

The Duchess of Burgundy and Regent Alix of Vergy in the Light of Her Documents and Correspondence



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ABSTRACT

Submitted article focuses on the analysis of preserved documents and correspondence of the Duchess of Burgundy Alix of Vergy. The article surveys especially on the political pursuit of the duchess during her regency just on the basis of this kind of sources. The article analyzes individual documents and letters and subsequently reflects in them the events of the time period and the personality of the Duchess of Burgundy. In the first part are briefly outlined comprehensive historiography about history of Burgundy and current state of research in this topic. Also are outlined the life events of Alix of Vergy from being the wife of Odo III., through being the regent up to the position of mother of the ruling Duke of Burgundy. In the second and the main part the article deals with the analysis of documents and correspondence of Alix of Vergy during her regnancy. The article on the basis of the source reconstructs the extent of her political power, independence and free decision-making throughout her reign.

KEYWORDS

Alix of Vergy; duchess of Burgundy; Burgundy; France; medieval noblewoman; charters; letters

Women in the medieval age are a very popular topic today, which is viewed from various perspectives and which many monographs, studies and expert articles are devoted to. I would like to use this text to discuss the figure of the Duchess of Burgundy and Regent Alix of Vergy, who lived in the first half of the 13th century, and the documents she issued and her correspondence. I would particularly like to point out the information these sources can provide, not only about her policies, but also about herself — about her actual powers, standing in society or her own self-representation. In this article I will focus on part of the surviving correspondence and particularly the documents she issued in her position as regent and which are related to the policies of the Duchy of Burgundy, both internal and external. I was chiefly able to use these sources to deduct her political goals and priorities, her position of power and her ability to handle difficult situations. The documents and letters are sources with an unusually high evidential value and retain their authenticity. Following care-

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ful and critical analysis, these sources can be used to derive many conclusions and interesting contexts.

The Duchess issued a significant number of documents and wrote a significant number of letters during her life, which were related to various topics. We can find documents discussing cultural matters — various donations or gifts to church houses are frequent. In addition to these more spiritual and cultural matters, there are also documents concerning her political activities and correspondence with other noblemen in the country. The circumstances under which Alix issued them are also significant — whether they are from the time when she was the wife of the Duke of Burgundy, from the time of her regency or after she handed over power to her son and partially withdrew from public life. Over sixty examples of correspondence and documents by Alix of Vergy, of various characters and from various time periods, have survived. The biggest group of surviving documents and letters is from the time of her regency, which is logical. Her efforts to establish contact with other important figures and noblemen in the region and kingdom are particularly evident in her personal correspondence — this mainly concerned Countess Blanche of Navarre and her son Count Thibault of Champagne. Alix was reinforcing her position and she also had to quickly resolve the disputes that arose following Odo's death and which erupted between the Duchess and the town of Dijon. The surviving sources are of various natures in many aspects. On one hand there are politically orientated formal letters and documents, and then simple donations, the granting of privileges and confirmations with a less formal structure, sales agreements, settlements of disputes and notifications on the other hand. The style of these documents changes slightly depending on how serious the topic was. Private letters to other members of the nobility were frequently of higher quality than documents of a public nature for instance, which were much less elaborate. The geographical areas of Alix's interests can also be traced from the surviving sources.

Documents that are somewhere between a public document and an open letter can frequently be encountered in France. The source is in the form of a document, but is addressed to someone (the public, barons, knights), it may discuss individual less important topics or contain notification of important circumstances. Alix issued a significant number of such documents and they could best be called a *public letter*. Alix used these public letters with a seal affixed to frequently notify a specific group of her final decision in a specific matter, whether this concerned a dispute, a transaction that had taken place or donations. The majority of these documents and public letters bear her own personal seal, as a symbol of importance and her position of power.

Contemporary historic science pays practically no attention to the person of Duchess Alix. There is no comprehensive monograph about her. With regard to the lack of interest by researchers about her person, only the surviving sources can be used to derive information. The history of Burgundy is a traditional topic of French historiography in general. Alix is usually briefly and inadequately mentioned in chapters that concern her husband Duke Odo III, or her son Hugo IV, but even then the situation is not simple, because there is also no monograph about Hugo IV himself, and his figure is always mentioned simply in a broader context, which complexly concerns the history of Burgundy or its shorter periods. A short work by Francose Etiévant titled *Eudes*



III Duc de Bourgogne,² was devoted to her husband in the nineteen eighties and was even republished at the beginning of the millennium. The monograph mainly discusses the person of the Duke and his involvement in the conflict between the French and English kings. However, there is no complaint possible against the number of works published about Burgundy. These cover general political history and also culture and the church. Because no monograph has been published about Alix and she is not mentioned very often in more extensive monographs, there is no other option but to derive information from available sources after these have undergone sufficient criticism.

With regard to essays in magazines, there are two expert articles available. One is older and the other is significantly newer. The first older and much shorter essay is by French historian Genevieve Moingeon-Perret and is simply titled — *Alix de Vergy. Duchesse de Bourgogne*.³ The second, recently published article is from the *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* by Sylvain Demarthe and bears the title — *Alix de Vergy et l'architecture religieuse en Bourgogne dans la première moitié du XIII^e siècle*.⁴ As is evident from the title, this essay discusses Alix of Vergy in relation to church architecture in the region of Burgundy during the first half of the thirteenth century. The article points out that many important church buildings were built and also renovated during the Duchess's regency and also after she had completed it.

The situation regarding works that are about the history of Burgundy in general or at least about selected issues is considerably better. A number of older and newer works that are substantiated by high-quality sources can be found on this topic. Many fundamental monographs are chiefly devoted to the history of Burgundy during the 14th and 15th centuries and then also to the individual figures of great dukes.⁵ The majority of these works are written in French, English-speaking authors are in the minority. Both extensive monographic works and also shorter essays can be found. One of the older works consists of several volumes by Maurice Chaume dating from the period between 1925 and 1931 and discusses the origin of the Duchy of Burgundy in the geographic, political and economic contexts. His work, titled *Les origines du duché de Bourgogne*⁶, is an excellent work providing the reasons for the origin of this geo-political formation. Older magazine essays such as *Etude sur l'administration de la justice dans la région bourguignonne de la fin du X^e au début de XIII^e* published in *Revue Historique* can also be taken into consideration.⁷ I would also like to mention the excellent historian Jean Richard whose great syntheses about Burgundy, written around the middle of the previous century, remain a basis for studies of the history of this region and whose

2 F. ÉTIEVANT, *Eudes III Duc de Bourgogne*. Les Éditions du Bien Public. 1987.

3 G. MOINGEON-PERRET, *Alix de Vergy. Duchesse de Bourgogne*. Mémoires de la Société d'archéologie de Beaune (Côte-d'Or) 56 (1971–1972). p. 111–115.

4 S. DEMARTHE, *Alix de Vergy et l'architecture religieuse en Bourgogne dans la première moitié du xiii^e siècle*. In: *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre | BUCEMA 19.2 | 2015* <https://cem.revues.org/14260> 14. 9. 2016

5 For instance F. AUTRAND, *Charles V le Sage*. Paris. 1994. B. SCHNERB, *L'État bourguignon 1363–1477*, Paris. 1999. R. VAUGHAN, *Charles the Bold. The Last Valois Duce of Burgundy*, London 1972; R. VAUGHAN, *Valois Burgundy*, London. 1975.

