THE ENIGMATIC SEPULCHRAL MONUMENT OF BERENGARIA (ca. 1170 –1230), QUEEN OF ENGLAND (1191–1199)

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The funerary monument of Berengaria, wife of Richard the Lionheart, king of England, is installed in the Cistercian abbey of L'Epau, which she founded on the outskirts of Le Mans and intended as her burial place. On the royal tomb the sculpted image of the queen represents her supine, clothed in royal garments and crowned. She is shown holding before her a square, panel-like object. On it, her own image appears once again, in high relief, lying probably on the floor, this time hands folded on her chest and two candlesticks with burning candles depicted one on each side of her body (Fig. 1 [a-c]).

The life and work of Berengaria, her conflicts with various powers over her royal rights and dowry as the former Queen of England and later on as the Lady of Le Mans, and her conflicts with the various ecclesiastical authorities, have been investigated since the 19th century by various scholars. Almost all of them mention the sepulchral monument of Berengaria and describe some of its components, but it seems to me that art historians have not yet deciphered its unique form (Figs. 2, 2a).⁴

Such a double-image – of the dead queen with wide open eyes holding her own image – is exceptional in 13th-century funerary sculpture and also in the post-medieval funerary repertory of forms. This representation of the deceased queen holding her own image depicted at the moment of death, expresses for posterity certain of her attitudes and perceptions of herself. It is noteworthy that neither Kurt Bauch in his *Das mittelalterliche Grabbild* nor Erwin Panofsky in his *Tomb Sculpture* have related to this extraordinary monument.⁵

This article investigates Berengaria's sepulchral monument and its meaning as reflecting the former Queen of England's stance and conceptions. I would like to contend that this visual narrative of the dead widowed queen reveals much about her relationships with the two women who played an important role in her life: her sister Blanche of Navarre, Countess Palatine of Troyes (1199–1229); and her cousin Blanche of Castile (1188–1252), Queen of France in the years 1223–1252. There are several parallel aspects in the lives of these three women. All were foreign Spanish princesses within the French royal and princely system. Berengaria was a bride and





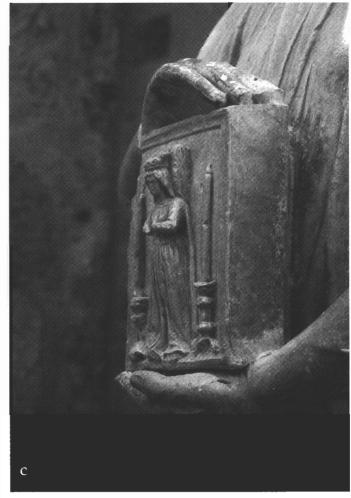


Fig. 1: a-b: The sepulchral monument of Berengaria in L'Epau c: Detail of the upper part, showing the image of Berengaria on the object she is holding





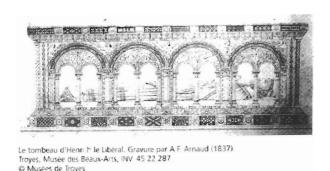
Fig. 2: The sepulchral monument of Berengaria in L'Epau

Fig. 2a: Berengaria holding her own tombstone

a wife, although not a mother, unlike the two other princesses; and she, like them, would later remain a widow for the rest of her life. I would like to contend that Berengaria's relationships with the other women, and her awareness of their lives, had an impact on the design of her own sepulchral monument as a multilayered work and testament to her life. Moreover, the monument seems to be carrying on a dialogue with the sepulchral monuments of these other two royal women, and with the monuments they erected for members of their families: The sepulchral monument of Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (1120–1204), Berengaria's mother-in-law; and the monument of Thibault III, which her sister Blanche of Navarre had commissioned for her husband in 1201 (Fig. 3). 10

