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CATHERINE DE'MEDICI: THE PHILOSOPHY OF POWER

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This article is the attempt to show the main principles of Catherine's de'Medici regency. The author analyzes the full portrait of this person, with all features of her character, principles and understanding what is power.

Keywords: Catherine de'Medici, power, regency, reign, cynicism.

В данной статье представляется попытка раскрыть основные принципы регентства Екатерины Медичи. Автор анализирует особенности характера, принципы и понимание власти этого исторического персонажа.

Ключевые слова: Екатерина Медичи, власть, регентство, царствование, цинизм.

Ця стаття являє собою спробу розкрити основні принципи регентства Катерини де Медичі. Авторка аналізує особливості характеру, принципи і розуміння того, що таке влада для цього історичного персонажу.

Ключові слова: Катерина Медичі, влада, регентство, царювання, цинізм.

Catherine de'Medici played an important part in the history of sixteenth century France. Despite of all contradictory facts about her life and regency, she is still popular. The first thing that comes to our mind when we try to remember something about this famous queen is the French Wars of Religion and, moreover, the St. Bartholomew's Day massacre. Often these historical facts were contemplated by scholars and writers; furthermore the main idea of our research is not to show the well-known «cruel» queen. First of all, we will try to estimate the full portrait of this person, with all features of her character, principles and understanding what is power.

Catherine de'Medici was born in 1519, in the family of Lorenzo II de' Medici and Madeleine de La Tour d'Auvergne. Unfortunately Madeleine died of puerperal fever or plague, and Lorenzo died a week later at the age of 27, leaving her an orphan after less than one month of life [3]. Edith Sichel gives us interesting facts about Catherine. Catherine de' Medici was regent, politician, trimmer, patroness, cynic. The author emphasizes that all these features belongs not only to Catherine, but to all the epoch. She figured as a kind of villain, mysterious figure surrounded by astrologers and secret drawers of poison-bottles. We should remember that all the historical characters are victims of exaggeration, and not her own crimes were probably ascribed to her. We must remember that she kept Roman empresses as ideals before her eyes and easily adjusted their

standards to those of the cardinals around her [4]. Indifference was the dominant note of Catherine's character, entire indifference means entire cynicism. Edith Sichel suspects that Catherine de' Medici was a serious cynic because she was an unconscious one, a person who sees things as they are, never as they may be. She drove common-sense to its absolute conclusion and judged every issue by its standards [4].

Her indifference did not betray itself socially. She was brilliant, acutely alive. She had French wit and Italian verve in conversation, and she must have known how to amuse, or she would not, in the early days of her marriage, have been the constant companion of François I. Her wit, salt and shrewd, was of the broad colloquial kind, well suited to cheer a jaded monarch. She understood how to laugh, not often, but aptly. Her power lay not so much in what she did as in her science of doing. She knew the right moment for laughing, and for weeping. For Catherine was, if we may say so, immensely feminine, and none grasped better than she that a woman's strength is in weakness [4]. Moral indifference had possession of Catherine's nature, but one desire was hers, by no means a moral one, which governed her quite as potently as her apathy and perhaps with more obvious effect. All her actions have ever been ruled and guided by a most powerful desire – the desire to reign [4]. But we remember that Catherine de' Medici was never able to rule France as its monarch because the Salic Law restricted the succession solely to men. But this Machiavellian – whose father was Machiavelli's patron – ruled it as regent for nearly 30 years, and did everything she could to strengthen the position of her three weak sons on its throne. Catherine's desire for domination over her children began to transform into the desire for political control as well. Catherine feared that the weakness of François II could bring down the Valois monarchy [2].

Therefore, she became convinced that both François and France needed her guidance. With a little luck and a lot of cunning, Catherine de' Medici was able to preserve peace in the kingdom by assuring the Bourbons and Montmorency that she retained control of her son. François II reigned for only a year before dying of a cold, and the weakened monarchy faced a new threat. François was succeeded by his brother, Charles IX, who was only ten years old at the time [1]. Having learned from her mistake with François II, Catherine de' Medici immediately claimed the Regency for herself. Although tradition gave that right to the King of Navarre, Antoine de Bourbon, he was too weak to oppose her and the Regency was made official. Charles would rule for fourteen years, but in reality he was never able to fully shake off the firm hand of his mother, who rationalized her calculating manipulations of her children by working to preserve their crown, which required keeping a balance between the Guise and Bourbons [1]. Catherine sought total control over her children. She preferred to have them in sight whenever possible and laid down very strict rules of behavior for them to follow. However, Catherine desired the love of her children as much as she desired their obedience. She was a mother who doted on her children, and was always ready to sacrifice her own repose, nay, even her life, for their happiness [1].

Raised in constantly shifting locations between Rome and Florence, Catherine had to learn self-reliance and develop inner strength. Catherine often found herself a sort of political prisoner of the enemies of the Medici and an instrument of the Medici's dynastic ambitions. Thus, she had little reason to love her Medici relations, but she did learn from them. From the ruthless Medici, Catherine learned the importance of using her children as pawns for dynastic and political gain and she learned it well [1]. Being a lifelong Catholic but always with a degree of religious cynicism, Catherine appears never to have understood the passion with which many of her contemporaries lived their religious lives. For her, religious differences seemed at first to be bargaining chips in court intrigues, which might be smoothed away by tactful diplomacy [2]. Catherine remained politically active until the end of her life, touring France on Henry's behalf and trying to assure the loyalty of its many fractured and war-torn provinces. She also amassed a huge collection of books and paintings, built or enlarged some of Paris' finest buildings, including the Tuileries Palace, and carried on to the end her fascination with astrology [2].

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