6 M. CHAUME, *Les origines du duché de Bourgogne*, 4 vol. Dijon 1925–1931.

7 F.L. GANSHOF, *Etude sur l'administration de la justice dans la région bourguignonne de la fin du xe au début de xiii^e*. In: *Revue historique*. CXXXV (1920). S. 193–218.



works are frequently used as a basis by many modern-day historians. The older of his works was published in 1954 in Paris and is titled *Les ducs de Bourgogne et la formation du duché du XI^e au XIV^e siècles*.⁸ This work is based on thorough analysis of sources and their criticism, and provides exhaustive information about the origin and formation of the Duchy of Burgundy. The second of Richard's works is conceived complexly but is shorter and is titled *Histoire de la Bourgogne*⁹ and the author discusses the historic development of this region in the text. Even though mainly French speaking historians are interested in the history of Burgundy, we can also find an excellent work concerning the history of Burgundy among Czech specialist publications. The monograph discusses this topic from a completely different perspective. The author of the work titled *Dějiny Burgundska — Nomen Burgundiae ve středověku*¹⁰ is historian Václav Drška. His work is based on careful study and analysis of sources from other period works. The author's goal was not a simple chronological description of developments in a specific region, but to endeavour to map the transformations of the term *Nomen Burgundiae* throughout the medieval ages. The geographical changes and also the development and importance of the words *Burgundy* and *Burgundians* over the centuries is pivotal for this author. In the Czech environment professor Martin Nejedlý also discusses this topic in his work titled *Pohleďte do zrcadla!*,¹¹ which discusses the culture of the court of Burgundy during the High Gothic period. The last monograph that I would like to mention concerns the important topic of the relationship between the church and the nobility in the territory of Burgundy and is titled *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980–1198*.¹² The author of this work is an American historian and specialist in medieval history, who is chiefly interested in the religious history of France between the sixth and thirteenth centuries, Constance Brittain Bouchard. In her work she discusses relationships between the leading figures of the church in this location and local representatives of the secular society, chiefly the noblemen.

I consider it appropriate to mention some of the many works published on the topic of women in the medieval ages. A general work by German historian and archivist Edith Ennen, with the simple title of *Women in the Mediaeval Age*¹³ has been published. Ennen divided her monograph into three sections by period — the early medieval period, the high and late medieval periods. She compares the position of women from the Germanic tribes, through women in court society, townswomen, women living in the country and church women, to the concept of women in politics. There is also an edition of essays assembled by historian Theodore Evergates, titled *Aristocratic women in medieval France*, which is worth attention.¹⁴ This com-

8 J. RICHARD, *Les ducs de Bourgogne et la formation du duché du XI^e au XIV^e siècles*, Dijon 1954.

9 J. RICHARD, *Histoire de la Bourgogne*, Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1957.

10 V. DRŠKA, *Dějiny Burgundska — Nomen Burgundiae ve středověku*, České Budějovice 2011.

11 M. NEJEDLÝ, *Pohleďte do zrcadla! — čtyři příběhy o autorech a čtenářích pramenů pozdního středověku*, Praha 2016.

12 C. B. BOUCHARD, *Sword, Miter, and Cloister: Nobility and the Church in Burgundy, 980–1198*, Cornell University Press. 1987, reprint 2009.

13 E. ENNEN, *Ženy ve středověku*, Praha 2001.

14 T. EVERGATES, *Aristocratic women in medieval France*. Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania Press 1999.



pilation contains essays about individual historic figures, such as Adele of Blois, and also more general works focusing on the standing of women and their rule in specific areas, for instance in Champagne, Aquitania or Flanders. Another no less interesting work is a newer compilation dating from 2012, which was published by the *University of St. Andrews*. The editors of this work are two historians interested in medieval society Joëlle Rollo-Koster and Kathryn L. Reyerson. This interesting and contributive work is titled *For the salvation of my soul: women and wills in medieval and early modern France*¹⁵ and discusses the issue of the social standing of women in France from the 12th century to approximately the 17th century. This compilation contains interesting essays concerning the general rights of women, their rights of inheritance or wills.

There is no separate edition of sources regarding Alix, but her documents and letters can be found in various editions devoted to the history of the region of Burgundy. The oldest work of this type was assembled by André Duchesne. It is devoted to the genealogy of the Dukes of Burgundy — *Histoire généalogique des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de France*.¹⁶ The second concerns Vergy itself — *Histoire généalogique de la maison de Vergy* and *Preuves de l'histoire de la maison de Vergy*.¹⁷ Another older collection of sources was published by Benedictine Urbain Plancher in his *Histoire générale et particulière de Bourgogne*.¹⁸ The two-part edition by Alexander Teulet titled *Layettes du Trésor des Chartes*¹⁹ and the collection of sources by archivist Joseph François — Garniera *Chartes de Communes et d'affranchissement en Bourgogne*, are also excellent compilations of archive sources regarding the more ancient history of the Burgundy region.²⁰ However, the edition of sources by French historian Ernest Petit is pivotal. Works by this author that I would like to name are *Chartes, manuscrits, autographes, documents historiques sur la Bourgogne*,²¹ published between 1886 — 1888. His masterpiece is an extensive work titled *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne de la race capétienne*.²² The published *The Cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne* is also an important

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- 15 J. ROLLO-KOSTER, K.L. REYERSON, *For the salvation of my soul: women and wills in medieval and early modern France*. St. Andrews. Centre for French History and Culture of the University of St. Andrews 2012.
- 16 A. DUCHESNE, *Histoire genealogique des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de France*, Paris 1628. *Histoire des rois, ducs, et comtes de Bourgogne et d'Arles: Histoire genealogique des ducs de Bourgogne de la maison de France*, Paris. 1616. rééd. 1619. rééd. 1628.
- 17 A. DUCHESNE, *Histoire généalogique de la maison de Vergy/Grande histoire de maison de Vergy*, Paris 1625. A. Duchesne, *Preuves de l'histoire de la maison de Vergy*, Paris 1625.
- 18 U. PLANCHER, *Histoire générale et particulière de Bourgogne, avec des notes, des dissertations et les preuves justificatives*, Dijon 1739 -1781.
- 19 A. TEULET, *Layettes du Trésor des Chartes*. Tome premier [De l'année 755 à l'année 1223], Paris 1863. A. TEULET, *Layettes du Trésor des chartes*. Tome deuxième [De l'année 1224 à l'année 1246]. Paris 1866.
- 20 J. Fr. GARNIER, *Chartes de Communes et d'affranchissement en Bourgogne*, Dijon 1867–1877.
- 21 E. PETIT, *Chartes, manuscrits, autographes, documents historiques sur la Bourgogne, faisant partie d'une collection particulière*, Dijon 1886.
- 22 E. PETIT, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne de la race capétienne, avec des documents inédits et des pièces justificatives*, Paris 1885 — 1905. E. PETIT, *Histoire generale des ducs de bourgogne/ Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne de la race capétienne*, Dijon 1885–1905.



and valuable source²³ This was edited by Theodor Evergates and was published by the publishing house of the University of Toronto six years ago. It contains correspondence between Duchess Alix and the Countess of Champagne for example. A complete collection of her charters and correspondence can be found on the Columbia's University website.²⁴

