

LOUISE DE KERALIO READS THE BIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES V WRITTEN BY CHRISTINE DE PIZAN: A COMPARISON OF TWO FEMALE INTELLECTUALS WHO LIVED FOUR CENTURIES APART

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ABSTRACT

A few years before the French Revolution, Louise de Keralio (1758-1822) set to work on the challenging task of compiling a collection of the best French writings by women. A great deal of space in the collection was devoted to Christine de Pizan (1365-1431) the first lay female professional intellectual. This essay will focus on Louise's assessment of Christine's historical work in her biography of Charles V (*Le Livre des fais et bonnes meurs du sage roy Charles V*). In her assessment, Louise argues that historical work is a particularly difficult genre and she describes Christine's writing style as effective and pleasant but criticises her omissions and inaccuracies. Louise recognises that Christine has been much used as a source, often as a primary source, and has frequently not been cited as such. She does not ignore the difficulties which Christine encountered as a woman in her scholarly work but appears to attach little importance to these. Louise argues that Christine could have done better, even in the specific and difficult field of historical study. Important here is the fact that such a major work, carried out at the request of the king's brother with the intention of preserving his memory for posterity, had been commissioned from a woman. This alone should have acted as a brake on Louise's criticisms but despite this, she does not hesitate to find Christine lacking in aspects of her work which would have been unthinkable at the time even for a man.

KEY WORDS

Historiography, Education, Literature, Women, Enlightenment.

CAPITALIA VERBA

Annales et Historiae, Artes and docendum, Litterae, Mulieres, Illustratio.

1. A comparison of two women

The theme of this essay is a comparison of two great female personalities separated by four centuries of history. The ideal juxtaposition took place at the time of the second of the two, in the 18th century, because that was when the latter made her assessment of the work of the former, concentrating in particular on her historical work. Both the women considered are relatively little known, the latter probably less even than the former. Both were lay intellectuals, historians (or rather historians as well) and both lived in France. The former, Christine de Pizan,¹ was born in Italy and owed much of her good fortune, in both personal and cultural terms, to her Italian connection and particularly to her father, Tommaso da Pizzano, who insisted on educating her and took her with him to the French court. Christine lived in both the 14th and 15th centuries (1365-1431) while the second of our two women, Louise de Keralio-Robert,² lived in both the 18th and 19th centuries (1758-1822). Both female writers received their formative cultural experiences in those domestic academies³ in which women had acquired learning from cultured and innovative fathers for centuries. As far as the work used for our comparison is concerned, Christine's biography of Charles V⁴, it was the first historical work written by a woman.

Louise —“femme savante”, translator and writer like both father and mother before her— published her work anonymously⁵ and was regarded as the first and only female historian at the dawn of the French Revolution. However, Christine de Pizan, author of the biography of the well-known and much loved King of France Charles V the Wise,⁶ preceded her as a female historian. As far as Christine's historical output is concerned, it is important to mention her history of Queen Elisabeth of England⁷ which, as befits a historical work, she based on documentary sources and

1. Willard, Charity Cannon. *Christine de Pizan. Her Life and Works*. New York: Persea Books, 1984; Roux, Simone. *Christine de Pizan. Femme de tete, dame de coeur*. Paris: Payot, 2006; Muzzarelli, Maria Giuseppina. *Un' italiana alla corte di Francia. Christine de Pizan intellettuale e donna*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2007; Autrand, Françoise. *Christine de Pizan*. Paris: Fayard, 2008.

2. See: Antheunis, Marjolijn L. *Le conventionnel Belge François Robert (1763-1826) et sa femme Louise de Kéralio (1758-1822)*. Wetteren: Éditions Bracke, 1955; Mazel, Geneviève. “Louise de Kéralio et Pierre-François Robert, précurseurs de l'idée républicaine”. *Bulletin de la Société d'histoire de Paris et de l'Île de France* (1989): 163-237; Geffroy, Auguste. “Louise de Keralio-Robert, pionnière du républicanisme sexiste”. *Annales historiques de la Révolution française*, 344 (2006): 107-124 <URL: <http://ahrf.revues.org/6113>>.

3. Ross, Sarah Gwyneth. *The Birth of Feminism. Woman as intellect in Renaissance Italy and England*. Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 2009: 19-94.

4. de Pizan, Christine. *Le Livre des faits et bonnes meurs du sage roi Charles V*, ed. Suzanne Solente. Paris: Honoré Champion, 1936-40; reprint Genève: Editions Slatkine, 1977; de Pizan, Christine. *Le Livre des faits et bonnes moeurs du roi Charles V le Sage*, ed. Eric Hicks, Thérèse Moreau. Paris: Stock/Moyen Age, 1977 (Italian translation: de Pizan, Christine. *La vita e dei buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo*, ed. Virginia Rossini. Rome: Carocci, 2010).