Furthermore, mention should be made of the tomb of Margaret of Navarre, the paternal aunt of Berengaria and Blanche of Navarre. Margaret was the consort of King William I of Sicily, Queen of Sicily and mother of William II. She had played an important role as the dowager regent until her son assumed the throne in 1166. Upon her death in 1188 she was buried in a royal sarcophagus in the cathedral of Monreale, which she had founded together with her son.¹¹

Berengaria – Major Stations in her Life up to the Death of Richard the Lionheart Berengaria was the daughter of King Sancho V El Sabio of Navarre (1150–1194). Her date of birth is not known, but it is assumed that she was born in the mid-1170s. Sancho V was





O Rescal Jacquinor BMWR Troves

Fig. 3: The sepulchral monument of Thibault III, commissioned by his wife Blanche of Navarre

widowed very early. He never remarried, a fact noted by the chroniclers due to its rarity — a king in his early 50s who had remained grieving for his dead wife. ¹⁴ The heir to his throne was Berengaria's brother, Sancho VI. ¹⁵

In 1191, Berengaria was to be wedded to Richard the Lionheart (assuming that she was born in the mid-1170s, she would have been about 15). This political wedding was intended to form an alliance between the Plantagenets, Richard and his mother Eleanor of Aquitaine, and the kings of Navarre, so as to ensure the defense of Aquitaine's southern border. In 1191, the 69-year-old Eleanor escorted Berengaria to her nuptials, on the long journey to Messina, Sicily, where Richard was camped en route to the crusade.

John Gillingham and Jean Flori¹⁶ offer the view that Richard was probably a homosexual, and might have had a relationship with King Philip II Augustus of France, with whom he had set out on the crusade. Indeed, one of the chroniclers tells that a hermit came to Richard and told him that he must repent and cleanse himself before Berengaria arrived; and so he did.¹⁷

Berengaria arrived with Eleanor of Aquitaine to find a complex political situation in Sicily. Richard's sister, Joanna, the widow of William II ("The Good"), the Norman king of Sicily who had died in 1189, was being held hostage by Tancred. Richard was called upon to free his sister. He also demanded the return of her property (her furniture and gold dinnerware service). Following their meeting, Richard left for the Holy Land and the two sisters-in-law, Berengaria and Joanna, almost the same age, set out after him. It is said that they grew close, constantly in conversation "like doves in a cage". Margaret of Navarre, Joanna's mother-in-law and Berengaria's aunt, had died just a year before in 1188; while Eleanor of Aquitaine was both the future mother-in-law of Berengaria and Joanna's mother, and this probably played a role in

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the development of their friendship. Fate then took a hand and the two were shipwrecked in a storm off Cyprus and taken captive. Richard arrived in hot pursuit, conquered Cyprus and, while there, the Norman bishop of Rouen performed his marriage to Berengaria. Some historians have argued that Berengaria then traveled to Acre and later returned to Rome.²⁰

Such lack of information is particularly striking in regard to Richard's capture and imprisonment by the Austrian duke on his return from the crusade in 1193. There is ample documentation of the great efforts made by his mother, Eleanor, in order to arrange his ransom: the letters she wrote to the Pope, the fortune she raised in ransom and, finally, her journey in the winter of 1193/4 to receive her liberated son in Cologne.²¹ Berengaria is not heard of throughout this period, and there is only slight information on her trip back to France with Joanna; of the places where she may have lived when she departed from Joanna,²² who married Count Raymond of Toulouse in 1196; and why she did not take part in the efforts to release Richard.²³ Descriptions of Richard's second coronation in Winchester in 1194 after his release also mention only the presence of his mother, Eleanor, seated in the north transept of the cathedral.²⁴ There is one indirect mention of a possible meeting between Berengaria and Richard. Even on his deathbed, however, Richard called only for his mother to come to Chalus.²⁵

We hear of Berengaria again only after Richard's death, and even then her status remained problematic until Eleanor's death in 1204. Berengaria did not receive the lands or allowance rightfully due to her as Dowager Queen of England. All these remained the property of Eleanor and of Isabel of Angoulême, the queen of John Lackland, the new English king.