The family that Alix comes from also has a long and complicated history. The first known Lord of Vergy was a certain Guérin, the brother of Saint Leodegar. Guérin himself reputedly died a martyr's death when he was allegedly stoned near a rocky promontory in Vergy, on the site where a castle was subsequently built. The noble line of the Lords of Vergy, who were also the counts of Chalon, Macon and Auverge, originated during the ninth century. We do not know much about Alix before she married because practically no information from this period has survived. She was most probably born in 1182 and she was the daughter of Hugo of Vergy and Gillette de Trainel. Several disputes erupted between the Lord of Vergy and the Duke of Burgundy, which nearly resulted in war between both men. The precise reason for these conflicts is not known,²⁵ but in the end both men reconciled and peace was to be guaranteed by the marriage of young Alix to the Duke of Burgundy, Odo III. Odo was a very capable man. During his father's absences he managed the Duchy as regent and after his father died in the Holy Land, it was Odo who was declared Duke before the eyes of noblemen at the St-Bénigne Cathedral in Dijon according to the old custom.²⁶ He ruled the duchy between 1192 and 1218. He did not follow an aggressive policy towards the French Crown as his father had initially done. He pursued another trend and became the faithful and loyal ally of Phillip II. Augustus, mainly in the kings wars against John Lackland and Emperor Otto IV. He courageously fought alongside his king in the battle of Bouvines in 1214, which was won by the French.²⁷ He then fought with the Cathars and endeavoured to eliminate hereticism in the south of France.²⁸ Alix was his second wife and she provided the Duke with his heir, the subsequent Hugo IV. The couple also had three daughters. Odo II subsequently decided to take up the cross. However, he unexpectedly died in 1218 during his journey to the Holy Land, leaving behind his wife Alix and his minor son, who was approximately five years old at the time, in the duchy of Burgundy. Alix then very competently ruled Burgundy as regent for many years, she participated in political negotiations, handled disputes of power and economic situations. She ruled very judiciously and maintained Burgundy in the position of respected and powerful land for her son. In his will, which he wrote before he departed on his crusade, the Duke appointed two men to oversee his son and wife and provide them with advice — William of Champagne, Archbishop of Reims and

23 T. EVERGATES, *The Cartulary of Countess Blanche of Champagne*. University of Toronto Press. 2010.

24 <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/woman/168.html> 15. 12. 2017

25 RICHARD, *Les ducs de Bourgogne*, p. 296.

26 Fr. ÉTIEVANT, *Eudes III Duc de Bourgogne*. Les Éditions du Bien Public. 1987. p. 7.

27 M. BARBER, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*. Pearson Education Limited. 2000. p. 110.

28 BARBER, *The Cathar*, p. 110.



Robert of Auvergne, Bishop of Clermont.²⁹ He basically appointed advisors that were to help the Duchess manage the territory. However, the sources I had available do not indicate that this actually took place. These two men are not mentioned in practically any sources and they do not appear in the list of witnesses or in the text of issued documents. The witnesses were usually people close to the Duchess, important noblemen or her brother, the Seneschal of Burgundy, but the two advisors appointed in the will do not appear as witnesses at all.³⁰ It was probable that the Duchess did not adhere to the will too closely. Alix was capable of making her own decisions and probably did not require advice from these two men very much or at all. One of the possible reasons for this is that both Clermont and Reims were distant from the Duchess's seat in Dijon. Furthermore, the Archbishop of Reims had many other duties as a result of his office, which took up much of time. The new Burgundy regent's independence also played a role. William of Vergy³¹ appeared most frequently as a witness, because, as the as the Seneschal of Burgundy and the Duchess's brother, he probably provided more support to Alix than the aforementioned church advisors appointed by Odo for example. William occasionally appears as a witness, so we can infer that he remained close to his sister. Many noblemen from Burgundy, who appeared quite frequently, were also named in the lists of witnesses on documents — Reynald of Choiseul, Vitus of Saulx, John of Chateaufort, the Magnate of Dijon, or Lambert of Chatillon, Pons and Odo of Grancey, Guido of Til, Hugo of Lormes, Raynier of Chatillon.³²

The oldest public letter issued by Alix from the time of her regency, concerning political events, is dated August 1218,³³ i.e. a month after the death of Duke Odo. This concerns a very important event. The document was issued in Paris and concerns a pledge of loyalty and obligation made by Alix to the French King Phillip II. Augustus. Alix classically identifies herself in this letter as *ducissa Burgundie* and swears to her feudal lord King Phillip on "the holy relics" that she will serve him well and loyally against all who would harm him. She also states that she will not marry without the consent and will of her king. William of Vergy and also noblemen and men who appear frequently in her other documents, appear as guarantors or witnesses here. The classic formula stating that if the Duchess defies the will of the King, then these men have the full right, power and strength to defy her in defence of King Phillip, appears at the end of this document. The importance of Dijon as the largest and capital city of Burgundy is also evident in the following document, also dated August 1218,³⁴ which is closely related to her previous pledge to King Phillip, but which was issued specifically for this town. This basically concerns the same matter as in the preceding document. The Duchess Alix informs in this document that in the event that she defies the will of King Phillip, the local residents have the full right to refuse her obedience. The last

29 PETIT, *Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne de la race capétienne*, IV., p. 2.

30 GARNIER, *Chartes*, 1.31 ; *Layettes du Tresor des Chartes*, Ed. A. TEULET, Paris 1863, 1.468-69. 1305.

31 GARNIER, *Chartes*, 1.31. Specifically identified as *my brother* — *frater meus* in the document.

32 GARNIER, *Chartes*, 1.31. A. TEULET, *Layettes du Tresor* 1.468-69. 1305.

33 *Ibid.*

34 A letter from Alix of Vergy (1218, August) [Online] *Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters*. [cit. 9. 1. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1363.html>



document, which dealt with obligations and pledges towards the French royal crown at the beginning of her regency, is the public letter from September of the same year 1218.³⁵ Here Alix notifies all *amicis et fidelibus suis, baronibus, militibus, burgensibus, ser-vientibus* — all friends and loyal subjects, barons, knights, townspeople and servants, that if she breaks her pledge to the king, they are to support the king against her by all means. This therefore concerns the same matter as in the previous case. The Duchess was in Dijon at this time, because this is where the document is dated. It is evident that the regent gives herself the same standing as other vassals of the kingdom. She makes a pledge that is normally made by men, which is proof of the indisputable and respected standing in society, which she was capable of achieving and maintaining. The feudal pledge is the legal and indisputable assumption of the duchy and the king acknowledged Alix as the rightful ruler with all the rights of her husband before her.

These documents and the places they were written indicate that the Duchess was fairly mobile during the first months of her regency, she did not remain in one residence. On the contrary, she travelled not only around the duchy, but also around the French kingdom, which is proven by her visit to Paris and the court of Phillip II. Augustus.

In 1220 Alix was forced to deal with problems and conflicts with the representatives of the town of Dijon. This dispute is evidenced by several documents and public letters dated the same year. The Duchess, who wanted to fulfil the pledge made by her husband and send knights to the Holy Land, urgently required funds for realisation of this plan. She decided to acquire these funds primarily by increasing taxes, but she encountered strong resistance from the local residents. In the end she chose a diplomatic solution, she partially yielded and issued a document by which she granted Dijon certain privileges in exchange for the money she required.

The public letter dated August 1220³⁶ explains the entire situation. In this letter the Duchess states the reasons why she was forced to tax the residents of Dijon. Alix classically titles herself at the beginning of the letter as *ducissa Burgundie* — the Duchess of Burgundy, as in other documents from this period. The actual texts informs us that Odo her husband instructed her before the eyes of the barons to send one hundred knights to the Holy Land at her expense to help battle the unbelievers for the salvation of his soul.³⁷ It is clear that Odo had to have fallen ill on his journey and was probably brought back to the duchy or near it, because, according to the wording, Alix and other noblemen had the opportunity to see him. It is impossible to find out how long the Duke was ill, the sources are silent on this matter. This obligation is the reason why Alix was forced to tax the town of Dijon and probably also other areas in order to acquire the requisite funds to cover her expenses. However, this caused a lot of resentment, particularly in Dijon, which the Duchess was forced to respond to and diplomatically resolve the entire matter. Alix notifies that she will not arrest anyone from Dijon or make anyone responsible in relation to the money during her regency. Dijon

³⁵ TEULET, *Layettes du Tresor* 1.172. 1314.

³⁶ GARNIER, *Chartes de Communes*, 1.32.

³⁷ *Ego Alaydis ducissa Burgundie, omnibus notum facio quod Odo bone memorie dux Burgundie dominus et maritus meus laborans in extremis, injunxit mihi coram baronibus suis, quod ego mitterem centum milites in subsidium Terre Sancte pro anima sua cum expensis meis*



was a very important and wealthy centre, it was the seat of the Dukes of Burgundy and was able to express some resistance due to its significant economic importance and strategic position and it was not wise for the dukes to anger the local commune.