5. On the phenomenon of anonymous female literature see: Colet, Louise. *Femmes des lettres XIX siècle. Autour de Louise Colet*, ed. Roger Bellet. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon, 1982.

6. Autrand, Françoise. *Charles 5. le Sage*. Paris: Fayard, 1994.

7. de Kéralio, Louise. *Histoire d'Elisabeth, reine d'Angleterre*. Paris: Lagrange, 1786-1788.



in so doing followed in her father's footsteps in the historical sphere.⁸ She compiled her history of Queen Elisabeth after a first attempt, midway between history and fiction, of doubtful historical value "Adélaïde Ou, mémoires de la marquise de ***" which is a story built around a female character and written from a female perspective.⁹

After writing her history of Queen Elisabeth, Louise turned her attention to the challenging task of compiling a collection of the best French works written by women, a significant scholarly project of great pedagogical value. Louise's intention was to demonstrate the limitations of any literary reconstruction which ignored female contributions. It was an extraordinarily powerful project aiming to create a female literary tradition but the suspension of work imposed by the start of the French Revolution not only interrupted the collection itself but, more generally, blocked the creation of a French literary canon including female work.¹⁰

Prior to this turn of the century interruption, which led to her abandoning her historical and literary ambitions in order to devote herself to the revolution,¹¹ Louise put together 14 volumes¹² (of which two, the 7th and 8th, were left empty because she meant to deal with them later) dedicated to her mother Marie-Françoise-Abeille, writer and translator.¹³ While Christine's mother did not share her daughter's scholarly inclinations, Louise's probably passed her passion for study and writing on to her daughter. The fathers of both women undoubtedly played a fundamental role. Translator and writer as well as editor of the "Journal des savants", Louise's father was undoubtedly an important influence on his daughter who became, uniquely, the only female founder and editor of a political journal.¹⁴ Probably as a result of the revolution, Louise's initial project, which had envisaged 36 or perhaps even 40 volumes, never got beyond the 14th.¹⁵

Louise devoted considerable attention to Christine in her collection of female writings, which she herself designed and wrote, and listed Christine's many volumes. She did so partly by quoting long extracts and partly by summarising the

8. Hesse, Carla Alison. *The Other Enlightenment. How French Women Became Modern*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001: 83.

9. Keralio, Louise de. *Adélaïde Ou. Mémoires de la marquise de ***. Ecrits par elle-meme*. Neuchatel: Société Typographique, 1782.

10. DeJean, Joan. "Classical Re-education: decanonizing the feminine", *Yale French Studies. The Politics of Tradition: placing women in French Literature*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988: 26-39.

11. Hesse, Carla Alison. *The Other Enlightenment...*: 92.

12. de Kéralio, Louise. (Louise Felicite Guinement de Keralio Robert) *Collection de meilleurs ouvrages françois, composés par de femmes, dédiée aux femmes françoises*. Paris: Lagrange, 1786-89. For vols. 1-3 see: Nabu Public Domain Reprints 2010 to which the quotations in the text refer. For the history of Charles V see t. II, Paris 1787, pp. 171-296.

13. See: *Madeleine and Catherine des Roches. From Mother and Daughter*, ed. Anne R. Larsen. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.

14. Hesse, Carla Alison. "Revolutionary histories: the literary politics of Louise de Keralio", *Culture and Identity in Early modern Europe. 1500-1800*, Barbara B. Diefendorf, Carla Alison Hesse, eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993: 236-259.

15. See: *Enlightenment and revolution. Essays in Honour of Norman Hampson*. Malcolm Crook, William Doyle, Alain Forrest, eds. Burlington: Ashgate Publishers, 2004.



work together with her own personal observations. In the first volume, she devotes a great deal of space to Eloise¹⁶ while the second begins its analysis of Christine in the context of reflections on the state of French literature in the 15th century, an analysis which continues into the first part of the third volume.¹⁷ Louise thus clearly regards Christine as worthy of considerable attention.

When she introduces Christine in the second volume of her "Collection", Louise refers to her as "de Pise", from Pisa¹⁸ although she knows that Christine was actually from Pizzano, near Bologna. She also says, quite rightly, that Christine was "une femme que nous perdriions trop à ne point adopter en France"¹⁹. Effectively, Christine was not French but Louise found it convenient to consider her so! She explains that her work made her famous in the 15th century and that she was as modest and virtuous as she was talented. When she sets out Christine's biographical information (taking her material from 'Boivin le Cadet's 18th century biography of Christine)²⁰ she mentions her father's Bologna origins, Tommaso from Pizzano²¹, just a few kilometres from Bologna. She says virtually nothing about Christine's early years but notes that she settled in France at the age of five and aged 15, married a young notary who was secretary to the King only to be widowed at only 25 years of age. At a little over 40 years of age Christine had already put together 15 volumes starting with her first works of poetry²².

