Did Christine de Pizan compose two Latin lines?
New Thoughts on her Sept psaumes allegorisés

Lori J. Walters
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Abstract: The article presents new reasons for believing that Christine de Pizan is the author of the two Latin lines found in one of the three presentation copies of the Sept psaumes allegorisés, Ms. Brussels, KBR 10987.

Résumé: L’article présente de nouvelles raisons de croire que Christine de Pizan est l’auteur des deux lignes en latin se trouvant dans l’une des trois copies de présentation de ses Sept psaumes allegorisés, le Ms. Brussels, KBR 10987.

In a book chapter I published in 2002, I gave several reasons for believing that Christine de Pizan composed the two Latin lines that appear in one of the five extant manuscript copies of her Sept psaumes allegorisés, Ms. Brussels, KBR 109871. In the present study I offer additional reasons for thinking that Christine was the author of these lines.

Determining their authorship has important implications, since Christine’s competency in Latin has long been a subject of controversy. The discovery of Christine Reno and Liliane Dulac2 that Christine translated into French a section of Thomas Aquinas’s Commentary on Aristotle’s Metaphysics in her Advision Cristine resolved any doubts about her ability to read Latin. The evidence I offer here in support of the idea that she actually composed two lines in Latin further strengthens our assessment of her competency in the language.

The following are the two Latin lines that appear in Ms. Brussels, KBR 10987:

Fructibus eloquii prophete in nomine xpisti
Nascitur istud opus quod corpore parva peregit.


(By the fruits of the utterance of the prophet [i.e., David], in the name of Christ / is born this work which one [feminine pronoun] small in body completed).

In my 2002 study, I gave several reasons for believing that Christine composed the lines herself:

1. She does not indicate, as she does elsewhere, that she is quoting someone else.
2. The Latin verses express themes treated by Christine in other texts. (To this reason I can now add that these Latin verses echo themes treated by Christine in the Sept psaumes 142:12 and 142:14).  
3. The phrase corpora parva (one [feminine] small in body) would seem to refer to a female author, and the same one who had composed the rest of the Sept psaumes included in the devotional book.
4. Roger S. Wieck, curator of Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts at the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, a major expert on the medieval Book of Hours, has not seen anything like these Latin verses in other manuscripts of the litanies.

When I originally published my findings in 2002, I had not yet had the opportunity to examine all five manuscripts of the Sept psaumes. I have now looked at four of them, Brussels, KBR 10987; Paris, BnF nouv. acq. fr. 4792; Brussels, KBR IV 1093, and Paris, BnF fr. 15216. The fifth manuscript, Coulet and Faure MS.2, which is in the hands of a private donor, is not available for consultation. I now have additional reasons for believing that Christine composed the lines in Latin found at the end of the litanies and other prayers that follow the Sept psaumes in Brussels, KBR 10987. I base myself on Reno’s identification of the manuscript as one of three presentation copies of the text (along with Paris, BnF nouv. acq. fr. 4792 and Coulet and Faure MS.2). That Christine was the copyist of the manuscript increases the probability that the lines, rendered in this same hand, were of her own composition. The probability of her authorship is further increased by the fact that the lines appear on a page ruled and decorated in the style of the rest of the text.

Brussels, KBR 10987 deserves our attention for another reason. Although this manuscript, like another presentation copy, Paris, BnF nouv. acq. fr. 4792, opens with a miniature of King David praying to God, it alone displays the two Latin lines. It is important to determine why Christine would have inscribed these lines in Brussels, KBR 10987, which in all likelihood is the copy she gave to the duke of Burgundy, Jean sans Peur, whereas she did not include them in Paris, BnF.