The conflict with Dijon occurred because the local residents naturally did not wish to contribute to the campaign by knights to the Holy Land, which is evident from the preceding document. Alix needed the money to fulfil her husband's wishes and so she agreed to the proposal by the representatives of the town. The second document from 1220³⁸ also deals with the same matter. In this document the Duchess pledges to the town of Dijon that until her son reaches his majority, 21 years according to the wording of the text, she will not demand anything of or draft anyone from the town of Dijon. The same prohibition also applies to her son Hugo. In the event that the regent married again, she would also not be able to draft any men or remove any tangible items from the town before her new husband pledges to protect the privileges that Dijon was granted.

As regent the Duchess also accepted pledges of loyalty from her subjects. One such document with the precise date of 10 April at the turn of 1220/1221 has survived.³⁹ In this document Alix accepted a pledge of loyalty from William of La Chapelle (today La Chapelle-du-Mont-de-France) during Easter. There is no information on the form of the pledge. It was simply stated that all the named estates would return to the possession of the Duchess and subsequently her son, if William and his wife Amelia died without issue. If the noble couple had a son or daughter, then their estates would pass smoothly to their offspring.

The joint document dated 26 August 1221, which was issued by Durand, Bishop of Chalon-sur-Saone, Alix, Duchess of Burgundy and Beatrix Countess of Chalon is also very interesting.⁴⁰ This document determines which of the three aforementioned parties had jurisdiction, power and rights in the Chalon-sur-Saone region. The document is very long and well stylised, it concerns many topics and regulates rights in the specific area. At the beginning it notifies that the authors have chosen twelve doctors who legally verified the duties and rights of the parties in this area.⁴¹ The first part deals with expansion of the local monastery by Jewish property. The next paragraph discusses division of the territory. There were to be twelve "servientes" (easements) in Chalon. Three of them belong to the bishop, three to the Duchess and three parts to Countess Beatrix, and specific viscounts have jurisdiction in the remainder. According to the document, the local monastery falls under the jurisdiction of the bishop, but both the Duchess and the Countess also have specific rights in this area, which do not affect the interior of the monastery in the event that a criminal is given refuge there. Such criminals may only be arrested if they leave the monastery. If any man comes to the town and settles with anyone who may have subjects here, this person automatically belongs to this lord. However, if the person fails to

38 GARNIER, *Chartes de Communes*, 1.31. A. DUCHESNE, *Preuves*, p. 151.

39 A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 15. 1. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1410.html>

40 A. TEULET, *Layettes du Tresor*, 1.522-23. 1465.

41 „omnibus notum facimus quod nos elegimus duodecim doctores qui, juramento prestito, nos super consuetudinibus et jure quod unusquisque nostrum habebat apud Cabilonem certifficarent.“



find such a lord within a day and a year, then he belongs to either the Duchess or the Countess. As stated above, all crimes that occur outside the monastery fall under the jurisdiction of provosts of the Duchess, the Countess, or the viscounts. The fact that all major routes over water and land belong either to the Duchess or the Countess is also acknowledged. The toll between individual parts of Chalon is also regulated. If something is announced in the town, this must comply with the consent of the bishop, the Duchess, the Countess and the viscounts. According to the document, only the Duchess, Countess and viscounts, i.e. the secular nobility, make decisions in the area surrounding the town.

During her regency the Duchess also had to devote her attention to disputes arising between individual subjects, particularly between members of the nobility in Burgundy. This concerned disagreements of various natures — disputes concerning property, estates, rights to specific commodities and similar. As regent, local ruler and supreme authority, Duchess Alix frequently settled the occurring disputes or confirmed mutual agreements. This is evident for example in the public letter dated 1227,⁴² in which Alix, in her position as Duchess of Burgundy, informs that she has taken possession of specific residences, not specified in detail, which her subject Pons of Grancey held illegally. He was probably a man who was often close to the regent, whose name appears on several other documents as witness. But in this document he is accused of illegally holding some land, particularly in Saint Benigne in Burgundy, which was also confirmed by another nobleman, Odo Ragot. In this document the Regent states that this man has no rights in this area and holds the land illegally. The land subsequently became the property of the Duchess of Burgundy. It is clear here that even though Pons was close to the Duchess for some time, he lost this status as a result of his actions. This can be given as an example that Alix was capable of changing and transforming the group of noblemen surrounding her.

In July of the same year, i.e. 1227,⁴³ a document appeared in which the Duchess approves and confirm specific freedoms for her men residing in Saint-Jean-de-Losne Castle (Saint-Jean-de-Losne is town on Saone river, 25 km southeast from Dijon). This provision was issued in compliance with the residents of the town of Talant (near Saint-Jean-de-Losne), who had previously agreed on this fact with Duke Odo III. However, the document was issued nearly ten years after Alix became regent and only then did she fulfil this pledge made by her husband. In my opinion it is illogical to assume that this would take so long without a clear reason. It is very evident that the regent wished to retain a stronger influence in this field for some time in case the situation escalated. Or she wished to refrain from completely relinquishing her rights over this area for some reason, whether this was for economic reasons or for reasons of power. At the beginning of the document the Duchess informs that she has acknowledged certain freedoms to the residents of her castle of Saint-Jean. The document continues with a list of these freedoms. For instance the residents were to choose 4 men who would have chief authority. This is followed by an interesting period record on how to deal with disputes and disagreements of various importance —

⁴² A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 15. 1. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1410.html>

⁴³ GARNIER, *Chartes* 2.7-10.

for instance if someone hits or slaps another person, he must pay a fine of five sous, but only in the event that the harmed individual cries out, if not, no fine is to be paid.⁴⁴ Saint-Jean Castle was situated not far from Dijon, as it was also specified that other customs and rights refer to Dijon, apart from fines, which the people residing in her castle are exempt from. An important point was devoted to the issue of the vineyards surrounding Dijon. The regent undertakes that if she places her patrol near Dijon, she will not disrupt the grape harvest. The regent's sense for economic matters is very evident here, as well as her guarantee of peace in an area during important agricultural work. Other instructions concern forests in the surrounding area, which belong to the Duchess. The residents of the castle are permitted free use of the forests, if this is necessary for work on the castle. People held at the castle are also to be freed. The document also states that anyone who wishes to find refuge at the castle will receive it, unless this concerns theft or murder. Residents of Saint-Jean Castle are also to be exempt from payment of most fees. Game and cattle caught in the local forests were also mentioned. A fee of six *denarios* was to be paid for each animal, two for sheep. The four chosen men had the authority to judge thieves, adulterers and murders in the castle and its surrounding area. At the end of the document the Duchess again confirms that all these provisions will also apply to her successor. It is interesting that she does not refer to her husband anywhere else in the text apart from the beginning, in spite of the fact that the entire situation was allegedly initiated by him. We can observe some discontinuity in relation to her husband's rule — Odo's rule is no longer important from the aspect of her position of power and here is no need to refer to him very much.