Louise also notes Christine's physical appearance and, based on observations of the miniature of her in the opening pages of "La Cité des Dames",²³ says of her that she had a round face, regular features and a delicate complexion²⁴. This attention to Christine's physical appearance corresponds to Louise's wish to illustrate her work with images of the authors or brief notes on their physical appearance. It was in fact Christine who refers to herself as having a deformity-free body and a relatively pleasant and not unhealthy, well proportioned face ("d'avoires corps sans nulle difformité et assez plaisant, et non maladif, mais bien complexionné"²⁵).

16. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection de meilleurs ouvrages françois, composés par de femmes...*: I, 299-430.

17. The total number of pages which Louise devotes to Christine are: Keralio, Louise de. *Collection de meilleurs ouvrages françois, composés par de femmes...*: II, 109-467; III, 1-132.

18. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes.....*: II, 108.

19. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages...*: 108.

20. Boivin le Cadet, *Vie de Christine de Pisan et de Thomàa de Pisan son père*, Mémoires de Littérature, tirez des Registres de l'Académie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres. Paris, Imprimerie Royale, 1736: II. See: Margolis, Nadia "Makers of the Christinian Corpus", *Christine de Pizan: A Casebook*, Barbara K. Altmann, Deborah L. McGrady, eds. New York-London: Routledge, 2003: 251-176, especially 253.

21. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 109.

22. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 116.

23. Muzzarelli, Maria Giuseppina. "Anatomia e fisiologia di una mise. La divisa di Christine de Pizan", *Christine de Pizan. Atti del VII Convegno Internazionale, Bologna, 22-26 September 2009*: forthcoming.

24. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 125.

25. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 124-125.



Taking her information from another of Christine's 18th century biographer's,²⁶ Louise introduces "L'Épître d'Othea à Hector" and "Débat de deux Amans", including a few extracts.²⁷ Then, after noting that the years between 1403 and 1405 were an intensely prolific literary period for Christine, she begins her analysis of the "Life of Charles V", a work which she devotes much attention to and which concerns us here. Louise refers to the work as one of the rarest works of this "savante femme" meaning rare in the sense that only a few manuscripts have survived. As well as 'rare' the work is also identified as 'curious': "plus curieux pour les François et pour les femmes; le genre de l'histoire étant plus difficile que tout autre"²⁸. It is a work which offers the interesting opportunity, she adds, to see how Christine dealt with the task of portraying her king and his actions and the countries he was then at war with.

2. Life and customs in the essay on Charles V: critical observations

After she describing the layout of the book, Louise begins her actual analysis of it using long extracts of Christine's work together with her own summaries and personal considerations. Right at the beginning of her analysis, in the introduction, Louise notes (and she repeats this later in her final analysis of the work) that it is only in Christine's biography of Charles that we find certain details about him—about the pious and wise king's death, for example— subjects which are given only cursory treatment in the chronicles. Louise notices that many authors have made use of Christine's work without citing her to the extent that she is for the most part ignored²⁹, criticises this and expresses the hope that Christine, together with all other authors whose works have been ransacked without them being mentioned, will be given the credit she is due. Again, in her preliminary section, Louise touches on the respect and love Christine showed her father noting that scholarliness seemed to be a hereditary gift in the family if it is true that Castel, one of Francis I's chroniclers, was the son of Etienne Castel, Christine de Pizan's husband³⁰. It is clear that Louise is also thinking of her own family here. She also notes in this section that Christine's is the only surviving biography of Charles V, one of the most celebrated and famous of French kings, because a biography written by a monk at

26. Sallier, Abbé. "Notice sur Christine de Pizan". *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions*, 17 (1751): 515-525. For information on the biographies that contain details on Christine see the introductory section of: *Oeuvres poétiques de Christine de Pizan*, ed. Maurice Roy. Paris: Librairie de Firmin Bidot, 1886: I.

27. *Poems of Cupid, God of Love: Christine de Pizan's "Epistre au Dieu d'Amours" and "Dit de la Rose"*, Thomas Hoccleve's "The Letter of Cupid", Thelma Fenster, Mary Erler, eds. Leiden-New York: Brill-Academic Publishers, 1990; *The Love Debate Poems of Christine de Pizan: "Le Livre du Débat de Deux Amans", "Le Livre des Trois Jugements", "Le Livre du Dit de Poissy"*, Barbara Altman, ed. Gainesville: Presses de l'Université de Floride, 1998.

28. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 167.

29. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 169.

30. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 169.



the Abbey of Saint Denis has been lost³¹. Abbot Leboeuf³² alone made an extract of Christine's work public and made her biography of Charles V a little better known.³³

"Lord God, open my lips, illuminate my mind and clear my intellect", Christine invokes at the beginning of her biography of the King and Louise begins the part of her work devoted to the biography by quoting this³⁴. It is important to remember here that Christine's life of Charles V was written in 1404 at the request of Philippe de Bourgogne, Charles's brother, who died in 1380.³⁵ It is the first historical work written by a woman and the only history that Christine wrote.³⁶ Many centuries would go by before we find another surviving historical work by a woman and that may well be Louise's late 18th-century work on the life of Queen Elisabeth.

What is Louise's assessment of Christine's work? The next few pages will look in particular at Louise's critical observations of Christine as a historian using the reflections that Christine incorporates into her description of Christine's biography of Charles V.

Firstly, as mentioned above, Louise maintains that historical work is not only less common than literary work but also more difficult. She recognises that Christine is a much used and under-quoted source. She also notes that most chapters in the first part of the work were the result of Christine's personal research and that when she writes about the reception of Emperor Charles IV and Clement VII's election, the information she gives is not to be found anywhere else³⁷. It is important to remember that Christine knew Charles personally and could thus supply direct information on such matters as the king's physical appearance. On this latter subject Louise writes³⁸ that Christine's portrayal of the king gives the impression that he was not a good looking man, with his long face and large nose, but that he had an attractive tone of voice and ease of expression.

Having acknowledged these positive elements, Louise moves on to her criticisms. She disputes the incorrect calculation which leads Christine to assert that Charles was the 56th king of France, 1023 years after King Faramond, but she does not go on to correct this error. She criticises Christine's dating of Charles's birth to 1336 with the observation that Christine had worked it out using the French style, which started the year at Easter.³⁹

31. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 170.

32. Leboeuf, Abbé. *Dissertation sur l'histoire ecclésiastique et civile de Paris, suivies de plusieurs éclaircissements sur l'histoire de France*. Paris, 1739-1743 especially vol. III; de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* 168.

33. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 168.

34. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 171.

35. Muzzarelli, Maria Giuseppina. "Christine de Pizan 'operaia' della ricostruzione storica? Osservazioni intorno al suo 'La vita e i buini costumi del saggio re Carlo V'", *Scritti di storia medievale offerti a Maria Consiglia De Matteis*. Spoleto: Fondazione Centro italiano di studi sull'alto Medioevo, 2011: 493-513.

36. Autrand, Françoise. *Christine de Pizan...*: 211-242.

37. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 168.

38. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 181.

39. Louise observes in a note that the abbot of Choisy, in reporting it as 1338, also got Charles's date of birth wrong (de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 175).



Louise does not examine the whole of Christine's text in order but omits sections she considers unimportant. She does not consider the section on the king's youth and early adulthood important (but somewhat incoherently she says that more information on Bertrand du Guesclin's youth would have been interesting and useful!) and expresses the opinion that Christine's description of it constitutes an excessively long digression. Christine, by contrast, argues that perfection comes gradually over time and that Charles's development into adulthood is therefore of some importance.

Louise makes no reference to a great many pages from the first section of the work and in particular to those on Charles's humility and his low opinion of the proud, or to the last chapters of the first section which refer to his qualities of devotion and moderation. Her choices on what to include, summarise or ignore are based on her own interests and cultural attitudes and often ignore Christine's religious themes.

In the second part of Christine's biography of the king, where she writes about Charles as knight, Louise neglects Christine's considerations on knighthood in general and omits the section on how the orders of knighthood were established, on the four gifts necessary for a knight and so on, in order to get straight on to the accusation of cowardice directed at Charles because he did not march at the head of his troops. This "timidité", as Louise calls it, confuses the image of Charles that Christine is attempting to portray. In actual fact the king had performed very well on the battlefield in Poitiers but suffered from a serious illness after he was crowned king. Louise tells a different story from Christine's on the subject without taking the latter's version into account writing that the illness in question was caused by a poison that had been given him⁴⁰ which weakened him and made it more difficult for him to sustain the burdens of warfare. Louise maintains that Christine's version is coherent with those of contemporary historians who reported this event but fails to note the specifics of the dates. Jean Froissart⁴¹ reports that the poisoning occurred in 1330 while other chronicles give it a much later date. In actual fact, Christine does not refer to poisoning but rather to an unspecified illness. She writes that:

since he was crowned king, when he was still in his prime, he suffered... from a long and serious illness. I don't know what the cause of this was but it left him much weakened and debilitated and he was very pale and thin, of weak constitution and inclined to fevers and stomach colds for the rest of his life. Another result of this illness was a right hand so swollen that it was no longer possible for him to hold heavy objects in it and for the rest of his life he had to submit to the whims of his doctors.⁴²

Louise argues that the correct date is 1337 whereas we know today that it is 1338.

40. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 203.

41. Jean Froissart was one of the most important chroniclers of his day and a fundamentally important source on, among other matters, the first phase of the Hundred Years' War. See: Foissaed, Jean. *Oeuvres de Froissart*, Joseph Marie le baron Kervyn de Lettenhove, ed. Paris: Académie royale des sciences, des lettres et des beaux arts de Belgique, 1863-77.

42. de Pizan, Christine. *La vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V...* 139.



In Christine's opinion, none of this diminished Charles's chivalrous qualities as he continued nonetheless to work tirelessly for the public good. As far as the presumed dating inaccuracy is concerned, Louise's accusations are somewhat strange as Christine gives no dates on the poisoning because she does not refer to poisoning at all or rather she does not refer to it here but mentions it later, in the third volume.⁴³ At this stage she refers to an illness which the king had suffered from since his prime and which might have been gout.

There is also discordance between the writings of Christine and Louise on the subject of Louis, Duke of Anjou, one of Charles's brothers. While Christine devotes considerable attention to him, Louise skims over him mentioning that he was killed by his wife, Queen Joan, a woman who Louise refers to as historically renowned for a monstrous collection of vices⁴⁴. In actual fact, however, Louis, Duke of Anjou was not the husband but rather the adopted son of Queen Joan I of Naples who was suspected of murdering her first husband, Andrew of Hungary. Louise would appear to be not entirely familiar with the rather complex vicissitudes of the Kingdom of Naples.

In reference to another of the king's brothers, John, Duke of Berry, Louise again refers to information that does not come from Christine. She says that he was one of Christine's protectors, that the latter sold him her collection of ballads for 200 *scudi*⁴⁵, that Christine delivered to him her "Livre del Long estude" in Paris in 1402,⁴⁶ her "Mutacion de Fortune" in 1403,⁴⁷ and her biography of Charles V in 1404, to which she added some verses on the seven psalms and her "Livre de la Paix" in 1409.⁴⁸ It is not clear why Louise refers to all this as it certainly adds nothing to our understanding of Charles's life. Perhaps Louise wanted to set out the connections between the author of the biography and the king's family with the likely intention of demonstrating how little freedom of opinion Christine enjoyed, a theme which she returns to more explicitly later on.

Christine's section on Louis of Orleans is included almost in its entirety and Louise notes the former's complaints relating to the accusations levelled at her of adulation and omission of the vices and defects of the individuals she describes⁴⁹. In defending herself against these accusations, Christine maintains that she wrote simply what she knew about the various individuals from personal experience and from speaking to those who, chosen for their wisdom and trustworthiness, knew them well. In all honesty, Christine does not deny that such sources might well have omitted some information or that might not have taken seriously the requests

43. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: 286, de Pizan, Christine. *La vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V...*: 173.

44. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: 205.

45. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: 205.

46. de Pizan, Christine. *Le Livre du Chemin de long étude*, ed. Andrea Tarnovski. Paris: Librairie Générale Française-Livre de Poche, 2000.

47. de Pizan, Christine. *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune*, ed. Suzanne Solente. Paris: Picard, 1959-1966.

48. *The "Livre de la Paix" of Christine de Pizan*, ed. Charity Cannon Willard. The Hague: Mouton, 1958.

49. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 210.



of a woman whose abilities and suitability to write about such eminent individuals would have been seen as intrinsically limited by her gender⁵⁰:

I found some who explained clearly and with pleasure what they knew... while others did not deem me worthy of consideration perhaps because it seemed to them that my limited abilities as a woman meant that I could not truly appreciate such eminent personalities.⁵¹

Again in self-defence, Christine observes that her purpose was to praise virtues not find vices as the latter is more dangerous than useful and more appropriately and prudently done in private⁵².

Such comments led Louise to a harsh conclusion, that in France in Christine's day, the qualities of a good historian "et de la dignité noble et male de son caractère"⁵³ were unknown, that every covering up is a lie and that hiding the vices of the powerful is to cancel out history! In the preface to her history of Queen Elisabeth, Louise maintains, in fact, that the role of history is to reconstruct the truth from the sources.⁵⁴

Louise thus judges Christine's prudence harshly but she cannot ignore the difficulties that the former had encountered as a woman in the profession of scholar and, in particular, as a historian. She does not in fact ignore the section in which Christine refers to these problems⁵⁵ and mentions difficulties of this sort on more than one occasion⁵⁶ but she does not seem to attach great importance to this despite noting that the field of historical study was an exclusively male one. Skimming over the question of gender-based hindrances, she nonetheless notes that the queen and the ladies of the court were not present at the ceremonies organised for the emperor's visit to King Charles and were not officially received by the emperor and his retinue. It is a fact, however, that the emperor wished to visit the queen⁵⁷.