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3 142:12: « Ton esperit bon me ramenra en droitturiere terre. Pour ton saint nom, tu me vivifieras en ta justice et equite ». Her commentary on this line opens with: « Mon Dieu, je croy de ceste parole ton benoit prophete David, qui me dit que ton Saint Esperit me adrecera et que tu me vivifieras, si soit ainsi fait. » 142:14: « Avec ce vueilles, benoit Trinité, un seul Dieu, avoir agreeable mon petit labour en ceste present œuvre... » (my emphasis). Sept psaumes, ed. cit., p. 151-52.
4 www.pizan.lib.ed.ac.uk/present.html
5 In a private consultation, Dr. Ann Kelders of the Bibliothèque royale de Belgique agreed with my judgment.
nouv. acq. fr. 4792. I suggest that her decision had to do with the key position at court held by Marguerite, the duke of Burgundy’s daughter, whose marriage to the dauphin Louis de Guyenne had been arranged by Jean sans Peur’s father, Philippe le Hardi. From the time of her marriage in 1405 until the young Louis’s unexpected death on December 18, 1415, this princess was slated to become the next queen of France and hopefully the mother of the next davidic-styled dauphin. Given the way that the book is described in the Latin lines quoted above, it is likely that Christine produced Brussels, KBR 10987 as an instructional guide for the royal family. We know that along with assuring peace in the realm and in the larger Christian community, guaranteeing dynastic continuity was a pressing concern for both French kings and queens. Thus a female author/counselor like Christine who advised the queen on her maternal duties was particularly well suited to help the monarchy project its enduring image of itself. To this end, the author frequently associated the French queen with the Virgin and the dauphin with Mary’s son Christ.

It is thus quite fitting that with the Latin lines quoted above Christine would employ birth imagery to express her ideas about a bookmaking project she had undertaken on behalf of the monarchy. In those lines she returns to a theme she had employed in her 1405 *Advision Cristine*, the theme of her books as metaphorical children born from the laborious work of her memory.9 There Lady Nature addresses the Christine character with these words:

> Ou temps que tu portoies les enfans en ton ventre, grant douleur a l’enfanter sentoies. Or vueil que de toy naissent noueaulx volumes, lesquelz les temps a venir et perpetuellement au monde presenteront ta memoire devant les princes et par l’univers en toutes places, lesquelz en joie et delit tu enfanteras de ta memoire, non obstant le labour et travail, lequel tout ainsi comme la femme qui a enfanté, si tost que celle ot le cry de son enfant oublie son mal, oublieras le travail du labour oyant la voix de tes volumes.

In this passage from the *Advision Cristine* the author develops the childbirth metaphor as she does in Brussels, KBR 10987 (*Nascitur istud opus*). Her use of birth imagery in this manuscript suggests that one of her aims was to bolster the legitimacy of France’s divinely sanctioned rule, as represented by the *Grandes Chroniques de France*, one of the major sources of her 1404 biography of King

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7 She does so in texts such as her 1405 *Epistre a la Reine*.

8 See L. J. Walters, « Christine de Pizan, France’s Memorialist: Persona, Performance, Memory », *Journal of European Studies*, 35.1 (March 2005), 29-45. The article is also available online at http://jes.sagepub.com/content/35/1.toc

Christine would as it were follow the lead of the original dynastic chronicler, the monk Primat, who had attempted to strengthen monarchical legitimacy by stressing the Latin origins of the French language. In the prologue to this official French history he affirms the continuity of Latin and the French of Île-de-France by saying that the dynastic chronicles and their Latin sources were written in «la même langue»11. In turn, the author of the two Latin verses in the Sept psaumes would appear to reinforce Primat’s energetic defense of monarchical legitimacy by adding these verses to a French text. It is a very astute move, one that conforms to what we know of Christine de Pizan.

In conclusion, I further speculate that Christine added these Latin lines to the manuscript she offered to the duke of Burgundy in order to associate her book with the royal line she believed was to be continued by his daughter and son-in-law. Christine had made special mention of the royal family in her commentary on Psalm 101:23, where she prayed specifically for «tous les roys, princes Crestiens, et par especial ceulx du sanc royal de France, et tous leurs parens»12. In adding the two Latin lines that represent this copy of her Sept psaumes as a metaphorical «memory child», Christine would be expressing the hope that Brussels, KBR 10987 would aid Jean sans Peur, his daughter Marguerite and her husband Louis, as well as all the descendants born of the young couple’s line, in carrying out their official duties. We can imagine that she offered her book to the duke of Burgundy as a type of supplement to the Grandes Chroniques, adding her voice to those of Primat and later royal chroniclers who never tired of teaching all members of the fleurs de lis that one of their highest obligations was to guarantee legitimate dynastic succession.

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12 Sept psaumes, ed. cit., p. 130.