The Duchess also devoted attention not only to her knights, subjects, residents of her castles, nobles or townspeople. She had to come to terms with the actions of some military orders in the territory of Burgundy. This specifically concerned the Templars, which were active in Beaune (important town in Burgundy with great vineyards).⁴⁵ In a document dated 1228 the Duchess grants the commander of the knights the right to a share in an oven or stove. At the request of brother Anselm, master and lord of the Hospitallers of Beaune, Alix of Vergy granted the knights the aforementioned right to an oven with the consent of her council. On closer examination of the document it is clear that the knights were to be granted the right to use the oven that was located at Villedieu in Burgundy. They were entitled to use the oven every Tuesday for their purposes, under the condition that half the proceeds from operation of the oven on this day would go to the Templar Order but the second half would go to the duchess. According to the subsequent text, supervisors who would inspect adherence to these provisions were to be appointed. Every local dwelling was also required to pay an annual rent, which consisted of 20–40 litres of oats and twelve *denarios*. The document also contains a list of witnesses in which John, the Lord of Chateauneuf (town of Chateauneuf is located near Dijon), again appears. However the council is mentioned here for the first time. There is not a lot of information on how the council

44 „*Qui de pugno vel palma percusserit, si inde clamor exierit, quinque solidos solvet si clamor non exierit, nichil.*“

45 A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 3. 2. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1412.html>



was to function, or its form, or what powers and authorities it did or did not have. The members of the council cannot be specified in more detail, for instance whether this concerned specific noblemen from the lists of witnesses. But it is practically not mentioned anywhere apart from this single case. We can therefore state that it was most probably of a formal nature without greater authority, because the regent never actually refers to it and appears in written documents absolutely independently.

A document dated October 1231⁴⁶ has similar elements to the previous document addressed to the residents of Saint-Jean Castle — the regent also acknowledges specific rights to local residents here, this time to the town of Echevronne in Burgundy. This area was part of the dowry Alix received when she married the Duke of Burgundy. The Duchess was authorised to perform an investigation concerning the rights of the Lords of Vergy in the town of Echevronne by the Deacon of Saint-Nazaire in Autun. Autun was another important city in Burgundy. As well as organisation of the local community it was for example required that the local provost also protect the nearby forests so that they were not abused in any manner without the consent of the town's representatives. The document also states that the Lord of Vergy is entitled to use the residents of the town, for instance he may dispatch them to settle specific matters on horseback. The person who becomes the provost in Vergy must publically swear in the church before men from this town and the local noblemen and pledge that he would adhere to all the aforementioned provisions. If the provost broke his pledge, he was to be prosecuted by church justice.

During the time of her regency Alix was capable of very appropriately responding to the political situation and dealing with arising problems or disputes. She initially gave her pledge of loyalty to the French King and she devoted several documents to this topic. She dealt with the rebellion by the administrators of Dijon by making specific concessions and acquired the necessary money for fulfilling her husband's last wish. She frequently dealt with proprietary disputes between local noblemen at the time and acted as the chief authority in the region. The document issued regarding the oven for the Templars indicates that the concessions she granted also created more income for her. She was also capable of modifying organisation of local administration and rights, which is clear from the distribution of authority in the area of Chalon-sur-Saone or on the document issued for the residents of Saint-Jean Castle. She appears confidently and independently in her documents, we can only see the list of witnesses from the Burgundy nobility. She was capable of quickly becoming familiar with the affairs and the needs of the duchy, which she responded to adequately and thereby achieved her goals successfully. The Duchess did not remain in her town seats but also travelled to the court of the French King in Paris or throughout areas of Burgundy. We can also observe figures from her lists of witnesses. We know that Alix did not use the advisors appointed to her in his will by her husband, but it is difficult to conclude whether she ever created a more rigid apparatus. It seems that the people in the lists of witnesses were either her relatives, mainly her brother William, or her favourites, important aristocrats from Burgundy or noblemen staying at the court. We cannot clearly determine where the foundations of her support among the Burgundy nobility were located, noblemen from the entire Burgundy region appeared

⁴⁶ GARNIER, *Chartes*, 2.127-29. 325.



in her documents. Of course those whose estates were nearer to the Duchess's seat, i.e. Dijon, appear more frequently. Aristocrats from other parts of the Kingdom, for instance Robert of Bauvais also occasionally appear.⁴⁷ The documents on which these noblemen appear concern matters, which geographically exceed the borders of the Burgundy Duchy — and are for instance mentioned on the Paris document, which confirms Alix's pledge to King Philippe Augustus dating from 1218.⁴⁸

As a Duchess, Alix of Vergy was also required to settle various disputes not only between her noblemen, but also between members of the nobility and church institutions. Disputes were of a various nature, this particularly concerned territorial disputes or the proceeds from territories. Some documents are shorter, particularly if they concern marginal matters, and others are more extensive, it depends on the degree of conflict between both parties and its subsequent solution. It also specifically depends on the two parties opposing each other in the dispute. Whether these were two noblemen or a nobleman and an institution, for instance a monastery. This most usually concerned territorial disputes, but texts in which the subject of the dispute between a nobleman and a monastery was a specific estate or even privileges, can also be found.

During her regency the Duchess frequently issued notifications in the form of an agreement between two parties in dispute. The oldest such document dates from April 1219.⁴⁹ This concerned settlement of relations between representatives of the monastery in Citeaux and William of Mont-Saint-Jean, a nobleman from Burgundy. William occasionally appeared on other documents issued by Alix of Vergy, so we can conclude that he must have occasionally appeared in her presence. The subject of this conflict was specific groves and woods and it was therefore a territorial dispute. According to the wording of the document William had to swear to the Duchess that his men in Vergy would follow not only his orders but also the orders of the Abbot of Citeaux.

In the following document the Duchess participated in an agreement between the monks of Longuay⁵⁰ and the ducal reeve, concerning a claim that the reeve had made for hay from the area of Aignay (today town Aignay-le-Duc).⁵¹ The reeve of Aignay was entitled to take some hay from the local fields, which probably belonged to the monastery, and store it in his granaries. He appealed that he had been granted this privilege by the deceased Duke of Burgundy, however, the Duchess denies this and states that the previous duke never granted similar rights to anyone. The local monks were finally relieved of making a levy of hay to the reeve.

An important source for the subject of disputes between secular and church authorities is a brief letter, which the Duchess sent the mayor and the provost of Dijon and the provost of Talant.⁵² In this document the Alix mediates a dispute between the

⁴⁷ GARNIER, *Chartes*, 1.31.

⁴⁸ TEULET, *Layettes du Tresor* 1.468-69. 1305.

⁴⁹ A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 3. 2. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1373.html>

⁵⁰ Abbey is located in the Aube valley

⁵¹ A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 7. 3. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1374.html>

⁵² A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 7. 3. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1380.html>



aforementioned parties — the mayor and both provosts as one party and the monks of Saint-Seine as the other party. The letter is dated August 1219. This concerned authority over the provost's men from Dijon, who were to be made responsible for their debts and the Abbot of Saint-Seine was prepared to punish them to satisfy their creditors. However, this brief document unfortunately does not provide more information.

Saint-Seine was forced to deal with disputes fairly often, which is also proven by a public letter dated 8 March 1220.⁵³ In a slightly longer letter the Duchess informs that William and Odo of Lamarche, who were summoned to the court in relation to a specific matter with the Abbot of Saint-Seine, failed to appear on the set day, but appeared on the following day. Alix writes that both brothers and young men from Lamarche brought a dispute about the length of a fief, a specific plot of land, before her. However, the problem was in another matter. Both noblemen were summoned to have their case heard to the ducal court of Burgundy, but they failed to appear on the set date. They arrived on the following day and actually dared to state that this was the correct day they should have appeared. It is written that the Duchess herself firmly explained their error — the day they arrived was not designated for them and their case⁵⁴. In the text of this source we can observe an excellent example of the independence of the actions of the Duchess of Burgundy and Regent. Alix appears here as a powerful and indisputable authority, who does not excuse impudence against her person and her decisions. The document does not state how and whether the dispute was actually resolved and there is no document that the Duchess continued to be interested in the dispute between both men.

In another document the Duchess informs that an agreement was reached in a dispute between the monks of Citeaux and Gerard of Franxault, noblemen of Burgundy.⁵⁵ The document is dated in the town of Argille in March 1220, where Alix was staying at the time. The Cistercians and Gerard were in a dispute concerning some land, part of which was allocated by this knight to the Cistercian brothers. The dispute also concerned the tithe from the territory levied by the knight. The subject of the dispute was land and a tithe. In the end, the Duchess decided that the Cistercians would pay a specific amount to this knight and he would leave them the land. Not only the knight, but also his son and wife, as well as others present, had to agree with this decision.

