonged to a network that existed in a female space. The network of nuns and abbesses that focused on Saint Pierre de Reims and similar women's abbeys was based on kinship and affinity ties, which were activated by the prolonged occupation of the same physical space. These networks joined women in a web of interconnecting kin, marital, and affinity relationships and also formed a link between

⁷²A. N., KK 908, "Inventaire general des titres, papiers et enseignements qui sont en la chambre des comptes du chasteau de Joinville fait en l'annee 1629," fols. 17-19.

⁷³A. N., KK 908, fol. 286: a donation to the Cordeliers of Joinville.

⁷⁴Further examples include the gift of six thousand livres to Saint Pierre by Marie de Lorraine, dowager of Scotland, in her testament; ADMR, 87H 6, pièce 16. Renée's annual gift to the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Reims, Bibliothèque Municipale de Reims, MS 1610; "Histoire de l'église, ville et province de Reims ... par Pierre Cocquault, prestre chanoine de l'église de Reims," 4: 441, 476; ADMR, 2G 359, pièces 1-3, 6.

dynastic benefices. Her position as a matriarch within such networks brought an abbess prestige and honor, which she was able to contribute to the overall prestige and honor of her family. These networks closely parallel the social structures that have been identified as existing in male noble culture as well as the female networks so important to the Huguenot nobility. The fact that these female Huguenot and ecclesiastical networks had less to do with the distribution of patronage in its various forms and the fact that this culture was shared on both sides of the confessional divide gives some insight into early modern elite society. It suggests that instead of being structures for the mobilization of power, these networks were a social system, which had as part of their function the distribution of patronage. The church and women should not be excluded from the analysis of these structures, since both can provide valuable insights into noble culture in early modern France.

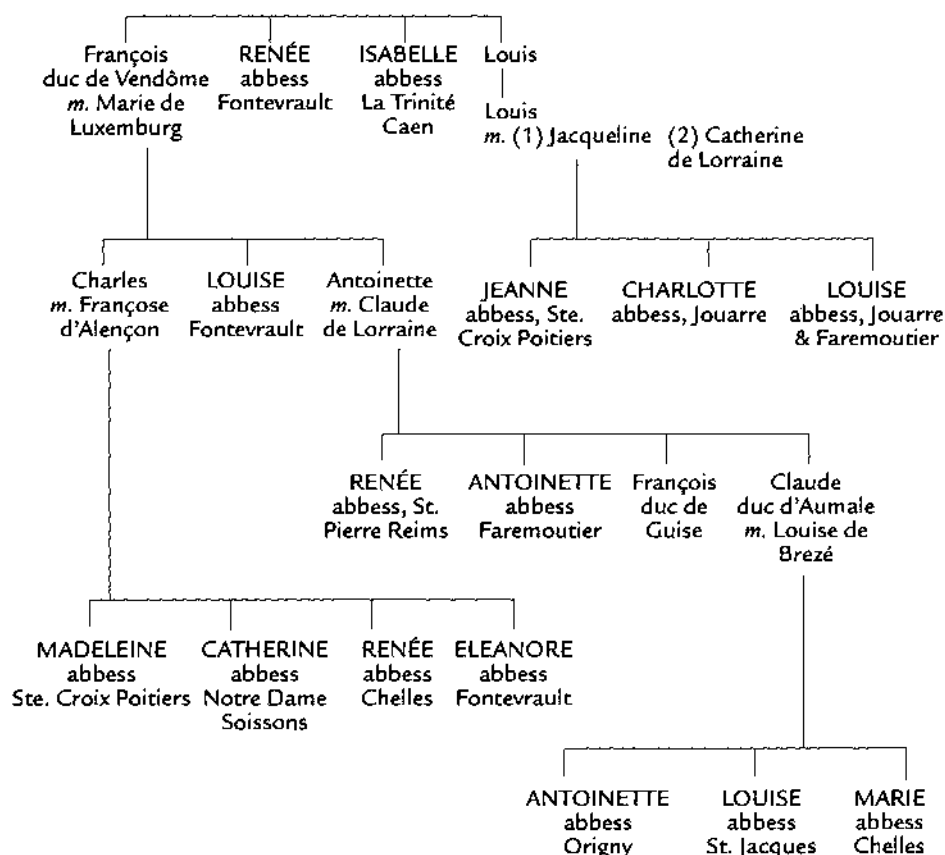
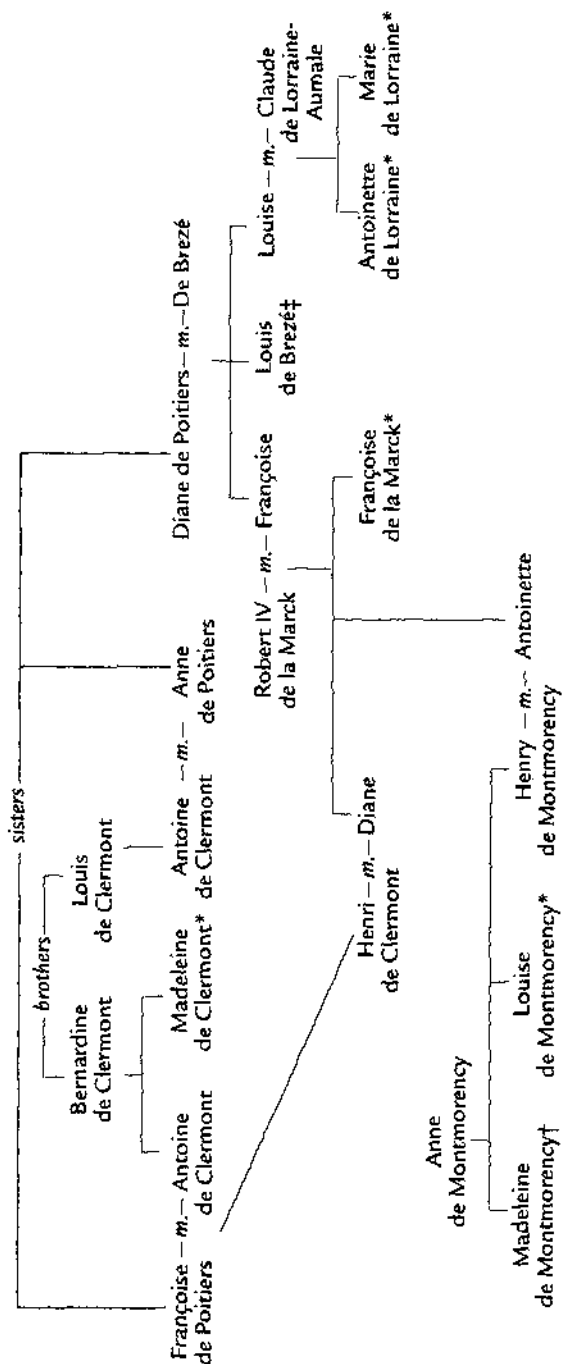


Table 1. Female Religious of the Houses of Bourbon and Guise



*denotes a nun at St. Pierre
†denotes a nun at Fontevraud
‡denotes bishop

Table 2. St. Pierre de Reims