Berengaria's condition was so grave that she went to live with her sister Blanche of Navarre, who had become Countess of Champagne in 1199.²⁶ It has been suggested that Blanche's marriage was arranged by Berengaria, her older sister, during Richard's funeral in 1199.²⁷ Blanche was herself widowed in 1201, when her husband, Thibault III, fell ill and died while preparing to lead the Fourth Crusade. At that point, Blanche became Countess-regent of Champagne. She bore two children: a girl in 1200 and a son, Thibault IV, born after her husband's death. The two widowed princesses lived together²⁸ until 1204, when, following Eleanor's death, Berengaria was given the city of Le Mans by Philip Augustus in return for waiving her rights to lands in Normandy and other regions.²⁹ She became the Lady of Le Mans, where she lived and ruled until her death.

Her life in Le Mans, residing in the traditional palace of the Counts of Anjou and Maine, is recorded as one of various conflicts with the ecclesiastical authorities and a constant debate with the King of England over her right to her dowry, with repeated appeals to the king, the Bishop of Winchester and the Pope for support. ³⁰

The two sisters continued to maintain contact throughout their lives, particularly by connections through various courtiers (mostly Spanish).³¹ They were also close to their cousin, Blanche of Castile, who married Louis in 1200 and in 1223 became Queen of France, when he was crowned Louis VIII.

Berengaria's choice to be buried in the Cistercian abbey that she had founded highlights the similar conception she shared with her sister, Blanche of Navarre, who had founded the

Cistercian monastery of Argensolle and was buried there,³² and her cousin, Blanche of Castile, who had founded the Cistercian monastery of Maubisson and was buried there.³³

The Interrelationships of the Three Spanish Princesses and Eleanor of Aquitaine

I believe that, despite the scant evidence, these three Spanish princesses maintained strong ties throughout their lives, reflecting not only family relations, but also similar perceptions borne out of familial conditions and an affinity to the courts of their homeland. The close relationship between Blanche of Castile and Berengaria is evident in documents of 1228-1230 describing the arrival of Blanche and her son Louis in Berengaria's region in 1228 and the financial assistance they provided to help her buy lands for the Cistercian monastery at l'Epau she meant to found and which she planned also as her burial place. ³⁴ Moreover, the two cousins seem also to have shared common memories of their youth traveling with Eleanor of Aquitaine, who had accompanied each of them in turn on her journey to meet and wed her future royal husband. In 1191 Eleanor had accompanied Berengaria from France to Sicily, to her wedding with Richard the Lionheart. This journey is documented: we hear how Eleanor, 69 years old, arrived with the 15year-old Berengaria in Pisa, from where they set sail to Brindisi, where Richard's boats awaited to take them to Sicily. 35 This was not Eleanor's first visit to Sicily, having visited it before on her return from the Holy Land in 1149, when she had been a guest of King Roger II of Sicily. Nine years later, ca. 1200, Eleanor of Aquitaine, then 78 years old, traveled to her daughter, Queen Eleanor of Castile, in order to choose one of her granddaughters as a bride for Louis VIII. We are told that she arrived at the court of Palencia, where she chose Blanca as the future Queen of France. She then accompanied the 12-year-old Blanche (Blanca), from Burgos or Palencia, to bring her as a future bride to Louis VIII, in an attempt to reconcile between Philip II Augustus of France, and her son, John Lackland, King of England. The chronicles relating to Eleanor's journey with Blanche include certain details: the harsh winter season, the delay in Bordeaux when Mercadier, the captain of Eleanor's guard, was murdered, the journey's continuation and, finally, Eleanor's retirement to Fontevrault, leaving Blanche to complete the journey with the Bishop of Bordeaux.³⁶