More noblemen had disputes with the Cistercians of Citeaux, as is proven by period sources. In July 1221 the Duchess resolved a dispute between the local monks and the Lords of Corcelles (Corcelles-les-Citeaux).⁵⁶ The document bearing the seal of Alix was also written in Corcelles. The Duchess travelled frequently about her land, as her documents prove. The dispute erupted between the Cistercians as one party and the Lords of Corcelles, specifically two brothers Guido and Rainald. The subject of the

53 A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 7. 3. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1380.html>

54 „*Sed dictum fuit a curia mea et recordatum quod dies ilia ad quam venerant non fuit eis assignata, sed dies precedens.*“

55 A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 7. 3. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1387.html>

56 A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 16. 3. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1391.html>

dispute was a nearby forest, and the fees and rights resulting from this forest. At the end of the document the Duchess unusually mentioned her son. She wrote that the form of peace as stipulated would be strictly adhered to not only by herself as the Duchess but also by her son Hugo and other heirs.⁵⁷

The last surviving document is devoted to a similar topic and dates from 1224.⁵⁸ This time it concerned a disagreement between the monks of Fontenay and the Lord of Eschalot. The argument took place in the presence of the Duchess between the Abbot and the convent in Fontenay as one party and Arnulph, Knight of Eschalot as the other party. This again concerned forests, possession of land and pastures in the territory of Eschalot and Poiseux in Burgundy. Again the Duchess made a conciliatory decision for both parties, when she acknowledged some rights to the monks and others to the knight and new borders of both territories were determined.

Alix of Vergy was required to judge disputes between the nobility and church institutions as the supreme authority in the area of Burgundy. The subjects of disputes were mostly estates, land, or specific income. Alix usually came to a just, but conciliatory solution, which was acceptable to both parties. Her goal was to refrain from harming either of the involved parties. In one case the Duchess also refused claims to a specific privilege that the ducal reeve was to have been granted by the previous duke. Alix denied his statement with the understanding that the duke never granted such privileges to anyone. In light of these documents, the Duchess acted very thoughtfully, but authoritatively.

During the period of her direct rule over Burgundy, Alix of Vergy executed extensive correspondence with the Countess of Champagne. Some documents are of a more personal nature, others are public notifications. Alix maintained an amicable relationship with the local counts, she even politically supported Countess Blanche. Her personal letters are of a warmer and more extensive nature than her brief public notifications. Both women had something in common, which possibly prompted Alix to establish this “friendship” — both of them became regents for their minor sons. After she was widowed Blanche also had to face opposition against her position by relatives of her deceased husband for some time, but thanks to Alix’s support and assistance she managed to retain her position.

Alix maintained contact with the court of the Count of Champagne from the first year of her regency. The oldest document dating from July 1218, a public letter signed in her own hand, has survived.⁵⁹ In this document the Duchess confirms that she wishes to maintain the peace and will help the Countess and her son Thibault during the on-going conflict.⁶⁰ The conflict took place in relation to Blanche’s position

57 „Hanc autem pacis compositionem per me factam, faciemus, ego dicta ducissa et filius meus Hugo, et heredes mei, hujusce firmiter observari.“

58 A letter from Alix of Vergy [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 16. 3. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1395.html>

59 DUCHESNE, *Histoire généalogique*, p. 155. EVERGATES, *The Cartulary*, p. 169.

60 „Ego A[lix] ducissa Burgundie. Notum facio tam presentibus quam futuris quod ego promisi & tacitis sacrosanctis Evangeliiis propria manu firmavi me fore in pace cum domina Blancha comitissa Trecensi[s] palatina, & cum Theobaldo filio ejusdem comitisse Campaniae, & me eosdem adjuturam bona fide & bono animo.“



as regent of Champagne, whereas Erard of Brienne and his wife Phillipa of Champagne and her sister Alix, the titular Queen of Cyprus, opposed Blanche's position as regent for her minor son.⁶¹ The Duchess of Burgundy undertook to help Blanche against them, their claims and allies. Alix became involved in political and power-based disputes in this case, which she was certainly not frightened of. She continued her alliance with Blanche and Thibault throughout her regency and her son Hugo subsequently continued this trend. With the Duchess's support Blanche retained her position as Countess of Champagne and, three years later, in 1221, Erard and Phillipa definitively surrendered their claim to this region.⁶² Another document dating from 1221 addressed to Countess Blanche dates was written in December and the Duchess of Burgundy herself informs that she has confirmed a letter she received from Erard and Phillipa, who surrender their claims to power in the Champagne region.⁶³ There is also one more document dating from 10 April 1222, in which the Duchess confirms, at their personal request, the fact that Erard and Phillipa definitively relinquish their claims to Champagne in her presence at Molesme and the region would now fall to Blanche of Navarre and her son Thibault.⁶⁴

A very long public letter with the same date of 10 April 1222 has also survived.⁶⁵ This continues to discuss the topic of power-related disputes concerning the Champagne region. In brief, the Duchess confirms that her loyal Erard of Chacenay pledged to her loyal Blanche and Thibault that he would help the Countess, particularly against the Queen of Cyprus who opposed her. The Duchess calls Erard of Chacenay *vir nobilis amicus et fidelis noster* — a noble, our friend and loyal subject. According to the text, this man pledged on his relics that he would help her dearest and most loyal Countess Blanche literally *contra omnem creaturam* or *against all creatures*, but chiefly against the aforementioned Queen of Cyprus. It stated that he would also help her against her potential husband, if the queen married. This phrase — that this noble is to defend the Countess against the Queen of Cyprus and her husband *if she ever has a husband* — is repeated in the text three more times. The slightly insulting tone of the content is clear — it can also be considered a specific insult or mockery of the figure of the Queen of Cyprus.

Some documents concerning Champagne and the local Countess are of an extensive political and power-related nature, they discuss the issue of alliance, but there are also sources in which topics other than political conflict dominate. For example, in the public letter dated 31 May 1219 the Duchess informs that the Countess of Champagne has granted safe conduct to a certain man at the direct request of Alix of

61 „contra Erardum de Brena, & uxorem ejus Philippam & contra reginam Cypri filiam Henrici quondam comitis Campaniae & eorum heredes & coadjutores ipsorum“

62 TEULET, *Layettes du Tresor* 1.534. 1486.

63 „Alaydis ducissa Burgunidae notas facit et confirmat litteras tam Erardi de Brena, quam Philippa uxoris ejus, mense novembri, in vigilia B. Martini datas, pro quittance comitatuum Campaniae et Briae comitissae Trecensi et ejus filio ab eis facta. — “Ego igitur in horum omnium testimonium, ad petitionem [dictorum Erardi et Philippe] presentem paginam sigilli mei impressione roboratam supradictis B. comitisse et Th. nato ejus tradidi, approbans eadem, et, quantum ad me pertinet, confirmans. Actum anno gratie millesimo ducentesimo vicesimo primo, mense decembri.“

64 EVERGATES, *The Cartulary*, p. 301–302.

65 *Ibid.* p. 299–300.



Vergy herself.⁶⁶ In this letter Alix informs that Blanche of Navarre, at her request and reminders (*ad preces et instantiam nostram*), granted safe conduct as immunity against arrest to a citizen of Lyons named Ponc of Chaponnay, who was to become a member of her armed guard. This document was to remain valid until the following holy day of Saint Mary Magdalene. The information that if the Countess incurs any damages then the Duchess will endeavour to compensate her, was also appended.