Louise takes advantage of this reference to the lack of female participation at these ceremonies to analyse the true nature of the relationship between king and queen and in so doing, uses information that does not come from Christine. She mentions that they became engaged when she was eleven years of age, that he trusted her a great deal and wanted her to participate in government. When he was ill, he demanded that the queen should deal herself with the most highly secret matters of state⁵⁸. He had her attend the meeting of the Estates-General in 1369 and in his will in 1377 he nominated her regent in the event of his death. All this explains Charles' acute grief at the queen's death and this corresponds to Christine's comments that

50. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 212.

51. de Pizan, Christine. *La vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V...*: 173.

52. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 211.

53. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 212.

54. See: Hesse, Carla Alison. *The other enlightenment...*: 86.

55. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 211.

56. Muzzarelli, Maria Guiseppina. "Christine de Pizan 'operaia' della ricostruzione storica?"...: 506-507.

57. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 278.

58. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 285.



“the king was terribly upset”.⁵⁹ On the subject of the queen, Louise writes that she died in childbirth as a result of an unwise decision taken against medical advice but comments that she was virtuous, humane, with a natural inclination to do good, prudent and moderate. She also comments that Christine does not praise her enough and that she writes more of her funeral than of her talents. On the other hand, she adds, the age was a superficial one with greater importance attached to appearances than to feelings⁶⁰.

Once again, Louise makes criticisms here which tell us much more about the limitations of her own age than of that of Christine. Not only does she reproach Christine for having written too little about the queen but also criticises her for being ill-informed about the plot to poison Charles V⁶¹, a fact which is reported both in Froissart’s account and in the Saint Denis chronicles and which Louise mentions without going into any further detail. She adds that the handwritten trial documents relating to the episode are kept at the Court of Audits and that Christine would have had access to them if she had looked for them. It would have been, she adds, much more interesting than an account of the king’s childhood. In actual fact, Christine does mention the poisoning episode but writes that she does not want to talk about it or those involved in it,

*because it does not relate directly to my subject. Anyone wanting to find out more about it can find the information towards the end of the French chronicles where Charles V is referred to after the account of the death of Queen Joanna of Bourbon.*⁶²

Christine was writing about very recent events and it seems likely that it could have compromised her, or at least put her in a difficult situation, to enquire into them too much. It was more current affairs than history for her. Louise criticises Christine for her choice of theme in any case and specifically for having neglected this clearly politicised theme but also accuses her of not devoting enough attention to matters relating to Normandy, Guyenne, Brittany and England⁶³ as well as for writing next to nothing about the death of Bertrand Du Guesclin, Constable of France and a courageous mercenary captain who played an important part in the Hundred Years’ War, so that she could go straight on to the king’s death.

In actual fact, Christine does not go straight on to the king’s death but devotes considerable attention to the election of Pope Bartholomew, to the disputes relating to this election and to the subsequent election of Pope Clement,⁶⁴ subjects which Louise does not even touch on. Louise does not consider matters relating to church affairs, even such important events as the Papal Schism and Charles V’s intention of

59. de Pizan, Christine. *La vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V...*: 173.

60. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 286.

61. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 286.

62. de Pizan, Christine. *La vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V...*: 329-331, especially 331.

63. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...*: II, 287.

64. de Pizan, Christine. *La vita e i buoni costumi del saggio re Carlo V...*: 331-340.



calling a general council, as sufficiently important so it is, in effect, Louise and not Christine who moves straight on to Charles V's death!

Louise acknowledges that much of the information about the king's death supplied by Christine is unique to her work, but combines this with a criticism. Most of the details in the description were taken from the Saint-Idenis Chronicles and if Christine had taken equal advantage of the other details supplied by Froissart and other chroniclers, she would have been able to put together a proper history of the king and not what she did produce, which Louise sees as a sort of a cold panegyric overloaded with trifles⁶⁵. Louise defines it a panegyric and says that the work cannot even be considered an annalistic one because the chronological order is "absolument inconu" to it⁶⁶ but this criticism seems undeser assuredly harsh.

In judging Christine so harshly Louise only very rarely and haphazardly makes any attempt to present the customs and lifestyles of the day. When she refers to Charles' library, for example, she makes no mention of the fact that he was the second king, after St. Louis, to plan a library in the palace. The accusation she makes is that Christine limited herself to touching on the important points and made mistakes in reporting the circumstances⁶⁷, an accusation which is serious and generic in equal measure.