The chronicles do not record Eleanor's relationships with each of the young women whom she had escorted on the long journeys. It is none the less plausible to assume that the journey with Eleanor must have left its mark on both young women at the time. Eleanor is described in various chronicles as a "matchless woman, beautiful and chaste, powerful and modest" and very impressive despite her advanced age. The princesses surely developed their own dialogue with her.³⁷

In addition, Thibault III, Blanche's husband, was also Eleanor's grandson, son of Henri le Libéral³⁸ and Marie of Champagne, Eleanor's daughter with King Louis VII of France.³⁹ Thus, the legendary Eleanor and the dramatic episodes of her life in all probability were important to the young ladies. Eleanor's relationship with Berengaria after Richard's death has not been recorded, a fact which raises some questions.

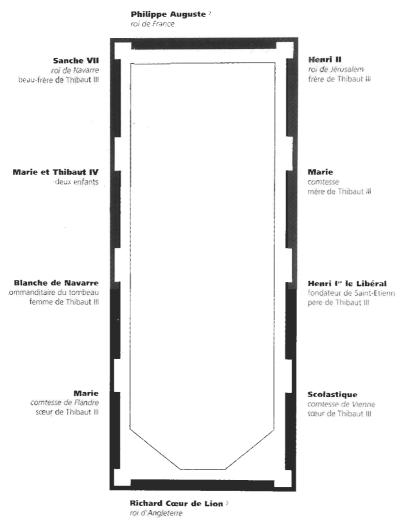


Fig. 4: The plan of the sepulchral monument of Thibault III – schematic drawing

I believe that Eleanor was an important personality if not a role-model for the three Spanish princesses. ⁴⁰ Thus, when each of the three became widowed, they showed no wish to remarry. Berengaria was widowed in 1199, upon Richard's death; Blanche of Navarre was widowed in 1201, after two years of marriage to Thibault III; and Blanche of Castile was widowed in 1226, upon the death of Louis VIII, to whom she had been married 26 years and with whom she had 11 children. During these periods, endless battles – which are beyond the scope of this article ⁴¹ – were carried by Blanche of Navarre, for the county of Champagne, ⁴² by Blanche of Castile as regent of France, and by Berengaria, with the clergy in Le Mans.

A second model for widowhood of the Spanish princesses may have been their father, Sancho V who had never remarried and remained grieving for his wife.

Dialogue with the Sepulchral Monuments of Blanche of Navarre

Berengaria's tomb can be read as a correspondence with the tomb that Blanche of Navarre erected for her husband and with Eleanor of Aquitaine's tomb.

The Sepulchral Monument of Thibault III, Erected by Blanche of Navarre

The dynastic tomb which Blanche of Navarre constructed in honor of her husband, Thibault III, in the palatine church of Saint Etienne in Troyes, was a deliberate political statement. ⁴³ The tomb was destroyed during the French Revolution, but its inscriptions and forms had been copied in drawings before the Revolution. The now partly destroyed palace of the Counts of Champagne in Troyes was originally connected to the church of St. Etienne, which no longer exists. The church was established by Henri le Libéral, who was buried there. His tomb stood before the altar, and his effigy was visible through the monument's frontal arches. From the much later very detailed descriptions, we learn that the tomb beside Henri's was that of Thibault III, whose effigy was placed on the tomb, represented as a pilgrim, since he had been intending to lead a crusade before he died. The effigy is described as bearing a pilgrim's satchel across the chest, carrying a crusader's cross and with a satchel marked by another cross; a pilgrim's staff is also represented. The inscription read: "This is Henri, Thibault, your father, who built this church". 44 The figure was sculpted supine on the lid of the tomb. On its sides were depicted figures in niches, with accompanying inscriptions, including Richard the Lionheart and Philip Augustus, Thibault III's two brothers-in-law. Among the other figures were Sancho VI (Blanche of Navarre's brother) and Henry II of Champagne, as well as Blanche of Navarre, Marie of Champagne and Henri le Libéral, and Thibault's sisters, Scholastique and Marie. 45 There is an inscription above each figure. That above Blanche, who commissioned the tomb, reads: "With this tomb, Blanche, descendant of the Kings of Navarre, reveals her burning love while covering the Count." Blanche's statue with a model of the tomb in her hand, faced Henri le Libéral holding a model of the church in his (Fig. 4). 46