A private letter to Blanche of Navarre dated June 1219 has also survived.⁶⁷ It was clear that problems soon arose in relation to Ponc the citizen of Lyons. Ponc was a very well-known merchant and trader in his period. He developed a long-scale trade with distant countries. This man also appears in the text of several subsequent letters. The Duchess informed the Countess of the results of her dispute with Ponc of Chaponnay and at the end of the letter she requests that she again grant him safe conduct. The letter is quite long. It begins *Alaydis ducissa Burgundie karissimis et fidelibus suis Blanche comitisse Trecensis palatine et Th(eobaldo) ejus filio, salutem* — *Alix, the Duchess of Burgundy greets her dear loyal Blanche, Countess of Troyes, and her son Thibault*. She then writes that the disputes that have arisen between her and the man from Lyons have been resolved in the following manner — Ponc was a vassal and loyal subject of the Duchess and if he remains loyal in the future, she will not arrest anyone from his family, his wife, or his sons or daughters. If they are arrested by another, Alix has the full right to free them. She also allows him to retain the estates he acquired under the condition that he would follow local customs. It is not absolutely clear from the text what disputes arose between both parties, but other letters indicate that Alix borrowed money from this man and this could be were the conflict began.

Another short and concise letter to Countess Blanche dates from the period of June in 2019.⁶⁸ Due to the incomplete date it is not certain which of the letters is the older. In this letter the Duchess asks the Countess and her son to act as guarantors for the debt she has towards Ponc of Chaponnay. The Duchess asks that they become a specific surety and the debtors of this man for the amount of *quingentis libris pruviniensis*, i.e. 500 pounds, which is due payable at the time of the impending markets around Saint John in Troyes. At the end of her letter she writes to Blanche that she will compensate her for these services and assistance and that she may request the same service of her at a later date. As I mentioned earlier, the Duchess was forced to pay many expenses at the beginning of her regency, whether these were connected to her husband's wish to send 100 fully armed men to the Holy Land, or with other expenses. She obtained some of the money she required by increasing taxes on Dijon for example, which led to conflict, and she was forced to borrow some money. However, Alix was able to competently overcome this initial crisis. Blanche probably always complied with the Duchess's requests out of gratitude, because the Duchess of Burgundy gave Blanche her full support in her disputes over the title of Count of Champagne.

Another letter addressed to *dear Countess Blanche*⁶⁹ is basically on the same topic. In this letter the Duchess informs that, as she requested in her previous letter, she

66 Ibid. p. 109.

67 EVERGATES, *The Cartulary*, p. 107–108.

68 Ibid. p. 110.

69 EVERGATES, *The Cartulary*, pp. 109–110.



made the Countess and her son the guarantors for her debt towards Ponc. However, it mentions a different amount — 100 gold marks and so this was probably a different loan. The due date of the owed amount was also recorded — by quarters, always at the time of the markets at Bar-sur-Aube.

In the following public letter the Duchess notifies that she has granted her protection to Ponc of Chaponnay and has provided him with a guard to Champagne and back.⁷⁰ This document is dated 2 December 1219. The Duchess informs that she has taken this man, a citizen of Lyons and Chalon, under her protection. While this man remains in Chalon-su-Saone, the Duchess will provide him with men and protection during his journey within the territory of the Countess of Champagne, which she again calls *beloved and loyal*. Alix also provided protection on his return journey, but there is no mention of the purpose of this journey or other information. The short message does not contain any detailed information from which more detailed conclusions can be derived. This probably continued to concern circumstances related to the fact that the Duchess was forced to borrow money from this man and the Countess Blanche became her guarantor.

A letter addressed to Blanche of Champagne, which is closely related to the preceding public letter, and dated 2 December 1219, has also survived.⁷¹ In a private letter the Duchess informs Blanche that she has granted safe conduct and a guard to Ponc of Champagne and asks her to do the same and pledges to compensate her for any damages incurred. Alix again calls Blanche *karrissime et fideli sue*,⁷² she sends her regards and much love (*salutem et amoris plenitudinem*). In conclusion she asks Blanche to issue Ponc with a document containing the right to free passage, similar to the one he has from her. I would like to examine the relationship between Blanche and Alix here. It may seem at first glance that a friendship had been established between the two women. They both found themselves in similar situations in their time, when they became regents for their minor sons. Blanche also had to face claims by other noblemen on the title of Count of Champagne. Alix subsequently supported her in the conflict and helped her retain her position. She managed to obtain Blanche's gratitude and in subsequent years Alix frequently used her and also her son as guarantors. From the formal aspect the letters and documents concerning Blanche are more familiar than others, but the question is whether to consider this an expression and proof of a friendship or whether this is simply a convention of the time. It is not known that these women gave each other any pledge, so Alix probably considered her relationship with Blanche to be of economic importance rather than personal.

The public letter the Duchess sent to Blanche of Navarre Countess of Champagne in April 1222 is also interesting.⁷³ It is evident how many matters the Duchess had to deal with. Alix assumes responsibility for all damages that were incurred after one of her men, who was arrested for looting and burglary by the people of Blanche of Navarre, was released. In this letter the Duchess informs the public that the Countess, again called her *dearest friend*, has released a man named Evrard at her request. Ac-

⁷⁰ Ibid. p. 109–10.

⁷¹ Ibid. p. 108–109.

⁷² *Dearest and loyal*

⁷³ EVERGATES, *The Cartulary*, p. 110. 106.

According to the letter, this man was *militem marescali mei* — or *the knight of her marshal*. The Countess allegedly held this knight for some time at Bar-sur-Aube, because he allegedly took part in the looting committed against townspeople and Peter of Cahors. In return for his release Alix promises that if this man causes any other damages to Blanche, Count Thibault, or his men and merchants in the future, she will be liable for the damages.

The debts the Duchess of Burgundy had to accrue during the initial period of her regency, in order to create sufficient capital to secure her position and fulfil pledges, is discussed in the public letter dated April 122. In this letter the Duchess records her debt of five hundred silver marks (*marchis*), which she borrowed from merchants from Siene.⁷⁴ She also named Thibault Count of Champagne her guarantor. The letter also names the persons from who she borrowed the money. She also pledges and assures the Count that she will pay her debt and possibly any other incurred damages.

The last document is a document dating from July 1227 and is easily the longest written document in this group. It was addressed to Thibault Count of Champagne and the public. The document is in the form of an agreement between the Duchess of Burgundy, her son Hugo and Thibault, to whom she pledges assistance and support in his campaign against the Count of Nevers. As a token of his support of Thibault, Hugo would not marry any woman from enemy families in the future, unless the Count agreed to such a marriage and did not mind it. In the end he married Yolanda of Dreux. Hugo appears here with his mother, but at the time he did not have his own seal or basically any political rights. The document mentions Alix and her son as Duke, however the letter chiefly concerned the issue of his marriage — *Ego Alaidis, ducissa Burgundie, et ego filius ejus, dux Burgundie*. They both declare that they have pledged assistance to Thibault of Champagne against the Count of Nevers and the term *creaturam*, which has been used before, is again used against all other beings, with the exception of the King and Queen of France and with the exception of the Duchess's noblemen and subjects. This agreement was to remain valid until her son Hugo reached the age of twenty-one years⁷⁵ — an age that Alix considered sufficiently mature for her to withdraw from political life and give her son full power over the Duchy of Burgundy. He reached this age in 1234, at this time he was roughly 14 years old. It would then be up to Hugo whether to renew this agreement or not. In this document Hugo pledged, through his mother, that he would not marry any daughter, sister or niece of their joint enemies — the text directly names their enemy as Count Robert, the Count of Bretagne, of la Marche, of Boulogne. Hugo is also not to marry any daughter of Robert of Courtenay, Enguerrand of Coucy or Guy of Chatillon. Alix and Hugo received support primarily from William of Vergy, then Anseric of Montreal, Clarembald of Chapes and Peter, the Marshal of Burgundy for the continuation of this agreement. According to this document, the Archbishop of Lyons and the Bishop of Langres were to have the power of excommunication or interdict if anyone violated this agreement. Alix had her seal affixed to the end of the document. Her son did not have a seal as yet, as is written in the text.