3. Louise's judgement

As far as Christine's writing style is concerned, Louise's attitude is partly critical and partly admiring. She writes, for example, that it would be easy to change Christine's style and make a good translation of her history but that her naïf language is intrinsically interesting and her descriptions, of clothing and ceremonies for example, are very enjoyable to read⁶⁸. She repeats this point later arguing that Christine's life of the king makes enjoyable reading "dans la langue de Christine" precisely because of her writing style to the extent that certain details would have come across as cold and insipid expressed in any other way⁶⁹. This appreciation of Christine's writing style is accompanied, however, by the accusation of inaccuracy. When she writes of Charles's good will and clemency, Christine does effectively confuse Scipio with Pompey (the victories over Mithridates and Tigranes were, in effect, Pompey's) and Louise considers Christine cites passages from ancient Greek and Roman history inaccurately. It is noticeable, Louise observes, that Christine had acquired a general knowledge of events but that she had no clear plan of them in her mind and she goes on to make an even more serious accusation, that it is this

65. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 295.

66. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 295.

67. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 295.

68. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 186.

69. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 186.



section where it becomes clear that “elle ne conoissait pas la règle et la marche d’une histoire”⁷⁰. In actual fact, Christine worked according to the rules of her day and her own personal methods, choosing in the process to throw light on the virtues of the individuals she describes and skim over their defects, particularly those of Louis of Anjou. Louise does acknowledge, however, that as luck would have it, Charles was in fact a great king and therefore Christine did not have to hide the truth often.

In conclusion Louise maintains that Christine would have been capable of much better work even in the specific and difficult field of historic study if she had only devoted a little more time, care and good judgement to the task⁷¹. Despite these limitations, Louise does recognise that Christine’s work has been of fundamental importance for many subsequent authors, who have taken from it many interesting anecdotes which help in an analysis of the personality of a king who Louise too believed had been one of the greatest French kings.

The defects that Louise identifies in Christine’s history are often attributable, she believes, not just to the era in which she lived but also to the sources she used. Badly written chronicles and often inexact, rarely in order, prevented an experienced historian from extracting from them what those who came after her were able to get from it⁷². Clearly Louise considers Christine not to have had “capable hands and the right spirit” but we might add that this was because she could not have overcome the limitations of her era.

Among the accusations levelled at Christine is not having devoted enough attention to the Constable Bertrand du Guesclin, and to his early life in particular, about which Christine may not have had information or not of the right sort. For Louise, even minor activities, details on the lives of great personalities are fundamental, charming the reader and enabling him to lose himself in a period of history. This sort of sensitivity to daily life and the details of history was not common in Christine’s day, but she managed, as Louise acknowledges, to work with intelligence within the limitations of her time⁷³. As well as her intelligence, Louise detects in Christine’s work the latter’s appreciation of virtue, nobility and love of her country and recognises that these characteristics gave great energy to her work alongside a sweetness and goodness of character which enabled her to put up with bad luck and the humility of seeking the support of individuals who were less virtuous but richer than her⁷⁴. Her opinion of Christine’s personality is, then, decidedly positive.

Alongside her positive opinion of Christine’s character, Louise also appreciated, as we have seen, her choice of words and writing style, which made the story more elegant. There are words in the work, she adds, which are unique to it and enhance the work’s value. These unspecified words were not known in Louise’s day and it

70. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 188.

71. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 296.

72. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 213.

73. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 226.

74. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 227.



is likely that Christine had picked them up from contemporary authors⁷⁵. In this respect, Christine's work is potentially a source for the history of language as well as a source for historical study and her own personal experiences of the individuals in question. Christine saw the ornately-dressed Saracen knight who visited Charles V with her own eyes⁷⁶ as she tells us in the section of the biography that deals with the intense diplomatic activity between Charles V and the rulers of Europe.

Louise's criticisms of Christine as a historian relate to a few errors of dating and identification and an inability to go beyond a simple list of the cities conquered to a portrayal of glorious war and of the great power acquired for the king⁷⁷. But Louise also criticises Christine for not having taken advantage of a series of interesting details which she did know about⁷⁸. Louise, herself, excuses Christine here on the basis of the fact that "ce n'étoit pas l'esprit du temps"⁷⁹. Overall, the task that Christine took on when she accepted the proposal of Philippe of Bourgogne, Charles V's brother, was a substantial one. Louise argues that the task was too great for her in a century in which even good male historians were few and far between, although they at least were more suitable than women to take on the most important jobs. When she started work on her biography, Louise maintains, Christine was not clear about the best approach to take and was confused by the huge amount of material and great potential of the subject matter. This was the source of her difficulty in putting the events in order. Christine's genius, which Louise only recognises indirectly, could not, or perhaps did not dare to, identify a plan of action for the work and thus could not supply her with the means to create a work in a genre in which methodology was almost totally absent, as even Louise admitted⁸⁰.