Blanche of Navarre had herself founded the Cistercian monastery of Argentsole, where she was buried. Her monument was executed only ca. 25 years after her death in 1230, probably at the initiative of her son, Thibault IV. It depicts her in a form similar to the figure of the Queen of Sheba at Rheims Cathedral, as Dectot has shown.⁴⁷

The Tomb of Margaret of Navarre

The tomb of Margaret of Navarre was situated in the cathedral of Monreale which she had founded together with her son in 1188. Even if Berengaria had not seen this tomb when in Sicily, she would almost certainly have been aware of it.

The Monuments of Berengaria and Eleanor of Aquitaine

Although nothing is known of Berengaria's relationship with Eleanor in her later years, it is reasonable to assume that she would have been familiar with Eleanor's tomb at Fontevrault, set beside the tombs of her husband, Henry II, and her son, Richard the Lionheart, both of



Fig. 5: Tomb monument, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Fontevrault

which were probably commissioned by Eleanor. It is not known whether she had also planned her own tomb (Fig. 5).⁴⁸ Eleanor, ⁴⁹ buried next to them, is represented holding a small open prayer book, her head entirely covered by a headdress, which has also been described as that of an older nun; her crowned head rests on a pillow; she is draped in bright clothes, and is lying on purple.

Berengaria is depicted in a totally different manner. Crowned as a young queen, with her beautiful hair shown, this representation is an extreme and bold deviation from the Eleanor model.

The object in Berengaria's hands does not seem to me to be a book, but a model of her own tomb. Representations of books were shown either open, as in Eleanor's tomb effigy, or closed and fastened with a metal clasp. Thus, the discussed object seems in fact to be a model of the very tomb on which she was laid out on the day of her death, with burning candles by her sides. This is therefore the moment of her death. Similarly, in two 13th-century manuscripts of the history of Outremer, two miniatures depict the crusader Kings Fulk and Amaury lying on their deathbeds, with candlesticks with burning candles surrounding them. Furthermore, the bronze effigy of Bishop Eurard de Fouilloy (d. 1222) in Amiens Cathedral is depicted with censing angels, acolytes with candles, and a dragon underfoot. None of the above-named, however, is depicted as a dead patron holding his own image on his deathbed.

A possible model for Berengaria's intent to depict herself as a patron could have been the figure of her sister, Blanche of Navarre, in the tomb she had constructed for her husband, as a figure holding the model of her husband's tomb. Blanche, however, is depicted as a living person. ⁵²

The double portrait of Berengaria can also be compared to much later self-portraits of women painters from 15-century manuscripts, depicted seated in front of their aisle in full figure and painting their own bust, while looking into a small mirror, 53 thus creating a relationship between the artist and her self-image.

Berengaria, patron of the Cistercian monastic foundation, holds her own portrait up toward the external world, as a declaration of her solitude and her prominent role and function in the charitable foundation.