⁷⁴ Ibid. p. 107.

⁷⁵ „Hugo dux, filius meus, compleverit vigesimum unum annum“



Sources on this issue show that Alix helped Countess Blanche and her son retain their position of power over the Champagne region after their position was opposed by relatives of the Countess's deceased husband. Alix provided extensive assistance in promoting Blanche as the rightful countess and regent and was not frightened even by the Queen of Cyprus, who opposed the Countess in this conflict. Alix helped a woman who was in the same situation as herself, who was to be required to rule on behalf of her minor son. A seemingly friendly relationship was established between both noblewomen, which is proven by the manner that Alix used to identify Blanche in her letters. The Duchess of Burgundy was also capable of skilfully using the gratitude of the Countess of Champagne for the help she provided — in several documents the Countess and her son became guarantors for the Duchess's debts, after the Duchess required money and was forced to borrow from merchants or individuals. The letters are slightly expressive, Alix frequently calls Blanche her *dearest and most loyal friend*, but that is where the any expression of favour ends. Other sentences in the text are rather matter-of-fact and rational. The longest document in this group of documents again deals with a political topic. Alix pledges to help the Countess and her son against the Count of Nevers and his allies. As a symbol of her support, her son Hugo would not marry any woman from the enemy families. Alix managed to successfully handle power-related issues and disputes in spite of her initially difficult financial situation. She appears here again as a confident and independent ruler who is familiar with the issue and the arising situation, is capable of suitably responding to events around her and carrying out a very successful policy.

Alix was independent regent from 1218 until the turn of 1233/1234, when Hugo reached 21 years of age, which is easy to prove by the manner of his title in surviving sources. My opinion to the length of regency by Alix of Verger differs to that of previous historians, according to which her regency lasted ten years from 1218 to 1228.⁷⁶ I would place the end of her regency at the turn of 1233/1234, mainly due to my studies of the manner in which she was titled and period customs, when men were considered adult at twenty-one years of age. Until the turn of 1233 and 1234 Alix strictly titles herself *ducisa Burgundiae* — *Duchess of Burgundy* and calls herself *Alaydis, ducissa, mater ducis Burgundie* — *Duchess, mother of the Duke of Burgundy* after this period. As the Regent of Burgundy Alix was naturally involved in political events — she worked with the counts of Champagne and supported them in their dispute against the noblemen of Nevers.⁷⁷ She also acted as mediator in the conflict between Dijon and Cîteaux.⁷⁸ During her regency she was revealed to be a powerful, strong and confident woman with extensive authority. She also personally made the feudal pledge of loyalty to King Philippe Augustus.⁷⁹ From her personal correspondence and documents we can observe her interesting transformation into a strong duchess who was capable of independently ruling the entire Duchy of Burgundy. She was capable

⁷⁶ PETIT, *Histoire des ducs*, IV., p. 40.

⁷⁷ A letter from Alix of Verger [Online] Epistolae. Women Medieval Latin Letters. [cit. 20. 4. 2018] from <https://epistolae.ctl.columbia.edu/letter/1398.html>

⁷⁸ *Cartulaire de Cîteaux*. Mémoires de la Commission des Antiquités du Département de la Côte d'Or. Tome 3. Chapitre Le château de Talant. par J. GARNIER, p. 223.

⁷⁹ PETIT, *Histoire des ducs*, IV., p. 3.

and not frightened by the problems that arose, on the contrary, she was capable of effectively resolving these problems. What is more she was also involved in political events in surrounding areas and was also considerably successful in this area. She also appeared to be a competent economist, she was capable of dealing with a poor financial situation and had full control over political aspects in Burgundy. She ruled for a very long time and there is no trace of anyone attempting to remove her from power and appoint her son as duke before she herself wished it. Furthermore, she was also capable of retaining her strong position in the court of Burgundy under the rule of her son. She actually did not need to fight for her power and all her regency was remarkably untroubled. It's a very interesting topic in connection with the other regent's governments. For example, the regency of the French queen Blanche of Castille who lived in same time wasn't so easy. She was in a difficult situation due to the fact that in France was essentially a stranger, without relatives and friends. Blanche had to face many problems and one of them was even rebellion of barons. Her position was more complicated and she had to perform harder. There may be several explanations why Alix regency was without bigger problems. I think it is related to the fact that Alix was not foreign to Burgundy and had already strong familial ties with the Duchy so her regency was well accepted by the local nobility. Another factor which also had played a role was her political alliance, especially with the king of France at the beginning of her rule. But also the same elements can be found among them — their self-confidence, the influence on others, the ability to solve the complicated political situations which led to their long regency.

Documents and letters by Alix of Vergy are very emotionally distant, matter-of-fact and rational with regard to the used wording. Alix did not resort to using emotionally coloured, complicated phrases. Nor can we find any references to the Bible, which were fairly frequent at the time. This reflects her personality — she does not let herself be controlled by her emotions, but is a rationally thinking ruler who leaves emotion aside. She did not endeavour to achieve her goals by appealing to emotion, but by using logical arguments based on the specific issue and her solution. In her documents and letters Alix always very clearly and briefly outlines the situation and seeks the simplest and easiest solution. Her practicality is also reflected in the length of the texts — they are usually briefer, describe the issue and subsequently provide a solution without any unnecessary protraction. Of course she also issued extensive documents, the length of which was not the result of more stylised wording, but the extensiveness of the topic she was dealing with. In the light of these documents Alix appears to be an independent woman and ruler, with her own principles and goals. At the time of her regency she governs independently, she is completely familiar with the problems of the duchy and is capable of quickly, effectively and successfully responding to them. She managed to reinforce her position, fulfil the pledge given to her husband and send 100 armed knights to the Holy Land, resolve the conflict with Dijon and stabilise the duchy's financial situation. She became the mediator in disputes between her subjects several times and acted as a guarantor and the supreme secular authority in the region. She confidently handled power-based issues, which is apparent from several of the documents she issued, in which she mentions topics of power dominance over specific areas. In addition to this she managed to support Blanche of Navarre in the power struggle for the title of count, she also devoted her





energy to monasteries, settled disputes between her noblemen and travelled extensively. She managed to sensitively respond to the requirements of the duchy at specific times. All this made her into an unusually successful and confident regent, who gained wide-ranging respect and achieved an unusually strong and independent position. She had good judgment and was capable of effectively resolving problems, which she may have learned from Duke Odo during their twenty years of marriage. She carried out a successful power-related and cultural policy. She managed to assert herself very well in her field and, in spite of today's established concept of the subordinate standing of medieval women, she concentrated considerable political power in her hands during her independent rule over the Burgundy Duchy. Alix managed to reinforce her power over the duchy, administered and managed it well and diligently, which led to further prosperity in her lands. She also became a ruler respected by people around her and was significantly independent of other men who surrounded her. She managed to hand over the duchy to her son as a prospering and stable area. An important issue was the Duchess's actual self-representation through her documents and letters. The surviving source material indicates that Alix managed to rule the specific area independently with the same authority as men and the people around her and society evidently accepted this.

After completing her regency, Alix focused more on cultural and religious activities, but did not withdraw from political life in Burgundy completely. Particularly during the period her son left on his first crusade. She was the force behind new structures or renovations of many important church buildings, particularly between the area of Dijon and Beaune. Alix was politically and culturally active basically until her death. The last surviving document is dated 1250. Alix was buried next to her husband in the family burial grounds in the Chapel of the Dukes of the Monastery Church in Citeaux. She is probably depicted on the keystone now stored in the depositary of the local museum in Reulle-Vergy and is also one of the modern statues on the bell-tower of the Cathedral in Dijon.