But what genre was Louise thinking of? Probably a historical work which was both rigorous and celebratory, capable of satisfying curiosity and a taste for detail as would seem to be implied by her comments on the exploits of Constable De Guesclin. Perhaps the need to keep her protectors happy and support herself and her family limited the range of research that every historical account needs if it is aspire to the truth. Christine was, in effect, poor, as Louise acknowledges, and her protectors were preeminent and resolute. The desire to keep them happy probably damaged a work that should have done more to deserve its role as a historical work⁸¹.

We looked earlier at the fact that Louise reproached Christine for neglecting curious and secondary elements which she herself, though probably not Christine's contemporaries, would have found interesting. But what about the fact that Louise

75. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 258.

76. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 268.

77. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 242.

78. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 241.

79. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 241.

80. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 242.

81. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages François composés par des femmes...* II, 242.



entirely neglected everything touching on church history including events of some importance such as the death of Pope Gregory IX and the choice of his successor?

Louise's criticisms appear generic or made in the light of eighteenth century culture and priorities as in fact even Louise herself recognises. In her collection, she recognises that good historians were rare in Christine's century and that she had few models to follow. She criticises her, then, and at the same time acknowledges that she would not have been able to improve on her work partly as a result of her own poverty as against the wealth and exacting demands of her protectors. Again in the collection, on the subject of the king's biography we read that it was the work that should have brought the most credit to her sex. And it was in fact an important work but historiography has resisted acknowledging it as such. The work was much desired at the apex of contemporary society by the late king's brother whose aim was to preserve Charles's memory as an example for future generations. That such an important task was entrusted to a woman is a sign of such staggering importance that it overshadows any criticism. And yet she is criticised for aspects of her work that would have been difficult if not impossible even for a man.

It's worth mentioning that Louise de Keralio also damned "Cité des Dames"⁸² regarding it as unworthy of a reader's interest⁸³ despite acknowledging the justice of the idea of giving the city a historical basis. In the work, Christine takes real women of virtue from history who might have been able to find peace in the city of her imagination, including queens, princesses and ladies who had showed courage and moral strength. A case in point is Blanche, St. Louis' mother. Clearly Christine could not have included important women who lived after her death but, as obvious as this is, Louise mentions it as if it was a defect.

On the subject of the "Livre de la Mutacion Fortune",⁸⁴ Louise criticises Christine for not following a precise plan for the work,⁸⁵ a defect, we read in the third volume of the "Collection", that is seen by some as a typically female fault but is in fact a characteristic of fifteenth-century work in general. Louise notes that fifteenth-century writings are generally verbose and this is certainly true of Christine who, despite the few criticisms Louise manages to force out (for having used in "Epistre sur le roman de la rose" a "dur et grossier"⁸⁶ writing style, for example), is acknowledged as having talent, coherence and overall ability to overcome the limitations of the intellectuals of her day.

Overall Christine is recognised as vastly erudite with a range of knowledge which was extraordinary for a woman of her age—and somewhat rare even amongst men—highly-principled, altruistic and of good character to the extent that she managed to keep her spirits up even in the worst of times. Louise also mentions

82. "Le Livre de la Cité des Dames" of Christine de Pizan: A critical Edition, ed. Maureen Cheney Curnow. Nashville: Vanderbilt University (PhD. Dissertation), 1975: 2 vols.

83. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages françois, composés par des femmes.....*: III, 32.

84. de Pizan, Christine. *Le Livre de la Mutacion de Fortune...*

85. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages françois, composés par des femmes.....*: III, 111.

86. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages françois, composés par des femmes.....*: III, 113.



that Christine was praised by many contemporary authors and acknowledged as “au rang des hommes illustres de son siècle”.⁸⁷ Christine —eminent man. At the end of the day this is a huge compliment, which is associated with weak and ill-founded criticisms. All the evidence suggests that Christine lived at the limits of what was allowed a woman of her day and that she even stretched these limits, but paradoxically she is reproached for not having lived outside her time. This is an unacceptable attitude and it is made all the worse by the fact that her accuser is a person, and a woman at that, who considered herself at least partly a historian and who should have been able to understand that the biography of Charles V was all the more precious for having being written by a woman.

87. de Kéralio, Louise. *Collection des meilleurs ouvrages françois, composés par des femmes.....*: III, 133.