Notes

- 1 Gillingham 1980: 157–173.
- 2. Cloulas 2004: 231-233.
- On the relocation of the tomb and the finding of female remains on the site, see the series of articles by Bouton (1963, 1964, 1969).
- The effigy of Berengaria has not received much scholarly attention and has been treated mainly in connection with the effigies at Fontevraud. See Trindade 1999: 195; Erlande-Brandenburg 1964: 484; Parsons 1997: 317–37.
- 5 Bauch 1976; Panotsky 1964.
- 6 Morganstern 2000: 110-18.
- 7 Ruiz-Domènec 1999: 39-54.
- 8 Jamison 1967: 289–344; Kronig 1993: 81–88; Bacile 2004.
- 9 Erlande-Brandenburg 1964: 484; Flori 2004.
- 10 Morganstern 2000: 110-18.
- 11 Houben 2002; Thompson 2002; Jamison 1967: 289–344; Kronig 1993: 81–88; Bacile 2004.
- 12 Chadron 1866; Trindade 1999; Gillingham 1980: 157-173.
- 13 Several chronicles mention the birth of Berengaria and her sisters. The most important of these is the chronicle entitled *De Rebus Hispaniae* written by Archbishop Rodrigo Jiménez de Rada around 1240. See Rodericus Ximenius de Rada, *De Rebus Hispaniae*: lib. v, cap. XXIV, 114. For a discussion of the other chronicles, see Trindade 1999: 32–37.
- 14 Moret y Mendi 1684–1704: IV, Bk XIX, 55. See also Trindade 1999: 47.
- 15 For Sancho VI, see especially Fortun Perez 1987; Lacarra 1971.
- 16 Flori 1999; Gillingham 1973.
- 17 Roger of Howden, *Chronica*, III, 288ff. For an English translation, see Trindade 1999: 120–121; Flori 1999: 209.
- 18 Trindade 1999: 78.
- 19 Pierre de Langtoft, Chronicle, vol. II, 1866, 47ff; see also Flori 1999: 128–129.
- 20 Trindade 1999: 110-111. See also Round 1899: 94.
- 21 Round 1899: 184–185; Cartulaire de l'Abbaye de l'Epau: no. 941.
- 22 Roger of Howden, Chronica, III, 288; Flori 1999: 209.
- 23 On Richard's captivity and Eleanor's efforts to release him, see Gillingham 1973; Flori 1999: 200–205.
- 24 Roger of Howden, Chronica, III, 247ff. See also Trindade 1999: 112-113.
- 25 Trindade 1999: 132–133.
- 26 Ibid., 144.
- 27 On the documents concerning the wedding, see Teulet 1863: I, doc. 489, 200, doc. 497, 204.
- 28 Cloulas 2000: 90-91.
- 29 DelisIe 1856: no. 805; Delaborde 1916: 416, no. 837; Cloulas 2000.
- 30 Crawford 1994: 42-47.
- 31 Among Berengaria's retinue we find for example, a 'Garcia' who served at St. Quiriace in Provins. See: Trindade 1999: 149.
- 32 Dectot 2004: 14.

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- 33 Ruiz-Domenec 1999: 39-54.
- 34 Trindade 1999: 183-184.
- 35 Stubbs 1864; Ambroise (trans. in Stone 1939).
- 36 Aurell 2005: 149.
- 37 Ibid.
- 38 Bur 1999: 6-7.
- 39 Queruel 1996: 53-63.
- 40 Aurell 2005; Labande 1986: 101-112.
- 41 For bibliography, see: Ruiz-Domenec 1999.
- 42 Evergates 1993: 51, 140, 142.
- 43 On the Counts of Champagne in general, see D'Arbois de Jubainville, Histoire; Idem, Catalogue.
- 44 Dectot 1998; idem 1999; idem 2004.
- 45 Dectot 1999: 28.
- 46 Idem, Blanche of Castile also chose to found a Cistercian nunnery and to be buried there. She had constructed the tonib for her husband, Louis VIII, but wished to be buried elsewhere. Berengaria could have been buried at Fontevrault, where the Plantagenets are buried, next to her husband Richard the Lionheart. But she, too, wished to be buried elsewhere, at Le Mans. These women clearly made a considered choice not only to live alone but to be buried alone, not alongside their spouses.
- 47 Idem 2005: 88.
- 48 Erlande-Brandenburg 1964.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Folda 1976: figs 109, 160.
- 51 Boase 1972: fig. 56.
- 52 Dectot 2004: fig. 24.
- 53 Bocaccio, Cleres: f. 101v; idem, renommées: f. 100v.

Photos: B. Z. Kedar

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